

SODWANA

For a total of 6 days, I didn't wear any make-up (i.e. mascara, eye shadow) nor washed any dirty dishes! Didn't have to worry about food, except choosing from the menu. No making the bed, sweeping the floor ...

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On 25 July (our 15th wedding anniversary) at 06:00 we left Joburg for Sodwana Bay. When we passed Nigel, the temperature was -1 oC!

I packed hard-boiled eggs, left-over tjops and wors and some chicken sandwiches. We drove slowly – all the small back roads. Then through Pongola (quite close to Swaziland border) and the last 60km gravel road through little black villages.

It was quite impressive how they managed to keep their areas clean. No plastic bags (the national flower) anywhere to see. And the women were all busy cutting the grass next to the road with mean-looking panga's. The children also just waved. All of them neatly dressed in their school wear.

After about 8 hours' drive, we arrived at Mseni Lodge (www.mseni.co.za). Before registering at the lodge, we tested the beach sand and Rissiepit took it all in her stride.



All the chalets are separated from each other by trees, shrubs and bushes. Ours were the honeymoon chalet and had a small patio, 1 bedroom, bathroom and small front area with 2 lounge chairs and coffee/tea facilities. And a daily cleaner. We did take our coffee machine with! (But had to buy fresh water on the 2nd day, because the chloor content was horrible!)

I've mentioned to them about our anniversary, so a chilled bottle of JC le Roux, Le Domaine, was waiting for us. We kept it for later. Also a bunch of wild flowers, a card and little orange flowers arranged in a heart. Quickly unpacked the clothes and went in search of a cold beer.



You could see the ocean from the upstairs pub, not from the restaurant. We met Benson (not Hedges) at the pub and had a nice chat with him. Our rates were dinner/bed/breakfast, so the menu was limited but changed every day. We had very nice chicken livers, lamb chops (Hein) and fish and rice (me). Hein tried the crème brulee, but it was quite a different version.

We sat on the patio and drank the sparkling wine. It was quite peaceful.



On Thursday (glorious weather) we had coffee and decided to walk to the beach. From the restaurant, it's about 500m – down all the way! – through dense trees and shrubs.

The beach was amazing! Smooth and we were the only ones! But boy! The walk back left me totally out of breath. Good exercise, though.

We had a choice of croissants, muffins and the usual English breakfast. Then we just relaxed at the chalet with our books. For lunch I had some divine chicken curry and steak, egg and chips for Hein. Later the afternoon we had coffee on the patio with quite a few small silver-blue monkeys running around. I went inside to fetch some Woolworths mixed nuts (the plastic pouch), put it on the railing, took 3 steps into the chalet, turned around and the monkey had his prize! Of course they managed to open the bag and had an absolute ball jumping around the trees, shaking the pouch. We just laughed.



While Hein sat on the patio's steps, he noticed this hole in the wood next to him. And the little eggs. Probably from gecko's?!

Our dinner was a bit disappointing. The shrimp cocktail was only mixed with tomato sauce, the beef schnitzel was bit oily and the chicken breast very salt.

Although the food wasn't of a very high standard, most of the meals were adequate. Must admit that I've had a lot worse in some fancy restaurants. Like Hein called it - 'koshuiskos' (boring school food).

Friday morning (not a cloud in sight) I was a bit stiff, especially my calves. We had a nice breakfast and drove out to Mbazwana for some more fresh water. It's a little village, but with a nice Spar.



After a very nice vegetable curry and cheeseburger lunch, we had a nap. Then we walked to the beach again, but this time I intended to get wet. Luckily no-one else was there, so I actually went into the sea with my bikini. Just at the shallow waters, though, not keen on the waves.

The photo (far left) is what a worm shed (I think) and my feet (left) to prove I've been on the beach.

After a nice dinner of fresh salad, fresh rolls and beef lasagna, we sat in bed reading. **(Yes, it's a typical Hein-Alma holiday - no strenuous activities, just relaxing, resting and being.)**

On Saturday morning (quite hot weather, again) after breakfast, we walked to the small supermarket close-by. Well, 1 km away from the chalet. So, once again, we had some exercise. This supermarket is filled with just about anything - crocs sandals, floppies, t-shirts, bikini's, fishing gear, food, fresh bread, children's toys, etc etc etc.

Round about lunchtime we drove to a nearby pub, called "Maak 'n Jol". (Remember this name, because it played a significant part at the end of our stay). From the outside a bit scrappy, but very big inside and clean. 2 Young white girls behind the counter with a, very obvious Bull-supporter, older white man. We had a few beers, some popcorn and he even offered us some giraffe biltong. (Or so he said). We wanted to stay for the rugby, but didn't feel like driving back in the dark.

