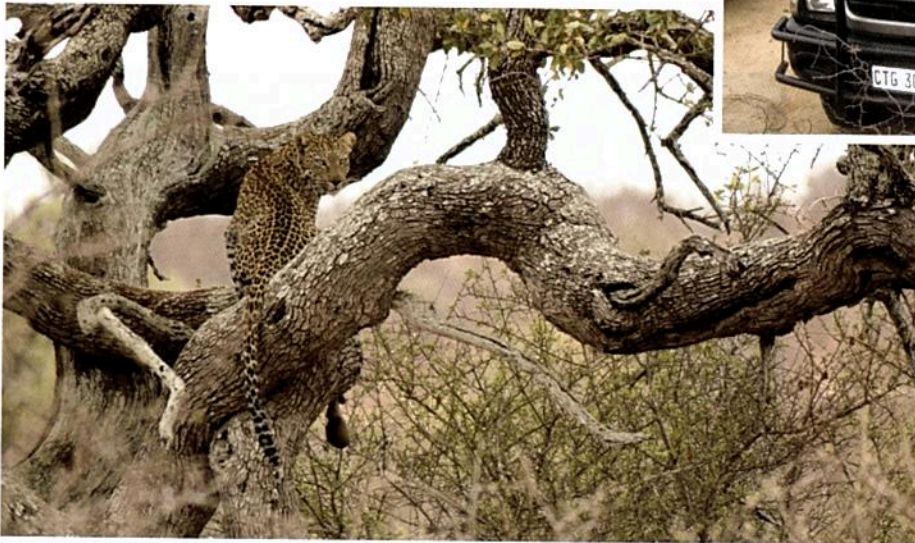


SHAPE Sub Aqua Club South Africa Dive And Safari Trip

By Colleen Thompson (USA – Civ)

Why do Shapians go on trips with the SHAPE Sub Aqua Club (SSAC)? The trips are grueling, exhausting, and fraught with morning wake up calls at 05:30, motion sickness, anti-malaria pills, buses with broken A/C, and Whale Sharks. Ah. There it is! There is the answer that everyone who has gone on a SSAC trip will give you of why they go. Whale Sharks. They'll also answer Humpback Whales, dolphins, Mola Mola, and Nudibranchs. Maybe they'll throw in something totally non-dive related, like cheetahs, Duran fruit, or Luxor, Egypt. You'd probably furrow your brow and question them. After all, who sees safari animals, exotic fruit, or ancient



Egyptian temples on a scuba diving trip? Well, let me tell you: Shapians on SSAC club trips see these things and so much more, and despite the exhausting pace of the trips,

they all line up, without a nanosecond of hesitation, for the next adventure.

The first club trip I went on was with 11 other Shapians to Hurghada, Egypt, in 2006. Since then I've traveled with SSAC to: Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, The Maldives, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Mozambique, and Egypt (too many times to count!). These trips have been with as few as 18 Shapians

and as many as 53. On our most recent trip to South Africa we were 20 Shapians, representing ten nationalities. All of us returned back to SHAPE exhausted and exhilarated at the same time because SSAC trips are not just simple dive trips. They are adventure trips packed with sporadic hot water, pushing buses out of the sand, and fruit stealing monkeys.

We dove in the Indian Ocean off the south-east coast of South Africa at Sodwana Bay, which seemed to be a million kilometers from nowhere.

It took us eight hours to get there by bus from Johannesburg, South Africa. It was so undeveloped that there were no boat launches; we had to physically launch our own Zodiac boats. And it was gorgeous! We were right at the end of the Humpback Whale migration and were incredibly fortunate and awed to not only see these huge, magnificent creatures breach as we rode out to dive sites, but to also hear their magical songs as we dove.

Our days were filled with diving and our evenings were spent



around the boma (Afrikaans for outdoor enclosure with fireplace), enjoying a braai (barbecue or grill), and listening to locals play guitar and sing, before retiring to our thatched roof cabins. One evening, we were treated with a ride to a lake to see the sunset, and in true SSAC fashion, it wasn't just a ride. Nothing is simple when it comes to our travels. We were piled into the backs of small trucks and rode in lawn chairs all the way to the lake. We traveled over sand and gravel roads which took us even further away from the remote location of our lodging. Sure, there were a few grumbles of discontent at the lack of modern conveniences such as seatbelts and shock absorbers, but all that was quickly forgotten when we set off in our chariots towards the setting sun. Without hes-



itation we would all do it again, most assuredly so!

After five days of diving we took a grueling 13 hour bus ride to Kruger National Park, where we went on safari for three days. Even the unseasonably cold weather, the early morning departures, and the breakfast eaten en route did not detract from the overall experience. All these minor inconveniences were forgotten when we spotted three cheetahs on the prowl in the tall grass, a leopard in a tree with its recent kill of a Steenbok deer, a very rare Sable Antelope with long ringed horns arching backwards, and hippos, giraffes, rhinos, hyena, and Impala deer. We also saw the most colorful and diverse birds I've ever seen, from a lucky spotting of two Secretary Birds,



with their eagle-like body and crane-like legs, to the frequent spotting of many Yellow-billed Hornbills, known locally as "flying bananas" due to their beak shape and color.

The pièce de résistance of the entire safari couldn't have been better if it had been planned. On the last day and not 500 meters from the exit of the park when we came upon a male lion majestically strolling along the road. Our driver abruptly stopped, then reversed out of the lion's path, and with cameras snapping, a thrill-charged quiet came over our group.

Ask any Shapian who has gone on a SHAPE Sub Aqua Club (SSAC) trip why they go and you'll get the hugest smile and the smuggest look, and then try to stop them from recounting the most awesome time they ever had!

For more information on SSAC, go to their website at www.shapesubaqua.com.

