

Cape Town, South Africa

Saturday 06 April 2013

The first day was a little chaotic. This is the first G-Adventures African West Coast cruise, and having specialized for the most part in Arctic and Antarctic voyages, cruising the heavily populated, socially kaleidoscopic and politically unpredictable bipolar regions of Africa seemed to introduce a variety of logistical challenges to the organizing staff that were not wholly resolved by the day of departure.

Our day began with a mustering in the lobby of the Portsmoor Hotel on the Cape Town Waterfront, with all and sundry mingling over breakfast, after which the work of luggage disposal and the settling of souls in coach seats for the day excursion in and around Cape Town played out. In a small convoy of coaches the group then left the waterfront district, moving through the city on a quite Saturday morning towards the Kloof Nek and Table Mountain. The weather was unfortunately quite mixed, as it often is at this time of the year, with low cloud, some smattering of rain and the heights of table mountain shrouded under skirts of deep mist.



The first order of business was a ride on the iconic Cape Town cable car to the summit of Table Mountain. There we assembled for a brisk, rather damp gathering to take in the still spectacular view of the city below, albeit only briefly as the cloud covering the summit parted. Then it was back to the coaches and down towards Camps Bay. Here our guide, eager to impress us with the exclusivity of this region of Cape Town, listed the names of the rich and famous regularly seen hereabouts, coupled with the astronomical property prices to be expected by anyone

imprudent enough to consider settling on the windward slopes of the mountain.

From here we wound our way along the equally famous Chapman's Peak road, a scenic drive like no other, pausing periodically to take in the sea vistas and cozy oceanside settlements, before entering the larger, more ethnically diverse towns of Hout Bay and Kommetjie. We were fortunate to have Conrad Hennig on board our coach, and as we entered the *Cape Of Good Hope Nature Reserve* we were treated to a brief but detailed discourse on the wonderful fynbos biome through which we were driving.

After a brief scenic observance at Cape Point, southwestern most point of the Cape Peninsular, where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet, some taking the vernacular to a point where the vista stretched on either side into the deep horizon, we embarked again and made our way to lunch at the Black Marlin restaurant in Simonstown.

There too we had the opportunity to visit the boulders site where a small colony of African, or Jackass penguins cling to viability in a small breeding colony that is heavily protected. After this we enjoyed a slow coach cruise back towards Cape Town, skirting the Constantia Winelands before making our way to the dockside berth of the MS Expedition, and embarkation.



Steaming out of Cape Town an hour or so later, as the sunset bathed the flanks of table mountains, and as the skirts of an earlier mist lifted off the mountain reveal a tempting thigh, many of us gathered on decks to observe our gentle departure. Slowly the elegant skyline of an elegant city receded into the haze of evening. All very beautiful, more so probably thanks to a few scattered sundowners, and a sense of palpable relief on the part of those that had labored long to make it happen that at last the voyage was underway.

Submitted by Peter Baxter, Lecturer
Photos by P. Baxter



At Sea, Cape Town to Lüderitz

Sunday 7 April, 2013

We cast off last evening from Cape Town harbor under clear skies and calm seas. After navigating the very narrow opening in the harbor walls, the ship was quickly in open sea and setting a northerly course for our almost 500nm run up the coast to Lüderitz, Namibia.

The Ding-Dong announced breakfast at eight am, which allowed some of us to catch up on sleep. We have been warned that we shouldn't count on late breakfasts every day. The sun rose over flat seas patrolled by the occasional shearwater gliding past. Although today will be spent entirely at sea, it will prove to be a busy one.

After breakfast, our Expedition Leader Lyn Mair gathers everyone to hear her vision of what we might expect our adventure along the African West Coast to include. With some detailed descriptions of places we hope to explore, and the sights we will see, the reality of this expedition begins to sink in. We will spend the next few weeks far off the beaten path. Lyn warns us to remain flexible and patient, as our itinerary includes challenging logistics in places that rarely have tourists. As the meeting adjourns, there is a buzz in the air as everyone is now primed to explore and discover surprises along the way.

As the afternoon progresses, Rob Caskie entertains with stories of South African History, and David Conrad take an in depth look at the Herero Uprising in South West Africa between at the beginning of the 20th century.

