



Sardines, Dolphins, Sharks... Oh My!

South Africa

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Edited by Gunild Symes

Since times long forgotten, the promise of treasures such as diamonds, gold and platinum has attracted adventurers from all over the world to South Africa in the vain hope of finding new riches.

Indeed, South Africa has long been a destination for adventurers world-wide since olden times. Hopes of finding new treasures, the excitement of the hunt and the pursuit of long held dreams heat up the mind of the explorer, painting fantasies in rainbow colors on the African plains. The desire to get away from the drudgery of everyday and familiar places inspires even the most inveterate home bodies and mamma's boys. Of course, divers have the adventurous spirit in the blood, too, from the time they are born. This is exactly why the unexplored treasures of this country are attractive and magical to everyone and are the basis of our journey to this exotic world.

In 1487, the explorer Bartolomeu Dias of Portugal became the first European to reach the most southern tip of Africa. King John II of Portugal named it the Cabo da Boa Esperança, or Cape of Good Hope, because it led to the riches of India cherished by Europeans and traders. Later, Jan van Riebeeck established a new midway station (now Cape Town) at the Cape of Good Hope on 6 April 1652 for the Dutch East India Company. Soon, colonists from the Netherlands, France and Germany started to arrive.

Modern South Africa is an incredible combination of people of different races, cultures, religions and languages. In this society of diverse social classes

South Africa is a paradise where wild animals can be seen not only at the ZOO! CLOCKWISE: Giraffes gaff at the camera; the South African landscape; Bateleur eagle; Elephant; Cheetah; Impala; Zebra



South African Treasures





there are 11 different languages spoken including Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Thus, it is very symbolic that the nation's motto is *!ke e: /xarra /ke*, or "Unity in Diversity"—literally, "Diverse People Unite".

The airlines of the Emirates offered us special weight terms as divers carrying extra heavy luggage with dive equipment. They rushed us over to this orange land of beauty, this mysterious country. What was waiting for us down there?

Catch the sardine

Each year, at the end of June and the beginning of July, the sardine migration travels along the south coast of the Republic of South

Africa. Millions of sardines collect into huge schools and follow each other somewhere for important sardine business.

Whales, dolphins, sharks, seals, sea birds, fishermen and divers cannot fail to attend this huge fish party. The place, where for a short time so many different sea animals collect together, is a big rarity on this Earth. It is an unique opportunity to watch the animals' behavior in natural conditions, get very closely acquainted them, and take good shots. It is exactly for this reason that we are going to the "Wild Coast", to Mbotyi River Lodge (www.mbotyi.co.za)—a very convenient place to organize a dive expedition.

Each week, there are meetings of about 50 people, madcaps and adventurers from all over the

world. They are equipped up to the teeth with the most modern photo and video equipment and technology and are ready to dive even into the Devil's horns just to test themselves and to capture some good photographic fortune from the sea. Businesslike South Africans from companies such as Sea-Air-Land (www.sea-air-land.com) and African Watersports (www.africanwatersports.co.za) provide top-end marine speed boat charters with experienced captians. Two microlight vehicles go out every day starting at sunrise to search the ocean for marine creature activity.

Action

This is the place where dolphins, whales and sharks hunt, corral and pack sardines together into



This is a real adventure trip. Exciting danger is everywhere at sea—in the air, at the surface and underwater. THIS PAGE: Scenes from the put-in and excursion to witness the action of Sardin Run including the sea aboil (far left) with plunging sea birds diving for sardines

turned. But, we, not having experienced this everyday, left with the dawn and headed out to sea anyway. Struggling with

very important.” At last, our boat is flying over the tops of the waves, falling into water troughs, and speeding towards our adventures. Our purpose (as guests in this neck of the woods) is to capture the sardine dinner on film.

boat out as far away from the coast as possible as soon as it was possible.

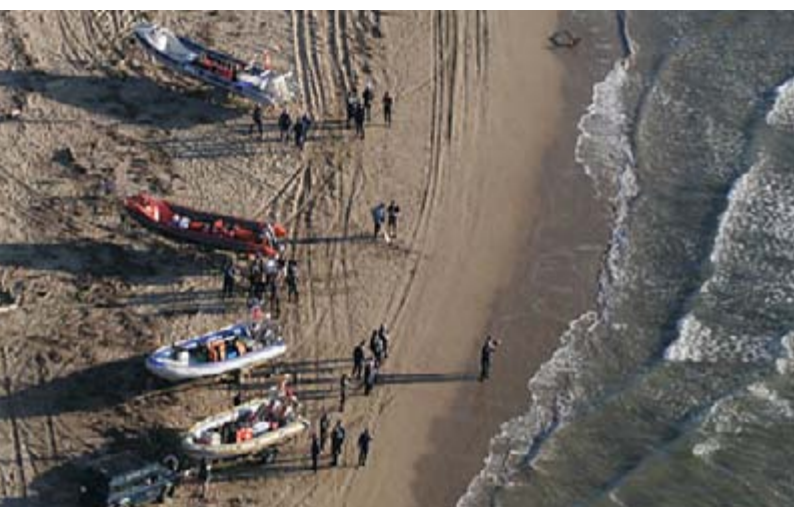
the waves and rolling around in the surf, we drove on out to the sea in search of sardines.

The hunt

“The key to success is harmonious command work,” said Nic de Gersigny, already on his sixth Sardine Run expedition. “The skilled pilot in the motorized hang-glider flying above the sea all day long observes the weather, finds places of congestion of sardines and whales, dolphins, sharks or diving birds, and by radio set, directs our boat to that location. From a boat, we can only see the congestion of the birds in dense flight circling above the specific spot in the sea. But the birds often arrive later, following the whales and dolphins who are leading the formation of the sardine bait balls. Therefore, support from the sky is

Finally, we found the first flock of diving birds. The sea was boiling from birds splashing and dropping out of the sky and down through the surface of the sea. It looked very serious, like a massive air attack and bombardment of the ocean. Involuntary ideas popped into my head, like how not to get under the birds’ bombardment—God forbid that a diving bird would cut my head open with a sharp beak! It seemed quite possible that one could lose one’s life under this intense bombardment.

Dolphins rushed in and zipped around the birds—their harmonious hunting groups jumping and leaping out of the water. As fast as it was possible, we were falling out of the boat with a loud command from our skipper. We grouped up and started the plunge.



a heap, or a bait ball, to make a convenient arrangement for dinner. Sea birds swoop down from the sky into the water when they see that the sardines are accumulated into a dense ball. Dinner is ready.

Speed diving from altitudes of 20-30 meters above, the birds

dive into the water—rowing with their wings and rolling by twisting their heads—pursuing the sardines with great enthusiasm.

