



SkyAfrica

Newsletter

October 2009

SkyAfrica Destinations
Madikwe

Hello dear flying friends!

It is with great pleasure that I introduce myself to you. My name is Maggie, the youngest daughter of Karl from SkyAfrica, esteemed sister of Newsletter author extraordinaire Erika, and since August 2009 the newest member of the SkyAfrica Team. For years now, I have been experiencing the SkyAfrica business of flying safaris and pilot stories from the “outside”, but it is time for me to go and jump in headfirst. Therefore, it is my turn to send you our latest newsletter in which I will present you with two of our exciting destination lodges.

In August this year, Karl and I had the privilege of visiting two wonderful Safari Lodges in the Madikwe Game Reserve in the North West Province of South Africa, just south of the Botswana Border.

The Madikwe is home to the Big Five and covers about 75,000 hectares of land. It is one of the largest game reserves in South Africa and the rich diversity of vegetation ensures a wide range of game and the topography offers ideal game viewing opportunities. The reserve consists of vast plains of open woodlands and grasslands, divided by the rough Rant van Tweedepoort, and bordered in the south by the Dwarsberg Mountains. The area is dotted with huge, rocky hills or inselbergs. The entire reserve has been enclosed in a 150km perimeter fence which has been electrified to prevent the escape of elephants and the larger predators – Karl included.

Located on the border to Botswana it is within easy flying distance from Jo'burg and ideal as a weekend retreat. Sky Africa has used it as a destination for many years, as it has two good airstrips one on the Eastern side and one in the West of the game reserve and the flight there is very scenic.

So with our bags packed and our flight plan worked out and ready, we made our way to the Sky Terminal at Brakpan Airfield. It was a clear and warm late Monday morning with a light breeze coming from the north.

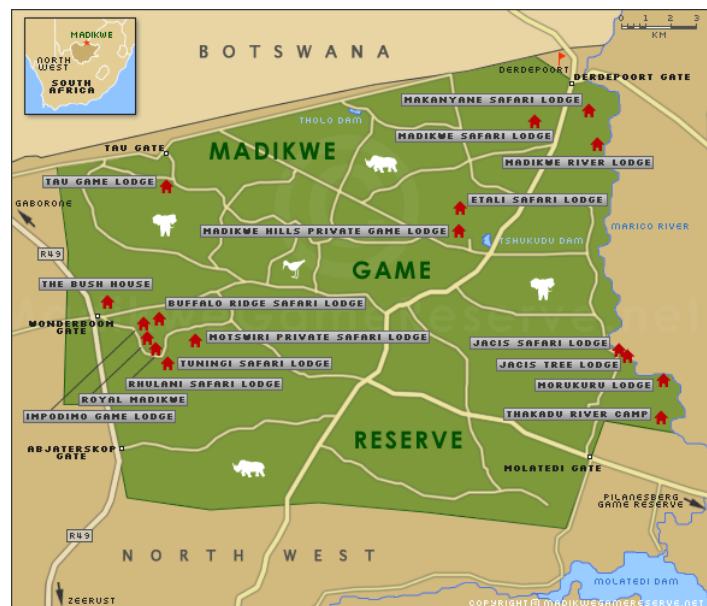
Living in a flying family I have obviously been in the air quite a few time, but this was special - this time I was going to pole the airplane myself, my first hour of flying!

I went through the pre-flight check and start up procedure before taxiing out a bit wobbly to Runway 18. OHK, our Cessna 172, was fully fuelled and set for our 1.5 hour flight northbound to the Madikwe Airstrip.

Lining up on the runway it was throttle in to full power, let go of the brakes and I performed my first ever takeoff. Being not as difficult as I thought it would be, before I knew it, we were already climbing to 7000 feet and headed west.

The City of Gold Johannesburg under our right wing, we cruised along the African sky viewing the mist hanging over the mountains. Not being a hardened aviator, the turbulence encountered over the hills made me feel a bit woozy. But the scenery was quite breathtaking as we flew along the Magaliesberg mountain ridge and the majestic Olifantsnek dam. Karl was making himself useful by doing the Radio work and navigation

Passing the Pilanesberg and Sun City we started our decent into Madikwe East. Below us we saw a Cessna Caravan touching down on the 1.2 km long gravel runway. After making sure no game was located on the strip, Karl performed a perfectly smooth landing and taxied to the end of





the runway, where David from *Jaci's Safari Lodge* was already awaiting us.

