

# Hong Kong to Southampton Voyage – Part 3

## Great Adventure Travelogue

### Part 3: The Seychelles to Port Elizabeth, South Africa

April 11, 2016

Dateline: Port Victoria, Mahe, The Seychelles

Latitude at Port Victoria 4.31 Degrees South, Longitude 55.30  
Degrees East



Docked at Port  
Victoria

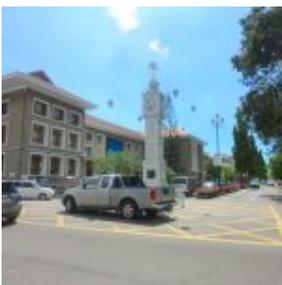
We arrived and docked at Port Victoria on the island of Mahe early, but not early enough to beat the heat. At 8:30 it was 92F. We had a catamaran sail and snorkeling planned for the afternoon so we set off to walk into the town of Port Victoria to do some exploring. The Seychelles are scattered over 175 square miles and consist of a group of 115 islands – a mix of flat coralline atolls and mountainous islands, which reminded us so much of the Virgin Islands that we were getting, if not homesick for them, then visit sick – bottom line is we need a VI fix). While the scenery is the same, the temperatures are not. The Virgin Islands are all around Latitude 18 degrees North, while the Seychelles are all around

4 degrees off the Equator, and those 14 degrees make a big difference. The coast of Kenya lies 1,000 miles to the west



Harbor at Port  
Victoria

The city of Port Victoria was first established as the seat of British Colonial government (the British were more or less everywhere back then). Principal exports today are vanilla, coconuts and coconut oil, fish and guano. The local people are called Seychellois (pronounced "Say shell wah" with the accent on "wah"). There is evidence that the Arabs had been here around the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, but the first European explorer to find the islands, Vasco de Gama, was Portuguese,. The islands were claimed for France by a French explorer who landed on Mahe in 1742 and the island group was named for the French Finance Minister, Jean Moreau de Sechelles. Settlers came in after that but not in droves and by 1791 there were only 572 people and 487 of them were slaves, and the capital city of Victoria was a crocodile infested swamp. The crocodiles are now extinct as are the giant tortoises which were



Port Victoria  
Town Square

killed off and eaten by the early settlers. The British took over the island in 1794 and it was officially ceded to them in 1814 with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo as part of the spoils of war. Once slavery was abolished in 1835, the islands went into a decline. It was finally rescued by tourism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but there have been a series of coups and attempted coups over the years. The last one was in 1986 and the country has been stable since then. They have a law that all warships calling on Port Victoria must be nuclear free – not a bad idea since they never know who might want to use a nuke in a coup attempt.

Victoria is one of the world's smallest capitals with only just over 26,000 inhabitants and the island of Mahe is only 17 x 8 miles. The walk to the center of town, not much more than a mile,



The Queen  
Victoria  
docked in Port  
Victoria

was a hot and steamy affair with our trying to take in water faster than we sweated it out. En route to town there was a park with inviting shade trees that we cut through and did enjoy a brief respite. We noticed that it bordered a small harbor and we could see the Queen Victoria at the quayside, beautifully framed by palm trees, and so we strolled over to snap a picture. We discovered that others had enjoyed this view before us, but then looking at the ground, we concluded that they were apparently enjoying more than the view. It was

littered with used bright pink condoms. Or as Gary said “So now we know what the locals do when they are not swimming and snorkeling”.

We slogged on to town to find a square of sorts with a small clock tower and a few shops selling this and that. There were some museums we could have visited but as best we could tell, they were not air conditioned and we are too wimpy (or didn't have sufficient interest) to visit them without it. There are pretty slim pickings as far as tourism goes here in town, but the main attractions are the beaches and the water, of course. Gary had been in the market for a pair of flip flops since Hong Kong, since he forgot to pack his, and strangely enough, here in the Seychelles, they had his size. Prior to this, he was a little like Cinderella's prince trying to find a fit. We concluded there are not many Size 12 feet in the Indian Ocean countries.



Docked in the  
Seychelles

We did a little reading on the Seychelles and learned that one of their chief exports is palm oil from a type of palm tree they call “coco de mer” – that is sea coconut, which has the distinction of being the world's largest nut.. They can get quite large and rather than bring one home, we bought a small carved replica to remember our visit to Port Victoria – should the size 12 flip flops fail to remind us, or perhaps suffer a “Margaritaville” style blowout. Our original thought was to

explore Port Victoria until time to meet our catamaran dockside, but we quickly determined that said exploration could in no way occupy the full 4 hours time we had available. And since it had been a couple of hours since we had been fed, we went back to the ship for lunch and a general cooling off.



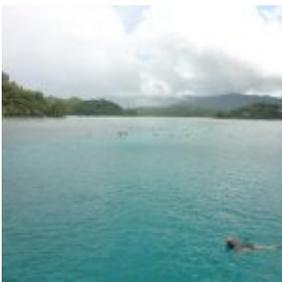
The Catamaran  
Atami

We boarded the catamaran with 78 other people, and set off for the National Marine Park of Moyenne Island, where we were promised a reef with an opportunity to snorkel, as well as a glass bottom boat ride to preview the delights below. It didn't seem all that crowded at first – as we took half the boat on the first glass bottom excursion and half on the second. We actually were seated on little benches 2 by 2 by a glass window below the deck of the boat in the hull. It was a great idea in theory, as long as you are not too claustrophobic, but in practice, the windows needed a good scrubbing, and the tide was out, the wind was blowing and the water was really churned up, making the visibility quite murky. We did see a few quite common fish called sergeant majors (due to their stripes) but the experience failed to thrill even the most novice aquatic people among us. It was however quite effectively air conditioned so we didn't mind it so much. We were, however, looking forward to getting into the water. Once everyone queued (a British word used on board for lining up) to get masks and snorkels, the boat seemed extremely crowded. We decided to bag the snorkeling opportunity and go swimming, which I am happy to report was absolutely delightful.



## Turquoise Waters

The water was a turquoise blue and so refreshing, and being in the water, we saw a great show with first time snorkelers trying to come down the steps with fins on, masks askew, snorkels upside down and so on. There was only one ladder on the catamaran so many people going back up to get a different mask, a different set of fins, or some basic instruction were trying to go up, while others were coming down. Because there was a fairly good current, we just hung out on the anchor line to stay close to the boat, while snorkelers took off at a pretty good clip, whether they intended to do so or not. The net effect was that snorkelers were scattered over several hundred yards, and so the boat crew deployed a chase boat (an inflatable dinghy) to round them up and in several cases, haul them aboard to get back to the



## Scattered Snorkelers

boat. Looking at the scene from the deck of the catamaran once we got out of the water, it was very reminiscent of one of the final scenes of the movie, *Titanic*, with people in lifejackets scattered for miles calling out for help (It was similar minus

the frozen part of course – these victims were in 90 degree water.) I was wondering whether we missed a good opportunity since we both love diving and snorkeling, but I was told by a fellow passenger who did go snorkeling that the scenery was the same as inside the glass bottom boat, but you were wet and getting a sunburn while you watched it.