Capping off the day, winemaker David van Neikerk describes his method of making Sparkling Wine in South Africa, and everyone gets to toast our good fortune with a glass of his very own High Constantia Vineyards Clos Andre MMC 2009 Sparkling Wine. But not until he demonstrates how to open a bottle with a sword! What a bubbly way to end our first full day of adventure!



Submitted by Page Turner, Librarian

Photos: Cape Town harbor at dawn – D. Gould. Sword bottle opening – W. Kahler

Luderitz and Kolmannskuppe, Namibia

Monday 8 April, 2013

Within minutes of disembarking from *MV Expedition* on the southern coast of Namibia, the GAdventure travelers encountered ascending blocks of architectural evidence that the seaside town of Luderitz had indeed been founded by German settlers who brought their culture with them to southwest Africa. From the brightly painted houses of Berg Street (built 1909-11) to the elegant 1910 Goerke House on the hill, it was also evident that a substantial number of the early 20th century newcomers to this remote seaport had achieved financial success from endeavors related to the nearby diamond fields. But the visitors of 2013 found that these days the colorful European-style buildings repose along sleepy inclined avenues where the era of bustling prosperity that produced them a century ago, has long since been absorbed into the mists of the offshore currents.



Just a few miles north, the wind whispers through invading dunes in derelict dwellings of the mining ghost town of Kolmannskuppe. Glancing at faded museum photographs, the visitors might have thought they could hear faint echoes of German life from the arduous era of the diamond industry: shouted orders over the rumble and clash of machinery, shrieking steam whistle of narrow-gauge train, plodding mule-hooves and rattling wagons -- or timeless murmurs from the town itself: children at school, nurse's uniforms rustling in hospital corridors, clatter of cooks in kitchens, discreet click of gems at the "Consolidated Diamond Mines of SWA Ltd." and the after-sunset syncopation of polka music, tumbled bowling pins, and ripple of laughter from the recreation center.



Submitted by David C. Conrad, Expedition Staff

Photos: a) Berg Street Houses, Luderitz - b) Guest in bathtub at derelict house in Kolmannskuppe by D. Conrad

Walvis Bay & Swakopmund, Namibia

Tuesday, 09 April 2013



Our morning at sea started with fur seals and Cape Gannets hunting around the ship. We passed the long sand spit of Pelican Point which forms a natural protection from the open Atlantic and in so doing has created the largest deep water harbor on the west coast of Africa. Industrial images were the first things to come into view but soon our attention was taken away from that scene by the fur seals who were scattered around the bay and off in the distance, hundreds of greater flamingo's feeding in the shallow waters near the mud flats.

The officials boarded the vessel and quickly cleared us so we could begin an epic car rally out into the Namib Desert! We loaded into 19 off road vehicles and took off first to see one of the largest dunes in the area! Dune 7. Our drivers explained about the colors, shapes and movement of the dunes and most of us were taken by the enormity of this one. A few hearty souls climbed to the top of the dune while the rest of us watched the colorful dancers under the palm trees.



Next we were off to see the fantastic Welwitschias – a living fossil that has existed since the day of the dinosaur. At first glance it looks like a misshapen dried up dying plant – but upon closer inspection we could see the adaptations that have made it such a successful and long lived plant found only in the Namib Desert.

We were soon off to look at the Moonlandscape – which is yet another portion of the desert with formations of such unusual peaks and valleys stretching off into tomorrow. I think in the end that was the most remarkable aspect of our day was the vastness of this - the world's oldest desert.

Back on ship board the officials cleared us out of Namibia in record time and we were soon underway for points north! Recap this evening celebrated our day which was topped off with a showing of a classic film – *The Africa Queen!*

Submitted by Susan Adie, Expedition Operations Manager for G Adventures

Photos: a) Climbing Dune 7 by Susan Adie, b) Dancing girls, Doug Gould; c) Welwitschia Forest, by Lyn Mair.

At Sea – Namibia Coast

Wednesday April 10, 2013

The MS Expedition is today steaming north along the Namibian coast, towards Lobito in Angola-a distance of 720 nautical miles. The morning is thankfully cool and overcast, with a moderate wind and swell. Temperature 14 Centigrade or 59 Fahrenheit.

