



NEWSLETTER

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Sanibonani (isiZulu), **Molo** (isiXhosa), **Hallo** (Afrikaans), **Thobela** (Sepedi), **Dumela** (Setswana), **Lumela** (Sesotho), **Abusheni** (Xitsonga), **Sanibona** (siSwati), **Avuwani** (Tshivenda), **Salibonani** (isiNdebele) and **Hello** from the Rainbow Nation

It's been a while since our last newsletter, thanks largely to a fantastically busy year that has included three Compass Odyssey South Africa & Swaziland tours, and two visits to Morocco for guidebook research (and reconnaissance for two Compass Odyssey tours planned for early 2009).

The first two South Africa & Swaziland tours were reserved for family and friends, arriving from Britain, Malaysia, Singapore, United States as well as both the east and west coasts of Australia. Having the opportunity to (finally) show our "tribe" around our new homeland was hugely satisfying, especially after the previous 12 months of organising and planning. Besides the obvious joy of witnessing this beautiful corner of Africa cast her magical spell over everyone, a defining moment for us was the parting comment "*Now I know why you want to be here*", made by Keith Hassall (Kate's Dad) on his final night in Cape Town.



On our Game Walk in Hlane Royal National Park.
Photo courtesy of Neal Larsen, Compass Odyssey South Africa & Swaziland Safari Sept 2007.



Binoculars were very handy for our Compass Odyssey Safari Oct 2007 group looking at two cheetah lying in the grass in Kruger National Park.

Our third tour - and first commercial foray into the world of tourism - was an absolute joy. Our 11 excited, interested (and interesting) and enthusiastic clients absorbed everything they were shown - whether inspiring or confronting - and in return, showered us with praise and constructive feedback. Unfortunately one couple had to depart the tour early, due to a nasty fall (non-alcohol related!) while in Swaziland. Although in a relatively remote area, the service and facilities at the local clinic were quite good, and the injured client is expected to be able to swing a golf club again in the not too distant future. The whole group recently met up for a "**Rhino Seekers**" reunion in Perth, which got us thinking about making it an annual event for all of our clients in the years to come....a good excuse to head back to Perth each year.

In amongst our busy year, we also received news that we will be adding a new baby-sized member to the Compass Odyssey team next year. Already nicknamed "Crumb" by our Cape Town mates, so far he hasn't caused too many pregnancy troubles - a trend we hope will continue when he is born sometime mid-February. In true Compass Odyssey nomadic style, our only purchases for Crumb so far have been a couple of slings in which to carry him around, and a pop-out tent-like contraption for away-from-home sleeping.

Impending parenthood has brought on a whole new dimension of responsibility that we are both coming to terms with, and includes thoughts and discussions on where we will educate Crumb, and what other languages, if any, this will require. As you'll see from our greeting above, South Africa is a land of many languages. The country's Constitution guarantees equal status to no less than 11 official languages, as well as mentioning 15 others that include dialects of the San people, and various Asian and European languages.

You may be interested to know that the language of the Zulu people - isiZulu - is the country's most widely spoken mother-tongue, followed by the Xhosa tribal language - isiXhosa - and the white "tribal" language - Afrikaans. English, or more precisely South African English, is only spoken as a first language by 8% of the population, although it is the country's *lingua franca* and the primary language of government, business, and commerce. A recent *Education Bill* ensures all high school-leaving students are proficient in at least two of the country's languages, with special emphasis being placed on indigenous languages. To help the cause, in true South African "rainbow" style - and in a world first - a local NGO, **Translate**, has produced a single typing keyboard that can be used for all 11 official languages, including Tshivenda and its five additional, unique characters.

The topic of **circumcision** has also arisen while talking about little Crumb's future. Recently, on World Aids Day (1st December), the local press reported on a possible link between male circumcision and lowering the possibility of contracting HIV/Aids. Studies currently being carried out in Kenya and Uganda have shown reductions in new infections of 53% and 48% respectively after the adult male subjects had been given the snip. The popular theory amongst researchers is that the very thin lining of the uncircumcised penis's foreskin can sometimes suffer minor abrasions during intercourse, and that these microscopic cuts make it easier for the virus to enter the bloodstream from an infected sexual partner. Although not being touted as providing complete protection against becoming infected with HIV/Aids, the word has got out and uncircumcised African men are beginning to line up for the "snip of a lifetime". This is particularly true in Swaziland, where almost 40% of adults, and nearly 50% of all 20 to 30 year olds are living with HIV/Aids. To try and satisfy demand there for operations, doctors are being trained in the circumcision procedure, and are helping out on special "circumcision days". On these days the operation is offered free of charge, although unfortunately many men are turned away due to the lack of professional medical staff. This demand for circumcision from Swaziland's male population is happening despite a deep-rooted cultural barrier in the country where Swazi boys were not traditionally circumcised, unlike most other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. During the 19th century, King Mswati II enforced a ban on "coming of age" circumcision as he felt the subsequent healing time distracted his warriors from the battles at hand.

