

BETWEEN THE SPOKES

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A big ride for the big five

By Corey Hinderstein
Photos by Chase Hinderstein

Part one of a two-part feature



Above, Chase and Corey pause for a photo op with a Baobob tree in Botswana.
Left, a lion cub pauses in the middle of the road at the Welgevonden Game Reserve in Limpopo, South Africa.

“Hey,” I heard in my helmet, “did you see that troop of baboons next to the road?” my husband Chase asked.

“Yes, I was watching them,” I replied.

“Did you see the rest of them cross the road right behind your rear wheel?” Just another day of riding in southern Africa.

We began our journey 13 days earlier in Johannesburg, South Africa, traced a broad circle around the Kalahari Desert, and were on our final day of riding into Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. In between those two cities, we rode through three countries, covered over 1,600 miles, and saw countless wild animals.

We were in Africa for the Ayres Adventures “Call of the Wild” tour. We booked the trip more than a year in advance and have been talking about it ever since, to the delight and exasperation of our friends and family. This trip was the right length for us—two weeks—and it focuses on the game viewing. I have always wanted to do a safari trip, but as scuba divers, Chase and I normally spend our longer vacations under water. The addition of motorcycles to the safari was enough to get Chase excited, and the coincidence of the timing of this trip with milestone birthdays for both of us made it an exciting and different way to celebrate.



ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

We arrived early in the morning in Johannesburg on the Saturday before Easter, after a day-long sojourn in London and a 12-hour overnight flight. This was deliberate on the part of Ayres, as our first day of riding was to take us through some of the city and the traffic is lighter on Easter Sunday than most other days of the year. Claus, a German who was one of our two tour leaders for the trip, met us at the airport. Claus is a highly experienced tour leader; he's worked for Ayres for many years and for Edelweiss for more than a decade before that. Despite this



Top
The Chobe River connects the Linyanti Swamp in Botswana to the Zambezi River. Its banks are home to many animals, including this elephant cow and her calf.

Above
The hippopotamus is widely considered the most dangerous animal in Africa, as they kill more humans every year than any other wild animal. Hippos are aggressive and territorial. They spend a lot of time in the water and, as can be seen here breaching the surface of the Chobe River, some sport extremely long teeth.

Right
Kavango, in the panhandle of Namibia, is home to the vast prairies of Bwabwata National Park and the Mahango Game Reserve. Various species of antelope, such as this kudu, spend their days there trying not to get caught by predators.



experience, this was to be his first tour in Africa and he seemed as excited as we were.

We went back to the hotel one suitcase short. Because we were to spend as many days off the bikes as on them, we had non-riding clothes in addition to riding gear, toiletries and other items with us. Chase and I each had one carry-on and one checked bag. Out of concern that luggage could be lost, I carried (or wore) all of my riding gear, knowing that it would be difficult to replace if lost. Validating my worry, my checked bag did not arrive in South Africa. I recommend for anyone taking this kind of tour to accept funny stares in the airport—and ridicule from your spouse—as you walk through the terminal in a high-visibility jacket because it saved the first days of my trip. A quick shopping trip got me what I needed for the 72 hours before the airline located my bag.

Claus took us to the suburban Johannesburg hotel that served as

our rendezvous point with the rest of the group. There we met John, a transplanted Scot who had moved to South Africa as a teenager and currently lives in Capetown. John has worked with Ayres for more than ten years and led countless tours in Africa.

These two tour leaders were amazingly competent in all aspects of the trip. They had to be skilled riders, logistics managers, wildlife experts, porters and psychologists and they were tested in all of these areas along the way. John's local knowledge of the customs, geography, infrastructure and processes such as border crossings made the trip run smoothly and provided us with peace of mind.

We got our rental motorcycles on the first afternoon. The default bike is a 2013 F700GS—which I rode—but each rider has the opportunity to request another model. Our group included two F700GS, two R1200GS (including Chase) and one R1200R. The

tour leaders rode John's personal R1200GSA.

On that first day, we had a group meeting to introduce ourselves and learn how the trip would run (see sidebar for details). There were seven guests for the five motorcycles on the trip. Chase and I each rode our own bike, Russ and Tina from Pennsylvania rode two-up, Wayne was on the trip by himself, and Christian from Germany's Black Forest rode; his wife Evelyn rode in the support van. Russ, Tina and Christian met two years ago on a motorcycle tour in New Zealand, and the two couples had since spent time together in Germany and decided to do this trip. Wayne was on this tour to compete unfinished business, as he came to the Call of the Wild tour in 2011, but could not complete it due to a wreck in which he suffered injuries. One of the tour leaders estimated that on every third trip, there is maybe one woman riding—and on this trip, it was me. It seems women are even more underrepresented on adventure tours than in the riding community as a whole. One area of discussion related to tips on riding through three countries on the "wrong" side of the road. Some of the effects are obvious—be aware of which lane you turn into at intersections—and some are less so, like the warning to look for stop signs on the opposite corner than that you are used to. We then went to dinner and tried to get a good night sleep, despite jet lag and excitement.