He gave us a very warm welcome and helped us unpack our luggage from the aircraft. Having secured and locked the airplane, we climbed onboard the game vehicle and drove to our first abode for the night. Already on the way there we saw quite a few gentle-eyed Impalas grazing in the sun and it was a lot warmer here than in Johannesburg. Just a short drive later we arrived safely at Jaci's Lodge and were welcomed by Kym and Wilkens with a refreshing drink. The lodge is accessible via a swing bridge, which brought out the child in Karl again. I'm guessing his goal was to make me nauseous all over again.



After a brief presentation of the lodge's facilities and amenities by Wilkens we headed to our room. Jaci's Lodge has a total of 8 rooms and 2 family suites. Each of them are decorated in true African style with a wooden porch overlooking the wilderness, a tent-like canvas acting as walls of the rooms, thatch roof, floor heating, fire place and an open-plan bathroom with handmade rock bath and a secluded outdoor shower.



With only a little time to spare in our luxurious room, we made our way back to the main lodge for a quick afternoon tea. We treated ourselves to a delicious vegetarian pizza and freshly squeezed orange juice before heading back to the game vehicle for our afternoon game drive through the reserve. Once again, our driver was David as we joined a British Family and an Australian father and son on the drive.



Off we went, through the African bush, a warm breeze in the air and the smell of the wild surrounding us. We came across quite a lot of impala, the most common African antelope. Some warthogs were grazing in the afternoon sun, covered with the red sand of the bushveld and soon we spotted a big pride of lions. About 15 teenage lions were lying under the trees and amongst the bushes, their moms keeping a close eye on them. Lions need a lot of energy for hunting and feeding, so most of the day they spend by sleeping and avoiding the sun – a good way to avoid premature aging and these expensive face creams. Our game vehicle had



to push some thorn bushes out of the way to reach this amazing herd of wild cats and we spent several minutes there watching the lions watch us!

As the sun continued its descent we let the lions go on with their beauty-sleep and headed to a clearing in the bush to enjoy a relaxing sundowner drink. David had also packed a few snacks and served us our drinks from the “bar”, also doubling as the front bumper of the Landcruiser vehicle. We used the time to get to know our fellow game

drive compatriots and watched the sun, as it vanished gracefully beyond the horizon. Packing up the “bar”, we hopped back onto the truck and cuddled into the blankets. Now, with the sun gone, it had gotten a ‘wee bit chilly’ out there. On our way back to the lodge we still kept an eye (and torch) out for any kind of wildlife and even spotted a lone giraffe and a few zebras along the way.

A steaming Glühwein was already waiting for us, as we arrived back at Jaci’s Lodge, which, after a nice cold ride home, was greatly appreciated. We headed back to the room to get changed and then joined the remainder of the guests and the staff at the oval fireplace in the lodge. It was a very relaxed atmosphere and the staff were all very friendly and attentive. Dinner was served soon after and Karl and I were joined by Kym and Deon from the Lodge and the Australian gentleman from the game drive. We all had a fantastic evening with a divine three course meal, wine and great company. Once again the staff exceeded our expectations with their service and attention to detail. Tired and with our tummies filled we said good night.

The room was cosy and warm, the drapes were closed and the mosquito net had been let down over the bed. The floor heating worked wonders and I honestly wouldn’t even have minded sleeping on the big comfortable cushion on the floor. In the end I did choose the huge fluffy bed instead and dozed off into the land of African dreams.





We skipped the early morning game drive since we had some admin work lined up, which also gave us a chance for a lie-in.! Karl decided to relax a while longer in the rock bath. Unfortunately for me, he managed to use up all the warm water, which left me having a very quick cold rinse in the outdoor shower.