While in Australia, Britain and elsewhere the scourge of HIV/Aids is perhaps not so visible to Joe and Jane Public, here in southern Africa its tentacles reach into every corner of society. On the outskirts of every town and village, cemeteries are filling up with hundreds of mounds of dirt - the final resting places of those too poor or ill to receive better treatment, or at least a better funeral. Archbishop Desmond Tutu recently said *"I know we throw figures and statistics at you, but maybe it does shock us a little if I say that in my own country, South Africa, we have been burying 600 people a day, something like two jumbo jets crashing EVERY day."* Tutu added, *"Put the face of someone you know, someone you love, on those statistics."* Even South Africans considered 'well-off' are exposed to the virus, when a maid or a gardener begins to regularly miss work, or becomes more and more lethargic, until they simply don't show up for work anymore, too sick to make the long journey from township shack to employer's home.

Our visits this year to the **Mpumelelo Crèche** in a village outside St Lucia - included in the itinerary of our South Africa & Swaziland safari - were memorable experiences for all of our clients. Our collaboration with the Perth based "Uthando Project" - whereby our clients travelled to South Africa with bags of dolls handmade by the Uthando members, and our clients - resulted in the handing over of around 600 dolls to the local co-ordinator of the KwaZulu Natal early childhood development organisation, TREE. In appreciation each time we visited, the crèche children - many of whom are AIDS orphans - performed traditional dances with encouragement and backup music by the teachers and caregivers. More than just a "feel good" exercise for ourselves, we hope our relationship with Uthando and TREE grows into something much bigger, and we will be continuing our visits during our 2008 tours.



Children receiving handmade dolls from teachers and caregivers at Mpumelelo Creche.
Photo courtesy of Phillipa Wheaton, Compass Odyssey South Africa & Swaziland Safari Sept 2007.



Girls dancing at Mpumelelo Creche with teachers and caregivers providing backup support and 'the beat' with whistles, drums and clapping.

Mid-December we are moving office (and home) to a seaside village called Kommetjie, from where we are only minutes away from one of Cape Town's most beautiful beaches. In a fantastic gesture to both the unemployed and the environment, Vodacom - one of South Africa's mobile cell phone networks - is conducting a massive clean up of much of the country's coastline from 15 December to 7 January. The clean ups will provide work for 209 unemployed people, as well as educating the locals about the negative impact of littering and how it endangers both aquatic and human life. Last year, the exercise cleared 43,914 bags of marine litter from the beaches. What a positive story to finish off the year.

To promote our 2008 tours, Crusty will be "pounding the pavement" back in Perth during the last week of January. We're planning to present an information evening for any interested travellers - with special "guest appearances" by some of our 2007 clients - and will email you all with more specific details closer to the time.

We truly wish you all a cheerful, happy, and meaningful festive season and hope your dreams and aspirations for 2008 will be realised. We also thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter from the southern corner of Africa. We'd love to show it to you sometime!

For now, **Hambani Kahle** (isiZulu), **Usale Kakuhle** (isiXhosa), **Totsiens** (Afrikaans), **Gabotse** (Sepedi), **Salang Sentle** (Setswana), **Tsamaya Hantle** (Sesotho), **Salani Kahle** (Xitsonga & siSwati), **Ri Do Vhonana** (Tshivenda), **Salani Kuhleke** (isiNdebele), and **Goodbye** from Kate and Crusty.

Kate and Crusty
Compass Odyssey
www.compassodyssey.net

The Uthando project: www.uthandoproject.org
TREE: www.tree-eed.co.za

2008 Compass Odyssey tour dates:

25 - 27 August (Johannesburg Mini Stay)
27 August - 11 September (South Africa & Swaziland safari)
11 - 16 September (Cape Town Mini Stay)

and

22 - 24 September (Johannesburg Mini Stay)
24 September - 9 October (South Africa & Swaziland safari)
9 - 14 October (Cape Town Mini Stay)