

Sunday November 16

We are now on our fifth day in Cape Town and leave for three days in Namibia tomorrow. Since arriving in South Africa late on Tuesday night we spent most of our first day relaxing on one of three decks of the home that belongs to our nephew and who has kindly invited us to stay. The home is in Bantry Bay, an exclusive suburb of Cape Town overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and we found it very easy to simply soak in the view and the sunshine. However, in the early evening we were driven to a restaurant about 30 minutes away and enjoyed a wonderful tasting menu with wine pairings.

On Thursday morning we took Lexus SUV (which also comes with the home) and drove to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront complex. This is one of the top tourist attractions in the city and has numerous restaurants as well as high end and souvenir shops. We spent a very pleasant two hours strolling through the area, with its view of Table Mountain (with its tablecloth of cloud today) and the city. The journey there and back was an easy drive and a good way to get used to driving the car that we will be using for our 12 day trip along the Garden Route later in the vacation.



We relaxed in the warm sunshine on the deck for a couple of hours and then were picked up at 3:15 for our evening out. We were driven first to a winery in Stellenbosch where we were invited to join a wine tasting session. Molly chose the “chocolate and wine pairings” and I added to that the standard five wine selection. The cost was very reasonable (about \$10 for both of us) and it was a very pleasant way to spend two hours in the shaded courtyard of the wine estate.

At 6:30 we had a reservation at Ruste en Vrede, a favorite of our nephew's and one of the top restaurants in the country. The food and service were excellent. We chose the four course dinner (with a choice between three or four dishes for each) but we noted that they also offer a six course tasting menu (next time!) Actually, our four courses turned into seven or eight dishes with the canapés, the amuse bouche

and palate cleansers along the way. All the course were relatively small but sufficient and each was explained in full detail by the waitress – an almost necessary detail since every dish had many little extras and sauces that were not obvious from the line item in the menu. The sommelier recommended a bottle of chenin blanc, which we both enjoy, and we finished the meal with espresso and chocolates. Fantastic! And a good thing that we had a driver to take us home!

On Friday we got up to breakfast on the deck on a sunny but quite cool morning. There was a stiff breeze blowing so, even in this sheltered part of the bay, a light sweater was very welcome.

We had decided that this would be the first of two days spent in town and we chose the Hop on/Hop off bus as our means of getting around. We had first to drive a few blocks to park the car and pick up the bus on its circular route around the city. There are two main routes for the buses in addition to two shorter routes that cover the downtown area and the Constantia wine estates.

Once in downtown we first walked through a street market and then to St George's Cathedral. This is the cathedral where Bishop Tutu preached and became famous for his quiet-spoken, peaceful approach to fighting apartheid and he is still emeritus archbishop there. It is a large cathedral very much in the European style with some fine stained glass windows and a large open nave. No photography is allowed inside.



From the cathedral we walked through the Company Gardens (which seem to have changed the name recently to the Company's Garden) which were the originally established quite literally as vegetable gardens by the Dutch East India Company. Now the area is more like a park with pleasant walkways, many trees (all identified), flower gardens and (still) a small vegetable garden. There are also a number of statues throughout the park of figures important in South African history, most notably a large statue of Cecil Rhodes who had the ambition to place all of Africa under British rule – and to connect Cape Town and Cairo by road and railway. He didn't succeed in either but obviously came very close in the former – and ultimately had a country named after him.



We left the Gardens just below the landmark Mount Nelson hotel (home to the famous afternoon teas and a place where anybody who is anybody stays while in Cape Town) and found a small café on a nearby street for a coffee lunch.



We then took the downtown bus on its entire circuit, passing through District Six, site of the infamous bulldozing of an entire community in 1967 at the height of the Apartheid era. The whole area had been left as wasteland as a memorial to that event but, since our last visit here six years ago, there has been some new housing built and the area is now home to a brand new university complex. Apparently there are mixed opinions on whether this prime real estate should be developed or left as a perpetual memorial but it seems that a compromise is being formulated that will keep some land undeveloped as a continuing reminder of those decades of Apartheid.

Also on the route is the city hall which sits across from huge square where hundreds of thousands gathered to hear Nelson Mandela after his release from prison on Robben Island.

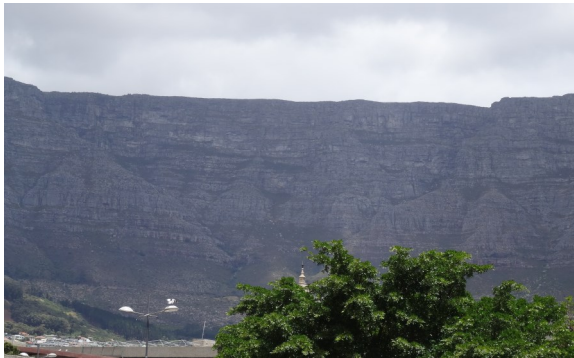
Downtown Cape Town has a pleasant mix of fine Victorian buildings and modern skyscrapers and is a vibrant area with amenities and entertainment venues to suit all tastes. It also has a relatively new and high-tech convention center which has made the city a conference center for both Africa and the world.

From downtown we took the alternative route all the way back to Bantry Bay. This was, however, a long ride (perhaps 1 ½ hours) which had several stops at major sites of interest, including the world famous Kirstenbosch botanical gardens situated right below the “back side” of Table Mountain. We visited there on our last visit and were very impressed with the gardens and its plants but today was not a good one to repeat. After a sunny and mild morning, the wind picked up, clouds rolled in and, inevitably it seemed, it began to rain. We were on the upper (open) deck of the bus but had fortunately moved forward to a small covered area just before the rains came.

