



Five Star Adventure

By Ian Kerr

One drawback with advancing years is that you like your creature comforts more. Adventure is fine as long as you don't have to rough it for more than a day and at the end is a hot shower, a good meal and a soft bed.

Nobody really believes Ewan and Charley sleep rough on their Long Way Down, or ride without a large back-up crew! German Ralf Moeglich worked this out a long time ago. He has been operating in southern Africa for seventeen years, providing motorcycle holidays with a difference. Despite being a Paris-Dakar rider, he realised that not everybody wanted to train, buy specialised machinery and see the world the hard way. So he set up Gravel Travel to offer the ordinary rider the chance to experience the African desert in complete safety without feeling they are on a package holiday.

His fleet of Yamaha XT660R's, (shortly to be replaced by the new Tenere) offers mildly challenging routes off-road that allow you to see the real countryside and wildlife in South Africa and Namibia, with discreet back-up and top-notch accommodation at the end of each day.

I jumped onto an Air Namibia night flight into Cape Town to join one of the most popular tours between there and Windhoek in

Namibia, arriving in time for an afternoon's exploring this vibrant city before meeting my group in our luxury sea-front hotel for a briefing. Next morning Ralf took us to an off-road site for some tips of how to cope with the terrain, before some more sightseeing.

The next day the tour really started and we left Cape Town. The back-up truck took our kit and we headed south along the coastline to the Cape of Good Hope. Most of the day was on surfaced roads, with some easy gravel tracks, finishing with some whale watching from our luxury hotel in Hermanus.

Next day we rode down the coast to Cape Agulhus, the most southerly point of the continent, where the Indian and Atlantic Ocean meet. Most of the route was on gravel tracks that for the locals are 'normal' roads, complete with road signs and speed limits! Then back inland to Stellenbosch, the wine region, and another luxury hotel right in the heart of a vineyard. Everybody was coping with the hard packed gravel 'trails' despite only one having ever ridden off a surfaced road before.

A ride up the spectacular Bains Pass on the outskirts of Cape Town saw us move totally away from tourist areas. The Cedarberg Mountains provided more challenging trails with

mindblowing views, showing how vast and unpopulated the country is. The following day the terrain became more rugged, with signs of civilisation as we headed north. I began to appreciate that to ride through this spectacular area, you really do need back-up and local knowledge. Certainly I would not have found the 'Woodpile' our overnight lodging in huts on the edge of Namaqualand, with its quirky accommodation, fantastic sunset and seafood barbeque.

A gloomy start to the following day saw us ride through diamond mines to the border crossing with Namibia and a short blast to Noordoever and the reed huts on the banks of the Orange River, our next stop. Then it was a short ride to the ghost town at Kolmanskop to learn about diamond mining and how it brought things like hospitals to the area. After an hour absorbing the history it was back across the desert before turning off the tarmac back onto the trails.

The Yamaha handled deserts, mountains and city traffic, four thousand kilometres over two weeks, over 80% on unsurfaced roads with no problems from a group of off-road virgins!

Five star adventure with five star comfort – absolutely brilliant!
www.graveltravel.co.uk ★