



Africa 101

JENNY LYNN shares an epic 101-day adventure overlanding sub-Saharan Africa in a Land Rover with kids.

I push the Land Rover with all my might as Jason puts the 4WD gear stick into reverse again, fine sand spitting into my face. The sun has just kissed the horizon, and we've given up all hope of arriving to camp before dark. This was the exact scenario people had warned us about – the same people who believed that taking our two- and four-year-old sons to Africa was a foolish idea. And here we are, just 10 days into 101, proving them right.

While we pace around the Land Rover scratching our heads, our boys learning a few

choice new words, 15 kids from the local village come rushing over with beaming smiles to help. They push us out with ease and guide us to the campsite over the hill, running alongside in case we get stuck again. Our boys are giggling with excitement and high-fiving the local kids through the window.

It is moments like this that have made us fall in love with Africa, and although there have been other seriously challenging moments, too, I am filled with a warm glow as we tackle these challenges together.

Why Africa?

We had been living in India for a year when my husband's work contract came to an end. With money saved and our boys not yet in school, it was the perfect time for an extended adventure.

We had travelled Africa pre-kids and promised ourselves that we would return one day with the boys. So, when a friend in South Africa offered a reduced rental on their Land Rover Defender with roof tents, we knew this was an opportunity not to let pass.



Isn't Africa dangerous?

Africa often gets a bad rap, with the problems of some countries projected onto the entire continent. But each country is different, and we never felt unsafe or threatened.

For the boys' safety, we avoided wild camping and stayed in official campsites. We packed a medical kit (including a malaria test kit), took antimalarials and were up to date with vaccinations. We also self-catered, which limited concerns of food poisoning, and no-one fell ill during the 101 days.

The main challenges were bad roads and corrupt officials. Our time in Tanzania coincided with the worst rains in over a decade, reducing roads to impassable slush. We learnt when not to push it, and to turn around and find another route. As for corrupt officials, they were few and far between and just needed their egos massaged. This aside, we received a warm welcome wherever we went.

The planning

For many, a trip like this is years in the making. But as the opportunity arose just a week before we left India, we didn't enjoy this luxury. If we had our time again, we would sign up for a basic mechanics course and 4WD training. But somehow, it all panned out as we learnt things along the way, such as letting air out of tyres before driving on sand!

Our start and end point was Hoedspruit, South Africa, where we collected and returned the Land Rover. We had a fixed pot of money and calculated that with a budget of £50 per day, after flights and visas, we could travel for 101 days. This is tight for Africa, but we managed it.

Our route took us through Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and back to South Africa. We planned only a few days in advance, although we set off each day with a Plan A and B, just in case. If we liked a place, we'd set up camp and stay a while, and if we didn't, we would move on. This flexibility was so freeing.

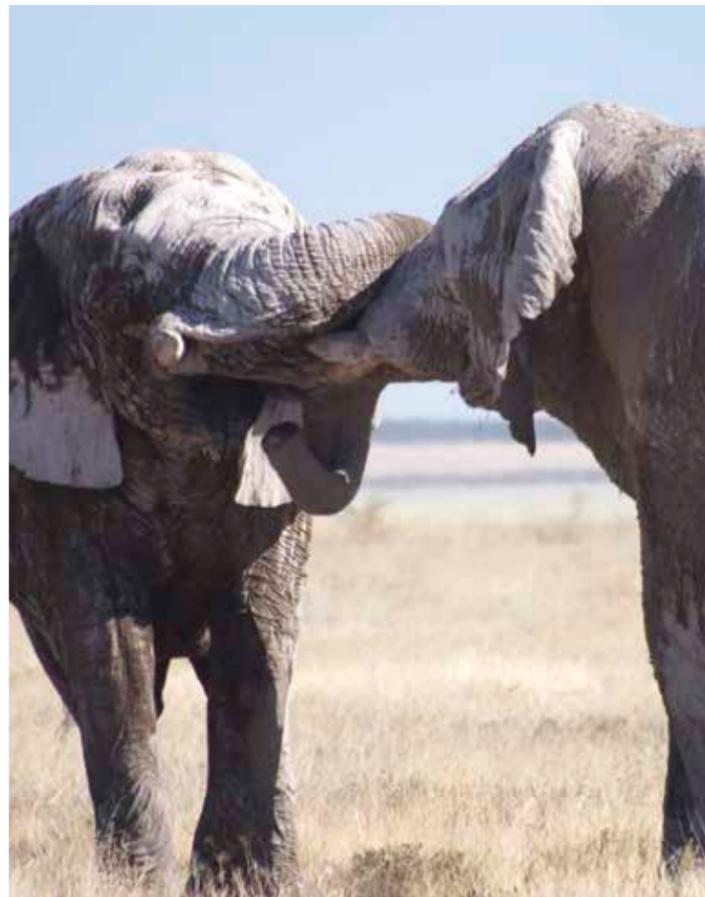
As for visas, we arranged them at borders, although arranging them before departure would have prevented hours of negotiation at the Mozambique/Malawi border crossing and fast-tracked other lengthy border crossings.

The highlights

It's almost impossible to sum up the highlights of 101 days in Africa, as there were so many; witnessing mating lions in Tanzania, racing down the crimson sand dunes of Namibia, a sunset sail on Lake Malawi or building castles on Mozambique's deserted beaches are just a few. But the strongest memories I have are of days driving through dusty villages with the windows down and kids running out to meet us, and evenings huddled with my boys around a campfire as we relive the day's adventures under the African night sky. Take me back. ■

Africa Report Card

Info mozambique tourism.co.za malawitourism.com
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