The “Wild Coast” is referred to in this manner because the currents, waves and wind vary unpredictably and change quickly. From time immemorial, this place has

had a bad reputation among seamen. Many brave seamen and good ships lie permanently on the bottom of the sea here.

Getting to the sea from the surf is a dangerous adventure in Mbotyi, even with a very skilled skipper. In the beginning, the whole team tried to push the

a surfer, slide the boat along the powerful ocean tidal waves—foam crested and roaring—rolling along the Wild Coast.

Those who were unlucky and had an unskilled captain got soaked with streams of salty water, their equipment washed overboard and their boat over-





All around us, the water was filled with continuous high-frequency squeaking—the voices of the dolphins. Somewhere below us, for a second, was the giant school of sardines shining and disappearing into the depths.

A few of the dolphins were a little curious with us. The chattering dolphins communicated

among themselves. They did a circle around our group. It was visible, that they discussed us with each other, examined us more closely, and then departed after

the sardines.

The sardines were gone again. They moved too quickly for us. All that was left in the water were the sparkling fish scales of the sardines—remnants from the dining table of the dolphins.

Then, the sharks came up from the depths to meet us; they were as curious as the other inhabitants of the sea. They turned directly under us, so we had to nestle our backs against each other more closely. We thought that if we presented ourselves as a large sea animal, we could frighten off the sharks. But some of the divers who were already approached by the sharks at close range, had to push them away aggressively with a long sharp stick. The sharks went back into the depths, and we got back onboard.

While we were in the water, all the activity had moved at least a kilometer away already. All the



events here happened so quickly that not only was it necessary to have surpassed skill, experience, and knowledge of the biological behavior of animals but great luck as well to appear in the right place at the right time. Furthermore, one needed to be able to manage to take pictures of all the events underwater.

We trained, over and over again. We jumped into the water at other locations where birds and dolphins were hunting. We pursued whales. By means of towing an empty plastic bottle, we beckoned a photo session with a new group of sharks. We gained experience and skill with the constant and instantly varying underwater conditions, and continued on this course six hours per day.

The next jump with the camera into the water resulted in an unsuccessful pursuit and, apparently, a group failure. All the divers, one by one, came back up into the boat, and I, the last one in line, looked back and around, being afraid of unexpected sharks.

The current carried me to the side of the boat. Everyone was onboard by now, and I was

heading there as well. But as not to be pushed, I swam more closely to the boat. I lifted my head upwards, and I saw a bird diving directly towards me.

Forgetting about everything, I pulled my head back down under the water and lifted the camera. It was happening! A small school of sardines gathered as the bird flew like a torpedo through the thickness of the water.

I took several shots by throwing up my arms camera in hand, like

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the heroes of the old Westerns did with their pistols, not even lifting the camera to my eyes. Six shots fired off, and by some miracle, I got my first picture of a bird flying underwater.

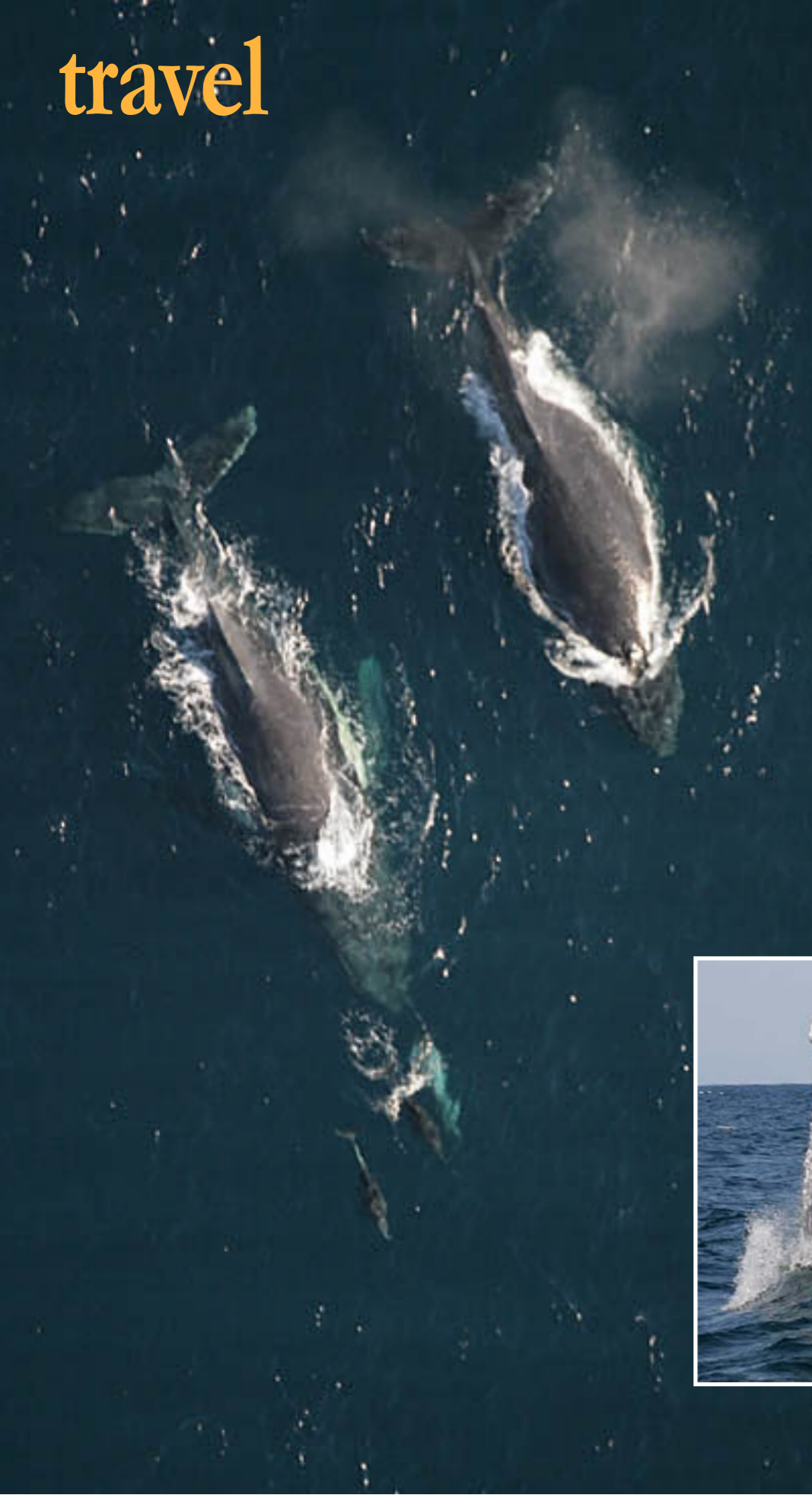
All of a sudden and unexpectedly, the long-awaited action began. The water boiled around me. Dolphins started rushing in. The thickness of the water was ripped apart by the breakers from birds piercing the water. Unfortunately, my camera overheated and broke before finishing writing all the images I took onto the CF card.

