

MADE


Machaba
Mentions



OUR MOTORING ED **DIETER LOSSKARN** TOOK TOYOTA'S HILUX GR-SPORT FOR AN ULTIMATE ROAD TEST. AS HIS WIFE FRANZISKA HAD NEVER SEEN VICTORIA FALLS BEFORE, THEY CHOSE THE LONG WAY ROUND — 9 200KM ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA, BOTSWANA, ZIMBABWE AND NAMIBIA. FROM KAROO TO KALAHARI, WET SALT PANS AND LUSH GREEN BUSH TO DRY DESERT, THEIR GRAVEL COMPANION NEVER DISAPPOINTED



“A heavy overnight thunderstorm turned the way out into our first mud challenge...”

THE ONLY WAY to experience the vastness of the African continent is by traversing it overland. A fly-in safari will never give you the same satisfactory feel on reaching your day's stage. Kilometre after kilometre, you'll see changes in the landscape, feel the temperatures rise and fall and rumble over corrugated stretches of dirt road — through potholes, stirring up clouds of dust, traversing rivers and waddling across bottomless mud.

Climbing out of the Hex River Valley into the much drier and more barren Karoo is one

of those key road trip moments. One constant, whenever we come past here, is tea and scones in the coffee shop of the British hamlet Matjiesfontein before leaving the Western Cape on the lonely tar road to Sutherland, going north.

The first stay couldn't have been in a more remote and peaceful location. Stuurmansfontein is reached on a 24km long, narrow and bumpy farm road. The farmstead was erected from local flat stones in 1840, the only building material available at the time. There is neither internet nor cell phone reception — initially unusual for us, but after a while pure bliss. It was hot when

we arrived, but we relaxed in the cool farm water tank, repurposed into a swimming pool. Owner Charmaine left us some freshly baked sourdough bread, olives and canola honey from the farm.

Upon our departure, we found that a heavy overnight thunderstorm turned the way out into our first mud challenge. In this sticky situation, we immediately fell in love with the BF Goodrich All Terrain tyres fitted to the Hilux. They were perfect in this slippery, soft terrain.

The sun soon started to shine and the Karoo was finally dry and dusty again as we approached the lush green banks of the Orange

River, Upington. Once there, we enjoyed gin and tonic and cigars at the boutique hotel Le Must Residence, with a view of the mighty river from the balcony.

JANUARY MARKS THE start of the wet season in the eastern parts of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. We were diving into the first giant rain front, with heavy thunderstorms and torrential rains. But just before we reached the malaria-free Madikwe Game Reserve on the border to Botswana, the downpour started to clear. In the warm afternoon light, we could

relish in surprisingly intense animal encounters on the way to Jaci's Tree lodge — our home for the next two nights. We admired members of their healthy, well-protected, rhino population (still proudly wearing their horns), zebras, warthogs and elephants. Lions, buffalos and giraffes followed us during the lodge's game drives in open Land Cruisers.

When we left, lodge manager Andrew asked us whether we wanted to take the normal or adventurous route out of the reserve to the small border post of Derdepoort. Normal? Never. He drew us a map to another adrenaline-filled »



morning. The Hilux handled the mud drive with ease and after a while we managed to find our way out and into Botswana.

No matter what travellers to Kenya and Tanzania may tell you, Botswana is the best wildlife destination in Africa. Mashatu Game Reserve in the Tuli Block, our next destination, proved this once again. We saw leopards, cheetahs and lions with their young ones — and respective kills. On top of it, the wet season rewarded us with enchanting yellow devil thorn flowers in full bloom, spread across endless lush green meadows. According to our ranger, all this had been dusty and brown only a couple of weeks ago. Unbelievable.

Rain, sun and green peace accompany us all the way to the magnificent Makgadikgadi Pans — giant salt pans, which apparently are as large as Franziska's homeland, Switzerland. Here, we stayed in the heavenly tented lodge, Jack's Camp.

Due to the heavy rainfall, the camp manager informed us that we will have to leave our car behind — to be picked up about 45km away from the lodge. Not an option. We explained the whole 'It's not a bakkie, it's a Hilux' concept. And after seeing our ride, the ranger allowed us to follow him into the pans in the Hilux, behind his raised Land Cruiser. Well, what can I tell you about

the pans? It was breathtaking. With deep water, above a soft bottom, you can't be too fast but also not too slow, as you don't want water in the engine compartment, nor get stuck in the mud. Once again — thanks to the awesome tyres, the increased power of the Toyota's diesel engine, its ground clearance and wading depth — we made it through to the camp, without any problems. But, I must admit, while ceaseless heavy thunderstorms unloaded water masses over the pans during our stay, I couldn't stop thinking about the way out.