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FIRST RIDE IN AFRICA

We woke early on Easter Sunday ready to hit the road to the Welgevonden Game Reserve on South Africa. I was the only one riding a motorcycle that I had never ridden before, and this added to my general anxiety about a trip with distances and road conditions I had never experienced. We started slowly as we made our way through the streets of Johannesburg, from a suburban area with high-end European designer boutiques to roads that passed through the terrible poverty of the townships. We did not have time to learn about these areas, but we had the first of many experiences of people being excited, curious and friendly as they saw us pass by. Waving children along the road became our constant companions and we had the great pleasure of talking with many of them during our trip.

As we emerged from the city, we encountered another sight that would become routine over the following two weeks: long, straight roads in generally good condition. When we first considered this trip, Chase called Ron Ayres to discuss it. I am a relatively new rider, with no experience with long distances or off-road conditions. Ron assured us that the

route was all paved and the riding was straightforward. In fact, he warned Chase that the riding itself was boring. The trip was more about the destination—the game parks—than the journey, he advised. That being said, I think there is more nuance to what Ron told us.

On the negative side, I was not prepared for all the road surfaces we encountered. Even though all the roads were paved,

that does not tell the whole story. In Botswana, there were long stretches of roads under construction where we diverted to a gravel temporary road. All along the route, we would pull to side of the road to unpaved “rest stops” consisting of a metal or wood table under a shade tree. Some of the gas stations had gravel lots. Four of our lodges had access roads that ranged from hard-packed dirt to deep, soft sand. I encourage anyone considering

a destination trip to make sure your riding skills are a level above what is described, not the bare minimum. I climbed a steep learning curve, but surfaces that made me hyperventilate in my helmet at the beginning of the trip were routine at the end. This was the result of a dropped bike in the sand, kind tour leaders and a patient husband



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to talk me through some basic techniques for riding on uneven and unstable ground.

On the positive side, despite the lack of road variety, I still feel that seeing these areas by motorcycle offered an experience that I could not have in a car or, more commonly for tours, in a bus. We passed through areas that for long stretches might have superficially looked the same. On a bus, I might have dozed off, turned on some music, engaged in a conversation or otherwise tuned out until arriving at the day's destination. On a motorcycle, I can never tune out. I am constantly surveying my surroundings for my own safety. I need to watch the road, the traffic—though for most of the trip this was about three other vehicles per hour—and other potential hazards. For this reason, I observed almost everything I passed, learning more about the countries and their differences,

We had to lock our doors, not because of crime but because baboons know how to open doors and like shampoo.

like how a village in Botswana differs in structure from a Namibian village. I smelled the air and noticed where the livestock were corralled and when the villagers were burning sweet grass in the morning. I felt the extreme desert temperature changes, sensing cool mornings by the river changing to hot afternoons on the savannas. This is an African experience I would not have had in a car, a bus or on a tour that covered much less distance with less variety of atmosphere. This is a uniquely motorcycle experience.

The ride to Welgevonden began our constant vigil for animals that could kill us. I don't refer to hippos and lions, though we would see our share of those,

but rather the animals near and on the road.

Throughout our journey, we saw cows, goats, sheep, pigs, dogs and donkeys. We also saw small antelope like steenbok and dikdik, warthogs, ostrich, baboons and even elephants. On that first morning, we saw our first baboons and warthogs. The danger these wildlife encounters posed was

real and they were not limited to the game parks. They were often crossing roads and are not used to the unique sounds of motorcycles. They say that the first bike startles the animal, the second rider avoids it and the third rider hits it. Riding with good group manners was crucial as the hazard lights and "slow down" motions from the riders in front were reliable warning signs.