## Musical Waters of the Seychelles

At 4:00 p.m. when we returned to the ship, the temperature was 38C or 100 F. Despite the heat and the dysfunctional snorkel trip, it was lovely being on the water in a crisp breeze and in the water in these beautiful islands. A fellow passenger had a T-shirt on with a slogan I liked that read “The Earth is filled with music for those who will listen”. I felt like we listened to the music of the waters of the Seychelles today.

**April 12, 2016**

**Dateline: Southern Indian Ocean**

**Latitude at Noon UTC + 4 hours, 9.7 Degrees South, Longitude  
56.1 Degrees East**

Today is our first day out of the Seychelles on a course for Mauritius. We had another strenuous round of breakfast and cribbage, followed by deck time, which involves sitting on the

Promenade Deck and watching the ocean roll by, with the occasional passenger or deck workman strolling by. This watching is very Zen like and can induce a trance or a nap, whichever comes first, and we also read, which may be interspersed with a nap or trance.

At noon (and we know it is noon because the ship sounds two long and two short blasts of the whistle, a.k.a. horn, and then the captain makes the navigational announcement . We were 410 miles northeast of the northernmost point of Madagascar and 46 miles from the Agalega Islands, two small islands belonging to Mauritius, which engage in the coconut trade. We were traveling at 16.7 knots, somewhat slowed by the equatorial current and 15 knot winds. We have traveled 360 miles from Port Victoria, Seychelles with 626 miles to go to Port Louis, Mauritius. We are traveling along the edge of the Mascarene Plateau. The water depth is over 10,000 feet but the depths can get as shallow as 26 to 500 feet and then can plunge at the edge of the plateau to a depth of about two and half miles). We have mild seas with 6 foot swells. The air temperature is 86 degrees F and the water is 90F. The captain advises that if we have seen a weather forecast, we will know that there is a cyclone well to the east of us, but we will be long gone before it reaches these waters.



Ice Carving On  
Board

We of course had lunch, afterward taking time to watch Bobby Cadic, the carving specialist who had dazzled us with vegetable carving a few days ago work his magic on a big block

of ice. We were amazed that he could A – carve anything out of a 200 pound block of ice and B – carve it before it melted since he was performing this feat poolside in full equatorial sun. He did both, carving a beautiful and intricately detailed swan. He also told us something we did not know which is that ice melts at exactly the same rate so the sculpture will shrink in size, but not lose its detail as it melts.

We made a point of seeing the on board movie, a very funny comedy called *This is Where I Leave You*. I had read the book and think the movie was equally good – something not usually the case. After the movie, we lounged most the afternoon away, (something different) but at tea time (a British ritual) a formal tea is served in the Queen's Room, but an informal tea is served in the Lido Buffett. There I introduced Gary to a new vice – the Cream Tea. Well to be honest, we both skip the tea, but we do partake of hot scones with cream and jam. We learned that there is the Devon tradition whereby you apply the cream and then the jam, and the



Scones in the  
Cornwall  
Tradition

Cornwall tradition where you apply the jam and then the cream. The Cornish tradition works best with hot scones, and we were told you should not be served them any other way. In fact – they should be consumed within 10 minutes of leaving the oven so they don't turn into hockey pucks. I have talked to some fellow passengers of the British persuasion that told me that there is no baking powder used to make scones – thus

differentiating them from their American cousins – biscuits. I am thinking they might want to consider some baking powder to add a little fluff to the scone, but I think that is not likely – they are big on tradition.

I am doing the two mile circuit in the afternoons on my own since Gary has pulled up lame, complaining of a bad knee. He thinks he pulled a tendon on one of the turns on previous sprints (or perhaps strolls) is more accurate around the deck. He is going to be taking it easy for a few days so he hopes the scones don't tip him over from a calories burned, calories consumed perspective.

We learned some Indian Ocean facts today, such as it is the third largest body of water on earth, covering about 20% of the earth's surface. It is bounded on the north by south Asia, the west by the Arabian Peninsula, on the east by the Maylay Peninsula and Australia, and on the south by the Southern Ocean. It is separated from the Atlantic at Longitude 20 degrees East (Cape of Good Hope South Africa) and from the Pacific at 147 degrees East. Its northernmost point is in the Persian Gulf. The ocean is 6,200 miles wide at the southern tips of Africa and Australia, and covers an area of 28.4 m. square miles.

We had an early dinner and fully intended to go see the evening's entertainment – a dance extravaganza, however this did not happen. We would blame the time change for that, but we actually gained an hour and went to bed earlier. It must be the salt air. In any event, we are not suffering from a lack of sleep.

**April 13, 2016**

**Dateline: Southern Indian Ocean**

**Latitude at Noon UTC + 4 hours, 16.2 Degrees South, Longitude  
56.9 Degrees East**

Today we were at sea between the Seychelles and the island of Mauritius. The weather is windy and cooler, but still tropical. We can tell that we are nearing the end of a segment of the cruise with all the fashion alerts that are being observed – that is plaid with plaid, plaid with strips, plaid with flowers. It seems people nearing the end of their cruise either have to wash some laundry, wear dirty clothes or make do with what remains in their suitcase, and fashion be damned.

Today we listened to a lecture by our Royal Navy liaison, who is a lieutenant commander in the British Navy, although many Brits still use the pronunciation, "Leftenant". No one seems to be quite sure of the origin of that pronunciation, but as has been pointed out, with the American pronunciation, "loo tenant", you could be calling your superior officer a toilet dweller. He talked about counter piracy measures for maritime security. The goal is to deter aggression with presence and projection of strength so the pirates will decide to look for softer targets. There are 9 choke points world-wide that are prime piracy areas (i.e. a lot of ships in a small area, slowing down for traffic and navigational hazards) that include the Straits of Hormuz, the Bosphorus, the Straits of Singapore, the Straits of Malacca, Gibraltar, Bab el Mandeb at the Horn of Africa? The other three are the Panama Canal, Suez Canal, Cape Horn. The Lieutenant Commander said that his and everyone else's favorite duty is the Caribbean. One of the toughest is the Nuclear Sub Deterrent group where servicemen and service women are at sea for weeks and weeks. In addition to military protection, the Royal Navy also has responsibilities for SOLAS (Safety of Lives at Sea) and respond to SOS signals received, as well as providing humanitarian relief around the globe. Ships and shippers use Just in Time delivery so any ship detained affects commerce, and often it is world-wide and thus part of their job is keeping commodities, including oil and gas moving. The Royal Navy is also involved in enforcing fishing grounds protection and dismantling mines left over for WW I and II. National

Security is at stake here because globe is shrinking and there is inter-global dependency.

The Royal Navy is very small by US Standards with just over 30,000 people. The US Navy has around 326,000 with another 100,000 reserves. Carnival Cruise Lines, the parent company of Cunard, have 94,000 employees and Boots the Chemist Shop, a British chain drug store has has 40,000. The bottom line is that the Royal Navy is a Small group with a big job. As a note of protocol, the Union Jack does not become the Union jack until it is up the flagpole. Until then it is the Union flag. He closed his presentation with this "benediction": "May you have a fair wind and following sea".