Very refreshed, especially me, we strolled down to the lodge again to have breakfast. A very cute buffet had been set up starting from cold meats and cereal to hot stew and fruits. Our bacon and eggs were prepared in a modern open kitchen in full view of the dining area. After breakfast, Wilkens took us for a tour around the lodge. The heated pool surrounded by hammocks and sun loungers is perfect for a relaxed afternoon with exotic cocktails. The Safari Suites are beautifully positioned overlooking the Marico River with a private pool and wrap



around decks.



Equipped with the newest machines and technology, the outdoor gym is surrounded by the bush, situated under thatch roof and is truly a wonderful place to stay fit and healthy. There is even a spacious playground just behind the gym, so your kids will be entertained while you exercise.



Along a wooden walkway on stilts we reached Jaci's Tree Lodge consisting of eight "Tree Houses", each surrounding a giant Leadwood tree.

The large open-plan main building includes a magnificent bar and lounge area, an open kitchen, an inviting dining area and a 4 sided open fireplace. The colours used at Jaci's Tree Lodge truly represent the vibe and culture of South Africa.

Unfortunately it was now time for us to bid farewell to everyone at Jaci's Safari Lodge and continue on to our next site visit location. Once again David took us to the airfield, where Koos and Ruan from the *Etali Safari Lodge* were already awaiting us.





Arriving at Etali we were welcomed with refreshing wet towels and a delicious drink. Our luggage was taken to our room while Koos, the owner and manager of Etali, gave us a tour around the Lodge. Opened in 2003, Koos picked out a beautiful spot to build as it offers splendid views over the reserve. The lodge consists of 8 luxury suites, one of which is also wheelchair accessible. A comfortable dining area with fireplace and bar invites for an enjoyable meal with cocktails, with the possibility to have lunch and dinner outside on the porch while gazing at the stars.

Every room at Etali is secluded and private and has its own outside shower and an enchanting whirlpool on the porch, which is often visited by elephant parched for a quick drink. Entering through the glass doors we found our room in earthy colours and soft features. The bed is specially made; with extra length and width, looking as inviting as ever. The bathroom is equipped with a large free standing bathtub, a glass shower and separate toilet.

Etali also offers a Wellness Centre with therapy rooms and a steam room right next to the outdoor gymnasium. Here you can treat yourself to oil or hot stone massages, indulge in a Chocolate Bath or relax with an African hand and foot massage. Enjoy being pampered whilst always having a great view over the bushveld and wild animals.

Instead of going to lunch, we decided to relax on our private porch with a good read and enjoy the views over the bushveld. At 3pm we met at the main lodge for a quick snack before departing on the afternoon game drive. This time we were accompanied by two other couples and our driver was Ruan. Little did we know at the time, that this game drive was going to be something special.

After only a few minutes into the drive we found a herd of elephants on the mountain, the cracking of the trees and their grunting noises clearly audible. We continued on to find three male lions sleeping under some bushes. We were told that these three lions were thrown out of their prides, found





each other and were since then an inseparable band of brothers. One of them came really close to our Landcruiser and decided to lie down in front of us. Reversing out, we drove on and

encountered a lone giraffe, nibbling its way through the trees. Ruan then told us that giraffes make sure that they only ever walk downwind of trees, as the trees actually communicate with one another and ‘warn’ the surrounding trees when they sense danger. These trees then release a repulsive scent from their leaves, thereby protecting themselves from hungry giraffes and other herbivores. Oh, how clever nature is!

On we went, coming across a few impalas, steenbok and zebras. At a large waterhole we found a rhino mother with her two “kids”, one of which was the most hyper rhino I have ever seen. It kept on running around its mom in wild circles and shoving its older brother every now and again. It did get tired after a while and started drinking milk from its mother to get another boost of energy. On the other side of the waterhole was a teenaged elephant splashing itself with water. Playfully it ran up to the road and on to the other side, where we thought it would carry on through the bushveld. However, he turned around and came straight towards us. Holding our breath, he stopped just before our vehicle, staring down our guide, who happened to be sitting on the lookout-perch type of seat on the hood of the Cruiser – totally relaxed! We’re still not overly sure who won this strange stare-competition, but eventually the elephant seemed to get a bit bored with us and headed back down to the waterhole, leaving us with our heart in our throats - yet with our guide apparently still as cool as a cucumber!



