

Romancing Africa

Flying Adventures' Self-Fly Safari Takes Flight Through The Wild



Candy Johnnie still is filled with thrill. There we were, says the 49-year-old flying adventurer of Lake Powell, Arizona, “following into the night and through the bush two male lions out walking. One got a bit twitchy as our 4-x-4 inched too close and we heard the thunder in his throat, which darn near freezes blood. This is the real thing!!”

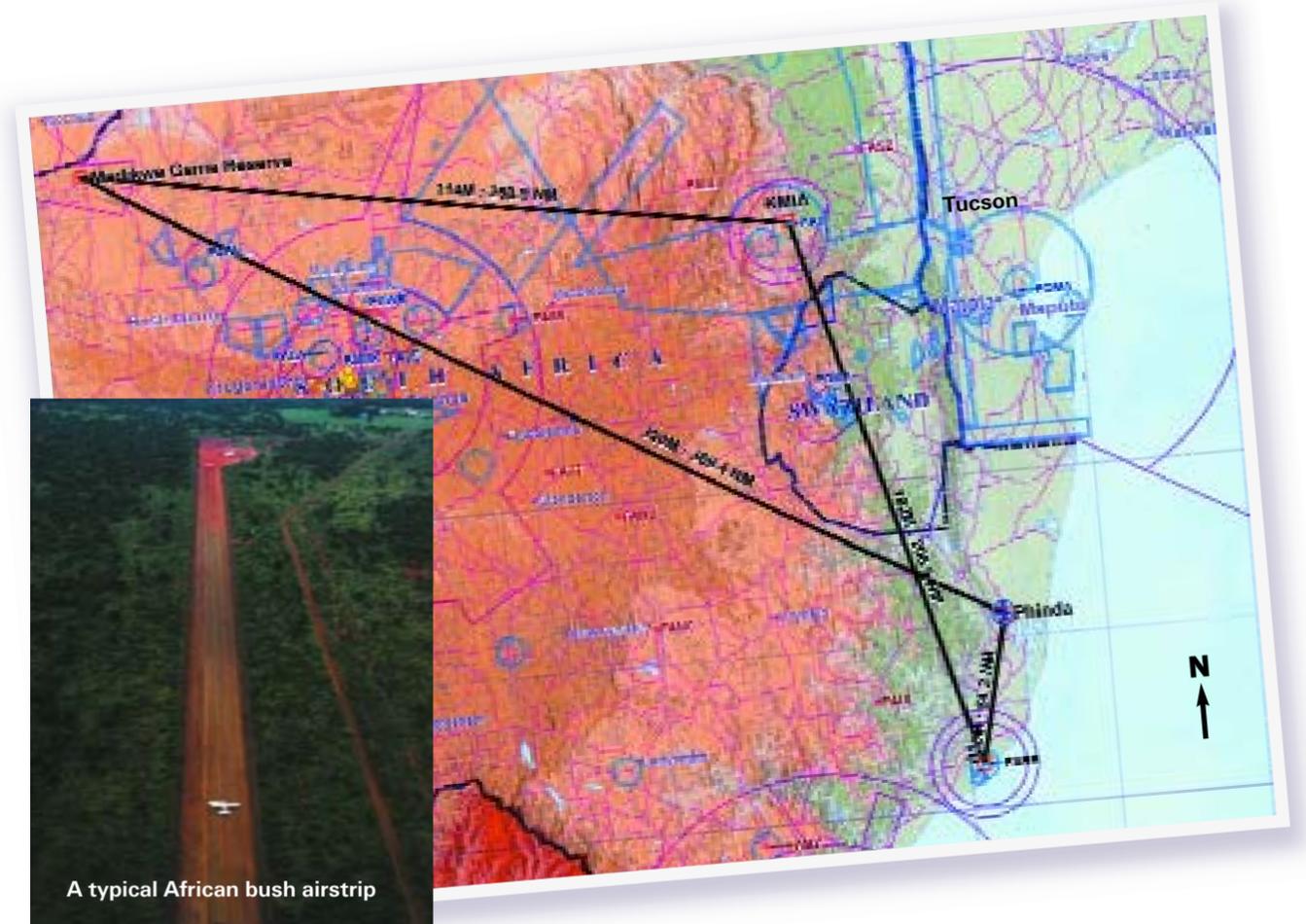
Corporate pilot John Vandervort, 57, of Pacific Palisades, California, even today remains amazed. “We were hoping that the animal encounters would not be contrived, planned or staged,” he says, noting that he and his wife, Carli, 56, a realtor, are mad for just the sort of “exotic, adventurous” trips that in March found them front-row to so many uncontrived meetings with the wild that the couple’s usual travel mantra – “we do not lay on the beach reading books” – might elicit a laugh and a wry *no kidding* from anyone lucky enough to hear their post-trip tales.

