

3 July – 18 July 2009
FronDida Travel-Lucia van Kruijl
Report South Africa, area KwaZulu Natal



In the evening of the 3rd of July I left for my two-week trip to South Africa, Kwazulu Natal. After a very good check at the customs in Amsterdam we arrived an hour later at London Heathrow. Take your time, because you will get another check even harder, belts off shoes off and how great, with nothing on you anymore, still the alarm went off at a few persons. It all took so much time that we had to hurry for our flight to Johannesburg.

The 10 hour flight to Johannesburg had a good service and with ear plugs I tried to sleep. Around 6 AM in the morning a young boy looked out of the window and I saw a wonderful orange sky, it was real...I was above the African continent. After a breakfast and a queue for the toilets we arrived in Johannesburg at 8.30 AM. From there we took the a plane to Durban for one hour, our final destination. Lucky that probably next year the international airport of Durban will be finished!

GPS System

Still I didn't now exactly who I would meet at the airport. I didn't had to search long, a big board showed my name. Budget was waiting for me. After making the arrangements for my car they showed me a well equipped van what was completely accessible and in the meantime I could have a good impression of the driver as well. Though there are no self driving cars with hand-control there is a big choice of cars to rent if your companion wants to drive. New is the GPS systems you can rent, but take care, specially in the bush there are most of the times no road names and certainly no numbers, that can make your GPS really confused.

Makaranga Garden Lodge and the area

In all the books I read before going to South Africa they warned you not to go into the townships. Certainly I had no intention to do this, but the GPS got confused and so we ended up in a township. The funny thing was that the GPS said: "you have reached your destination" what I saw was some chicken and a man with a small empty suitcase. No Makaranga Garden Lodge with 5 stars for sure.

After this extra excursion-trip, we finally arrived at Makaranga Garden Lodge at Kloof, our destination for a few days.



I was amazed by the beauties of this lodge, sculptures, great paintings, wonderful plants and flowers. It made me feel relaxed instantly and felt home. Also the staff under a professional and friendly guidance were great.

With the complete accessible rooms and a wonderful swimming pool with even the ramp made in art look, it's a perfect destination to be for a few days. After a long journey you need to relax. Don't forget to plan a day for walking in the beautiful park which belongs to this lodge. Look at the amazing plants and hear new unknown sounds of so many bird species. And bring a visit to the Health an Beauty Spa.

In this area, only half an hour away from Durban, you can make several trips. See the curiosity of the Golden Line of Durban, take a look at the Indian Ocean and yes I found three beach wheelchairs next to the entrance of O'Shaka Marineworld. O'Shaka Marineworld offers you shows of different sea mammals and it's all accessible .

At the other side of Kloof, just a 15 minute drive, you'll find the beautiful 1000 Hills. If you want to see Drakensbergen, the amazing mountains, it's better to do it during your stay at Makaranga Lodge. Unfortunately I had no time to check it out on accessibility.

Elephant Coast

The rest of my the time I stayed in Kwazulu Natal we went to the Elephant Coast, a complete other world. It's about 280 km, a four hour drive from Kloof. Take care you have enough petrol because along the highway N2 you have only two petrol-stations, here you can have a drink, a bite and accessible toilets.

There is so much to do and see at the Elephant Coast, that you don't have enough time to see it all.

Safari/Game Drive

A great experience is a safari/game drive in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. My suggestion is to make a game drive for at least two days probably you will do it a day extra under the guidance of Dave. Under his guidance you will learn and see a lot of this magnificent Park. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi has it's Big 5; the lion, leopard, the buffalo, the rhino and the elephant. Besides the big 5 you will see the wildebeest, impala, nyala, giraffe and many others. The park is renowned for saving the white rhino. With the accessible van and a ranger through it's rolling hills, forest and thorn field valleys you will have the experience of your life. In this park there is also accessible accommodation, Hilltop Camp with breathtaking views. Don't forget your photo camera and your pinochles!

Zululand

Not only the nature of the Elephant Coast is a must also its people. In the middle of Zululand you can learn about their rich cultural heritage, their traditions and history. Numerous unique opportunities are available for you to interact with this friendly nation.

Dumazulu Village is good accessible and you will learn here some words of the language, see the handcraft, taste traditionally brewed sorghum beer and watch energetic Zulu dancing.



St. Lucia

St. Lucia is named after Saint Lucy, patron saint of the blind.

