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THE ANIMAL AND PLANT KINGDOMS OF SOUTH AFRICA

by Nancy Cherry

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Many folks have asked us about our safari to South Africa. We thought here would be a great place to explain what it offers.

First, Gary is a member of PAAZAB (Pan African Association of Zoological Gardens, Aquaria and Botanical Gardens). At their annual meetings he has met most of the directors of institutions we will visit, and they have told him if he ever brings a group to their facility they want to provide a personalized tour.

Our Safari starts in Cape Town, one of the three most beautiful port cities in the world, and our hotel is on a working harbor with oceangoing ships from all over the world. We'll take a revolving cable car to the top of Table Mountain, Cape Town's famous landmark, and tour the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. A highlight of our stay in Cape Town will be our visit to the famous Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens with their striking display of outdoor sculptures, and many footpaths.

Our modes of transportation will include modern coaches with large viewing windows, Safari combis (vans), open sided 4WD game-viewing vehicles, boats, and on foot. Accommodations include chalets, luxurious lodges, a converted homestead and the unique tree suites in the Phantom Forest.

Along the famous Garden Route we'll stop at significant spots where our Guides will explain why South Africa has such a wide and unusual variety of botanical specimens -- some found nowhere else in the world. In all, South Africa has 22,000 flowering species, which is 10% of the total count found in the world. We learn about fynbos and the infinite variety of proteas - the national flower of South Africa. Because of perennial moisture, our drive through the Tsitsikamma Mountains (derived from a Hottenhot word) passes by creepers, ferns, moss, lichen, brilliantly colored fungi and wild orchids. In this moist maze are forests of yellowwood, candlewood, Cape chestnut burgeon, and evergreen

The Garden Route ends at Port Elizabeth -- and from there we fly to Durban, a beautiful resort town on the white beaches of the Indian Ocean. After an overnight in Durban we travel to Shakaland for lunch (your chance to try traditional foods, if you so desire). In the afternoon we motor to Zulu Nyala

Lodge, built on a mountaintop in the heart of Maputoland, with a fabulous view. In addition to our game drives in the private Zulu Nyala Reserve, we will spend the entire day in the Hluhluwe Umfolozi Game Reserve, a wilderness set aside to save the black and white rhinos from extinction. Most of the big game species are found here as well, including lion and leopard. Our game drives will not be disappointing. During our stay at Zulu Nyala Lodge we take a boat to visit the St. Lucia estuary, an area that has been declared a World Heritage Site and offers wonderful birdwatching.

Once again we board an aircraft to fly to the northern section of South Africa where Kruger National Park is located. So far during this Safari we will have traveled nearly the whole of the southern South Africa coastline and now we'll see another totally different habitat in northern South Africa.

We'll be staying in the private MalaMala Game Reserve just outside the border of Kruger, which enables us to do game drives in open safari vehicles. For three nights we luxuriate at Kirkman's Kamp. In 2000 it was closed for three months for substantial refurbishment, yet the early 19th Century charm of the camp was preserved. With no fence between Kruger and our camp, wildlife come and go at will.

This area is famous for exotic game. Our sightings could include nyala antelope, white rhino and even some seldom seen species such as the pangolin, serval, African wild cat, side-striped jackal, honey badger and wild dog. Black rhino are rare - but Cowabunga often has good luck! In addition there are the larger animals such as buffalo, lion, leopard, kudu, hippo, hyena and elephant. Gary is extremely excited about this Safari as all the places we're going, except Cape Town, are new for us - they'll be a first for a Cowabunga group. It's a different kind of Safari because of the emphasis on both the plant life and the wildlife - something for everyone!



Safaris since 1974.