A Good Breeze  
on Deck

At noon today we were 400 miles from the east coast of Madagascar, traveling at 15.6 knots. We have traveled 709 miles from Port Victoria in the Seychelles with 234 to go to Port Louis, Mauritius. We continued traveling across the Mascarene Plain with the water depth at 14,500 feet. The skies were partly cloudy and the seas moderate with 8 to 12 foot swells. The trade winds were blowing so things are blessedly cooler with the air temperature at 84F and the sea at 86 F. We passed some small islands called Cargados Carajos, belonging to Mauritius with a population of 63 people, mostly fishermen.

A note on trade winds: The Southeast trades blow steadily toward the Equator. The heat causes a high pressure dome that

draws winds toward it. This was very important in the days of sail. In the Caribbean they utilized the Northeast Trades, which also blow steadily.



Relaxing on  
the Promenade  
Deck

We had some Promenade Deck time to rest our brains up which included some napping. We happened to notice the ladders to get up to lifeboats and saw that they were covered with a lock. We speculated that this would have been a great place to stow away – and you could eat at the Lido or consume emergency rations, and wash your clothes at the launderette. There may be a book plot here. And for characters for the book, we saw a lot of candidates to pull from, such as the strange walker – a guy pulling himself along with an invisible rope, or the bare-chested octogenarian, bent over almost double but plugging along, matching many of the young whippersnappers stride for stride. On the Promenade Deck, there are a few “Wide-uns” who block more effectively than NFL players, who we feel must have studied the Flying Wedge play from Notre Dame.

Gary went to a wine tasting and determined that yes, he still likes it. The evening performance included band members from the olden days – 10CC, Cliff Richard, and the Moody Blues. The show was called the Rewind Project. In case your wonder what happens to band members of defunct bands – if they don't overdose – they could appear on a cruise ship. We also learned the origin of the term “Three Sheets to the Wind”. In the days of sailing ships “sheets” were what the lines that

controlled the sails were called. When those sheets are cast to the wind or let go, it would cause the ship to shudder and stagger, just like a drunken sailor out of control.

We are to arrive at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow for Immigration Inspection so we have an excuse to go to bed early, which we always do anyway. We are amazed at how much and how soundly we sleep. We love the quiet and the roll of the ship to rock us to sleep and keep us there at good 10 hours or so.

**April 14, 2016**

**Dateline: Port Louis, Mauritius**

**Latitude at Port Louis 20.9 Degrees South, Longitude 57.2 Degrees East**



Port Louis

This morning we docked in Port Louis on the island of Mauritius, located due east of Madagascar on what was once believed to be a land bridge between Asia and Africa. The closest port of any size is Mombasa, Kenya, over a thousand miles away. The island covers about 720 square miles and is home to over a million people. It is mountainous with steep gorges slicing through vast fields of sugar cane. Mauritius was known to the Arabs, but it is so remote, it remained uninhabited until the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive, and found the resident dodo bird, much to their liking as an entrée, and proceeded with the extinction between the years of 1681 and

1693. They named the island after a Dutch Prince named



Turquoise  
Waters of  
Mauritius

Maurice. Their settlements never took hold and they gave it up in 1710, leaving behind two notorious legacies— one the extinction of the dodo and two the introduction of slavery, but on a positive note, they did introduce beer. The French came along and re-established the sugar plantations and used the island as a base for their corsairs – sort of authorized pirates who could raid British ships with the blessing of their government. The British had a similar arrangement, but theirs were called privateers. Nevertheless, they took action to eliminate the corsair activity and took over Mauritius in 1810. Once slavery was abolished in 1835, they had to bring in indentured servants from India to work the sugar cane fields. Sugar is still a major export, but now tourism is an important industry as well.



Our Welcome to  
Mauritius

Port Louis, so named by the French after King Louis XV, is the capital, as well as the economic center of Mauritius. There is a bustle of traffic and activity in this multi-cultural country. You can see a mix of western dress, Indian saris and Muslim veils on the women. Men and children also dress in their own styles, as they choose, sometimes with style seeming to be totally absent. The streets are very crowded around the local markets with vehicles and pedestrians. You can tell the British were here – at least when cars came to be used since they drive on the left. As in Great Britain, in Mauritius the people elect the Prime Minister as head of the Parliamentary Republic. Mauritius gained independence in 1968, but did not become a republic until 1992. There are plenty of places to explore in town: markets, forts, a mosque and a cathedral, but we were headed for the beach. We cleared immigration on board and went out to find our bus.



Our transport  
to the  
Catamaran

We met our local guide Laeticia, who was totally thrilled to meet two Americans – her first ever. She says she loves the way we talk, but she couldn't tell the difference between my Southern and Gary's Pacific Northwest. She just knew we weren't British, South African or European where most of her tourists come from. Today's temperature is 79F and would be pleasant, but the humidity is around 70% so we are glad to be going out on a catamaran today. English is the official language, but they use French "to be polite", according Laeticia, but we were not sure what she meant by this – maybe

as a courtesy to non English speakers. The most widely spoken language is Creole – a mixture of French and English which sounds very lilting.

The drive was through smallish pointy mountains formed by volcanoes, worn down over the eons, changing to green hills, covered with sugarcane and pineapple. Higher up there were forests turning to jungle with riotous undergrowth of flowers, vines, and shrubs. The soil is extremely fertile and just about everything grows here – a veritable Eden. Mark Twain visited here and wrote that “Mauritius was created before paradise came into being and served as an example for the latter.” January and February are the hurricane (cyclone) season, so Eden occasionally has some rough weather.



Lush  
Vegetation of  
Mauritius

Tropical plants that we have to get at a nursery and tend to with utmost care absolutely flourish here – hibiscus, ixora, mandevilla, bougainvillea, oleander and many more I couldn't identify. Trees are also bountiful – banyan, palm, rosewood, avocado, papaya, mango all along the roadway, and then there were casuarina trees lining the coves. There are a number of ruins here from plantation days, many with only chimneys remaining. Our guide told us that if they are square, they were French, if they are round, they were British. Mauritius has a problem with “morons” (a.k.a. more-on), similar to what we saw in the Seychelles. People don't have enough money to complete a house as large as they want so they add a little

more on each year – sometimes just leaving unfinished concrete with iron rebar sticking up for months or even years.



Sharp Peaks of  
Mauritius

They have no insects here and consequently few birds, but that seems a relatively small price to pay. There are also no snakes and no sharks since the island is almost encircled by shallow coral reefs and the channel for the harbor had to be dredged. There are only 3 types of wild mammals here – wild boar, monkeys and mongoose. The local diet is largely fish and chicken and they have to import meat and cheese from South Africa. Their chief exports are sugar, flowers and a few textiles and they have recently introduced call centers. Our guide told us that cows are not raised here because they could not be slaughtered due to a Hindu belief that considers them sacred, and they don't want to have them roaming around.