We arrived at the Welgevonden Game Reserve by lunchtime and parked the motorcycles in a guarded gravel parking lot that served as a common meeting area for all the lodges in the park. William, our ranger from the Shibula Lodge, met us there and took us up into the park. One of the great elements of this Ayres tour is the variety of the lodges and wildlife settings in which we stayed. Shibula is a small lodge with separated rooms down their own paths and a beautiful common area. The service staff at Shibula was friendly and accommodating. This was not always the case on our trip, as there is not a strong service

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culture in southern Africa. We stayed at luxury hotels and found that in some places, like Shibula, there was a great desire to provide good service even if the details were lacking. In other places we stayed, there was not even the superficial attempt to provide good service. We really appreciated those individuals who tried to make our stays comfortable and easy.

Welgevonden is a private game reserve and it limits the size of the lodges allowed within its fences. At more than 90,000 acres, it is home to over 50 different mammal species, including the “big five” animals. The big five—lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and Cape buffalo—are the prizes for African game viewers. They are not necessarily the biggest by size, nor the rarest animals to find, but they are the five most dangerous animals to hunt on foot, which is where the big five designation originates. Shibula Lodge is deep within the reserve

and is not fenced, so the rangers warned us not to wander at night.

Over the course of four game drives in our two days in Welgevonden, William showed us a wide variety of plant, animal and bird life. We did a night drive and saw spiders, chameleon and an owl; we also enjoyed a “sundowner,” an evening cocktail next to the white rhinos. We managed to see four of the big five, but never spotted a leopard. The most memorable moments were the interactions between species. Our first morning drive started out with William tracking fresh lion prints on the road. We turned a corner to find two lionesses and four cubs right in front of us on the road. We quickly became aware that a rhino with a juvenile were not happy with the lions in their territory. They stormed the road, chased off the lions, and then turned their sights on our Land Rover; we slowly reversed up the road until the rhinos relaxed.

Later, we found a cheetah with two cubs in the grass. In a feat that I still can’t comprehend, Claus spotted the smallest black tip of an ear in the tall grass. A brown hyena also took an interest in the cheetahs. It approached, separated one of the cubs from the mother and looked like it would have a meal. The mother cheetah then acted, pouncing on the hyena and chasing it off. While I respect the course of nature, I was glad to not see a cub die. These interactions were fascinating and highlighted the real-world setting and that animals are wild.

3&S

Next month: Part two of this exciting journey—and more stunning photos!

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BETWEEN THE SPOKES

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A big ride for the big five

Part two of a two-part feature

By Corey Hinderstein

Photos by Chase Hinderstein

WELCOME TO BOTSWANA

After two excellent days at Shibula Lodge, we wistfully retrieved our motorcycles at the parking area and started our second ride. The next three days were all riding days. We spent the first night at a roadside hotel, the only night we did not stay at a wildlife viewing location. While unremarkable in most ways, it was the site of my most embarrassing moment of the trip: I dropped my motorcycle in the parking lot. No damage to the bike, but I was reminded that beyond the cost of the tour and airfare, one must be prepared to incur more expense (up to a \$2,000 deductible) in case of damage to the motorcycle. I was embarrassed, but was eventually joined by my fellow riders as everyone on the trip dropped their bikes—three of them twice.

This travel day included our border crossing into Botswana. We had to be stamped out of South Africa and traverse “no man’s land” where we crossed the Limpopo River. The process of crossing the border into Botswana included paying road taxes, took a long time



and was not very transparent. What one person paid was not always the same as the next person. We were fortunate to have John’s local knowledge to help us navigate the procedures and to advocate for us with the officials.

The road conditions changed immediately upon crossing into Botswana. The domestic animals and wildlife on the road increased significantly, with goats, cows and donkeys a near-constant presence. In addition, the road surface, strewn with potholes now, deteriorated. We arrived for lunch at Nata Lodge, adjacent to a sanctuary that includes some of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, and checked in. Three of us took a drive into the sanctuary, where we saw multitudes of birds and witnessed a sunset over the Great Makgadikgadi Pan, definitely a highlight of the trip. Most of our trip mates chose to rest after two days of riding, but Chase and I wanted to get the most out of the trip as possible. When anyone at any lodge said, “you have the option to...” our response was always “yes.”

Most people will recognize the animals on these pages: ostrich, zebra and elephant. Below, Corey holds a cute little lizard that is no doubt excessively poisonous.



TWO DAYS OF WATER

After Nata, we rode to Chobe Safari Lodge on the Chobe River, where we spent two nights. The rooms at Chobe were more traditional hotel rooms, but the public areas were large, high ceilinged open-air wooden structures with trees growing underneath. After a brief time to clean up, we took a unique game “drive” that was actually a boat ride on the Chobe River. From the boat, we had our first significant elephant viewing. Chobe is famous for its elephants and is home to an estimated 50,000 Kalahari elephants. Here we saw elephants in family groups, wading, swimming and playing in the mud. We also saw large numbers of hippopotami in the water and Nile crocodiles sunbathing on the sandbars. The game viewing from the boat offered a different perspective and allowed very close observation without any obvious disturbance of the animals. The birds along the Chobe River were also beautifully colored and very diverse.