A few exciting minutes later, and I found myself once again in an absolutely empty ocean—all the recent events already seeming like a fantastic mirage. If not for the pictures remaining in the memory of my camera and the sardine fish-scales floating around of me, it all could have been a dream.

We knew in advance that our success with catching images of the diving sea birds was doomed, so our focus and confidence was transferred to dolphins, sardines



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Sardines circle around divers to avoid their bubbles; Dolphin pierces a baitball of sardines to snatch a meal; Seabird returns to the surface after diving for sardines; Shark encounter



The best whale-watching in the world

supreme sea inhabitants.

It seemed that the sardine hunt lasted only about ten minutes, but when we come back to the boat, overflowing with impressions, our skipper told us that

we had been in the

water for one and a half hours! So quickly does time fly during the Sardine Run. One and a half hours of activity and my 4GB memory card was filled with pictures.

Whales

We devoted the whole next day to photographing whales. Our pilot searched for whales, informed us of their direction of travel, and then, we set off to pursue them. With a speed worthy of the Special Forces, we jumped into the water as we traveled at the same speed as the whales, and kicked our fins like crazy in hopes that they would swim up to us more closely.

Whales are like people, absolutely different. If one of them dived far away and more deeply in order not to intersect with us underwater, others were absolutely indifferent to us. The third individual showed discontent and a lot of annoyance with the small men. The fourth showed surprising curiosity. We especially liked the humpbacked whales. They adored jumping out of the water, spraying enchanting fountains, waving chest fins and clapping their huge tail fins on the surface. The dull

and whales. They became photo models for us. Our day came when we dived all together twice.

The school of sardines, ever-changing in external form and outline, moved around a depth of no more than five to seven meters—slowly or quickly, the bait ball would swell. Bubbles exhaled by the divers gathered the sardines into a rotating circle dissipated by an attack by dolphins only to gather again in an almost perfect geometrical sphere.

We took more pictures.

discussed the situation with each other—what were these strange finned-feet entities doing near their sardines and why were these beings preventing them from having a snack?

Having stopped the discussion and made a decision, they swam up quickly onto different sides of us and the bait ball, and with well-trained hunting formation and loud shouts (underwater high-frequency squeaks), forced the whole sardine ball to move swiftly away, cutting it off from us. The dolphins swam at reckless speeds, dashing into the bait ball and snatching sardines from different angles.

I tried to catch up with the bait ball. I kicked my fins very hard. Then, I lifted my head and saw a dolphin with a brilliant sardine in its teeth take off away from the fish stew and swim directly towards me.

No, we had no time to collide, he was too skilled underwater and dodged a blow as easily as the passing of a thought, and he did not even forget to swallow the fish he had just caught.

Hunting directed by dolphins reaches the top of perfection and is, indeed, one of the most harmonious activities of these



Frightened by our air bubbles, the dolphins gathered in a group away from us. It was visible and audible how they

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THIS PAGE: Humpback whales are spotted swimming with their friends, the dolphins, and breaching the surface of the sea in spectacular fashion





round ends of their noses were so photogenic, too!

But the most amazing event happened when, tired and out of breath, we sat down for a minute to have a rest in our boat. On this occasion, we had already made five to seven unsuccessful attempts at pursuit, jumped into the water, tried to follow the whales, rowing with all the force we could muster, but made not one picture of our passionately favored sea giants. All the whales were completely immersed underwater or departed too quickly. And here, in that one moment when we relaxed, reflecting on the vanity of a diver's life and of the hunters of whales, was, literally within two to three meters from

our boat, a huge head silently rising out of the sea.

The whale stayed there and looked at us closely; it was obvi-

frighten away the huge entity. We were not pulled at all to our cameras, and simply enjoyed our silent dialogue with the whale.

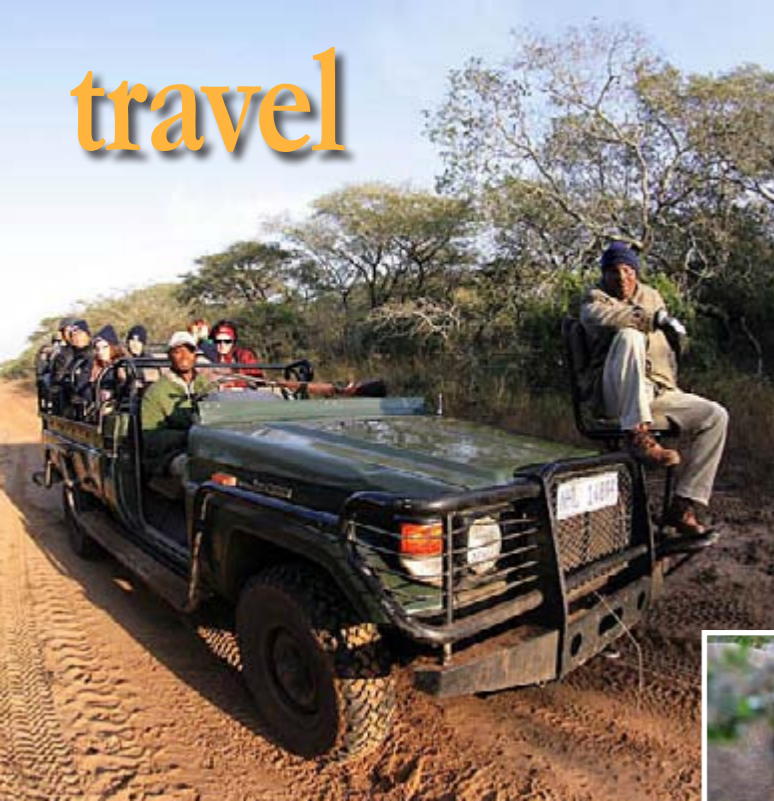
Perhaps, the whale had bad eyesight and consequently swam up more closely to have a better look, or, maybe, he wished to smell us? We would never know. Some long moments later, he noisily inhaled, as though he was grumbling something to himself under his nose and dived, slapping his wide tail fin on the water. Yes, the slap was so strong that the entire



boat has covered with a down-pour of salty rain. We never saw the whale again, having not had a chance to ask him in time what it was that he was wanted.

ous that he wished to examine us further. We were so amazed at this show, that we were simply dumbfounded and had not stirred at all, being afraid to

THIS PAGE: An amazing ride for skydivers. A microlight provides unique perspectives of the South African landscape



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The Big Five

To travel so far, to the edge of the Ojkumeny, and only dive for sardines and whales would be truly unfortunate. Even for keen divers, it is interesting to see and get acquainted with not only the underwater world, but also the overland world in this part of the planet. Following the trail to the treasures of the Republic of South Africa brings one in contact with the unique nature kept

today only in national parks.

