

Day one - Got up super early. Got to the Barcelona airport and there was a mega long line for checking. We had plenty of time but stood in line for an hour and then had to run to the gate. There was also an air traffic controllers strike in Paris (which we were flying through) which caused some problems and made us nervous. All was OK though and the flights were smooth. We got to fly on a two-week old Boeing Dreamliner with bigger windows that darkened with the push of a button, more legroom and personal TVs. We loved the flight from Paris to Nairobi.



We met by Jane and Barnabas and taken to Grace House. Stopped at the YaYa mall for money. We miscalculated and accidentally took out the Kenya shilling equivalent of \$800. Whoops. Had a Kit Kat appetizer and then curry and french fries for dinner in the hotel. Jacob liked dinner. Lily not so much. This was to be a pattern.

Day two - Met Jane and she brought a few Polycom boys and girls to meet with us and have breakfast together. Jacob handed off over 400 books for his BM book project. Polycom kids were very excited for hotel breakfast and also playing. Jacob played frisbee with the boys, Lily made rubberband bracelets with the girls. Very nice introduction to Kenya. Jane was great.



Picked-up and driven to Rock House in Karen (outside Nairobi). It looked like a hotel from Jurassic Park. Relaxed for a little while and then took a nature walk to the giraffe reserve. We all kissed giraffes and saw warthogs and a tortoise. Saw some monkeys and chameleon on walk.



Day three - Picked up by Barnabas and taken to David Shedrick elephant orphanage. Loved seeing baby elephants being bottle fed. Lily adopted a baby elephant named, Kamok.



Went to Karen Blixin house and had a very boring tour. Only thing that saved it was making fun of Mike's quantitative question behind his back. On to the "Bomas" for a performance of Africa dance and acrobats. About 1000 people there (mostly kids on fieldtrips) and only 8 white people (we were four of them). Lastly a stop at the grocery store to stock up on junk food for our safari.



Day four - Picked up by our crew. Elijah our guide, Duncan our driver and David our cook. Totally excited for our Toyota Land Cruiser with a pop-up roof. Headed out to the bush.



Made a stop in Narok at the market and Jacob bargained for a Maasai knife. Just what every kid needs, a 16" knife. Might bought a Maasai club for herding animals and whacking lions. Saw the cows being sold and loaded into trucks to head to the city for slaughter. Saw our first zebra, but only its butt from a long way off and our first Thompson gazelles. Drove some more (another theme of our trip!) and parked next to a beautiful stream in the middle of no-where. Our crew set-up the tent while we explored, blew bubbles with Maasai kids while their mom's did laundry in stream, and played soccer.







Went for a walk to meet a Maasai family and go in his house. Very interesting but Lily does not like to touch or be touched so it is a little stressful for her since all of the elders wanted to bless Lily but touching her head and saying, “sopa” and all of little kids wanted her to touch their head and say “sopa” to bless them. Walked home under stars. Had dinner and a campfire. Our camp was guarded all night by the Maasai.



Day five - Took a three hour walk through the countryside with a Maasai elder. He showed us which trees and plants were used for which things....what is used to treat gonorrhea, what can be turned into arrow tip poison, what was used for soap.





We only had to walk one way because both our Maasai guide and safari guide had cell phones so they could call our driver, Duncan, to let him know when and where to pick us up. In Kenya everybody had cell phones. We drove to Maasai cultural village where we were welcomed by dancing and jumping Maasai.



We spent the night in Maasai huts made of dung, mud, stick houses (with beds). We also did some warrior training and visited a widow's village where women live whose husband's have died. Also saw room for girls who have run away from very young marriages and FGM (female genital mutilation). We spent a lot of time with Mary who was married at about 10 or 11 to be the 8th wife of a much older man. He died she was widowed before 14. Now she is in school.