The lovely musician on board, Bronwen, gave a presentation “Ways of African music”, filled with information about the development of African music as a result of slavery and trade, and the variety of tribes on the continent. Bronwen’s talk was infused with video’s showing various types of music, and she played an Mbira, much to everyone’s delight.

Resident artist, Lucia, then shared a “Painter’s Journey”. Lucia has spent time with wild Chimpanzees, and been in both the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The audience was intrigued at her vast knowledge, and special skills as an artist. Sketches and watercolours of icy scenes enthralled us all.



Lunch ended with pancakes in syrup, enjoyed very much. Clearly the guests are getting to know one another well after 7 days together, and many spent the balmy afternoon sipping wine on the afterdeck, then chose to miss dinner. The afternoon turned out considerably warmer than the morning had been.

A full afternoon found us watching a BBC documentary presented by Attenborough on the Kalahari-a superlative program with hitherto unseen footage of desert Rhino and Giraffe. Resident photographer, Wolfgang, then spoke on having fun with Photography. His casual, fun-filled style belies huge talent, and we were all delighted to see his gorgeous images from around the globe, including a Penguin shot which earned him Photographer of the Year. He assisted with instruction on aspect, rule of thirds, light, use of lenses, etc and will revisit these lessons as the cruise proceeds

At 6.30pm vintner David, from High Constantia winery, gave a brilliant presentation on Bordeaux wines-2 from Bordeaux and 2 from South Africa. The ship provided almost 500 glasses, and the audience were taught how to taste wine, what to look for in and on the glass, etc. Accompanied by South African biltong, it was most illuminating, presented by a passionate vintner who is an accomplished speaker. One guest shouted out that it was the best evening on tour thus far! Most guests agreed, and his wine (Sebastian) voted favourite by many.

After dinner, the diminutive Bronwen, played various musical instruments and sang for the guests in the Polar Bear Bar. The music was haunting and varied, no denying Bronwen’s innate skills, and a fitting end to a great day at sea. Guests are fortunate to have such talented staff on board and certainly are enjoying the presentations enormously.

Submitted by Rob Caskie – Historian
Art of Africa by Lucia de Leiris, Artist in Residence

At Sea – Namibia Coast

Thursday 11 April, 2013

Since midnight last night we have been travelling in Angolan waters. The temperature has changed markedly as has the humidity. Sea temperature now at 26 Centigrade-13C off Namibia! Ambient temperature 17C or 64 Fahrenheit. A busy day began with David Conrad presenting a wonderful lecture and slide show on Art, Religion and Power in the Portuguese-influenced African culture. Coupled with a deep,sonorous voice David's presentations are much enjoyed by all, who were fascinated too by the influence of Catholicism in the region.

During the morning resident photographer Wolfgang assisted passengers with various aspects of photography informally-a wonderful opportunity for all. Dr Steve Boyes then presented "uPholi wants a Forest" Saving South Africa's most endangered Parrot. A beautifully presented and illustrated lecture on how desperate the plight of the Cape Parrot has become, through dramatic destruction of the Yellow-wood forests all over southern Africa. It was indeed a very somber, thought-provoking lecture, filled too with hope on account of Steve's ambitious and fantastic regeneration programs. This remarkable biologist has devoted his life to saving South Africa's national Parrot, and in so doing our national tree, too!

Early afternoon a large group of travelers found their way to join Lucia for a drawing class in the Polar Bear Pub. Later a crowd gathered for Attenborough's special program on the Savannah regions of southern Africa, filled with breathtaking cinematography. Perhaps most interesting were the comments at the end of the program regarding the extreme lengths the team had gone to in order to secure the sequences.

Many guests spent time on the outside decks today, enjoying the weather and one another's company, on very calm seas. The evening found ex-Zimbabwean, Peter Baxter, presenting a wonderful lecture on the life and legacy of Jan Christiaan Smuts, perhaps one of South Africa's least remembered, yet greatest sons. A farm boy who went to school aged 12, upon the death of his brother, matriculated in 6 years, earned two Law firsts at Cambridge, and went on to command in East Africa, and ensured that South Africa sided with the Allies rather than the Germans in 1914. Will South Africa ever see the ilk of such a polymath again?