The private Game Resort Phinda—which in translation from the Zulu language means "jungle"—has 23,000 hectares of South-African jungle. It is located within 15 minutes of air travel from the coast. But when

we landed here, we understood that we had entered an entirely different world.

We chose to go to Phinda because it was near one of the best natural parks of the Southern Hemisphere. It meant that we would find true professionals of the game business, we thought. Surely, they would show us the Big Five: a lion, a leopard, an elephant, a rhinoceros and a buffalo, living in a natural environment. And we were not mistaken!

With a hat that could have been Indiana Jones', some warm blankets, a little marula (a local sweet drink), binoculars, two cameras, a powerful four wheel drive open off-road vehicle, and an armed ranger on a bumper, we headed out to a meeting with new adventures in the real bush—this was a South African safari not to miss!

It was exclusive. We went through the jungle to track a lion, hiked through the high grasses of the savanna to track a cheetah, and cautiously, being afraid to approach too closely, photographed the elusive rhinoceros and a buffalo, participated in a night pursuit of a leopard and finally sensed and smelled an elephant running very close to us.

Afterthoughts

Two weeks of adventure seemed to fly by in a breath—so quickly, easily and with immense fascination. We had become active participants in an absolutely unique on the planet underwater event—the great migration of sardines and the big hunt for them by thousands of sea birds, sharks and dolphins. We lived and breathed South Africa, where it is still possible to see and photograph dozens of jumping whales. For a long time in our memories, will our minds' eyes remain in the great canyons, roaring falls, bright juicy colors of the wild woods, sensing the lions' hunt seizing

us down to our bones, hearing the night roar of the lion—the tsar of the animals—seeking the leopard—the king of the night jungle—and the fastest predator, the cheetah, eternally chewing and breaking into high speed chases all along the way. We saw elephants, rhinoceroses and self-assured, unshakable buffalos.

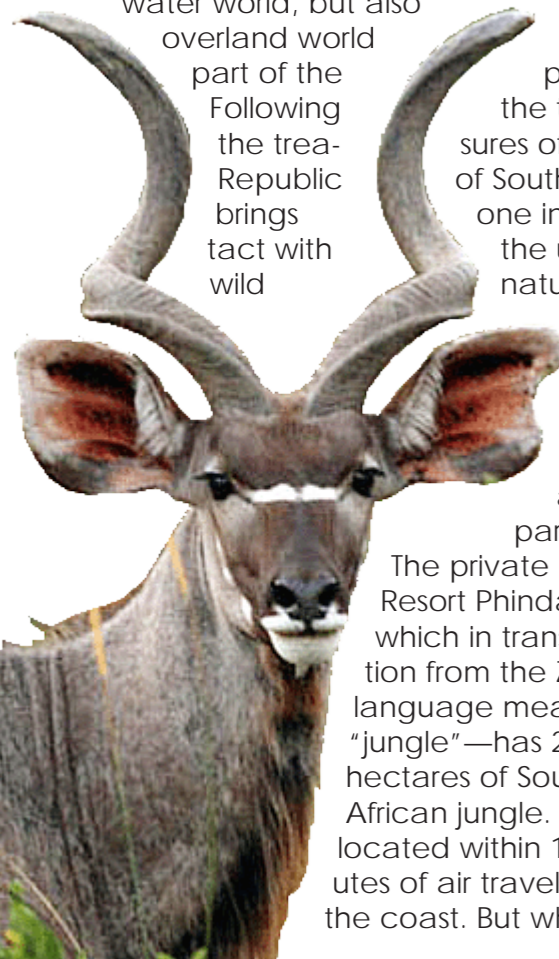
Now we can authoritatively state that Southern Africa is definitely one of the best places in the world for diving and for photo safaris with wild animals. The nature of South Africa and its wild inhabitants are the most priceless treasures, indeed, national treasures of this great country, and subjects of fascination for modern adventurers.

We left the South African Republic with a feeling of deep satisfaction—we opened ourselves to a new world and have the strong desire to return here once again to follow the migration of the sardines along the Wild Coast! ■

The editor wishes to express his most sincere gratitude to: Ship captain, Paul Warren Von Blerk, expert on whales and sharks of the Wild Coast; Microlight pilot, Larry Eschner, heavenly slow mover, who gave us a wonderful opportunity to see the Wild Coast in an absolutely new perspective; Emirates Airlines, (Emirates.

com) for allowing 10 kg extra weight for underwater equipment free-of-charge; The management of CCAfrica (CCAfrica.com) for granting us an opportunity to get acquainted with the wild nature of Phinda Privat Game Reserve.

Big 5 and more! CLOCKWISE: Tourists and guides head out to the bush; Yawning cheetah cub; Rhinos; Lion paw print; Galloping bison; Lounging cheetahs; Waterbuffalo; Baby elephant; Antelope



Rainer Schimpf

& *His Adventure Playground for Experts*

Text by Harald Apelt
Photos by Daniel Debes, Pascal Fazio,
Ralf Kiefner, Wolfgang Pölzer, Robert
Raderschatt and Rainer Schimpf

What has already been assumed for a long time now has been **photographed, filmed and confirmed**: Orcas have an acquired taste and go hunting especially for members of their own species—dolphins. Ashore, Port Elizabeth in South Africa is by far not the only attraction—seals, sharks, whales and a vast diversity of all kinds of species make Madiba Bay an adventure playground for divers and adventurers. For this reason, Rainer Schimpf has developed a unique advanced program for dive experts and filmmakers.

“There was absolute silence on board,” said Rainer Schimpf, owner of Expert-Tours in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. “A kind of ‘wow’ atmosphere.” When Schimpf started the two 90 PS engines of his semi-rigid boat, *Expert-Tours*, and went back to the harbor of Port Elizabeth, the dive pro was overwhelmed, and his clients on the boat were speechless. Only then did the divers realize that they had been witnesses to a most unusual happening.

The cameras went crazy, and Schimpf took footage with his HD-camera of orcas chasing a school of dolphins. This phenomenon had been observed before, but never had it been documented with such impressive footage.