The Waterfall  
on the Rain-  
Swollen Grand  
River

We had about an hour ride to catch our catamaran and were greeted with rum and coke as soon as we arrived. Someone on the ship had said there would be rum and coke after snorkeling, but somehow the boat crew didn't get the message so we had continuous rum. It was a fun trip and we stopped for swimming and snorkeling in really shallow water, but it was fun anyway. There was a side trip to a waterfall in a smaller boat so we went on that too. It was sort of a short waterfall with a long name (the Grand River South East Waterfall), but the rum was flowing and of course that made everything much grander. It was pretty windy on the return trip and I lost my hat (Chattahoochee Country Club) and one of the ship's beach towels as well – there in the ocean off the beach for some intrepid snorkeler to find at a future date) They were serving some little snacks that looked like cheese straws, but did not have any of the flavor of cheese straws. We asked the boat crew what they were and they were sort of stumped to come up with the right words in English and they finally settled on “flour” and sure enough, they did taste like flour – and not much else. But the rum was good and all in all, it was a great afternoon.

**April 15, 2016**

**Dateline: Le Port, Reunion Island**

**Latitude at Le Port 20.4 Degrees South, Longitude 55.2 Degrees East**



Entering the  
Harbor at Le

## Port

Watching our approach to Reunion Island this morning, we could see the peak of the Pieton des Nieges (Snowy Peak), which is over 10,000 feet above sea level and is the highest point on the Indian Ocean. This mountain is 27,000 feet above the sea floor, and is only 2,000 feet shorter than Mt. Everest if you measure it that way. We docked at 8:00 a.m. and had a tour planned for the morning which would take us to the top of the peak. The temperature was a pleasant 78 degrees, which was way cooler than Mauritius was yesterday.

Reunion is a Department of France, way out in the middle of nowhere with the nearest land mass of any size being Madagascar, 500 miles to the west. We saw a teeny Eiffel tower – perhaps 6 foot high, at a local residence, homage we assumed to the mother country. The total population of the island is around 700,000, a third of which live in the capital of St. Denis. Reunion was briefly visited by the Portuguese, prior to 1642 when the French East India Company established a layover station for their ships to re-provision. The island has only been settled for 360 years. In the early days, seafarers would drop off pigs and goats and let them live off the land so they would have a source of fresh meat on future trips. In 1663 the first people arrived, landing near what is today the village of St. Paul.

The first settlers were actually a group of mutineers who had been deported from Mauritius, and who took up residence in a cave where they stayed for 3 years. The French officially set up a colony in 1668 at St. Denis. In the years 1805-06, attempts were made to grow coffee, but regular cyclones discouraged that effort. From 1810 to 1815 the British took over and replaced coffee plantations which were struggling, with sugar cane. They started sugar cane and rum production to facilitate trade. The French returned in 1815 and continued successfully with the sugar plantations. The most prominent

family on the island at this time was named Desbassyns, and they published the Black Code, which was a book on how to manage slaves. Successful plantations were largely made possible through slave labor, but after slavery was abolished in 1848, they used indentured servants from China and India. Today sugar still accounts for 85% of the island's exports, and over half of the current population of Reunion is of mixed race (Creole), descendants of former slaves and indentured servants.



Dramatic  
Vistas of  
Reunion Island

From north to south the Reunion Island is 62 miles long and from east to west it is 44 miles wide. Reunion is very scenic with mountains and forests and over 300 waterfalls, as well as 17 miles of beach. The swimming conditions are not ideal since the ocean floor drops sharply, creating undertows and creating an inviting environment for sharks, but they still have beach resorts nonetheless. The island has an extinct volcano, Pieton des Nieges, approximately 2,000 years old, and an active one called Pieton Fournaise, (8, 631 feet.) which is one of the most active in the world. It erupted 4 times in 2015. On the slopes of the Pieton des Nieges are 3 dramatically beautiful "*cirques*", or craters, one of which, the Cirque de Mafate, was our destination for today.

As we left the ship today we saw a gentleman with a set of golf clubs. He told us that he has been around the world so many times that there is nothing new for him to see and so his

mission this year is to play golf in every port. We understand Reunion Island has some lovely courses and it's a beautiful day, so it should be good golfing today. There are also lots of activities here for the intrepid – paragliding, ultra-light aircraft, trekking, mountain biking and then for the regular people there is, in addition to golf, scuba diving, 4 wheeling fishing, and beach going. We also understand they have a luge facility here – iceless we assume.



Rugged  
Mountains of  
Reunion

We wish we had booked a helicopter tour, which today would have been magnificent, flying over the jungle and craters, the beaches and reefs, the vanilla and coffee plantations, and the waterfalls. The island is very lush and green now, but they are just ending the wet season and we were told things will brown quite a bit.

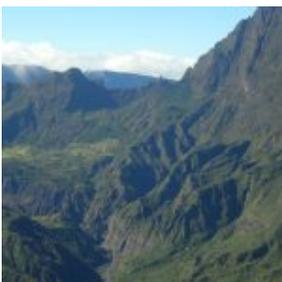
As we left the quayside at Le Port (not really a village in itself – just “the port”), our guide told us that there was a dockworker and construction worker strike today, which is why there was so little traffic and so little activity. They have 845,000 people and 500,000 cars, so there normally would be a lot of traffic on the narrow roads. We set off with our guide Myriam and our driver Jean Michel. Driving through town we saw a rather strange combination cemetery and vegetable garden. It seemed strange, but with land with good topsoil at a premium, I guess they have to do what they have to do. Another local oddity, Myriam gave us a map of the island and I spotted a

village called Le Tampon, but I have no report on this since we didn't visit it. Reunion Claim to fame seems to be that Roland Garros was born here. He was a famous WWI aviator, and the namesake of a tennis complex in Paris.



Windswept  
Trees along  
the Mountain  
Road

Heading up into the mountains we were shocked at the lack of guard rails and shoulders on some very narrow and winding roads. Instead of shoulders there were concrete drainage ditches about 3 feet deep. The tow truck business must be booming here. Cars often had to back up to give us room to get past them on hairpin curves. The slopes were lined with what they call gorse and what we would call scotch broom, brilliant yellow blossoms cascading down the hillsides. The trees were short and looked windswept, much like the Monterey Pines on the California coast. We spotted roadside vendors selling vanilla and coffee, reportedly quite tasty and quite expensive if bought as an export.



The Cirque to

## Mafate Crater

We would be traveling inland to Piton Maito, a mountaintop park that overlooks the Cirque de Mafate crater, which is a UNESCO world heritage site, perhaps the most remote we have ever visited. The name Maito means burned land. We crossed a wide river bed with a shallow river called the River of Pebbles, but I must say these were big pebbles, many of Volkswagen size. We stopped to view the Cirque de Mafate (Crater of Mafate) named after a locally famous runaway slave. Slave catchers were brutal back in those days and often did not bring slaves back, but would kill them and bring the owners their scalp to collect their bounty. The owners, while losing valuable "property", used this as a method to discourage other runaways.



Village in the  
Mafate Crater

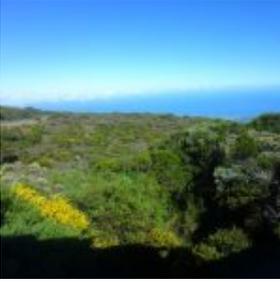
We did not expect to see such dramatic scenery here and found it so reminiscent of Machu Picchu, minus the Incan ruins. We were further surprised to see small villages in the crater. Our guide told us about 800 people live here in 3 villages, but they get sometimes as many as 200 trekkers per day on hiking trips. The only way they can get in or out of the village is on foot. Residents and trekkers alike hike up (or down) the River of Pebbles, which originates in the crater. Or in case of emergencies or lazy trekkers, you can go in by helicopter. The people are apparently self sufficient and raise their own food, and earn money from offering room and board to hikers.