The Road Scholar group on board (39 guests) enjoyed a wonderful cocktail party with canape's in the Polar Bear Lounge before dinner, and thoroughly enjoyed the occasion, beautifully put on by the ship's hotel department.

After dinner, Bronwen entertained some guests with wonderful African music in her own inimitable way, and all went to bed excited about the prospects of visiting Lobito and Beguela in Angola tomorrow.

Submitted by Rob Caskie – Historian
Photo – Bronwen plays music in the Polar Bear Bar by D. Gould



Lobito, Angola

Friday 12 April, 2013

We steamed into the Angolan port of Lobito feeling a tangible atmosphere of suppressed excitement. Not only was the temperature and humidity noticeably tropical, but the thought of entering Africa proper seemed to most of us to be the moment when the adventure really begins.

Angola is a nation of mixed reputation. It was the theatre of one of Africa's longest and most brutal wars, but it is also part of Portuguese Africa, offering that wonderful Afro/Latino synthesis that seems to inject so much warmth, vitality and vivacity in the simple act of living. This was put on immediate display by a full showing of Angolan officials as we docked at our berth, all turned out in perfect order, and determined that their strength of numbers would be applied wholly and completely to our comfort and convenience.

The top heavy process of paperwork, so adored across the continent, was waived in this instance, and we were expedited to our busses under the warming tropical sun. Thereafter we set off amid the great ceremony of screaming police sirens, a paramedic vehicle bringing up the rear, and a corps of young, smiling enthusiastic Angolan guides testing out their English, their guiding chops and the sheer pleasure of having such a large group of foreigners to tour their wonderful city.



The tour for the day covered the two towns of Lobito and Benguela, both cast in the unique Portuguese/African style, veneered slightly, but only very slightly, by the fresh paint of modern architecture and construction, and displaying the usual Portuguese national obsession with tree lined avenues and lovely central parkways and public spaces

We paused first at the 16th century fort of San Pedro site don a hilltop guarding the old crossing on the Catumbela River. This offered great views of the surrounding city, the 1905 steel bridge that had been responsible for so much congestion, and the governor's residence on an opposite hill. And then a little later we visited the gorgeous little period cathedral church of *Igreja Catedral de Nossa Senhora de Fatima*.



The morning was wound up at the central square of Benguela where a rather staged street market and dance performance devolved very quickly into a rollicking street party attended by everyone within earshot of the music, which of course immediately lent the scene a sense of authenticity that even the organizers could hardly have expected.

From there we were transported to a beachside restaurant, admittedly a little overwhelmed by the volume of diners, but nonetheless oozing local atmosphere where very local fare was offered, washed down by local beer, and attended by the curious beach goers with the kind of reserved friendliness that seems to characterize the Angolans.

The day was rounded off by a superb and unexpected train excursion back to Lobito within a venerable line of railway carriages dating from the 1930s, and harking back to grand old days of train travel. For many this was the highlight of the day – a slow, rather elegant shamble through the crowded shanty towns and open spaces between the cities, seeing and being seen, and absorbing the wonderful ambience of dark wood interiors and the musty airs of an age long past. A wonderful day all in all.

Submitted by Peter Baxter, Historian/Lecturer

Photos: a) Colonial Architecture - b) Street Dancer, both by D. Gould

At Sea, Angola to Congo

Saturday 13 April, 2013

By now, everyone has settled into the ship's sea-day routines of a late breakfast and a fine series of lectures. With the ship being so close to the equator, the outside decks are hot under clear skies and calm seas. A few fishing boats are passing on the horizon, but we are out of sight of land.

Conrad Henning kicks the day off with some campfire style tales of Elephants in Africa. For those who are looking for a more hands on distraction, Artist Lucia de Leiris begins the Art Workshops in earnest up in the Polar Bear Bar, and at 11:15, Steve "Budgie Boy" Boyes presents an interesting lecture about the dying Okavango Delta and why it's not too late to save it.