Mary and Lily had a nice time together both asking the other one questions. We also did some spear throwing, climbed a hill to watch the sunset, planted trees and ended the day with a visit to the hot springs. Good day but Mom hated the hot springs...dirty, muddy, trash filled, ewww.

Day six - Took another walk through the countryside to a school that serves the surrounding community but also shelters and schools over 50 girls who have run away from very young marriages and FGM.



The young girls recited poems about having voice and rejecting FGM. They asked us to recite a poem and the best we could come up with was "Sick" by Shel Silverstein. Suzanne and Jacob also know "One Sister for Sale" but given that the school's motto is about not trading "Cows for Girls" it seemed to poor taste to make light of selling a girl. Lily and Suz blew bubbles with the smaller children and Jacob played soccer with the older ones.

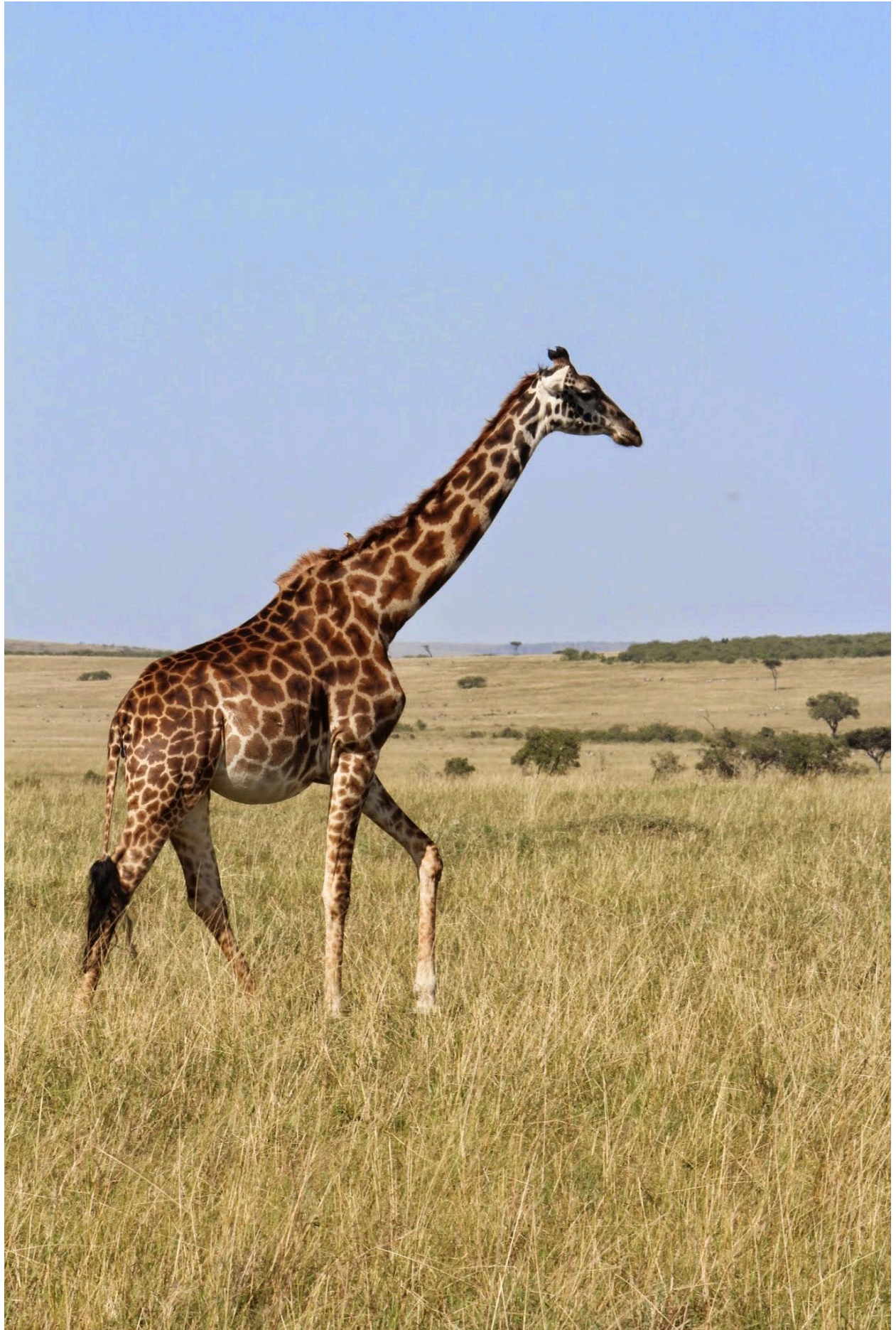


The principal told us that the school can not assign homework because the parents take the children's school bags for their own use and use the papers for starting fires. We donated some school supplies, made a donation and Jacob left his soccer ball behind for the children. It seemed like so little but at least we did something to help. Later in the day Jacob and Mike did some additional Maasai warrior training which involved about five Maasai young men hurling 12" pieces of sisal at each other as hard as possible. Mike and Jacob luckily had shields. Lily and Suz just watched. After lunch we had a long drive to our "permanent tented camp" close to the Masi Mara National Park. We had to keep our tents padlocked because the monkeys were smart enough to unzip the tents and then they would come in and ransack your stuff and bite us. Honestly made us a little anxious. Lily chose to sleep with Suz and Mike slept with Jacob.

Day seven - All day game drive in the Masi Mara National park. We got up early and were in the car for 12 hours of driving around with stops for morning tea and lunch. We saw TONS of animals from 1000s of wildebeast and zebras to a cheetah, lions, elephants, gazelles, buffalo, hippos, etc.. It was a long day but very fun to see all the animals - most very close. We also loved having tea under the acacia tree. It was kind of "out of africa". We were very lucky to see so many animals since the "great migration" had started a little early and we were catching the beginning.