The island is very tidy, but our guide told us they have a dumping problem with people putting their garbage into ravines and it washes out to sea shore during the rainy season, causing health and pollution problems. They also have graffiti here and there, but it is not too pervasive. We saw only one stray dog – a dingo looking thing with great big ears.



Clouds  
Settling on  
the Peaks

Reunion Island was one of those serendipity things we like to experience. We knew next to nothing about it, had low expectations and it was a total delight with a wonderful climate and beautiful scenery with no insects and all kinds of plants – a little slice Garden of Eden out in the Indian Ocean. Of course with no insects there are a limited number of birds, but this is a small sacrifice. The plants are not always welcome and most species have been introduced – some are downright invasive such as lantana and cryptomeria. The latter was introduced due to a lumber shortage on the island for home building. It filled and exceeded that particular need and is crowding out native trees, including the Highland Tamarind and acacia. They, like the American south, also have a kudzu problem. Someone had the bright idea to introduce flies to control the kudzu somehow. We didn't hear how that was supposed to work, but in any event, it was not a good idea. We have often seen in our travels many attempts by humans to try to fix nature, only to suffer unintended consequences .



## High Altitude Picnic Sites

The views from the mountain slopes were incredible. There were dozens of picnic tables with every one affording a scenic overlook spot. It is the season for humpback whales but we didn't get to spot any, despite the wide swaths of ocean we could see. From the slopes of the mountains, the Queen Victoria is a tiny speck far below us.

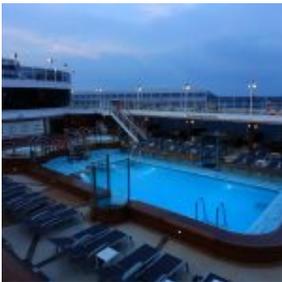
Our guide told us that Reunion was often visited by the French Pirate, Olivier Levasseur, who lived from 1688 to 1730. His nicknames were La Buse (the Buzzard) and La Bouche (the mouth) because he so voraciously attacked his enemies. His big score was a ship laden with treasure that had stopped in the shallow waters of Reunion for repairs. The ship had dumped all its cannon trying to stay afloat during a storm and so it made easy pickings for la Buse and crew. Exactly what happened to the estimated billion dollars in treasure is unknown, but just before he was hanged for piracy in 1730, Le Buse reportedly tossed a cryptogram on a piece of paper with clues to the treasure to the spectators telling them to find it. He wore an eye patch and is believed to be the prototype for Long John Silver in Treasure Island. The Island where he left the treasure is believed to be either Reunion, or nearby Mahe Island, so there are always treasure hunters about trying to find it.

Both vanilla and geranium oil are produced commercially here, but in very limited quantities. Vanilla has flourished with the introduction of manual pollination techniques. Unlike Mexico, which has a host of bees that fulfill this function,

Reunion has to use manual pollination and there is a 6 year period between planting and harvesting, and thus the expense of the finished product.

On our way back to the ship, we visited La Maison de Geranium, a local distillery and producer of geranium oil . As our guide Myriam explains. It is an essential oil sort of a cure all for mosquito bites and all sorts of other skin problems. It took a minute to catch on since she pronounces it, "zha rah nee um".

Once back on the ship. We opted for some pool time, which turned out to be a very decadent interlude of margaritas and then scones with cream and jam at tea time, and we visited with new friends we met from South Africa that we met at the Chief Engineer's Dinner.



The Lido Pool

We had some pool entertainment in the form of a passenger kerfuffle. One Indian gentleman was swimming laps and splashing a German woman every time he went by. She told him he should not be splashing. Then an English woman stepped in and told the German woman off to the effect that the swimming pool is for swimming and there is no rule against splashing and she can't boss everyone around and besides, she was rude to her two days ago. The poor Indian man had fled, fearing bloodshed. About this time the deck stewards came over to referee in case it came to fisticuffs, but with a few stink eyes exchanged, both glowering women retreated to their respective corners of the pool and the drama wound down. We

don't' know if hostilities were resumed since we had to retreat ourselves to get ready for dinner

We watched the evening entertainment, David Copperfield, not the famous illusionist, and not nearly as entertaining as the poolside dust-up. He bills himself as an "unusualist" – and he was unusual and funny, although I have to say much of the British humor is lost on us – we just don't have the background to get all the jokes.

We thought the exciting day was over when we came back to our stateroom, but this was not the case. We had been told that our balcony would be power washed sometime during the day (we thought day meant before the sun went down). We had a little tap-tap on our door about 10:00 p.m. and it was Ray, our cabin steward. We were up reading emails, and tried to let him in, but he said sorry no problem and he left. A few minutes later, we hear someone on our balcony, leaped up to throw open the curtains to see Ray with power washer in hand, busily scrubbing away. I was horrified to think he had gone through a neighboring cabin and in a daring maneuver, climbed from their balcony to ours on the exterior of the ship, at sea at night with the ship underway, but Gary showed me a little partition they could move to have access from one balcony to another. Nevertheless, Ray is one very hard working individual – making beds and cleaning toilets all day, power washing at night. We can only hope he gets hazardous duty pay for the night work.

**April 16, 2016**

**Dateline: Indian Ocean, off the Coast of Madagascar**

**Latitude at Noon UTC +4 24.1 Degrees South, Longitude 49.0 Degrees East**

Since leaving Reunion Island yesterday we are headed on a westerly course traveling over the Madagascar Basin, recorded to be as deep as 19,000 feet. We would pass within 16 miles of

the island of Madagascar this evening. We are sorry not to be visiting it – it is one of those exotic names that fires up your imagination – even before the movie came out. At noon today we had traveled 380 miles from Reunion Island and this is the first of 3 sea days to reach Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

After breakfast, we retired to the Carinthia Lounge to read and play cribbage and had the opportunity to further absorb fashion wear of our fellow passengers. We sadly noted that today even the sartorial splendor of Reginald (the Tom Selleck, Geraldo Rivera look alike) has succumbed to fashion alert status. Today he wore a pin strip linen jacket in off white with a plaid shirt which was borderline clashing in my fashion book. We have noticed that as the cruise wore on, people were getting to the bottom of their suitcases and were putting together whatever garments are clean, regardless of color or pattern. We are seeing more and more plaid with flowers, stripes with plaid and every other eyesore combination. A long held travel maxim of mine is thus reinforced and that is : Pack only neutral solid colors.

We attended two lectures today. The first was entitled the Myths and Magic of Plastic Surgery and it was accompanied by a bit of unplanned medical melodrama, with one of the spectators fainting dead away at the graphic images of the reconstructive cosmetic surgery photos. The doctor conducting the talk said it happens all the time with new interns in surgery so he wasn't too alarmed, but we still had a Code Alpha where the medical team responded, just in case it was more serious and all the blood and gore actually caused someone a heart attack. The doctor said it is called vasovagal response, a common response of interns seeing live surgery for the first time and fainting dead away. The man's poor wife looked so stricken we thought she may have needed a little resuscitation too. However, just like an injured football player, when he stood up and was escorted out by medics, he got a round of applause

from the audience. We think the doctor may want to reconsider the audiovisual element of his talk.