The leader of the orcas attacked one dolphin from

underneath, caught it, and breached vertically out of the water, then let go of the wounded dolphin only to attack it again after a short moment. This hunting behaviour was known of the Great White sharks when they patrol in front of the kelp, or on the reefs hunting

for seals that leave the secure haven of the kelp.

“This was one of the most amazing moments I have experienced as an animal filmer and diving tours operator,” said Schimpf after this trip, which made such amazing pictures possible for his clients that their



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DANIEL DEBES



DANIEL DEBES



DANIEL DEBES



DANIEL DEBES

Orca hunting dolphin—these first-of-a-kind shots prove that orcas prey on their cousins, the dolphins





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Extreme coastline of South Africa; A humpback whale breaches near the dive boat; You can dive cageless with Great White sharks; The Schimpf family, Rainer, Jonas and Petra, in Capetown

Schimpf. He only takes divers on his tours who have more than 100 logged dives, with experience and ease in rough conditions of current, swell and visibility. He doesn't do dive tours on a daily basis. "I only offer diving packages. In general, the duration of these packages is about ten days, and during that period, the diving spots will be picked individually and dived all depending on the weather circumstances," explained Schimpf. Only then, can he guarantee that the sometimes big expectations of his clients will be fulfilled by the end.

"For example, during the Sardine Run (see following article), we spent most of the time on the sea. We often deal with rough seas and current, and when we sight a baitball, everything has to happen

fast. The divers must be in the water within two to three minutes, otherwise the action will happen without them." This is why Schimpf insists on experienced guests, diving with their own equipment and perfectly controlling it.

"At the Sardine Run, we don't do buddy diving. This is impossible under a baitball," Schimpf explains. The visibility varies between three and 15 meters. Currents are not unusual, and if one gets into a baitball, the person has to react fast and right. For this reason, every Dive Expert-Tours' guest has to follow an explicit briefing to be able to react appropriately in the sometimes extreme situations. "If you come up with sand, you have lost," Schimpf said with a smile, because the Sardine Run takes place in the blue,

underneath the diver—nothing but blue water and up to 200 meters depth.

It's kind of a problem that the expectations of the clients have risen so high due to what they have seen on animal documentaries such as those of National Geographic. In reality, these documentaries are only 45 minutes cut out of several years of production during which the film teams stayed several weeks in a row in South Africa and dived many hundreds of times.

But the Sardine Run is not the only attraction for the passionate underwater filmer that South Africa has to offer. On the Madiba Bay Diving Tour, one may experience close encounters with humpback whales, brydes whales, minky



Common dolphins schooling off the coast of Port Elizabeth are spotted on the early morning dive



images were even printed on the cover pages of international daily newspapers.

Schimpf does diving tours within his company Dive Expert-Tours offering to his clients, as he says, "the non plus ultra" of their diving curriculum.

Schimpf is German and has lived since 1999 together with his wife, Petra, and their 9-year-old son, Jonas, in Port Elizabeth, their new home in South Africa.

It is here that he undertakes his company in showing film crews, professional photographers

and experienced divers the highlights of the ocean around Port Elizabeth. "Underwater scouting" or "marine logistics" is what this activity is called—an experience of a permanent adventure for paying customers.

And what Schimpf has to offer is so exclusive that it has its price. Nevertheless, these extraordinary tours get more and more supporters willing to pay the price and the strain, in order to witness spectacular encounters.

"What we do here is not for beginners," said

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mug shot of humpback whale breaching; Filmcrews from Blue Planet prepare for a shoot; Sponges decorate the reef; Two nudibranchs; Diverse garden of soft and hard corals make up the reef off Port Elizabeth; Sea anemone

Views of a Tiger shark and Gray Nurse shark or Sand Tiger shark (bottom left)

Rainer Schimpf

the visibility is not good and diving not a pleasure. Nevertheless, even during this unspectacular period there are travel destinations offering something really special.

During this period, Schimpf offers tours to Mozambique or Namibia. The Mozambique Channel in the North is known for its large encounters with whale sharks and mantas. And in Namibia, Dive Expert-Tours offers a special treat for diving groups: Lake Otjikoto.

The diameter of the little round Lake Otjikoto is only 150 meters, but it has something special to hide. It looks like it was created by a meteorite, but this is not the case. The lake evolved due to collapsing karst vacuums filling up with ground water.

At some places the lake is 95 meters deep. In addition, the lake keeps a special secret. On 9 July 1915, World War I took place in central Europe, the German Schutztruppe in the former German

RAINER SCHIMPF



RALF KIEFNER

a game of patience before experiencing this diving highlight. We have planes flying up the coast, and we read satellite pictures in order to spot the big schools of

sardines. (Flying with ultralights is not enough as we work offshore. Two-engine Barons are standard, as they can fly 40 miles offshore and are able to find the action.) As soon as we have a sighting, we direct our boat to the GPS position. In case of far away distances, we take the boat onto the trailer and drive up the coast, in order to reach the sardines. We offer this 'flexible' Sardine Run to give our clients the best possible chance to be part of this natural phenomenon," said Petra Schimpf.

It is not an easy task because often it is Petra who has to organise that the clients get there where the sardines are. And sometimes even the hotels have to be changed and rebooked, and the clients, including their luggage and equipment, transferred to the action. "This is quite big logistics to be managed in a short given time but also a

factor why nearly all our tours are successful for our clients" said Petra proudly.

The best travel time for the Sardine Run is between February and July. After that period, the stormy season starts and the waves in front of South Africa might reach up three to four meters. In front of Cape Town in the open ocean, waves even build up to 17 – 22 meters. Then,

at once be encountered.

"And one thing that surely no client will ever forget are the encounters with the dolphins. When we spot the huge schools of dolphins with sometimes up to 2,500 animals going through the water like a cavalry all at the same speed and all in the same direction, this is when we experience a special relationship with nature and the universe. This is an experience hard to explain in words," enthused Schimpf about his "adventure playground ocean".

The business with this particular type of tourism also has a hitch. Schimpf and his wife, Petra, came a long way and gained lots of experience before they got it right in terms of nature logistics. "It's not the way that we simply can plan the Sardine Run, and then sell it to the clients. The impressive schools of sardines don't come to order," Schimpf explained. "This is why it's

go fish hunting in their impressive ways, and even supporters of the macro photography will be highly satisfied. More than 140 species of nudibranchs have been counted here.

The variety of species in Madiba Bay, Port Elizabeth, is due to its extraordinary geographical situation. Because it is here, in the shore region of Port Elizabeth, where warm and cold water currents reunite, so that nearly all sea creatures of South Africa may

whales, Southern Right whales, Orcas, and common dolphins. Often the clients also have spectacular dives with seals.