The next morning we assembled for a day trip to Zimbabwe to see Victoria Falls. Breakfast marked the arrival of the vervet monkeys, who gathered in the trees and beams inside the lodge and attempted to steal sugar packets from the tables. The staff kept them at bay by showing a slingshot. I assume the slingshot is often brandished but rarely used.

The bus ride to Zimbabwe took about 90 minutes, most of which involved waiting at the border. The guide picked us up at the lodge in Botswana, then handed us over to his colleague on the other side. While we were warned that we would get wet at Victoria Falls, we did not understand that we would be soaked to the skin despite wearing parkas. The spray from the water was less a mist and more like a tropical storm. The scale of Victoria Falls—height, breadth and volume—is awe-inspiring. We took some time to shop in a market where

the vendors were very aggressive, demanding attention to their wares. They also regularly asked to trade their goods—primarily mass-produced souvenirs, not artisan crafts—for a baseball cap or shoes. For most of our trip, we saw people living a subsistence lifestyle; they did not have excess but they had enough. It was only in Zimbabwe that we really experienced desperation.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US

The next day was Chase’s birthday and we spent it riding to the Bagani, Namibia, located on the Okavango River. This was an all-day ride that began with an hour of riding through the Chobe National Park, the only time we actually rode in one of the game parks. We saw a Cape buffalo next to the road and elephants crossing. We also had the border crossing into Namibia, which was thankfully more straightforward than previous border procedures.

Once we crossed into Namibia, we rode through the region called the Caprivi Strip. This isolated area runs along the north side of Botswana, has no towns or landmarks, and functions primarily as a connection for Namibia to the Zambezi River. Because it is so desolate, we had to bring box lunches from Chobe to eat on the side of the road. We also ate watermelon purchased from one of the dozen children standing on the side of the road over the course of many miles. These kids held the watermelons above their head for sale, though we saw few other vehicles along the stretch of road. After our



lunch, we gathered all of the untouched items from the box lunches and the support van dropped the bag of food at a village along our route.

The support van also carried gas cans during this ride. This ride stretched the fuel range of our motorcycles, and we could never be sure that a gas station would have fuel when we needed it. For this reason, we filled up more often than we needed to throughout the trip, just in case the next station didn't have gas. The same rule would have been helpful for cash as well. While ATMs were common, they did not always have money in them. After one incident when an empty ATM meant I needed to borrow cash from a tour leader to pay for gas, I was sure to withdraw more than I thought I needed at future stops.

We arrived at Divava Okavango Lodge & Spa late in the afternoon. The ride into Divava was one of the most memorable motorcycle moments of the trip, and was a story retold regularly for the duration of the tour. We were warned that the half-mile access road to the lodge was soft sand, very deep at points. John suggested that anyone not comfortable with the ride should leave their bike at the start of the driveway and ride in the van. Needing no further prodding after my second spill in the sand at Nata, I arrived at the turnoff, grabbed my things from the bags and hopped in the van. Tina, who let Russ ride in alone, joined me. The men all decided to give it a go, despite Claus' scouting report that the sand was quite soft and loose. In the van, Claus asked for wagers on who would go down

first, and he emphasized first as he believed more than one would fall. We speculated that it would be Russ or Wayne, who had less experience in sand, or Chase, who has off-road training and might be overconfident. No one wagered on Christian.

We followed Wayne, who was fishtailing wildly but was paddling forward. We rounded a bend to find Chase on the ground. However, the bet was declared void because Russ was also on his side a few yards ahead. Then Wayne went down right in front of us. Russ and Wayne decided to abandon the effort and joined us in the van. Chase continued on and made it to the lodge. He later shared with all of us what the other riders had witnessed: before his spill he kept the bike up through a wild ride that veered from side to side on the road and nearly threw him off. He kept the power on and collected himself only to spill a few yards later. Meanwhile, riding through with no problems was Christian on his R1200R with slick tires. The tour leaders shuttled the bikes to the lodge. When we departed two days later, everyone chose to ride in the van and have the tour leaders take the bikes through the sand. Christian, confident in his sand skills, decided to tempt fate and ride out. He dropped the bike twice.