Day eight - Very long drive to a Kikuyu homestead near Lake Elementaita. The Kikuyu are pastoral (the Maasai are nomads) and we got to learn about local farming techniques, sample some kale and very spicy chilis as we walked around as well as seeing the potatoes, papayas, onions, etc growing. We had elected to spend the night the with the family so we got to know them well, play with the children, see the cows come into the yard at night, etc.. Jacob entertained the family with his magic card tricks, Lily did rainbow looming and we blew up balloons which were fun to bounce around. When we arrived they were digging a new latrine that would be 17 meters deep when completed. It was a very deep hole being dug one bucket of earth at a time. The last one was dug 30 years ago. Mike and I thought it was none too early since the old one was a little full. Amazingly all of us did fine with the outdoor squat latrine. Not our favorite, but just fine.



Day nine - Woke up early and Jacob, Mike and Suz were able to milk a cow (Lily opted out)...all for the first time. Had breakfast and spent a little more time with the family before being picked up.



Suz saw the “kitchen” where the Kikuyu wife was preparing the meals for 10 people (her family and ours). One propane burner, a small charcoal fire and no running water. It was amazing what she could produce with so little! After being picked up we went directly to a modern hotel with Western toilets, warm showers and electricity. After five nights of less than modern facilities it was a nice treat. After cleaning up we again got in the car and drive to a coffee and tea plantation near the Menengai volcanic crater. It was set in a cool forest and very pretty. We learned about coffee and tea production, did a walk around the estate and then had a lovely lunch on the lawn of the manor house. The plantation used to be owned by a British family but it is now locally owned by a cooperative of Kenyans. We did a little archery to cap off the afternoon and then headed back to the hotel to do a little laundry in the sink.

Day ten - We woke up early for another driving safari this time in at Lake Nakuru. Honestly after the Masi Mara it was anti-climatic but we did see rhinos and lots of baboons so that was fun.