In many ways, it is hard to believe that this part of the world still has such an apparently inexhaustible variety of species to offer. "This sounds so unreal, nobody wants to believe it," said Schimpf, because in the ocean around Port Elizabeth, there are not only whales but also 22 shark species, penguins

RALF KIEFNER

WOLFGANG PÖLZER / WWW.UNDERWATER-PHOTOS.NET

A pride of lions rest



RAINER SCHIMPF



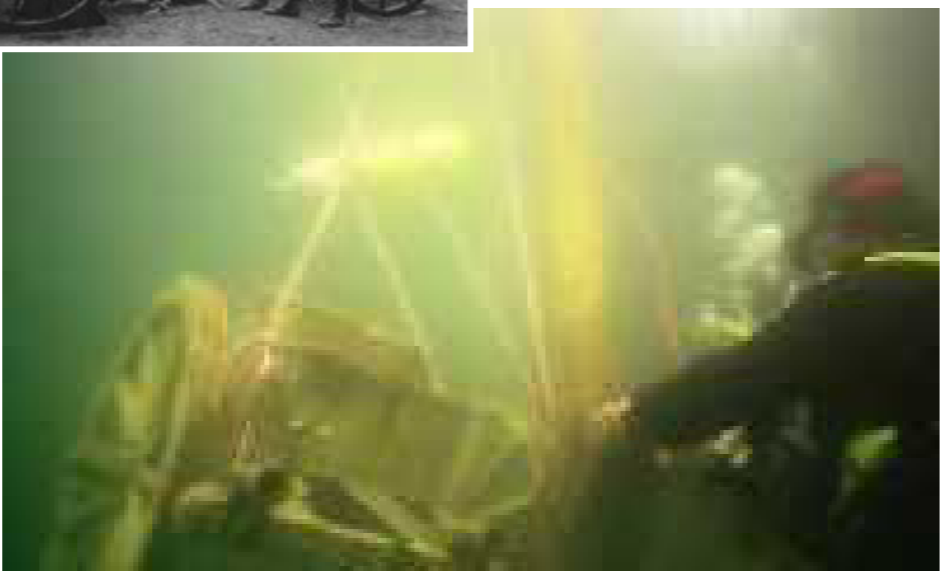
ROBERT RADERSCHATT

ABOVE: Lake Otjikoto. LEFT & BOTTOM: Germans sank their weapons, canons and ammunitions in the lake. CENTER INSET: Historic photo of the Krupp canons used by the Germans in WWI



is provided at the cosy and comfortable Bed & Breakfast, "Villa Chameleon", of Dive Expert-Tours. Villa Chameleon is situated in the calm but central suburb called Walmer on a property where Schimpf and his family live as well. A family atmosphere and integration of the guests is

therefore to be expected. Already in the morning, the diving guests start the planning of the diving day with Schimpf in the breakfast room of the house of the Schimpf family. With a Combi and the boat trailer, they drive seven minutes down to the harbor from where the diving excursions normally start. And it doesn't matter what has been foreseen for that very special day—in the evening the group comes back to the "Villa Chameleon" with sparkling eyes and stuffed with spectacular impressions, said Schimpf. ■



South-West had to surrender to the superior forces of the South African troops. But before that happened, the German troops sank their weapons, canons and ammunitions in the lake in order to avoid the enemy from getting a hold of them.

At a depth from 50 metres on, tech diving fans can still see old 7.5 cm Krupp canons. Ammunition boxes and nearly one hundred year old automatic machine guns can be discovered in their original condition. Some pieces of this old artillery have been retrieved and restored. They can now be seen in the regional museums.

What has never been found is the gold treasure. Rumours suggest that sealed boxes with gold from the

banks of the abandoned town have been sunk in the lake. Officially, they have never been recovered—a good story in a dangerous depth.

Besides the classic diving program, one should not forget to do the huge and spectacular land program in South Africa. A land safari to see the "Big Five" in the national parks offers breathtaking viewings of wildlife just like the diving tours do.

Accommodations in the two million strong metropolis of Port Elizabeth

Port Elizabeth

In 1488, Bartholomeu Diaz came as the first European into the Algoa Bay, which has been used since then as an anchor place to resupply ships with food and drinking water. In the centuries to follow, many European sailing nations came into the Bay and many of them shipwrecked (400 estimated ship wrecks), some still can be dived on.

The British founded Port Elizabeth in 1799 and built Fort Frederick – the oldest stone building in the Eastern Cape and the oldest English building in Africa, South of the Sahara (see picture underneath). The fort was erected to protect the port against a possible attack by the French, but never once was shot fired out of the canons. A peaceful landing of the first 5,000 English settlers in 26 sailing ships occurred in Port Elizabeth in 1820.

Sir Rufane Donkin, who was the governor of the Cape at the time, gave the city its name by naming it after his wife Elizabeth who died two years earlier in India. A stone pyramid was built in the Donkin Reserve in memory of his wife. At the harbor, a clock tower "Campanile" erected in 1923 is a memorial to the first settlers arriving in 1820.

During Apartheid, Madiba Bay/Port Elizabeth became a center of resistance primarily due to the fact that many powerful leaders of the movement came for the Eastern Cape including Nelson Mandela, who grew up in the province (in the village Qunu), Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu and Steve Biko.

In the year 2000, Port Elizabeth became part of a new district "Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality" named after Nelson Mandela and includes the cities of Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Dispatch. ■



The first Europeans reached Algoa Bay in 1488

Today, Port Elizabeth (also called PE) has more than 2 million inhabitants and is the fourth biggest city in South Africa after Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. The harbor is the third biggest harbor in South Africa because Port Elizabeth became an important container docking port. PE's strongest industry is the automotive industry. Ford and VW (Uitenhage) have their production sites here. Another important industry is wool export.

PE has an airport that is fully integrated in the flight timetables of South African Airways. For the Soccer World Cup in 2010, there are plans of making the runway longer to enable international airlines to fly into Port Elizabeth directly.

Madiba Bay/Port Elizabeth has more than 40 km stretches of impeccable beach, most of them ideal for water sport activities. The city is an ideal starting point for anybody wanting to explore the beauties of the Eastern Cape. In this province, five different biome meet, and thus makes the region a must-see for every eco-tourist and anybody wanting to experience South Africa's extraordinary landscapes.

The region around today's Port Elizabeth was originally been settled by the San people. Later Xhosa settled here as well, especially along the Sundays River.