Our African Film Festival continues in the afternoon with a special video from one of our own guests; Jose Antonio Ruiz Diez used his own money to fund a project to build a school to provide education to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and he then created a film to document the effort.

Finally, Winemaker Dave van Niekerk once again amused and informed us with while he offered four Red Single Varietals for tasting. Dave's vast knowledge mixed with a comedian's delivery continues to delight and inform us about the fascinating (and tasty) world of wine and wine making.



Submitted by Page Turner, Librarian
Photos: Art workshop and Red Wine bottle- both by W. Kahler

Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo**Sunday 14 April 2013**

The day started off with a view of Pointe Noire in the distance, we were about to embark on an expedition into a place that most of us had never been to before. The temperature was 73.6 ° F and the air was thick with humidity. We were about to make our way into the harbor and then the ship stopped and put the anchor down. We weren't sure what had happened until we realized we had stopped outside of the harbor to wait for the pilot. For a few moments we thought our day would be spent, anchored outside the harbor looking at the city. We waited and waited and finally were met by the pilot and arrived alongside at 09h30, a while after our expected arrival time. This is where our adventure in "Congo Brazzaville" began and an adventure it was.



We started off by going to the Diosso Gorge to look at the red sand stone gully, created by natural erosion. Wolfgang gave an impromptu workshop on compositional techniques for photographing the gorge and we all peered down the ochre slopes to the green valley below.

We then headed over to the Diosso Scientific and Cultural museum where enthusiastic museum guides gave us a tour of the collection. They explained everything in French, which thankfully for some, Guy

translated.

From this point we stopped off at a picturesque seaside hotel for a comfort break, refreshments, toilets and time to put our toes in the sea. Some people went back to the ship and the rest of the group went to the Atlantic Hotel while another group went off to see the countryside and got stranded for some time under the shade of a baobab, finally returning to the Atlantic for a much need dip in the pool and a beer.

While we were in town we were able to wander through the main street, Charles De Gaulle. There was a craft market where we tested out our bartering skills with the craftsmen; many of us discovered a wonderful Patisserie where ogled at rows and rows of beautiful cakes and pastries and some of us even found an ice cream shop.

We all made our way back to the ship on the various shuttle busses and were ready to leave at 18h00 but the pilot was nowhere to be found. We waited and waited and finally he appeared 2 hours later and guided us out of Pointe Noire Harbor. We were on our way to another day at sea and another adventure.

Submitted by Bronwen Clacherty

Photos: a) Jess and the boys at Diosso Gorge by Wolfgang Kaehler

At Sea, Congo to Sao Tome

Monday 15 April, 2013



As we sail towards San Tome and Principe we will enter the The Gulf of Guinea. It is the north easternmost part of the tropical Atlantic Ocean between Cape Lopez in Gabon, north and west to Cape Palmas in Liberia. The intersection of the Equator and Prime Meridian (zero degrees latitude and longitude) is in the gulf. Among the many rivers that drain into the Gulf of Guinea are the Niger and the Volta. The coastline on the gulf includes the Bight of Benin and the Bight of Bonny. The Niger River in particular deposited organic sediments out to sea over millions of years which became crude oil. The Gulf of Guinea region, along with the Congo River delta and Angola further south, are expected to provide around a quarter of the United States' oil imports by 2015. This region is now regarded as one of the world's top oil and gas exploration hotspots.

Once again, a day at sea is an opportunity for guests to catch up with new friends, swap some photos or get a nap. For the staff, it's a full schedule of lectures and workshops, beginning with David Conrad's - *D'mba as Matrix of West African Womanhood: Gateways to the Spirit World*. Followed by art and photos workshops with Wolfgang and Lucia's.

Our African (floating) Film Festival feature entertained afternoon guests with a showing of *La Vie est Belle* (Life is Rosy) in the Discovery Lounge.

Finally, Winemaker Dave van Niekerk pours some more wine, teaching us about the difference between New World and Old World grapes. How knew that wine could be so entertaining?.