It was David's last day cooking for us so we had lunch, took some pictures, tipped him and said goodbye to him before heading back to the car. We liked David but his cooking was very monotonous and we were actually kind of happy that we would not have more of his cooking. Then back in the car to head to Lake Elementita. Lake Elementita was also kind of a bust. It used to have 1000s of flamingos which was its main draw but rising water level changed the salinity of the lake and now the flamingos main food source is gone and are the flammingos. We took a little nature walk but it was hot, we didn't bring enough water, and we were all getting rather worn down.



Then back in the car AGAIN for more driving to Lake Naivasha where we checked into a cute “chalet”. There was a pool and a restaurant where we actually could choose what we wanted to eat. Yummy dinner and comfortable beds.

Day eleven - Buffet breakfast with an omelet bar and juice...very exciting! Then a fun boat ride on Lake Navasha we were saw tons of birds, hippos and interesting plants and guano covered trees. It was lovely to be out on the lake and a welcome change of pace from the car.





We were all feeling a little road weary. Then back in the car for another long drive to Nairobi and back to Rock House for a little rest, laundry and relaxation. In Nairobi we also said goodbye to Elijah our guide. Gave envelopes with tips and took pictures. We were supposed to have dinner at Rock House but opted instead to get a ride to the mall so we could have pizza, KFC, Asian noodles and frozen yogurt for dinner. We all felt DONE with meat in sauce, soup, etc.. We all realized that we were lucky to have such plentiful food especially when so many in Kenya go hungry but our Western appetites are used to variation. We also stocked up on more snack food for the Tanzania portion of our trip.



Day twelve - Packed up and headed to the Tanzanian border where we were handed off to the Tanzanian crew for another week of adventure. The border crossing went smoothly but it was a little confusing because our Kenyan driver wanted to take us across the border but he needed to buy a fire extinguisher for the car and needed a special permit to cross with the car. Finally across and then to the Tembo Guest House which was a very basic but comfortable place run by a Canadian foundation that helps girls with education. At Tembo we met Dennis who would be our guide for Tanzania. After lunch (which was exciting because there was a meat pie and a snickers bar for each person) we headed out a nature walk with Dennis and a Maasai guide. It was fun until we ran out of water and realized we had another 1-2 hours and Lily kind of panicked. I walked back to Tembo with Lily and Dennis, and Mike and Jacob continued on the walk. We all discovered “the sandpaper” tree which has leaves that are great for sanding. Mike, Jacob and Lily have all been making Maasai heading sticks and the leaves from the sandpaper tree are a great help. Dinner was good and included a serenade from our new Maasai friend who played American folk songs on the guitar.