And speaking of the photos, we wondered if showing several hundred people on a cruise ship before and after pictures and discussing the cases was a violation of HIPA laws that we have in the US, but this doctor is South African so maybe the same rules don't apply. He talked about the differences between reconstructive and cosmetic surgery and the pitfalls of popular "surgical safaris" whereby you can disappear for several weeks and have a vacation at the same time. The doctor reports that a major pitfall of this practice that you need to rest while recovering and not driving around looking for wild animals.



Impala Herd of  
South Africa

The second speaker, was Gavin Robinson, a wildlife consultant who has spent his life working with animal conservancies in Africa. Today's talk dealt with techniques for relocating game from areas of danger or over population. One of the primary methods for relocation of herds is to create a corral of sorts (called a "boma") and create a funnel with sheeting and then herd the animals through the tunnel created. They originally used white sheeting, but learned brown worked better. Wild animals are not used to seeing white things in their day to day life. They sometimes use a helicopter if the animals are dangerous and will load them into a waiting vehicle or in some cases a boat. Individual animals, especially large ones, are often darted from a helicopter and are sometimes transported

suspended from the helicopter. Gavin tells us that the animals are given an antidote and can wake up rather quickly, so they designate the fastest runner to administer the wake-up shot.

Once animals have been darted they are tested for diseases, such as tuberculosis. This is such an infectious disease, they will destroy infected animals. When an animal has been darted, they cover the eyes because they are still open and they stuff cotton in the ears because they can still hear Rhinos in particular are endangered due to poachers selling to a huge market in Asia for rhino horn, which is believed to be an aphrodisiac. At one time there was an effort to cut their horns cut off with a chain saw to prevent poaching. It is like a claw or toenail, completely painless, but it will grow back if not surgically removed at the base and they found that poachers will kill an animal whose horns have been removed anyway so they don't waste time tracking an animal with no horn to "harvest". Consequently, this is not widely practiced any more.



Resting Rhino

Rhinos are still tracked, and trackers used to paint a number on their sides but rhinos would rub against trees to get it off so now they have gone to ear tags that can be radio tracked. There are both black and white rhino species, however they are the same color. The white rhino got its name from the Dutch word "weid" which means wide, and which was used to describe their mouths. The black rhino has a pointed hook shaped lip. They have different shaped mouths to accommodate their eating habits – the black rhino browses in

the brush where the white rhino eats grass.

Elephants are also often relocated. Since can only breathe through their trunk, not their mouths, teams have to be careful when they dart them to ensure they don't go down in the wrong position. Their sheer weight can cause their lungs to collapse. They also have to be mindful of body temperature since elephants would normally flap their ears to cool off. They have to be moved with cranes and flatbed trucks if they are relocated.



Giraffe in the Wild

To move giraffes it is important to keep them upright since they are twenty two feet tall and their circulation is impaired when they are down. Typically the catchers, will lasso the legs and guide them to a truck. Females can be identified by their spindly horns with fur on them. The males have thicker horns with no fur.

When horned animals like impala are transported, their horns are covered to protect the other animals being transported. They are much better at moving animals today. When they first started they had a 95% mortality rate. Today it is 1%. Another thing they learned is to leave the truck running when they stop since it seems to soothe the animals.

We had a leisurely afternoon, with a late lunch, some reading and journal writing. I walked solo today Gary back on injured list with a knee strain. We set our clocks forward tonight, but will still managed to sleep the extra hour. We have been

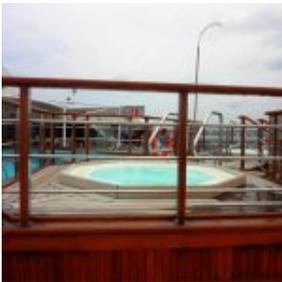
sleeping like babies on this trip, especially on the days at sea.

**April 17, 2016**

**Dateline: Off the Coast of Madagascar**

**Latitude at Noon UTC +3 28.0 Degrees South, Longitude 48.7 Degrees East**

Today we continued on our southwesterly course toward South Africa, passing over the Mozambique Basin which is over 400 miles wide and 800 miles long. We were told to be on the lookout for large marine animals, but unfortunately did not spot any. It was a beautiful sunny morning and we took up lounge chairs at the pool and were like a couple of lizards all morning, soaking up the sun. We also spent some time in the hot tub (a.k.a. spa)



Hot Tub at the Pavilion Pool

We are struck by how many of the elderly and the goofy seemed to gravitate toward the pool and of course we fit right in. There are a few with obvious dementia, and they can be understood and compassion extended, but some don't seem to fit into that category – or into any other we are familiar with. For example, there is the 90 pound woman who is at the pool every day, putting on sunscreen and then fidgeting with items in her beach bag. She has that thousand yard stare that they talk about in soldiers who come home with traumatic stress disorder. We're not sure what hers situation is, but I have

noticed she has her Kindle on the very largest font possible with about 10 words to a page and she stares at it for minutes at a time and never turns the page. Now she does nod off every so often, which I have been known to do myself so I can't get too critical in that regard.

At noon we were 240 miles off Cape St. Marie in Madagascar, traveling at a speed of 21.3 knots with a following wind at 16 knots. We have traveled 520 miles since noon yesterday with 852 to go to Port Elizabeth. The air temperature was 77F and the water temperature was 82F.



An elephant  
Reaching for  
the Good Stuff  
Up High

In the afternoon we went to a presentation by Gavin Robinson, a naturalist who we heard speak yesterday. Today's topic is conservancies –organizations trying to save Africa's wildlife in the wild. They also take a very strong position that animals should not be made into pets. There are only 3 conservancies in Zimbabwe now. They have to decide when to intercede in the natural flow of events. One project they undertake is to try to ensure that there is no more than a mile or so walk to the waterhole. A problem that they encounter is that elephants can smell water in the pipe they installed and instead of following it to the waterhole, they just rip it out of the ground. They also build "man-hide" huts at the water holes so they can count animals.

After lunch we ran into someone Gary recognized from our World Cruise on the QE2 10 years ago, a gentleman from Yorkshire, who told us he has over 2,000 days on Cunard cruises (and we thought we were well traveled with 150 days). He is having two separate 80<sup>th</sup> birthday parties on board and invited us to both.

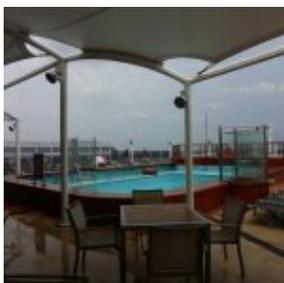
Gary went to a wine tasting and watched the float your boat races (where the passengers had built their own miniature ships and raced them in the pool. He was impressed by the ingenuity of the designers which were tasked with building a boat that could carry a six pack of beer as cargo and float and make headway. It was a daunting task. I, on the other hand, was busy reading and writing in my journal, with perhaps a tiny nap thrown in.