Submitted by Page Turner, Librarian

Photos: Sea bird on ocean & art supplies- both by P. Turner

Sao Tome

Tuesday, 16 April 2013

A truly spectacular day started when we anchored off the island about two miles offshore. The officials were jostled on board and the ship and passengers and staff cleared. It was an



exciting day as the zodiacs were used for the very first time on our epic West African voyage. The ride into town was wet for some, but the heat and humidity of the area made it feel insignificant, and actually, quite pleasant! Our buses were waiting for us at the pier – and scanning the horizon we could see that Sao Tome was truly a wonderful destination. The architecture was Portuguese-colonial and many of the old buildings had been restored. There seemed to be money in Sao Tome, after many years of Marxist-

Leninist dictatorship. A steep drive up to the centre of the island resulted in us going a small hike to a gorgeous waterfall. It was so nice to finally be in some wilderness area- pristine it was not, but just to have some forest around us healed the soul.

The tour continued to a marvelous old Coffee Station called Monte Café, reinvigorated by foreign money where the Saotomeans were waiting for us and showing us their dance moves. Some of the staff and guests joined in and the vibe in the air was truly great. We all convened at the lunch spot right on the beach, but what greeted us before we tucked into a delicious lunch was a water-spout tornado underneath impossibly black clouds, a first for many. A quick trip past the airport revealed the craziness that is so African. Two aircraft (one which had “explore Canada’s arctic” on it) had been incorporated to a nightclub! We then got back into our buses and headed off to explore the quaint town – The rain was starting to come down but we managed to explore the marvelous fort at the entrance to the harbour. It was like going back in time to the colonial era, and the inhabitants had just left. A quick stop at a small shop to buy some local chocolate and gifts and then we headed back to the pier to start the process of bringing us all back to the ship by means of our trusty zodiacs. What a day it had been. Anchor up, we headed in the night to the sister island Principe....



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Submitted by Conrad Hennig
Photos: all C. Henning

Príncipe, São Tomé & P

Wednesday, 17 April 2013

It was a pearly-grey morning as we approached our anchorage close to the lush green island of Príncipe. Black basaltic rocks and golden beaches lined the shore while luxuriant forests clothed the hillsides. Zodiacs went ashore, officials came on board and in no time everyone began their expedition starting at the tiny Bom Bom Island. A picturesque, long boardwalk connected to the main land. Western Reef Herons, mostly all black with bright yellow feet, could be seen picking at the rocks and in the shallow water. Palm trees, green lawn, sparkling swimming pool and fancy chalets were there at the Bom Bom Resort to indulge our senses and provide the creature comforts. Conrad and Steve



led the Birdwatching and Nature walks through the thick coastal forest with many streams and muddy places. A bright jewel of a Malachite Kingfisher flashed by as the forest met the beach and a larger Blue-breasted Kingfisher was observed inside the forest. Land crabs could be taken from their hidey holes and examined, they are a local delicacy! A huge mahogany tree had the beginnings of a strangler fig creeping up its trunk and many species of ferns and mosses covered the branches of the larger trees. The road up the hill gave great open views of the canopy where the lovely sounds of the endemic Dohrn's Thrush-babbler echoed around the valley. Two species of introduced monkeys, a Samango and a Colobus were seen at some distance. The excitement of the morning was the sound of parrots squawking and screeching and then several African Greys were seen as they flew overhead.



Talented Lucia set up her drawing easel and proceeded to paint the scenery. Her creative water colour depicted the beach, long causeway and the rugged, black rocks.

Wolfgang had a group of wannabe paparazzi following him around as they found shadows, rocks, shells and scenery to shoot with their long or short lenses.

The weather was so calm and perfect that zodiac cruises were the order of the day. Drivers took off in all directions along the coast, stopping off in small villages to purchase local sweet pineapples and bananas. Guy, sitting in his zodiac, wove palm fronds into baskets to carry the fruit, Stefan had some of us swimming in the clear water and David, our serious vintner, took great delight in finding remote villages and the remains of ancient ruins.

The Bom Bom restaurant advertised curried fish and other tasty treats which tempted some of us for lunch. Many though, did the quick zodiac shuttle back to our ship and enjoyed a lunch back on board.

Submitted by Lyn Mair Expedition Leader

Photos by L. Mair: Boardwalk linking tiny BomBom island to mainland; Zodiac cruising with David Van Niekerk,



April 18th