Fort Frederick built by the English in PE in 1799



Sardine Run

The Sardine Run is a rare phenomenon in the animal world, a mystery which hasn't been completely solved yet. The Sardine Run takes place every year during the end of February until July from Plettenberg Bay to Port Elizabeth up to Port St. Johns. Big schools of sardines follow plankton and swim from the South Atlantic to the west coast of South Africa. From here, they follow the nutritious Benguela current into the Cape region.

Text by Harald Apelt
Photos by Ralf Kiefner

In the best case scenario, the Algulhas current coming from the North East of South Africa and going to the South loses its strength during winter months and a counter current comes up along the east coast. This counter current also carries plankton and, consequently, sardines follow. For geographical reasons, this current and, therefore, the sardines settle every February between Plettenberg Bay and Port Elizabeth. Only when from June onwards the winter storms begin to blow, the sardines continue their journey in the current, pushing to the North.

In cases when the winter storms do not go through, as in the years 2006 and 2007, and the Algulhas current remains too strong, the Sardine Run

only takes place in the region around Port Elizabeth.

Why most of the sardines migrate and where they go after they come along such a long distance still has to be figured out. But one thing is for certain—where the schools of sardines are, big hunters of the ocean reunite for a common feast. Penguins, seals, all kinds of shark species, whales and huge numbers of dolphin schools feed on the sumptuous dinner table.

The most spectacular scenes are the feeding frenzies of sharks, gannets, whales and dolphins on sardines trapped under the surface of the water by the marine mammals giving chase in a teams. Like shepherd dogs, the dolphins surround the sardines, making their circles smaller and small-



THIS PAGE: Scenes from Sardin Run where sharks, dolphins and sea birds feed on sardines in a baitball





Topside view: Gannets diving for sardines

cake. The birds do not seem to be on the feeding list of the sharks. Why should one eat dry bread if the table is set with other glorious food?

The whole spectacle is dynamically loaded because the baitball constantly moves, changing depth and position. So some good advice for divers is to observe the action from a secure distance and from underneath the action. Water temperatures between 16 – 22°C

Sardine Run

are moderate, but the visibility can vary strongly from 0 to 25 meters.

And the Sardine Run is a hard task. From 7:00 am in the morning, the boat leaves port and the whole day is spent at sea. With Dive Expert-Tours, the boat travels up to 120 km a day—even when the sea might be rough. Also, diving a baitball demands the highest concentration and perfect handling of equipment as well as the matrices of buoyancy because the person who becomes a game ball of the baitball can easily become a victim of a shark by mistake, bumping into the diver.

After approximately 15 – 20 minutes, the show is over. By then, the baitball becomes so small that the remaining sardines leave the security of the school and flee in all directions. Having had enough of the action, the hunters leave the place of the big feast after having succeeded in their day's task.

Special thanks to Ralf Kiefner at www.ocean-pix.de ■

THIS PAGE: Glowing white bodies of gannets streaming through the water join the ghost images of feeding sharks and dolphins

er, blowing air bubbles surrounding the school of sardines like a virtual net and holding them together. The school of sardines condenses more and more until it appears on the water surface as a big, round, silver shiny and restless ball—the so-called baitball. Finally, the big feast can begin.

As the hosts, the dolphins open the feast and shortly afterwards, the dolphins and sharks breach through the baitball in order to catch the sardines without any effort. From the air, hundreds of gannets come into play. These birds are the Air Force of the Sardine Run. For a long period of

time, they observe the ocean and look out for signs of when the sardines are being chased by the dolphins and pushed onto the surface. Then, the surface gets transformed by millions of little sardine bodies into a boiling and silvery shining surface as they try hard, panic-stricken, to swim down again.

But it's too late; there's no more escape for the sardines. With routine and without getting in each other's way, sharks and dolphins complete their job, and from the air, gannets shoot fearlessly into the bustle to get their part of the prey. Anyone who thinks that the gannets' strategy only

consists of lucky hits is wrong. In a nearly vertical nose dive with open wings, they aim for the center of the baitball. Only in the last second do they put back their wings and their "landing gear" and shoot like an arrow into the ocean with a speed up to 100 km per hour. Underwater, they are able to use the remaining speed to skillfully catch a sardine. And if they miss by a few centimeters, they use two or three wing-strokes to complete their dive successfully.

The gannets dive into the ocean up to 15 meters deep in order to secure themselves their part of the



fact file

South Africa



SOURCES: US CIA WORLD FACT BOOK, SCUBADOC.COM

History In 1652, Dutch traders landed at the southern tip of modern day South Africa and founding the city of Cape Town, establishing a resupply station on the spice route between the Netherlands and the East. In 1806, many Dutch settlers (the Boers) travelled north to establish their own republics after the British seized the area of the Cape of Good Hope. In 1867 and 1886, the discovery of diamonds and gold encouraged wealth and immigration. This intensified the subjugation of the indigenous population. The years 1899-1902 saw the British defeat the Boers resistance during the Boer War; but, the British and the Afrikaners, as the Boers became known, governed together under the Union of South Africa. The National Party was voted into power in 1948 and

heid—the separate development of the races. In 1994, the first multi-racial elections saw the end of apartheid and brought in black majority rule. Government: republic. Capital: Pretoria.

Geography Southern Africa, is located at the southern tip of the continent of Africa. The country of Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa, which also almost completely surrounds Swaziland. Coastline: 2,798 km. Terrain: vast interior plateau surrounded by rugged hills and a thin coastal plain. Lowest point: Atlantic Ocean 0 m. Highest point: Njesuthi 3,408 m. Natural hazards: extended droughts. Environmental issues: extensive water conservation and control measures are required due to the lack of important arterial rivers or lakes; water usage increases out-

pace supply; agricultural runoff and urban discharge cause pollution of rivers; acid rain due to air pollution; soil erosion; desertification. South Africa is party to: Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic-Marine Living Resources, Antarctic Seals, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling.

Economy A middle-income, emerging market with a large supply of natural resources, South Africa has well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport sectors. Its stock exchange is the 17th largest in the world. Its modern infrastructure supports an efficient distribution of goods to major cities throughout the region. Since 2004, growth has been strong, as South Africa reaps the benefits of macroeconomic stability and a boom in global commodities. However, there is still high unemployment and an outdated infrastructure limits growth. The country began to experience an electricity crisis at the end of 2007, due to supply problems of the state power supplier Eskom plagued with aged plants. It necessitated “load-shedding” cuts to businesses and

residents in the major urban areas. Remnants of the apartheid period include daunting economic problems, especially poverty, no economic empowerment among disadvantaged groups, and public transportation shortages. The economic policy of the country is fiscally conservative but pragmatic. It focuses on controlling inflation, sustaining a budget surplus, and—as a means in increasing job growth and household income—employing state-owned enterprises to provide basic services to low-income areas. Natural resources: gold, chromium, antimony, coal, iron ore, manganese, nickel, phosphates, tin, uranium, gem diamonds, platinum, copper, vanadium, salt, natural gas. Agriculture: corn, wheat, sugarcane, fruits, vegetables; beef, poultry, mutton, wool, dairy products. Industries: mining (South Africa is the world’s largest producer of gold, platinum, chromium), automobile assembly, metalworking, machinery, textiles, iron and steel, chemicals, fertilizer, foodstuffs, commercial ship repair.