Hein watched the rugby in the pub and we had an average dinner of salad and calamari.

When we woke up Sunday, we just didn't feel like dressing for breakfast. We had a few cups of coffee in bed and then decided to drive to St Lucia for lunch. About 154 kms.

We went to the Estuary first and then decided to buy pizzas and have them on the beach. Very good idea. Except Hein's pizza wasn't cooked through, so we spent about 10 min on the beach, bought Hein a cheeseburger-pie and drove all the way back.

Dinner was a very mediocre chicken salad and nice beef curry.

Monday morning (we paid till the Tuesday) we had a nice breakfast of croissants, muffins and eggs.



I took the photo of the curtains in the restaurant. Now that's a first, even for me.

But I liked the tealight-candle idea. It's just seasand in a brandy glass.



After reading for a bit, we felt like a different menu for lunch. Remember the pub "Maak 'n Jol"? By 11:30 we drove out there, but they seemed closed. We drove around for a bit and realised they are not open during the week.

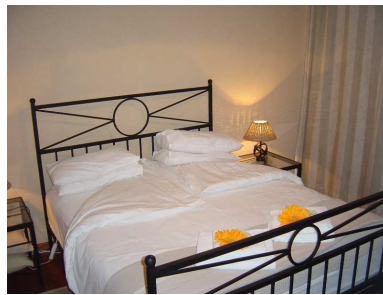
Hein suggested that we pack and stay over on the way back home. Me, $\frac{3}{4}$ Jew, said: "But we've already paid for Monday night and then we'll lose that money". But then after 2 seconds, admitted that I'm 'gatvol' and yes - let's do it.

I packed half of our stuff and then went on-line to search for a guesthouse. Literally looked on the map, saw Piet Retief. Hmm, sounded historical, there's bound to be some nice guesthouses. Then saw the name "Dirkiesdorp". Now, that sounded very quaint. And they had quite a few lodgings.

But then my eye fell on 'Wakkerstroom'. Saw a lovely country inn there, reasonable rates and booked. By 12:30 we were on our way. It was a very nice, relaxing holiday, but I don't think we'll go back to Sodwana. Been there, walked the beach, got the tan (or t-shirt).

Drove through Piet Retief (what a dull, yucky town) and then through Dirkiesdorp. We shook our heads and laughed. It's just a small black village.

With a bit of anxiety we drove into Wakkerstroom just before 5. Filled up the tank and went to the inn. Well, well, well. For R240 per person b&b, what a pleasure. (www.countryinn.co.za)



(Left) Small lounge that's part of your room with lovely old wooden floor (but polished a bit too much). (Centre) Bedroom (queen-size bed) with electric blankets and then an en-suite bathroom with corner bath and 'fluffy white towels'. (I always wanted one of those baths, but realised they are not so practical. 2 People cannot really fit in it and you can't really stretch out, cause it's too short). But very nice, anyway.

The dining room area (Right) very tastefully decorated with carpets against the wall and loads of straw baskets. They also have a coffee machine (Illy), so I was in coffee-heaven!! Also some safe parking for Rissiepit.

Dinner was quite a surprise (although they mention on their website that the owners are ex-London chefs). Started off with a tomato, mozzarella and basil pesto salad (bottom left). We were totally blown away. The taste... And the presentation! Hein had chicken, ham and lemon sauce with a pastry on top, potato croquettes and pumpkin (bottom right). Absolutely yummy. My ostrich carpaccio was nice, but my potted blue cheese with melba toast, just a tad too rich!



Wakkerstroom has a few outdoor activities, the main attraction the birdlife. While we waited for breakfast, 2 big white men and a youngish girl walked in for breakfast. One of them had a strange accent and when we questioned them, the one guy and the girl actually stays in New York. The other guy stays, hang onto your seats, about 1 km away from us in Sundowner, Joburg.

They are on a pilgrimage to visit their great-grandparents' graves. Their grandparents came from Afrikaans as well as the British side. So they actually fought against one another during the war and then ended up marrying. The one side started the town Volksrust (just a few kms away from Wakkerstroom) and the other side started Wakkerstroom.

What a wonderful story!

After breakfast we checked out and drove through the town and took these photo's.



Left is the FNB Bank. And what a quaint garage! (Right)

We were back home by 12. Unpacked, did some washing, fetched the kids and guess what was for dinner – BRAAIVLEIS! Lovely lamb tjops, chicken sausages, tomato-feta-basil salad and jacket potatoes with cottage cheese.

And what did I drink? JC le Roux's Le Domaine.

Everything back to normal again. Dirty dishes, dirty floors, washing, etc etc.