Cradled by the Indian Ocean, the magnificent Lake St. Lucia and the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, St. Lucia has become South Africa's top nature destination for eco-tourists to discover and enjoy. With a boat-trip you can enjoy the well-known hippos, crocodiles and many bird species. The way up to the boat and in the boat it's accessible for wheelchairs, unfortunately to come into the boat isn't, with help you can enjoy an incredible experience. The boats owner is working on a lift, and he expects it into a view weeks, let's hope for it!

Also one lodge in St. Lucia is building new rooms, and as they told me it'll be accessible. They expect to be finished in a couple of months. It would be great, because this place has so much to offer that you need a few days for it.

Interaction with Cat Species, Rambo the Elephant and Crocs

If you like to interact with the animals you have the possibility to visit several centre's.

Visit the rehabilitation centre for cats. Here you can see closely the African Wildcat, the Serval, the Lynx and the Cheetah. Two times a day visitors can under guidance see and feed these marvellous wild cat species.

Or meet the majestic elephant named "Rambo", a bull elephant who will teach you everything about the elephants. He allows you even the possibility to touch him. Be sure he's worlds best topmodel.

And if you have strong nerves, visit the Zulu Croc centre, where Karl gives you a two hour experience with crocodiles and snakes.

My tips

Doors

Most doors of the accessible places are wide enough, but take care that your wheelchair isn't wider than 80cm.

Driving

The South African have a very polite way of driving. Keep yourself to the rules and fit yourself into their drive-style. Take care of the people walking aside the high-ways and along the untarred roads. The roads, tarred or untarred are very good to drive in South-Africa. Slow down your speed, special in the dark and on untarred roads. There is always a change of people walking and of course the animals.

Swimming pools

I haven't seen any swimming pool that has the signs if it's aloud to dive or not, neither there are no measurements for the depth of the pool.

Be careful, never dive into the water.



Accessibility

The places which pretend to be accessible was for a great deal according our rules/laws. But I have to mention that sometimes something was missing. For example: the bathroom was accessible but at the toilet no handrail (it was coming??).

The boat I mentioned at St. Lucia had from the parking place till the boat everywhere ramps, and also in the boat is an accessible toilet. But to come into the boat has to be done with aid (the lift is coming in a few weeks). Hope to see the photos when it's finished.

Drinking Water

Though there is said that the water is drinkable, my advise is to buy bottled water in any case. Special for clients who have a weak bladder or have no or hardly no senses of the bladder. The pharmacists in SA sell, for a cheap price, water bags for rinsing. It's better that clients with easy inflammation of the bladder take a cure and test with them.

Accessible Equipment/Aid

It's possible to hire wheelchairs, lift etc. in Durban

"Nursing/Helping" aid for washing/clothing in the morning and/or evening, if necessary, I haven't found out yet.

Medical Care

The medical standard in South Africa is rather good, but I advise our clients to take a good health insurance for treatments in private hospitals and for private doctors.

Special in area's where hospitals are not nearby it's important to have reliable doctors around.

The Hearing Impaired

For the hearing impaired I suggest to take a sign-interpreter with them.

I didn't find any accessibility for the hearing impaired. Makaranga Garden Lodge is busy with a special call-system.

The Visual Impaired

For the visual impaired I couldn't find any Braille information.

Only the interaction with the elephants is very interesting for them, but it's necessary that the guides are explaining more by telling in combination with feeling/touching.

Special for visual impaired we need to make tours on the senses of feeling and hearing.

I have to talk this over with an expert of SA who can show the best way to organise something for these clients.

Slow Walkers

South Africa is a very good destination for the slow walkers.

Lots of excursions/trips will be done by car or boat. Also the rather flat areas are easy to walk in.

Language

Special for the Dutch and Flemish speaking clients it is very easy to understand South African language if they can't speak English enough.



Finding your way

If you are self driving please take this notice.

A GPS is very valuable, but take care of the note in my story above.

The South African are good-willing but showing the way isn't always that easy. And you can get lost easy specially in the bush-areas. I have discovered that.

Ask for a good map at the Tourist Information Desk.

Conclusion

Fronída Travel will put South Africa, the area Kwazulu Natal to it's program of destinations. The holidays will be offered for the mobility impaired, slow walkers, hearing impaired, non-impaired and we will make a special tour for business-people (impaired or non-impaired).

Fronída Travel has been helped a lot during the trip by the assistance of different persons: the itineraries of Access2Africa Safaris made by Jennae, information by her husband J.J. Bezuidenhout, Tanya Cox of Makaranga Garden Lodge, Budget at Durban Airport, Dave Davies owner of Hluhluwe Backpackers and ranger. My sincere thanks to all of you!



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