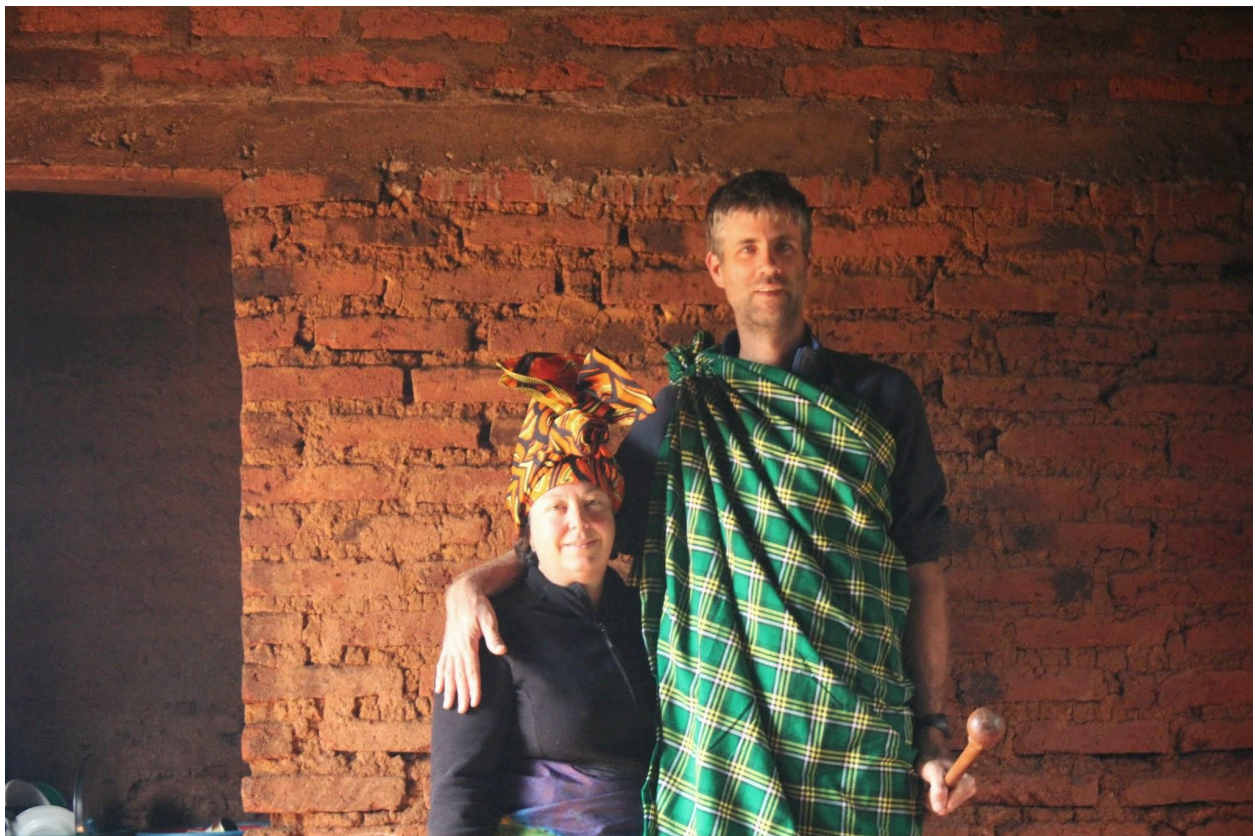
Day thirteen - After breakfast we headed to Arusha with Dennis where we met our Tanzania cook and driver. We explored the market in Arusha and bought some baskets, baobab candy and Maasai blankets.





Then off on a rather long drive to Lake Manyara where we did a game drive in the forest. Again after Masi Mara it was kind of a bust and we were sick of being in the car. Also the box lunch packed by Tembo lodge was not great so we were kind of cranky. We treated the kids to food in the gift shop which changed everybody's mood. Then another drive to the Endoro Lodge which was beautiful! After many nights of basic accommodation this place was a real treat. There was a pool, bar, wifi, dinner buffet, massages and white crisp bed linens. We were in heaven!

Day fourteen - Got up on the early side and went to visit the Iraqw tribal people. We were met by the village chief who invited us into his home and told us a little about the culture. We also did a little Iraqw dancing. Mike, Jacob and I were coerced into it. Lily sat by and laughed at us. We also learned about how the Iraqw call women. I would be "Mama Mike" since I am the wife of Mike and mother of his children. It seemed really weird but then I realized it was no different than being called Mrs. Swift.



We then went on a three hour walk around the area with the son of the village chief. We learned about farming and the local brick making which includes taking chunks of red clay out of the hills, bashing it with a wooden stick until it is powder, mixing in water to making rectangles, letting them dry in the sun, and then finally stacking everything up and building a kiln around them with the old broken bricks. It was slow, hot, back breaking work BUT our Iraqw guide told us it was great work because anybody who needed money could just go there and work hard by making their own bricks.



Our walk also took us to a place where the village people had hid during the Idi Amin era invasion. It is now a sacred area and no animal are allowed to graze there. We had lunch under the acacia trees and learned more about what it is like to be a child there...same food everyday, long walks to school, lots of chores BUT also lots of family and other kids to play with all the time. As we relaxed after lunch our guide started petting Lily's head since her hair was so smooth, remarkably she was OK with it. We spent a relaxing afternoon at the lodge swimming, catching-up on email and even getting massages and a pedicure (for Lily).