Staying in opulent tents close to nature, Jack's Camp is one of the most amazing places to stay in Southern Africa — it's like something out of a fairy-tale, especially under the night sky ablaze with stars. The sundowners in the pan are special as well. Here, we counted 83 vultures feasting on three zebras struck dead by lightning.

OUR NEXT DESTINATION: the famous falls, named after a rather moody looking English queen. Oh, and yes, we made it out of the pans. In fact, knowing what to expect made the exit easier than the entry.

Crossing the border into Zimbabwe takes time and patience — and lots of US-dollars to account for the fees placed on everything, »



TOYOTA HILUX GR-SPORT

- >> ENGINE 2.8-l., 4cyl. turbodiesel, paired with an 6-speed auto
- >> POWER 165kW & 550Nm
- >> TOP SPEED 175km/h
- >> GROUND CLEARANCE 293mm
- >> WADING DEPTH 720mm
- >> PRICE R999 000
- TOYOTA.CO.ZA



WHEN DRIVING TO VIC FALLS: STAY HERE

Along the way, we discovered these gems in terrain, making our trip all the more enjoyable.

1. STUURMANSFONTEIN CORBELLED HOUSE, KAROO, SOUTH AFRICA

A unique overnight stay in a 1840s home made from local stone. Peaceful, cosy and romantic.

[@stuurmansfontein](#)

2. LE MUST MANOR, UPINGTON, SOUTH AFRICA

The regal double-storey house overlooks views into the lush garden, over the Orange River and beyond. [lemustupington.com](#)

3. TULI SAFARI LODGE, MASHATU GAME RESERVE, BOTSWANA

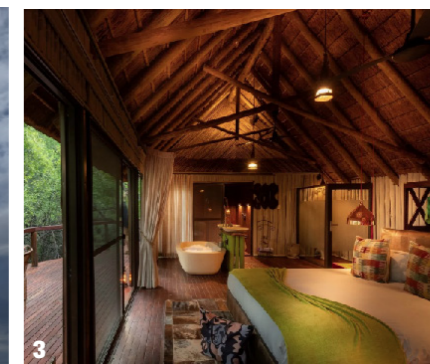
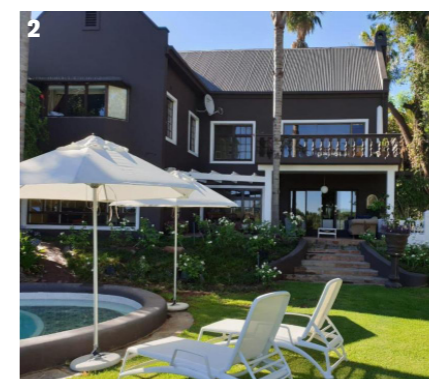
Luxury boutique hotel ambience in Mashatu, with excellent big-cat sightings guaranteed. [mashatu.com](#)

4. JACI'S TREE LODGE, MADIKWE GAME RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA

The best overnight stay in Madikwe Game Reserve with great wildlife experiences. [jacislodges.co.za](#)

5. JACK'S CAMP, MAKGADIKGADI PANS, BOTSWANA

One of the most unique tented stays in Africa, in the middle of a vast salt pan. [naturalselection.travel](#)



"The Hilux handled the mud drive with ease and we managed to find our way out and into Botswana"

6. VICTORIA FALLS SAFARI LODGE, VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE

A large, vibrant hotel near the falls — plus stunning waterhole views from the rooms. [victoria-falls-safari-lodge.com](#)

7. VICTORIA FALLS HOTEL, VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE

One of Africa's most famous hotels, the grand, old lady with a view of the falls and bridge does not disappoint. [victoriafallshotel.com](#)





8. NGOMA SAFARI LODGE, CHOBE, BOTSWANA

Excellent game drives with lots of wildlife sightings into Chobe National Park, superb food and outstanding service. machabasafaris.com

9. NAMUSHASHA RIVER LODGE, CAPRIVI, NAMIBIA

Old school lodge with modern rooms, offering river cruises and magnificent views. gondwana-collection.com

10. HAKUSEMBE RIVER LODGE, CAPRIVI, NAMIBIA

This traditional lodge allows guests to find both adventure and relaxation. gondwana-collection.com

11. ETOSHA KING NEHALE LODGE, ETOSHA, NAMIBIA

An architectural masterpiece in the middle of a salt pan. gondwana-collection.com



12. ETOSHA SAFARI LODGE, ETOSHA, NAMIBIA

Cosy lodge close to Etosha National Park's central entrance. gondwana-collection.com



13. SWAKOPMUND GUEST HOUSE, SWAKOPMUND, NAMIBIA

Friendly, fresh and airy guest house that blends modern and eco-friendly comfort. swakopmundguesthouse.com