We had dinner with the new friends we made from South Africa, Zoe and Paddy, but first there were drinks in the Commodore Club, the Commodore's Cocktail Party. It was out latest night ever and we slipped off to go to bed around midnight.

**April 18, 2016**

**Dateline: Mozambique Basin, Off the Coast of South Africa**

**Latitude at Noon UTC +3 – 31.5 Degrees South, Longitude 32.3 Degrees East**



Cloudy and  
Cool at the  
Pavilion Pool

We awoke to a rainy and windy morning, finding it much cooler

than the previous days. The sea was slate blue, with foaming whitecaps, giving us a gentle roll. When you look to the horizon day after day on a ship traversing an ocean, you can easily believe the fact that the earth is comprised of 70 percent water. Our speed was 20 knots and at noon we were 103 miles off the coast of South Africa. The water under the keel was almost 10,000 feet deep. We had traveled 503 miles since noon yesterday, with 367 miles to go to reach Port Elizabeth. Seas were slight with a moderate swell (a swell is a wave that does not break). The air temperature was 75 degrees F. and the water was 72 F. We are in the Agellas Current which flows from north to south along the African Coast line. This area is one of several places in the world where rogue waves (a strong , extreme surface wave, significantly higher than other waves, with 60 feet to over 100 feet having been recorded) can develop. In this area it is the most dangerous when there is a strong southerly gale with a ship approaching the continental shelf.

Today was a good day to be in the Winter Garden which is like a giant atrium and is often too warm when the sun is out, but perfect today. We read and chatted with other passengers. The afternoon cleared and we spent some time on our balcony which was sheltered from the wind. We had an opportunity to see the boat-builders handiwork and to admire the competition champion.

We went to another lecture by Lieutenant Commander Campbell-Baldwin. Although many pirates were land based in Somalia in the early days (at least in modern times) of raids on ships, they got more sophisticated and could range much further by having a "mother ship" that could take them miles offshore to launch their attacks.

Most piracy work is in international waters, and the occurrence has been greatly reduced. So far this year there have only been 4 incidents of suspicious activity and no attacks. A lot of this is attributed to vigilance and

preparedness on the part of commercial ships. They are more interested in deterrence rather than engagement. One of the main tools of deterrence is armed security personnel on board. The Queen Victoria employed the services of a private firm called Solis. We had 3 ex-marines on board, who were armed. Such arming was only recently widely utilized starting in 2011 after the 2009 Maersk Alabama incident. There was a movie about this called Captain Phillips, released in 2013, starring Tom Hanks)

Another tool which we saw deployed on both sides of the ship was LRAD – long range acoustical device, which can be pointed at oncoming attackers and cranked up to painful levels. It operates at ultra high frequency – human conversation 60 decibels, level of pain and ear damage is 85 and LRAD puts out 160, which is much more effective than high pressure water hoses, although they put those out too.

We also attended a lecture by the plastic surgeon, Dr. Alastain Lamont, who had wowed the audience a few days earlier with audio-visual aids so graphic that one audience member passed out. Today there was a warning that there might be some “unsettling” photos. The last lecture covered traumatic injury reconstruction, and today’s covered elective surgery. I guess patient confidentiality is not an issue in South Africa since we saw photos of a number of before and after breast enhancements. It was still graphic, but sexually so, rather than blood and guts type stuff. All in all it was very interesting to understand how this is done. The number one female cosmetic surgery in South Africa is pretty much a tie between face lifts and breast enhancements for women’ however, the number one male surgery is calf implants. It seems that no amount of working out at the gym can build those calves up – unlike skinny arms which can be developed at the gym, if you have bird legs, you will always have them since they are inherited.

Today we learned another nautical tidbit: Wind on board ships

is measured on the Beaufort Scale – an empirical measure that relates wind speed to observed conditions on the sea (or land). It was devised in 1805 by Sir Francis Beaufort, a Royal Navy Officer and was first used in Darwin's voyage to South America and the Galapagos. The initial scale of zero to twelve did not reference wind speeds, but rather relative effects on sails on war ships. The scale ranged from "just sufficient to give steerage" to "that which no canvas sails could withstand" so at zero all the sails were up, at 6 about half would be up and at 12 all would be taken down.

Sea days always give us the chance to observe our fellow passengers and today we realized we have 3 potential Santas on board in addition to Shakespeare Santa with the Bard's hairdo of bald on top and thin and stringy on the sides with a full beard, whom we have frequently seen around the ship. There is also Shaq Santa – who is slick bald like Shaquille O'Neal, but with a full white beard. He will need a wig or a weave in order to have the snow white wavy hair flowing from under his cap if he is to play the role. There is also Skinny Santa, who has the hair and beard, but he is going to need a pillow to pull it off. We turned in early tonight – nothing new about that – to get ready for an adventure tomorrow when we dock in Port Elizabeth where we plan to go on a day safari at a game reserve.

**April 19, 2016**

**Dateline: Port Elizabeth, South Africa**

**Latitude at Port Elizabeth, 33.71 Degrees South, Longitude 25.52 Degrees East**



## Docked at Port Elizabeth

Today dawned cool and rainy as we cruised into Nelson Mandela Bay and docked in Port Elizabeth on the Eastern Cape of South Africa. We had set our clocks back an hour overnight so we are only 2 hours ahead of what used to be called Greenwich Mean Time, but is now called Universal Time Coordinated or UTC. As of today we were half way through our 42 day voyage. Port Elizabeth is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest city in South Africa, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest port, but it has the largest bay in the country called Algoa Bay, which is an arm of the Indian Ocean. The currency here is the rand, as in krugerrand, but the gold coins are no longer used in day to day transactions since the value of an individual coin is over a thousand dollars and up. Today one rand is equal to 7 cents in US currency.

The area was first occupied by the San tribe of bushmen, then the Khoisan (also with the intriguing name of the Hottentots), followed by the Xhosa, (pronounced Coh-sah with a clicking noise added to the front of the word, which are the dominate native people there today. The first Europeans were the Portuguese of course – they seemed to get out in front of all the good exploring that was done. The first Europeans to actually live in what is termed the Eastern Cape were the Dutch farmers who came up from the Cape of Good Hope in what is called the Southern Cape. The British came along and built a fort here in 1799 and then in 1820 came the 4,000 settlers that would help keep it British. Before that it was just a fresh water stop on the sea trade route between Europe and India and the Far East. The town was named after the wife of

the acting governor, Sir Rufane Donkin. Today Port Elizabeth has 1.3 million people. While the area is the center of South African auto manufacturing, the old center city retains much of its charm and several places of interests which we will have to save for a future trip.

Our plan today was to bypass the city of Port Elizabeth and head out to a game preserve where we would be able perhaps to spot the Big Five – lion, rhino, Cape buffalo, leopard and elephant. We were told that the area actually advertises the Big Seven – the original five plus great white sharks and southern right whales which inhabit the waters just off-shore.

