

# Australian Air-Ferry

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## *September Newsletter*

### **Wilds of Africa**

Thirty minutes from Beira in Mozambique, the pilot of an old Beech 18, who was leaving the impoverished nation, called us to warn of a fuel shortage. He had been sold 400 litres, and he was heading towards South Africa where he could refuel.

Our agent had phoned the previous night and was told that Beira had a plentiful supply of Avgas.

After we'd landed we were instructed to park on a northerly bay, after shutting the engines down we climbed out and stood next to the aircraft, hundreds of metres from anywhere. No one in sight, no assistance from anyone and certainly no sight of a refuelling truck. Thirty minutes passed before we finally found a BP truck, the message was simple, "you can only have 500 litres." In this part of the world there's no close refuelling options, it left us short of our next destination.



**Aero Commander in Sri Lanka**

After checking the map and consulting with our representative in South Africa we decided that we'd make it to Madagascar (Nosy) with a plentiful reserve, this was not a planned stop but our options were very limited. It was in the general direction of our African exit and they had Avgas.

After acquiring our rationed fuel we organised a car that was impersonating a taxi and headed into the very heart of Beira.

The scenery during our transit reinforced that eerie feeling that we'd had at the airport, there's a powerful, unmistakable poverty here that most could not endure, you would have to be born into this life and know nothing else to survive here.

Mozambique had been colonised by the Portuguese, but had been given their independence in 1975. In the 60's the largest wild life reserve in Africa was closed and we're told the rebels killed most of the Europeans, before eating the wild life.

Socialist mismanagement and a brutal civil war from 1977-92 exacerbated the plight of Mozambique.

Large-scale emigration by whites, economic dependence on South Africa, a severe drought, and a prolonged civil war has hindered the country's development. The ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique party formally abandoned Marxism in 1989, and a new constitution the following year provided for multiparty elections and a free market economy. A UN-negotiated peace agreement between FRELIMO and rebel Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) forces ended the fighting in 1992. In December 2004, Mozambique underwent a delicate transition as Joaquim CHISSANO stepped down after 18 years in office.

Mozambique has a population of 19,686,505, 1.3 million people are suffering from HIV/aids, a staggering 12.2%.

The population is 99.66% African (Makhuwa, Tsonga, Lomwe, Sena, and others), Europeans 0.06%, Euro-Africans 0.2%, and Indians 0.08%.

At independence in 1975, Mozambique was one of the world's poorest countries.

In 1987, the government embarked on a series of macroeconomic reforms designed to stabilize the economy. These steps, combined with donor assistance and with political stability since the multi-party elections in 1994, have led to dramatic improvements in the country's growth rate. Inflation was reduced to single digits during the late 1990s although it returned to double digits in 2000-03. Fiscal reforms, including the introduction of a value-added tax and reform of the customs service, have improved the government's revenue collection abilities. In spite of these gains, Mozambique remains dependent upon foreign assistance for much of its annual budget, and the majority of the population remains below the poverty line. Subsistence agriculture continues to employ

the vast majority of the country's work force. A substantial trade imbalance persists although the opening of the Mozal aluminum smelter, the country's largest foreign investment project to date, has increased export earnings.



Australian Air Ferry crew arrived at the accommodation and by Mozambique standards it was good. After a short walk (for exercise purposes) we'd settled into the relative safety

of the dining room, here we could try and forget the unpleasant sights that afternoon had burdened us with.

Before leaving South Africa we'd been told to try the Prawns, Shrimp or Scampy to some. And after a brief look at the menu we opted for the only dish on the menu that mentioned Prawns. Four halves appeared shortly after, they were as thick as your wrist and as long as the plate, we decided that swimming in the ocean in this part of the world was definitely not an option, you wouldn't want to come across a hungry Prawn.

After retiring early it was quickly evident that the street outside was noisy, and the later the night got, the louder the African music / chanting became, this continued until 4-5 am in the morning.

The following day we got off to an early start, it's hard to explain, but we were glad to be into international waters and away from a nation that really does not make foreigners feel welcome. This country has a dark past and many have lost their lives here.