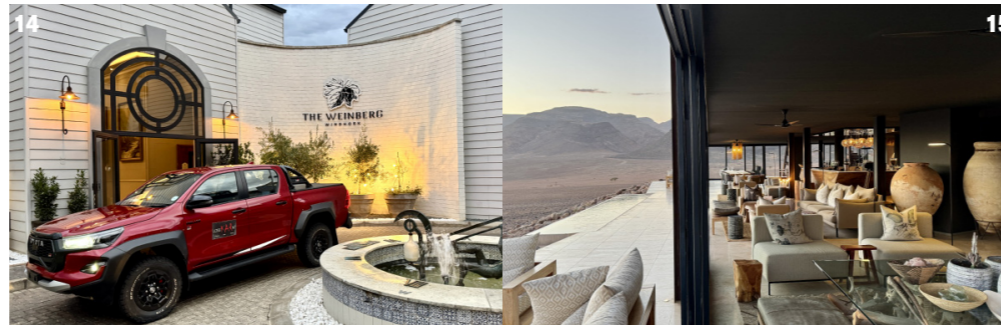
14. THE WEINBERG, WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

Elegant and chic hotel blending city life with African style. gondwana-collection.com



15. SOSSUSVLEI DESERT LODGE, NAMIB, NAMIBIA

Stunning, serene desert lodge with endless opportunity to explore. andbeyond.com



PHOTOGRAPHS: MOTORPRESS.COM, SUPPLIED

from carbon to road tax, visas etc. All in all R2 600, which we saw as an additional entrance fee to the Falls. At the first police stop in Zimbabwe, the rather brash woman in uniform wanted to see a report about the missing front number plate. Yes, the lost number plate, we almost forgot, buried somewhere in the endless mud of Makgadikgadi. We promised her to file a report at the police station in Victoria Falls. Luckily we did, as we had to show it at all subsequent road blocks.

Off-season at the Falls means they are less crowded, which we enjoyed as well as the famous hotel they are named after — equally much less populated than usual. After a fantastic stay, we were accompanied by dramatic skies, rains, followed by beautiful sunshine back into Botswana.

AT THE BORDER to Namibia, we stayed at Ngoma Safari Lodge, within the Chobe Forest Reserve. This gem of a place combined awesome game drives along the Chobe River, exquisite food and excellent service. A few days later, we crossed into Namibia, slowly leaving behind the wet season. (Only the occasional thunderstorm in the afternoon brought some short-lived relief from the summer heat.)

Due to the lack of a navigation system or Apple Car Play in the Hilux, and the patchy signage along the roads, we had to rely on our map-reading skills, trying to find the most adventurous route to Etosha National Park. The old-school way.

After experiencing the wondrous wildlife in Botswana, we found the Etosha National Park a bit lacklustre. It's there, but not in abundance like in Chobe or the Tuli Block. And I'm not even talking about the Delta or Moremi — regions we left out this time because they were too flooded.

What we did discover, however, was an architectural masterpiece right next to the pans, just outside the park. Gondwana Collection owns a comprehensive selection of awesome and affordable overnight stays in Namibia.

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Some are tastefully renovated older places, like Namushasha and Hakusembe River Lodge, which we both experienced in the Caprivi Strip. But Etosha King Nehale Lodge was built by Gondwana and is akin to Desert Grace in the Namib — pure style, perfectly blended into the surrounding landscapes.

In Windhoek, Africa's cosiest capital city, we stayed in another Gondwana property — an attractive boutique hotel, which could be in Cape Town, aptly named “The Weinberg” (German for vineyard). A beer- and Jagermeister-induced visit at Joe's Beer House is a must, when staying over.

The next morning, in typical fashion, we sought an adventurous road option to Swakopmund. The untarred C28 traverses the Khomas Highland via the scenic Bosua Pass. First mountains, then down into the Namib desert, while dodging another thunderstorm.

You can't go more German in Africa than Swakopmund. Architecture and food are uniquely Teutonic — and we enjoyed both it. The C14 from Swakopmund to Sossusvlei is the last tricky dirt road section — one with infamously nasty, sharp gravel. On each and every one of our previous, numerous road trips we had tyre punctures. Not this time. I have to compliment those All Terrains yet again.

Before heading back South, we rested for two nights in our favourite Namib place, Sossusvlei Desert Lodge. It's a dream destination, where everything is magnificent in position, views, food and service.

As always, when in Namibia, our last stop was the Canyon Road House, close to the Fish River. Here, various sleeping beauties rust in peace and we sipped cold beers from the tap at Tankstelle bar, aptly named as the German word for 'service station'. And, of course, our conversation was about our next road trip. ☘