

TRAVEL SOUTHAFRICA

At home in Zulu

Lions, cheetahs, elephants, hippos — yet the greatest memory is of the people, writes Stephen Scourfield



Cheetah, Mkuze Falls Private Game Reserve.

At Durban airport to see me off, Wayne is carrying a piece of PVC pipe of substantial girth and much more than a metre long... Inside the white pipe are traditional Zulu spears, beaded and handmade especially for me by staff at the Oyster Box Private Hotel at Umhlanga Rocks, just north of Durban on the east coast of South Africa, where Wayne is executive director and where I have spent several days....

It might seem a strange place to start an article about my ... trip around the KwaZulu-Natal province with ... Greg (Garson).

Ten lions had walked past a vehicle I was in, just 4m away. I had watched three cheetah toying with the idea of a kill, then settling back to purr like kittens in the grass while the wildebeest spruiked off. I had seen African elephants, a rhinoceros in a mud wallow, hippopotamus, buffalo, and countless spectacular birds.

Greg had peeled off the layers of modern South African history, through the contemporary changes, opportunities and challenges, to openly discuss the apartheid years that went before. Then back through the Zulu kings to the mighty Shaka, whose warriors would dogtrot barefoot 60km

a day and then fight and win. Greg had built the skeleton on which two days with Anglo-Zulu war expert David Rattray would put the flesh, graphically recreating before me the massacre of Isandlwana and the battle at Rorke's Drift. I had seen where Mahatma Gandhi, who was here for 21 years, developed his philosophy of passive resistance.



Greg Garson of Garsons Expeditions personally leads the tours.

Pictures: Stephen Scourfield

Greg had also taken me back further, to the emergence near here of homo sapiens — modern humankind. We had brushed on Sans Bushman art dating back more than 20,000 years, and discussed the geology and botany of this part of the African continent.

We had spent time in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Mountains, which took my breath away for their spectacular topography.

I had stayed in comfort at the Oyster Box Private Hotel, one of South Africa's most distinguished and historic hotels, overlooking the Umhlanga lighthouse; at the five-star lodge of Mkuze Falls Private Game Reserve; at Fugitive's Drift, David and Nicky Rattray's wonderful battlefields accommodation, perhaps sleeping in the same bed as the various royalty which has visited too.

And yet the greatest memory of all is people met, friendships made, and great kindnesses shown. That is the true wonder of travel.