Day fifteen - Left the clean and cool Endoro lodge to begin our journey to the Serengeti. It was a long but beautiful drive with Maasai people and villages along the road, giraffe, zebras, etc in the distance.



We were able to stop at the Olduvai Gorge and a view of the archaeological sites where early human tools and fossils have been found. This was particularly interesting to Suzanne since she was an anthropology major in college and her professors had made some of the discoveries at Olduvai. The kids listened patiently and seemed to learn something about early humans. We arrived at our campground and our crew set-up our tent while we did a little exploring. Since we were in the middle of the Serengeti we were not allowed to walk beyond the borders of our campground...since we didn't want to be eaten by lions, we followed the rules. It was classic campground with about 6 other groups staying there. There was also a covered area for eating and a round tented and fenced area where all of the cooks of the various groups cooked and stored the food. It was weird camping in tent like we usually do but having somebody set-up our tent and cook for us. Mike and Suz enjoyed the sunset and Suzanne read from her book of women's adventure travel stories to Jacob, Lily and Mike while they sanded their Maasai walking sticks.

Day 16 - Got up early for a morning game drive through the Serengeti. It was beautiful watching the sun come and seeing all of the animals. More zebras, elephants, giraffes, hyenas, wildbeast, etc., etc.. As we were driving around we came across a pride of young male lions who were being active, walking around our safari car, etc.. We could have reached out and touched them.



We also saw a leopard which is rather special since they are very shy. We returned to camp for siesta and took showers before our afternoon game drive. Suzanne was a little challenged by her shower since mice had invaded the bathroom in search of water and had pooped all around. The heat of the day made the shower worth it but icky. In the afternoon we drove to a hippo pool where there were dozens of hippos of all ages and sizes wallowing together in the water. Hippos are very noisy making tons of farting, burping and snorting sounds. There was also very prolific poopers spraying their poop all over the place with their tails which are kind of like windshield wiper. We found them endlessly funny.



The day ended with rain. Suzanne was worried that the tent would leak but we were cozy and dry.

Day 17 - Got up very, very early to be picked up for our hot air balloon ride. We had been on the fence about this since it was obscenely expensive (\$540pp) but it was kind of a dream of Mike's so we decided to go for it. We arrived at the launch site and were briefed by our pilot before loading into the basket.





The basket had four sections (one on each corner) which each fit four people and the pilot stood in the middle. We each wore a belt/harness that was clipped onto the basket. We loaded into the basket while it was laying down so we were laying down at first until the balloon slowly inflated and we were raised up-right. We saw the sun rise over the Serengeti, elephants, hippos, giraffes, etc, down below, birds flying, tops of trees. It was really magnificent. After about an hour were landed and had a glass of champagne (cava actually from Spain) and then headed to our breakfast spot where we has a very fancy white tablecloth, china, silver breakfast served by men in turbans...all under the acacia trees. It was a little corny but very fun.



After our balloon experience we were picked up by our guide and did a little nature walk. We were supposed to do another game drive but opted instead to watch a video of alligators and lions killing prey in the visitors center. Then back to camp to have lunch and pack-up before our long drive to the rim of the Ngorongoro crater.



We checked into the Rhino Lodge which is owned and run by the Maasai and just as we arrived and opened the door to our room's veranda, an elephant was walking by. Also a large male elephant walked right through the parking lot.



We had a good dinner with our guide and driver which included biz (popcorn) and cocktail in front of the fire.