Full of adrenaline, we headed on and soon after found a new thrilling scene. A mother rhino was trapped under a dry marula tree with her two-week old baby hiding between her front legs. Surrounded by about 20 lionesses, she was frantically trying to protect her little one.





The lions constantly crept closer, ready to pounce on the little calf. But when confronted with an angry mother supporting a long horn with a few tons of body mass, retreat is often the sensible part of valour, even for the King of the jungle. It was nail biting stuff, nature at its rawest – purely a game of survival. The sun was already setting and it was clear that the lions were going to wait until after dark before they attack. We had already forgotten about our drinks, waiting in a cool box under our feet, to be drunk during our relaxing sundowners. The spectacle happening before our eyes was too exciting to leave for drinks. Cuddled up in warm ponchos we stayed with the rhino and the lions until after dark. About three other game vehicles were parked around us, not wanting to miss any action either. After 3 hours of constant attack and stalemate, we decided to head back to the lodge to have dinner, as it was freezing cold and we were all craving for something delicious to eat - probably exactly what the lions were thinking about too. So with an uneasy sensation we left the scene and drove home. The next morning, we were informed that the lions had been unsuccessful in their mission and had given up shortly after we'd left. Pheeww, lucky baby rhino, I'd say!!

Back at the lodge we treated ourselves to a fruity cocktail and joined the other guests for a three-course dinner at the fireplace. The staff did a fantastic job of taking care of us and the food was divine and beautifully prepared. A glass of the best South Red washed down dinner and we were kindly escorted to our room by an armed ranger to protect us from wild animals, as the lodge is not fenced in.



Our luxurious quarters had already been prepared for us and the fireplace had warmed the entire room and given it a cosy atmosphere. Tired and relaxed after a warm bath, I hopped into the comfy bed and fell asleep instantly.





In the morning we departed quite early for our morning game

drive. It was hard to beat the excitement of the evening before, but we did spot a few unusual birds, some zebras and springbok, South

Africa's national animal. We returned hungry and ready for breakfast. Outside on the porch we enjoyed our bacon and eggs, cereal and toast under the African sun.

After breakfast we said our goodbyes to everyone at the Etali Safari Lodge and headed back to the airfield. The staff had even kindly prepared a generous snack pack for our flight home and brought us to the airstrip, where our aerie was just how we left her, without any hyena bites or anything.

We packed our bags into the back and did a pre-flight check. Everything was in order and Karl prepared the flight route for this leg. The tanks had enough fuel to bring us home, but we planned a quick fuel stop in Rustenburg. First pilot rule I learnt, better be safe than sorry!

With Madikwe lying at 3319 ft, we set the QNH and checked all the instruments.

From where we were parked we did a running take-off. Again I applied full power and gently pulled the Cessna 172 up into the pristine Bushveld air.

At 7500 ft the flight was a bit smoother than the first leg; I concentrated on keeping the plane level, found a point on the horizon and held the direction, Bushpilots VOR as per Skyafrika doctrine. We joined left hand downwind at Rustenburg, Karl took over control on final approach and with wing down into the crosswind, landed us safely on runway 34.



We refuelled and filled in the necessary paperwork

before heading back out onto heading for FABB. Low-level we flew over the dried farmlands of the western Transvaal and the dusty Gold mines of Carltonville and Randburg. About half an hour later we were inbound over the Ergo Slimes Dam and could see Brakkies, our home base. With a quick fly-by over the airfield to check the wind, we landed on runway 36 and taxied back to the Sky Terminal hangar.

Thank you Dad for those wonderful two days in the Madikwe Game Reserve and for letting me experience my first few flying hours. Also a big thank you to everyone at Jaci's Lodges, especially Kym and Deon for their wonderfully warm hospitality and also Koos at the Etali Safari Lodge, thank you for letting us experience everything at the lodge, it is truly a magical place.

Happy landings to all of you and I hope you enjoyed the read and will be joining SKYAFRICA soon to experience it for yourself!!! ☺

Maggie



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