We had a face to face immigration process on board and went ashore for our planned tour which was a safari to the Shamwari Game Camp. There was a bit of a mix-up and our bus was missing in action with the driver apparently lost, first in the town and then inside the Ship Terminal – not a good sign since it was not all that big a place, and the ship is far from inconspicuous. Finally when he did arrive, he was coming the wrong way from all the other busses and causing traffic congestion. Then there was an issue with bus numbers and tour numbers missing from some busses so inevitably people were getting on the wrong busses. The name on our bus was the Blunden Coach Company, which we decided must be an Afrikaans word for “blundering”. Additionally there were some musicians and dancers, who were supposed to perform to welcome us to South Africa, but they showed up late and only a few cruise passengers were left on the dock to see them. We came up two people short so they may have been left at the dock or on the wrong bus. In spite of the mix-ups, we boarded our bus and set off for our adventure.



## Open Country of the Eastern Cape

Our drive took us north along the coast line where breakwaters had been build using barricades shaped like jacks( from the child's game) fabricated from concrete to keep the waves off the road. We were told there are over 26,000 of these barricades along this stretch of highway. We passed Blue Water Bay and the Port of Coega, a deep water industrial port that recently opened to relieve port congestion in Port Elizabeth. They primarily service container ships and car carriers. We also passed vast stretches of salt pans, where salt is commercially mined. There were sand dunes along the beach in many places along the estuary of the Sundays River, which is a major recreational area for local people. We were told that sand surfing is a big sport here. The Sundays River Valley is also a large citrus growing region. An interesting note on Sundays River – it flows underground for much of its journey to the Indian Ocean. The tide was out as we passed through and we saw people out on the tidal flats digging clams.

There were several “feather markets” or what we would call flea markets along the route. The “feather” designation came from the days when ostrich feathers were a major South African Export. That may seem strange, but no stranger than the origin of the term “flea” market. That term actually comes from a market in Paris where shabby second hand goods (the kind you might expect to find fleas in) were sold. And whereas we have deer cautions on our highways, they had signs cautioning that drivers should be on the lookout for springbok leaping out

onto the roadway.

We passed signs for the Elephant Project, which we were told is a reserve for elephants. Apparently, these are ocean loving elephants and the government had to provide a means for them to get across the 4 lane highway so they can frolic in the sea and return to their food sources. We continued on to grassy rolling plains, now yellowing in their autumn season, with cattle dotting the hillsides. Plumbago, a plant with lavender blooms that I buy in small pots for big bucks was growing wild along the roadside. We eventually passed through the “town” of Patterson, using the term loosely – the main features were 6 grain silos.



Rhino in the  
Bush

We continued on north with the landscape growing greener and brushier as we emerged onto what is termed the veld (pronounced “velt”) and we could see mountains in the distance as we continued to travel along the coast to the Shamwari Game Reserve (Shamwari translates as “my friend” in ). South Africa has a number of these reserves dedicated to conserving their national treasure – the wild animals, plus they have the Kruger National Park further north still which is a huge tract of land filled with reserves. For our purposes, we needed one within a few hours’ drive of Port Elizabeth. Shamwari was only an hour and half so we were wondering how wild could it be. Since we were so close to town, our expectations were low, but we were quite pleasantly surprised, and in fact we saw two rhino before we even got off the bus.



Shamwari Manor  
House

Shamwari was established in 1992 on 25 thousand hectares of land (almost 62,000 acres) on what was once a cattle farm. They stocked the wild game taking in many orphaned and displaced animals requiring a place to live and thrive. There are a few shabby, but colorful houses on the reserve and all roads are unpaved and dusty. The local tribes people are the Xhosa (pronounced "Cosa" ) of the Bantu group. Amid all this, there is a sharp contrast of the Long Lee House, an Edwardian Manor house set in the middle of the reserve that serves as headquarters, restaurant and guest quarters for visitors.



Tourist  
Protector at  
Shamwari

We boarded safari vehicles, open jeeps with an armed driver, just in case any predatory animals got to frisky with the tourists. We drove out into the reserve on dirt roads and encountered all sorts of creatures from the antelope family – from tiny duikers to the graceful impalas and bounding springbok, who do an interesting maneuver called "pronking" where they jump straight up on all four feet. Scientists

studying them are not sure whether they do this to impress the females with their agility, or if they do it just for fun. Impalas are also impressive athletes capable of leaping up about 10 feet and forward around 33 feet. They do this to escape predators, but sometime appear to just do it to have fun. Consequently, it's not always easy being a predator. In fact we were told that even the lonely warthogs sometimes attack cheetahs. Female warthogs have the big warts around their eyes to protect them against predators whereas the males have the big curved tusks. With their small mouths, cheetahs can't really inflict much damage on a big warthog, but lions are a different story. Running is the key strategy in encounters with them.



A Waterbuck at  
Shamwari

Then there were also many species we saw from the antelope family that are much larger and less frisky than the prancing and pronking ones, such as the kudu, bushbuck, oryx, hartebeest and waterbuck (the latter's distinctive marking is seen on his behind). Our guide told us they think the white ring of waterbuck fur seen as the animal departs resembles a toilet seat. We were fortunate to see the largest of the antelope family, the eland which is about as large as an elk or moose.

We saw a huge fish eagle soaring over one of the water holes looking for lunch. We also saw ibis wading in the water holes and herons perched and staring motionless, waiting for something interesting to swim by. Guinea fowl, looking much

like pheasants, were pecking away in the grassy areas. We also saw



Giraffe  
Snacking on  
Acacia

giraffes, but just from the neck up – their bodies were concealed in dense brush. Giraffes feed primarily on acacia leaves (shaped much like those of a mimosa) but with some serious thorns, which the giraffes don't even seem to notice. Our guide showed us a few thorns 4 to 6 inches long that had been hollowed out by wasps, which then move in and take up residence. They don't seem to bother the giraffes either. They are easily the most serene creatures on the veld.



Elephants at  
the River

Close to the end of our trip, we were treated to a herd of elephants at the river, eating mass quantities of trees, bark and all. Elephants eat for up to 18 hours per day. Lions on the other hand nap up to 20 hours a day. We saw a napping lion

and got to examine lion paw prints which were easily 8 or 9 inches across. We also found lion leftovers (an unfortunate zebra), but gave this area a wide berth since we weren't sure he might be in the area to guard his kill to snack on later. We saw other zebra nonchalantly grazing, not sure if they even missed their unfortunate herd member who became the lion's lunch. We also



A Leopard  
Tortoise

got a glimpse of a caracal, a small member of the cat family – well small relative to lions, but still much larger than a domestic cat. It was padding along by a waterhole. We also saw what the guide called a yellow mongoose, but it is better known in the US as a meerkat (as seen in The Lion King). Just as we were heading back to the manor house, we saw a leopard tortoise and our guide got out and picked him up to let us touch him. He was similar to a box turtle but about 8 times as big.

In the “so ugly they are cute category” we saw wart hogs with their babies, whose cow-like plumed tail seems to wave at you as they trot away. We were



Warthogs on  
the Lawn of  
the Manor  
House

delighted to see them on the lawn of the manor house when we stopped for lunch, just grazing away. We had a buffet lunch, not too memorable, but amused ourselves strolling the grounds of this very magical place – where else can you have lunch where there are warthogs on your lawn and rhinos in your road?

We got back to the ship in the late afternoon, just in time for scones and tea and some time in the hot tub as we pulled out of Port Elizabeth. Our next port is Cape Town and we are eagerly storing up energy (in the form of rest and calories) in anticipation.