Divava had beautiful views of the river from each chalet and the appointments were luxurious. The management of the lodge was excellent and we had some of the best service of the trip. Dinner was presented outside, "boma" style, and featured traditional singing and dancing by the lodge staff. Chase and I were the only ones to take the optional game drive the next day with our guide, Kopinga. We spent the morning of my birthday in the Mahango National Park, and we were rewarded for our early alarm by seeing a leopard and completing our big five list. We also saw many other animals, had some good giraffe encounters and saw beautiful birds including the rollers and bee-eaters that had become our favorites in the region.



We also saw a 1,000-year-old giant baobab tree, the largest we saw of this distinctive native species. In the afternoon, we spent time on the river in a beautiful two-level wooden boat with our friends the hippos and crocodiles. We then pulled onto a sandbar

overlooking Popa Falls, a small waterfall in the river, where there was a sundowner awaiting us. That night, the staff presented a cake and sang a few rounds of Happy Birthday in our honor. It was an amazing way to celebrate a milestone. It was appropriate that Chase got a long ride capped by a sand adventure on his birthday and I got a relaxed game drive with a leopard-sighting drive on mine.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

After two nights at Divava, we began the longest ride of the trip that took us nearly 400 miles to the Mokuti Lodge, just outside the gate of Etosha National Park. The park itself is the size of New Jersey and is home to some of the most endangered and rare species in the region, including the black rhino, which numbers fewer than 5,000 worldwide. We spent three nights at Mokuti Lodge, allowing for two full days in the park. Mokuti Lodge has a lush landscape with resident populations of mongoose scampering around the pool deck and endangered Bondebok antelopes grazing on the lawn outside the rooms.

Etosha afforded us the chance to do self-directed game drives. We separated into two groups and drove





This guy is either waving to a friend on the far shore of the river, or he's fishing. On the next page, Corey poses with some children along the way.

four-wheel drive vehicles provided by Ayres as part of the tour. Wayne joined Chase and I; John and Claus traded off the chance to go into the park with us. The activity in Etosha centers primarily around the many water holes dotted throughout the park. Getting into the park as it opened at sunrise meant that we saw animals emerging in the coolest part of the day. Staying at a viewing site until sunset was irresistible because it was the most active time of the day, but it risked the disapproving glares of the rangers at the gate who were charged with seeing all vehicles out before the gates could close.

The first day, after seeing a leopard stalking through the grass and some extra large elephants, our group decided to set off to see if we could find lions. We had seen no lions since our first morning encounter with the lionesses and cubs, and we were seeking a male lion. The far end of the park has the greatest lion populations, so we decided to take the long ride to the other side during the least active, hottest part of the day. Our reward for the trip was to see almost nothing—mainly empty expanses of desert and scrub trees with nothing taking shelter in the shade. We began a long, disappointed drive back across the park. About halfway, we pulled over to a water hole to look at an interesting bird of prey at the top of a tree. Wayne made a joke about two sandy colored boulders under the tree being lions, and we laughed, as that was a running theme of the day. As we began to pull away and drive past the tree, a spate of profanity filled the truck as we realized that the boulders really were lions!

We were now parked, with windows down, ten feet from two young male lions enjoying their mid-day nap. We hushed each other, knowing that startling the lions could be the last thing we did, but they were paying no mind to us. After 15 minutes of watching them snooze, occasionally lift their heads or roll on their backs, we began to suggest ideas for how we could wake them up. Of

course, we would never do anything to actually prod them, but we didn't need to. Soon, a giraffe approached the watering hole and attracted the attention of the lions. One rose and began a long, slow stalk of the giraffe. It would creep forward as the giraffe lowered its head to drink and then drop to its belly when the giraffe would pop up and look around. The dance ended when the giraffe wandered off safely and we left our lions soon after. Our 45 minutes with these animals were a highlight of our game viewing. Over our two days in Etosha, we also saw black rhino (including a juvenile), spotted hyena and herds of dozens of giraffe, among many others.