“Cheetahs, cheetahs, everywhere!” says Candy.

“How close and direct the connection!” says John.

The excitement lingers indeed for many of the 8 couples who joined *Flying Adventures* on its *Second Annual Flying Adventures Africa* flying safari. The awe, the fun and the adventure they shared on the two-week self-fly odyssey through South Africa, land of hundreds of thousands of acres of protected reserves where cheetah and hippo and lion (among countless species of other wondrous wild things) live lives that are very, very unstaged, was, says Candy, “priceless.” Christine and Allan Gardner of Boca Raton, Florida, agree: “All in all we have been to London, Paris and Rome,” says Christine, adding that she and Allan never would have gone to Africa without the promise of flying their own plane. “We have chartered sailboats in the West Indies, taken a boat all around Cape Cod, traveled to Haiti in our own boat, flown our own airplane all over the place for 25 years, but this trip to South Africa was the best ever.

A family of Phinda cats: cheetahs in repose; opposite: South African fever trees, so named for the malaria fever once thought, mistakenly, to originate within its spindly branches and leaves



“The entire thing,” she adds, “was totally unexpected.”

Organized under the excellent auspices of African Flying Safaris, a travel-adventure company based in Las Vegas, Nevada, *Flying Adventures*'s airborne odyssey offered these passionate pilots the opportunity to acquire an African license (visit www.flyingadventures.com/AfricanLicense.pdf for details) and fly your own Cessna 182 (other aircraft available as well) above landscape redolent of all that is exotic. After all, where else in one game reserve alone can you see 507 different species of bird, including raptors, owls and herons, 332 indigenous types of tree, 114 various reptiles, and unrivaled concentrations of bushbabies, butterflies, badgers...*life*, like is possible at Kruger National Park? Besides fly-in visits to sanctuaries where Africa's classic “big 5” thrive (lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino), this safari

saw the intrepid group of ever-game couples replenishing their huge enthusiasm for camaraderie during overnights at romantic safari camps run by CC-Africa. “The best part of the trip was the new friends we made,” says Christine. Short for Conservation Corporation Africa, this is the eco-tour company whose enlightened vision includes “care of the land, care of the wildlife, care of the people.” Indeed. The trip's accommodations – Phinda Mountain Lodge, Madikwe Safari Lodge and Bongani Mountain Lodge – were Afro-chic oases of plunge pools, outdoor showers (on your own private deck overlooking the savanna), lantern-lit *bomas* (outdoor dining areas) and cozy fireside libraries that comfort, luxury, and...well, let's just call it something awfully wonderful. “Unapologetic indulgence with a green conscience” is CC-Africa's word for it. “We were having so much fun!” is John's. Adds

Candy: “The meals alone were astounding – wow.”

“The trip's first surprise was meeting our fellow travelers,” says Christine, who with her aviator husband, both retired, does lots of flying when the couple takes off to their second home in the Bahamas. “It was amazing the amount of things we all had in common; well, maybe not, since most were pilots who love to travel and have adventures. Together we laughed constantly for days.” The group's great good humor came in handy – especially when around the time the itinerary had them expected at the Madikwe Safari Lodge, which is located in the heart of Africa's largest wildlife sanctuary, the 187,800-acre Madikwe Game Reserve, and a ranger-led bushdrive into the wild was waiting to take the adventurers to what they were most eager to see: the animals.

“No one told Mother Nature we were

You Are Invited

Third Annual Flying Adventures Africa: A Self-Fly Safari

Date: April 12 through May 5, 2007

Place: Soar the desert moonscape of Namibia, where breathtaking fire-colored sand dunes merge with endless sky for 800 spectacular miles of the Atlantic Ocean's Skeleton Coast. Here, the world's oldest desert – the Namib – shares its secrets, as does the mysterious “forbidden diamond region.” Remote. Magnificent. And from the air a spectacle of landscape seen nowhere else on Earth: Namibia bids welcome to wondrous flying adventure.

From there, we fly “the gem of Africa,” Botswana. The Earth's largest inland river delta – the fertile Okavango – flows into the Kalahari Desert in a lush, vast landscape so rich in wildlife that it is home to the world's most populous elephant herd, bird species that number in the thousands, Africa's most wondrous Big 5 (Lion, Leopard, Elephant, Buffalo, and Rhino), and countless other wild things that thrive in a splendor of astonishing animals. For airborne adventurers who thrill to nature, Botswana calls.