We'd picked this aircraft up in South Africa, of course nothing had gone to plan, from when we arrived Sunday evening, right through until Thursday morning when we finally got away it had seemed as though the ferry gods had wanted us to stay in South Africa indefinitely.

## **South Africa**

There's a much larger white population in South Africa, and its history is as interesting as Mozambique's.

After the British seized the Cape of Good Hope area in 1806, many of the Dutch settlers (the Boers) trekked north to found their own republics. The discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) spurred wealth and immigration and intensified the subjugation of the native inhabitants. The Boers resisted British encroachments, but were defeated in the Boer War (1899-1902).

The resulting Union of South Africa operated under a policy of apartheid - the separate development of the races. The 1990s brought an end to apartheid politically and ushered in black majority rule.

South Africa is a middle-income, emerging market with an abundant supply of natural resources; well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport sectors; a stock exchange that ranks among the 10 largest in the world; and a modern infrastructure supporting an efficient distribution of goods to major urban centers throughout the region.

However, growth has not been strong enough to lower South Africa's high unemployment rate, and daunting economic problems remain from the apartheid era - especially poverty and lack of economic empowerment among the disadvantaged groups. South African

economic policy is fiscally conservative, but pragmatic, focusing on targeting inflation and liberalizing trade as means to increase job growth and household income.

South Africa has a population of 44,187,637, 5.3 million people are infected with HIV/aids, that's a staggering 21.5%. The population is 79% black African, white 9.6%, colored 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5%.

### **Madagascar**

Madagascar had been colonised by the French and so we didn't know what to expect when we landed, this country was still very close to Africa.

Very quickly after landing we discovered their French speaking skills were very good, but their English was very bad, conversely our French was very bad. However, we battled on with our communication problems and found ourselves underway again in approx one hour.



**Sunset over the India Ocean**

As we sailed out over the northern tip of this nation, we found ourselves discussing the French colonisation program. We'd flown over Tahiti, Noumea and Port Villa in the

Pacific, but it seemed the French had been very busy in the Indian Ocean as well with Madagascar, Seychelles and other islands to the east.

It was getting late in the evening when we arrived in the Seychelles, cloud had fixed itself to the lofty portions of the mountainous terrain that made up the islands centre and frequent rain showers kept the airport damp.

The airfield was on the eastern side of the island and we'd come in from the south-west, to avoid any problems we tracked cautiously around the island at sea and committed to an approach from the east.

After being marshalled into position a handling agent met us, who again could speak very good French, our French was getting better but still lacked finesse.

This part of the world seemed safe enough and after checking the weather the following morning we decided to stay an extra day. A cyclone was centred southwest of Hong Kong and it had caused some weather to form just south of Sri Lanka, right in our path, the ferry gods were at it again.

After a day in the Seychelles we headed for the Maldives, a very popular holiday destination, picturesque islands surrounded by coral reefs, arguably the best island holidays in the world.

But they are islands without Avgas, so we passed over the top and landed in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka people are very friendly; they had an ample supply of Avgas and could speak very good English.

We'd booked into the TAJ, and found a very nice Chinese restaurant within the complex.

The next morning we realised that the Chinese had given us both food poisoning, and that the next few days in the aircraft would be a struggle, especially as it did not have a toilet on board.

The next morning we headed across to Medan in Indonesia, and here we stayed to recover from our fatigue and upset tummies.

During a walk the following day a bicycle fitted with a sidecar approached and as it was available we waived him down and climbed aboard. The first officer started complaining almost immediately that the very small seat on the back of the bike was extremely painful. At least he wasn't over six foot tall and squeezed into the very tiny sidecar. After a short pedal we felt sorry for the rider who by now had broken into a very heavy sweat, so we paid him handsomely and continued on foot.

Our short break passed quickly and we found ourselves perched in the Aero Commander heading towards Jakarta for a refuelling stop. This time we got it right, an Australian

friend based in Jakarta was waiting at the airport with the refuellers and his assistance with the Indonesian language was much appreciated.

That night we were back in Australia, we'd landed in Port Hedland and after dropping our luggage in the room we found a local eatery for some good old fashioned Australian tucker.

The next day the aircraft was delivered and we were heading for some good old-fashioned R&R at home.

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