Climate South Africa is mostly semiarid with with sunny days and

cool nights. There are subtropical areas along the east coast.

Population 43,786,115 (July 2008 est.) This figure factors in the effects and mortality rate of AIDS which is ravaging the country’s population. Ethnic groups: black African 79%, white 9.6%, mixed 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5% (2001 census). Religions Zion Christian 11.1%, Pentecostal/Charismatic 8.2%, Catholic 7.1%, Methodist 6.8%, Dutch Reformed 6.7%, Anglican 3.8%, Muslim 1.5%, other Christian 36% (2001 census), Internet users: 5.1 million (2005).

Currency rand (ZAR). Exchange rates: 1EUR=11.39ZAR, 1USD=7.60ZAR, 1GBP=14.27ZAR, 1AUD=6.67ZAR, SGD=5.44ZAR

Language IsiZulu 23.8%, IsiXhosa 17.6%, Afrikaans 13.3%, Sepedi 9.4%, English 8.2%, Setswana 8.2%, Sesotho 7.9%, Xitsonga 4.4%, other languages: 7.2% (2001 census).

Health There is an intermediate degree of risk for food or water-

borne diseases such as bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. Vectorborne diseases include Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever and malaria. Water contact diseases include schistosomiasis (2008).

Decompression Chambers

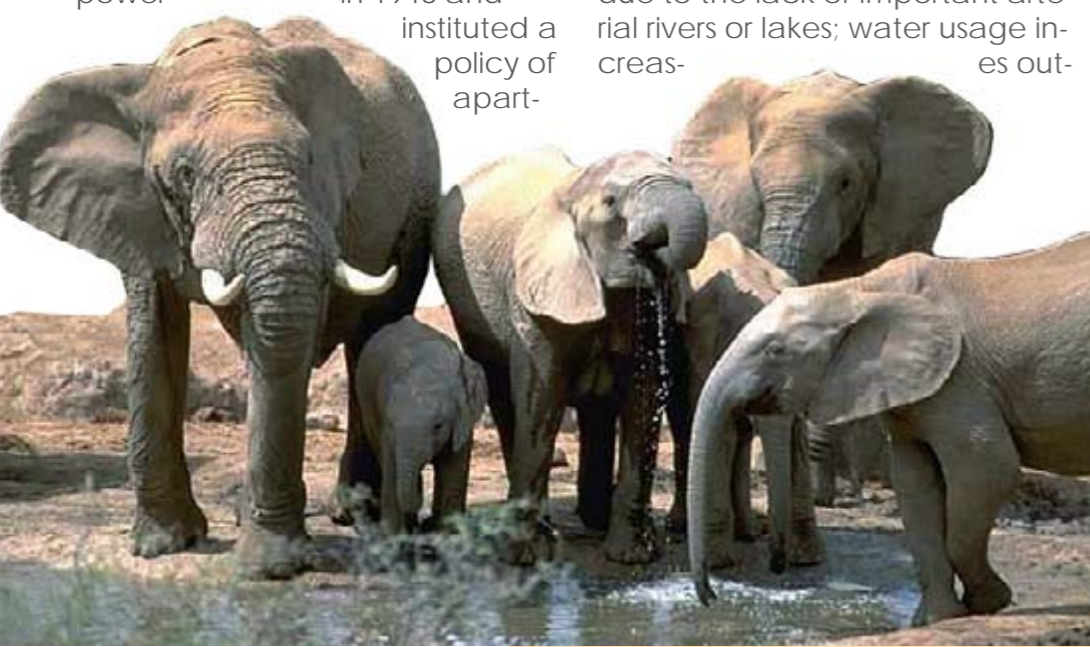
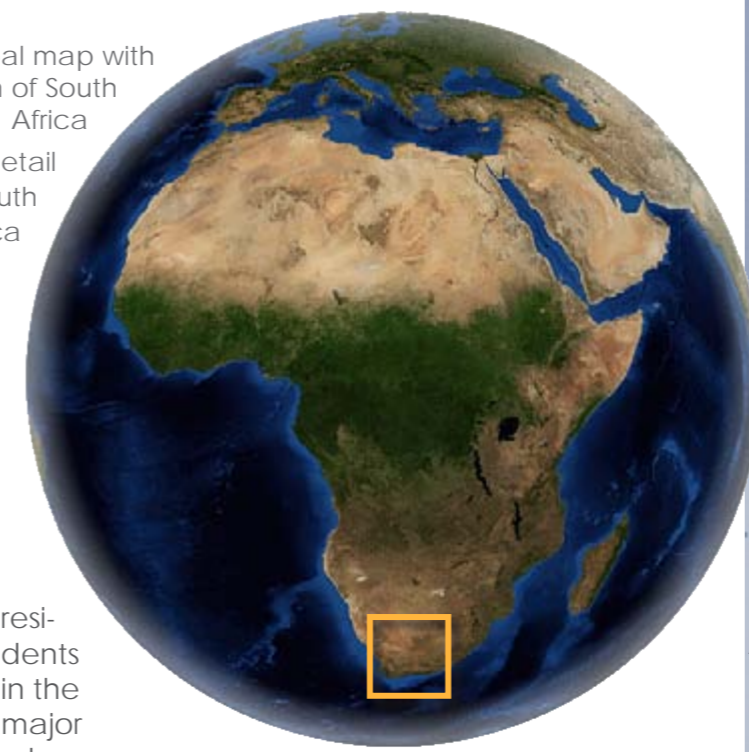
CAPE TOWN: National Hyperbarics Klienmont Hospital, Cape Town 24-Hour Hotline: Tel. 021-671-8655

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JOHANNESBURG: The Hyperbaric Treatment Centre cc, East rand of Johannesburg, Tel. 011-914-2675 www.hyperbaric.co.za

Web sites Expert-Tours www.expert-tours.de South Africa Tourism www.southafrica.net ■

RIGHT: Global map with location of South Africa
FAR RIGHT: Detail map of South Africa



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