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She grew up on a farm and I grew up in a city. Overnight camp in Wisconsin was as close to nature as I ever was.

Although I knew I was in good hands with her leading the way with our [Go2Africa](#) travel agent, the trip prep had me in high anxiety. I wasn't sure if it was my age or traveling so far away that had me feeling overwhelmed.

The challenges were numerous: required multiple vaccinations, travel documents, extra copies of my passport, travel insurance, a safari wardrobe, [Kindle](#) downloads, and — wait for the big one — restrictions on soft-sided, no-wheels baggage weight!

My whole life being a clothes horse, I have the extra-large, over-the-weight-limit bags.

Lists and more lists: arranging the dog sitter, stopping the mail and deliveries, bank business, hair appointments, getting to [LAX](#), navigating multiple airports.



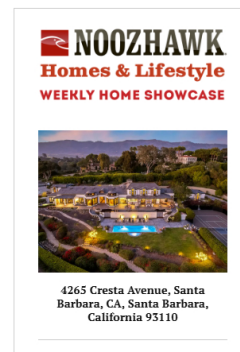
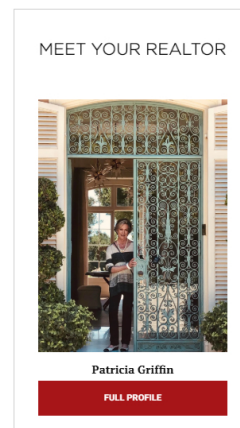
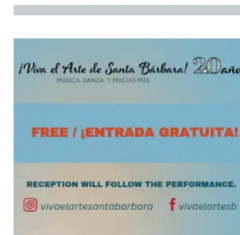
Then there are my cosmetics and the requirement for all my medications to be in their actual bottles and not a convenient organizer.

My bedroom pre-trip was a floor littered with pants, vests, zip-up tops, T-shirts, underwear, shoes, jackets, socks, binoculars, [Patagonia](#) jackets.

I was told the early morning safaris and overnight temperatures are very cold in late May and early June, since it's winter in Africa, while afternoons are very warm.

Is this a vacation or do I need to go into training for the [Olympics](#)?

Seeing the [Big Five animals](#) — African elephant, Cape buffalo, black rhinoceros, African lion and African leopard — had me intrigued and inspired me to go, and I knew once I got off the plane I would be dazzled and delighted.



“Even people who are not drawn to animals would be surprised at what it feels like to watch an elephant walk past your room.”

But until that departure time, I was probably a little nuts. I felt I was in pretty good physical shape with no need for a wheelchair in the airport, but my nervous system hadn't gotten the message.

As I settled into my seat, I felt elated but like Catherine O'Hara's mom character in *Home Alone*. I wondered if I had forgotten Kevin?!

The airline flights to Africa are very long, and while Emirates does an admirable job of ensuring comfort and support, I've never been on airplanes for so many hours in one trip and never been so happy to get off.

The Dubai airport had a long layover before we flew to Botswana in South Africa with a stop in Johannesburg.

Dubai is a bustling center of a universe so large it should have its own ZIP code. I rate it No. 1 for people watching.



(Judy Foreman / Noozhawk video)

When we finally arrived for a two-day decompression in Johannesburg, all I wanted to do was sleep and try to shake off the jet lag.

After the semi-recovery, our six-seater plane from Kasane Airport ferried us to an airstrip in the middle of the bush of Botswana.

Our guide was all smiles as he loaded us into an all-terrain jeep and drove us to our first stop, Ngoma Safari Lodge, over unpaved roads and big bumps. I was told this is known as an "Africa massage."

The endless vistas with miles of grasses, trees, unfettered roads and bird songs started to sink in immediately, especially as we drove past elephant herds drinking water and bathing themselves, towers of giraffes and throngs of zebras.

In the following days and at the second reserve, Khwai Lediba, our morning and late afternoon safaris included sundowner bars and food set up in the bush.



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MORE HOMES



(Judy Foreman / [Noozhawk](#) video)

I saw a family of baboons, a leopard, hippopotamus, Cape buffalo, kudu, antelopes, warthogs, vultures, a wildcat, crocodiles and a wild dog.

We had cameras at the ready and could not get enough photos of elephants coming up to our boat, or watching them fluttering their long eyelashes and gently caring for their babies.

Even people who are not drawn to animals would be surprised at what it feels like to watch an elephant walk past your room. Humans are a speck on this earth.

The light at sunrise and sunset is a magical color of orange and magenta that would be hard to describe other than taking your breath away. The night sky, with every star and galaxy visible, is unlike anything I have ever seen.

As the trip was ending, I was anxious to share my experience with my children and grandchildren. Like me, the closest they had ever gotten to Africa were multiple viewings of *The Lion King*.



(Judy Foreman / [Noozhawk](#) video)

I'm already missing the sounds of the animals and the voices of the lodge staff's songs from our final night.

I wanted to hang onto that feeling and was in no rush to return to my barking dogs and responsibility for running my life.

My bucket list has a few more stops later this year, but I'll save that story for another time.

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Judy Foreman, Noozhawk Columnist

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