THE HOME STRETCH

With regret, we left Mokuti Lodge for the final ride into Windhoek, the largest city in Namibia. It is home to just 322,000 people and the downtown area resembles Crystal City. We rode uneventfully for most of the trip, but the journey into Windhoek had moments of excitement. Russ and Tina turned around to see what happened to Christian, who had stopped to take a picture. When Russ turned to rejoin the group, he dropped the bike in the road. Cars immediately stopped—we had finally entered a region with more traffic—and our support

van caught up soon after and confirmed that no one was hurt. Meanwhile Christian sped ahead to let Claus know what happened while a car waved at me to tell me that our van had been in a minor crash! Each of us was hearing different things so, after two more U-turns to gather the group, we pulled over to figure out what actually happened. Learning that everyone was safe was a relief and we moved on with the trip. It was the last flurry of excitement before arriving at our final hotel, emptying our tank bags and side cases and turning in the motorcycle keys. After a final group dinner featuring a variety of local meats like kudu, zebra and crocodile—and a well-earned toast to John and Claus—we split up to pack for our flights home.

My lasting impressions of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are overwhelmingly positive. This trip was set up to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but I hope it was not the only time I will visit.

There is an acronym we heard throughout our trip: "T.I.A." It is uttered with resignation when encountering slow service, unclear instructions or contradictory statements, thus carrying an undertone of exasperation or frustration. However, the warmth of the people, the grandeur of the environment and the beauty of the wildlife cause me to say, with only enthusiasm, "T.I.A.: This is Africa."





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Traveling by Ayres Adventures

By Chase Hinderstein

You've signed up for a luxurious and well-orchestrated trip by motorcycle. You're well insured and experienced enough. You realize the guides aren't there to corral you or to act as butlers, but to ensure the waypoints are well chosen, and that once there, you're getting the attention you so well deserve.

Our recent tour in Africa was our first international motorcycle tour and was with Ayres Adventures on their "Call of the Wild" itinerary.

Each of us riders (there was one pillion and one spouse chose the van) rode a very new BMW, the default being the 700 GS; two of us chose to upgrade to a 2012 R 1200 GS, and one to a R 1200 R (Classic).

The bikes are less than a year old, yet well broken in. My GS had about 15,000 miles on it when I took possession, but despite the mileage through Africa, it showed less wear than the odometer would have justified. The bikes are insured, of course, but there's a deductible.

We each had a set of BMW side cases, a top case, and a tank bag. The luggage made it easy for us to carry some water, cameras and other small items, and to quickly store a helmet when stopping. They weren't entirely necessary, as Ayres also provides a support van on most of its tours.

On this tour we stopped frequently to stretch and keep our fuel topped up. I got the impression that each roadside picnic area, every gas station and each market were well-known to the guides and mapped out from experience.

It seemed a bit ironic that we would stop each hour, since the operator has a background in the long-distance riding world, but

the days were paced well and the schedules had us stopping for meals and check-ins at proper times.

The nuance that I perceived from our Ayres experience, and which I think sets them apart from what I've heard of other tours, is that they were always focused on the guest's experience and trying to ensure that it was both intimate and of a very high quality.

Part of this comes from bookings they've sorted for the itinerary. Not only were the lodgings very well appointed, but they typically weren't those that you would expect to be jockeying with busloads of tourists for space in the parking lots or in the dining rooms. The exception to prove the rule was an overnight stop at a larger modern hotel, which I might compare to a decent Holiday Inn. It was in very good shape, but it didn't have much to offer beyond a comfortable room. The guides were almost shy about having us stay there, but that stop served to break up a long portion of road before our next game destination.

More typically, we would stay in small five-star game lodges. Usually the rooms were beautiful suites. Though appointed in a traditional African style, they had luxurious soaking tubs, additional outdoor showers, personal hot tub spas and other amenities. More importantly, our band of seven guests was usually at least half of the lodge's total residents.

While it wasn't the Ayres guide's job to wait on us hand and

foot, they were subtly focused on the lodge staff's fulfillment of the guests' wishes. Normally they too could relax a bit and enjoy the setting, although often I noted that they were not engrossed in their own meal or the activities in the parks. Rather, they were monitoring that we received what we had asked for and that we were getting the full attention of the lodge that Ayres expected. They acted as our stewards to ensure we were content.

Our days were our own to do with as we liked. When riding, we could have gone at it alone anytime we chose as long as we were able to make our way to that afternoon's destination. While the guides advised us of the local laws and customs, we controlled our own throttle. Pushing the bikes to 180 kilometers per hour (112 mph) was fine as long as you could handle the consequences. If you preferred to go seek a road offering more dirt, you were free to roam.

The same is true of the days off the bike. The destinations offered various activities and the Ayres guides were always there to participate and oversee the fun, but you chose your own pace.

To encapsulate the experience of traveling by Ayres, I compare it to traveling with a wealthy and experienced older brother, one committed to showing you a great time. Once you've joined them, you don't have to worry about a thing beyond paying for a bit of beer or wine on occasion.



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