Next, wing through the subtropical beach forests, isolated desert and remarkable bush wilderness of dazzling South Africa. Here, the San (Bushmen) culture, acres of beautiful wild-animal preserve, and the destination – the one-of-a-kind Ngala Lodge – create an experience of Africa that is absolutely magical.

Accommodations: Five-star “camping” in the luxury safari camps of CC-Africa. Whether game lodge, cottage or canvas “suite,” these eco-conscious retreats in savanna, forest or bushveld are Afro-chic oases that offer beauty, comfort, sophistication...and overnights forever to remember.

Who's Invited: You. Eight aircraft only are reserved for this safari exclusively designed for *Flying Adventures* magazine. Join *Flying Adventures'* Publisher on this journey to experience Africa on a unique adventure typically unavailable elsewhere. Sign-up soon. After all, how often does the opportunity arise to fly yourself through the wild in the company of like-minded aviators who, like you, thrill to piloting through lands of extreme excitement?

Your Hosts: African Flying Safaris in partnership with *Flying Adventures* Magazine

Dress: Your best adventurous spirit

Details: Visit flyingadventures.com/Africa.pdf for a full description of trip details.

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planning this trip because the worst weather, the largest amount of rain to fall in 20 years, we were told, was happening, right then,” says Christine. “Right when we wanted to fly airplanes into the unknown!”

Oh, of course, that: weather. Weather that temporarily grounded some of the planes and kept Madikwe Lodge a destination that had to wait while the flying adventurers did exactly what flying adventurers do, which is have even *more* adventures!

“We were disappointed as pilots that we weren't able to fly (the itinerary) exactly as planned, says Candy. “However, we know such is the nature of flying: Mother

Nature always takes precedence. Amazingly,” she adds, “weather actually added to our fun because you know how it is with pilots. No problem! We just go on to Plan B, C or whichever number we're up to – har!” John agrees: “It was all part of the experience to rely on our own abilities and not depend on a tour operator or guide to manage every aspect of the trip.”

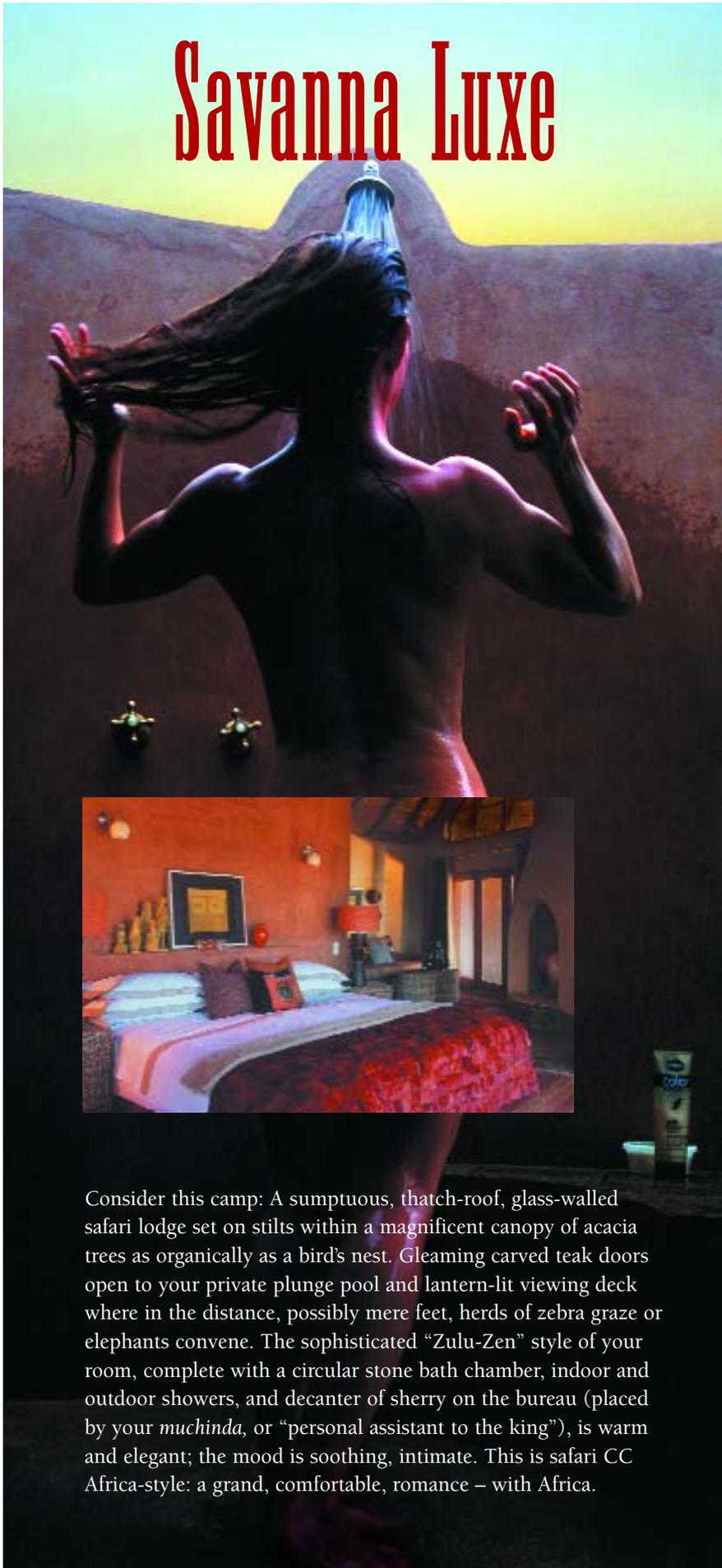
Plan B meant a detour to a deserted airport “with animals on the runway,” as Christine recalls. She laughs: “We were in an unplanned destination in what seemed to us the middle of nowhere in Africa. This was an adventure all right!” With a damn-