Day eighteen. Up again very early (5:45am!) to check out and do a game drive in the bottom of the Ngorongoro crater before driving to Arusha for our 3:30pm flight to Zanzibar. It was very, very foggy and dark, and we were driving on little mountain roads around the rim of the crater before heading into it. Suzanne was kind of freaked out that we would hit an elephant (there was elephant poop in the road) or another car. Luckily when we headed down into the crater we were below the clouds and the sun started to come up. The crater is home to tons of animals who all live on the bottom where there is a good water source. Again we saw a full array of animals including zebras crossing the road which made us all giggle.



We also spent a lot of time making wildebeest sounds echoing the herds we were driving through. At some point Lily needed to use the bathroom and our guide told us there was an official washroom we could use about 10 minutes away instead of our usual au natural pit stop. We headed there but when we arrived we realized Lily could NOT use the restroom because about 10 meters away there was a pride of lions sunning themselves and carefully watching an unsuspecting zebra and warthog.



We were hoping to see the lions chase the prey but they were taking their time. We headed back up the crater wall and started our long drive back to Arusha where we would catch our flight to Zanzibar. We arrived and the small and rather funky airport in plenty of time. We ordered a pizza but it was made with ketchup and too gross for even my kids (Spicoli was wrong!) so they ate raw raman and pringles. Our flight to Zanzibar was on a small 12 passenger plane. Since there were 13 passengers, Mike was promoted to co-pilot. It was fun to fly low over the land and see Tanzania from above.



After landing and driving for about 90 minutes we finally arrived at Gold Zanzibar, our hotel. It had been a very long day but we were all thrilled to be there. The room was gorgeous with clean white soft sheets, a full bathroom, hibiscus flowers on our beds, nice toiletries, etc.. The hotel was on the beach and also had a lovely pool, bar, etc.. We were in heaven after our long day and intense previous 18 days.





Day nineteen - After our yummy hotel breakfast buffet we lounged around on beach, swam in the pool, walked on the beach, had cocktails, had lunch at the hotel next door, and just generally relaxed. The beach was incredible picturesque with clear blue green water, palm trees, the softest white sand we had ever seen, dug out canoes and dhows with fisherman going by, women in colorful hijab buying fish from the boats, etc..



The resort is owned by Italians so the food and decor was kind of African-Italian. Lily was quite excited by the custom pasta bar and Jacob could not seem to eat enough grilled squid. Mike and I were just excited to be eating salad and more veggies. While we did love the hotel Suzane found that poverty outside the gate of the hotel to be a stark contrast and of course disturbing. The people on our side the gate had endless fresh water from the tap but the families outside the gate had to carry their water. There was a group of boys playing in the trash heap, throwing rocks at glass bottles perched on a ledge and then walking in all the broken glass in barefoot. While we felt lucky to be there we also tried to think about what we could be doing better in the world.

Day twenty - After breakfast we headed down the beach to meet our dive boat. Since we had all gotten PADI certified we were also excited to dive in the Indian Ocean. We were taking a dhow to an atoll on the opposite side of the island where there was a good coral reef.





Unfortunately the boat ride was about two hours and there were a lot of waves so we were all feeling a little sick. We finally arrived at the dive site and after a little drama getting into the water (Lily had never done a backward roll into the water and it was hard with all her gear on a rolling boat) started our dive. It was fun to be underwater and seeing all of the tropical fish and school of fish. After a rest we did a second dive which was also fun but Jacob ran out of air quite quickly and both kids were having some buoyancy problems. The boat ride back was smoother and we all had a good day.

Day twenty one - We took advantage of the morning's low tide and walked down the amazing beach to another town. The sea was an incredible green color and there were storm clouds in the distance which made all of the colors even more intense. The seascape with Maasai guys, fisherman, boats, etc was almost painfully beautiful. We were not sure if we had ever been in a more beautiful place. We spent the afternoon lounging around and packing-up.



Day twenty-two - Picked up at 2:20am to start our journey to the airport and then back to Barcelona.



It was a long day but after three flights we finally made it back to Barcelona (Zanzibar-Nairobi-Amsterdam-Barcelona). We were tired, dirty and glad to be home.