The “monsoon” started in earnest just as we reached Hout Bay and we spent the remaining portion of the ride – along a beautiful stretch of the Atlantic coast – trying to avoid the streams that came through leaks in the obviously inadequate roof. Fortunately, by the time we reached the spot where we had left the car, the rain had stopped but the very strong wind made it feel much colder than the low sixties registered on the thermometer. We were glad to get back into the warmth of the house, have a hot cup of tea and get dried out.

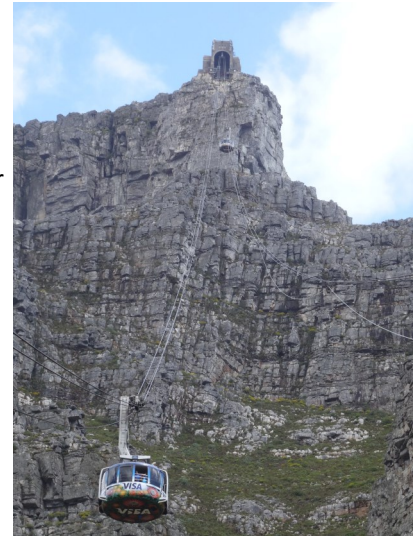
In the evening we were driven to another restaurant on a wine estate in Constantia which once again our nephew had recommended. Again we chose a meal with wine pairings and, as on the previous two evenings, the food and service were excellent.

On Saturday we drove to the Hop on/Hop off bus stop and rode into town, getting off at the V&A Waterfront. Here we took a 30 minute canal boat trip which went as far as the convention center and back. Table Mountain was clear on top for the first time on this visit so we had some great views of it, the Lion’s Head and Rump (both part of the Table Mountain range) and of the city from a different perspective. Much of the ride was alongside luxury hotels and apartments which we were told were home to many famous people from around the world, including Oprah Winfrey and Lance Armstrong.



After this short ride and a cup of coffee, we hopped on the bus again and took it up the very steep and twisty road to the Table Mountain cable car station. Following a forty minute wait in line we were in the car which took us to the top (at almost 3500 feet) and on which the floor rotated so everyone got some great views across the city and harbor.

Just as we reached the top it started to rain. It wasn’t particularly heavy and at first didn’t cloud the views of the still sunlit city below. However, the rain did pick up and everyone its



seemed made a rush for the cafeteria and/or the gift shop. Both were far too crowded for us, so we walked a little in the rain as the clouds began to envelope the summit and then got in line for the ride back down.

The rain had stopped (or perhaps never started) at the lower station so we were once again in sunshine, although it was still breezy and cool, so a warming cup of coffee went down well. By this time it was almost 4pm so we got the next convenient bus back to Bantry Bay and the house.



This evening we were treated to a wonderful dinner prepared by Mark’s chef Donie and we then spent a relaxing time enjoying the sunset and the quiet of the villa..

Sunday was a glorious day for our drive to Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope. The drive took us along the western coast of the Peninsula, first along the world famous Chapman's Peak drive (a short but stunning toll road) and then a little inland before descending to the coast road again which took us to the entrance to the Cape National Park (part of Table Mountain National Park). Within the Park were the southerly and southwesterly points of Africa, Cape Point (with its lighthouse) and the Cape of Good Hope, respectively.

At the Cape of Good Hope we (along with numerous others, mainly Japanese) took pictures marking this historic spot and then we drove a short distance to the lighthouse at Cape Point. This is the spot where all the tourist gift shops are so we chose simply to catch a glimpse of the lighthouse and the magnificent coast around it before heading back north.

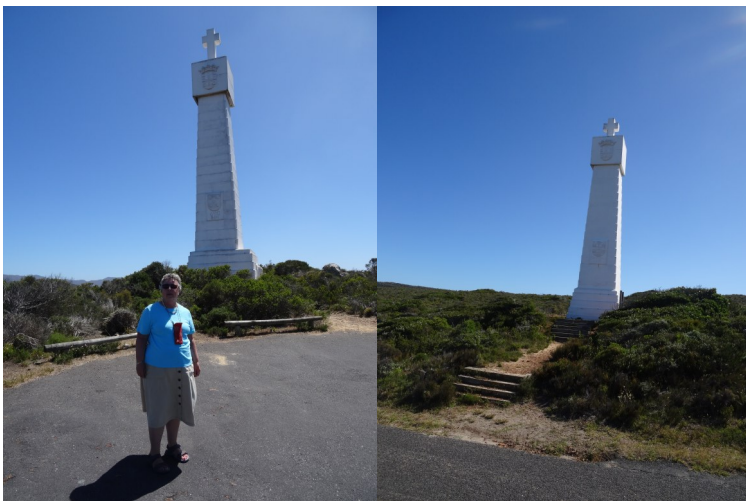
Along the way we visited two monuments to the early Portuguese explorers who came around the Cape in the late 1400s - Dias and Vasco da Gama. It is amazing to think that these two had rounded the Cape and (in the case of de Gama) opened up a sea route to India before Columbus had returned from his discovery of America. The two monuments are 20th century forms of identification markers that the two explorers had built.



Cape of Good Hope and Cape Point



We returned to Cape Town along the eastern shore of the Peninsula where the crashing waves were, if anything, even more impressive than those on the western side. For those



The Dias and de Gama Monuments

who have driven the coastal route along California's coast between LA and San Francisco, the scenery here is reminiscent but perhaps even more spectacular. And on a beautiful day such as today, it is difficult to imagine a more beautiful drive.



We even saw wild ostrich and baboons along the roadside.



We returned to the house in Cape Town about 5:30 and were treated to another superb meal by Donie the Chef – this time a fish Thai curry and a traditional African sweet dessert, together with espresso and limoncello to finish.

We retired early in preparation for our very early start for Namibia tomorrow. More from there hopefully.

Molly and Bob