the-itinerary glee, the group discovered they were in Parys, a town named for the city in France no less unique. Here, the safarifiers fascinated themselves at Vredfort Crater, the largest verified impact crater on Earth and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Also an evening at Shaka Zulu Land, a colorful local draw where, says Candy, “the dancing ceremony was exhilarating, with drums, drums, singing and clapping that sure got the 'ole hearts pounding.”

Of course, the beauty of being on self-fly safari, and like a little bird free to wing in and out of every enticing place that calls, however remote, however unknown, is that



Savanna Luxe



Consider this camp: A sumptuous, thatch-roof, glass-walled safari lodge set on stilts within a magnificent canopy of acacia trees as organically as a bird's nest. Gleaming carved teak doors open to your private plunge pool and lantern-lit viewing deck where in the distance, possibly mere feet, herds of zebra graze or elephants convene. The sophisticated "Zulu-Zen" style of your room, complete with a circular stone bath chamber, indoor and outdoor showers, and decanter of sherry on the bureau (placed by your *muchinda*, or "personal assistant to the king"), is warm and elegant; the mood is soothing, intimate. This is safari CC Africa-style: a grand, comfortable, romance – with Africa.

these intrepid adventurers were ready when the fun – and the surprises – just kept coming. It may have been when they were kicking back in safari camp, savoring an evening sherry from the decanter placed in their room by a *muchinda*, or "personal assistant to the king." Or it might have been while hanging on every word of a native Swanzi tracker during one of the many bushdrives they enjoyed, the tracker who, with astonishing instinct and knowing, led the way to sights that never failed to get, yes, "the 'ole hearts pounding." But every second of every minute of every remarkable day: "How lucky we all felt to be witness to real African magic!" says Candy.

Ah, African magic. The couples on flying safari are unanimous in describing what to them was the one surprise that got many, in the words of Christine, "totally hooked."

Cheetahs, cheetahs everywhere!

Lions and rhinos and hippos. Elephants, leopards, giraffes. In the wild. Up close. "I have the pictures," says Candy, as if needing proof that her eyes did not deceive, her excitement was, against all sense, real. "A giraffe coming close enough to say hello who bowed to us...in greeting. AWESOME." Photos of a lioness with her frolicking cubs – cats that "came so close to our vehicle that we could reach out and touch them if we dared," says Christine. Snaps of feeding elephants as they crashed through and felled trees to take a bite of each. The digital and video memories collected on this self-fly safari might convince those with whom they're shared that this was a trip of delight, all right, with loads of drama and packed with surprise. That is, if the trip participants were not so keen to speak of its joys themselves.

"I had no idea that Africa would still have so much raw, untouched land," says John. Or beauty." Says Candy: "The wine, the food...springbok, kudo and ostrich; there's no telling what else we have eaten; did I mention? All delicious. The people, the culture....It's like the magic of Africa now is permanently etched into my heart and mind." And the thrill of flying it all yourself? Well, says John, you want exotic? you want adventure? you want not to loll on a beach reading books?

"Fly Africa."



Let's Go Flying



Hippopotamus - Mother and Child
St. Lucia Wetlands Park, South Africa
Photograph by Lori Parker

*Youth fades; love droops, the leaves of friendship fall;
a mother's secret hope outlives them all..*

—Oliver Wendall Holmes