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Daddy & Son Safari: Part I

"The last time work and baby-stuff shared space in that bag my iPhone died".



With the sun setting behind the big jackalberry tree, and the first nightjar welcoming the onset of night, my son Fynn ran as fast as his sturdy legs of 31 months could take him. 'Hiding', he giggled, as he rounded the landrover with a tottering speed wobble. Nick, the young safari guide, and his tracker, Lucas, were in hot pursuit. They were also laughing.

It was the most unusual sundowner stop I'd ever had on 15 years of game-drives.

The game-drive has long been one of my few pleasures, allowing me to get miles away from what can easily become life's daily drivel, a place where I can drive demons hence, breathe in the scent of wild sage and fresh elephant poo (it's not dung when you're with a toddler), and wake to the sound of birds. But life changes, and there's no change bigger than a little one.

With his Mom overseas for three weeks, and no domestic help for that period, it was me and Fynn, 24/7 alone at home in Cape Town. All thoughts of my television work were abandoned.

So it was that he and I set off for the bush.

Like his Dad, Fynn is happiest surrounded by nature, but I was also about to see just how easy it is to go on safari with a toddler. From the welcome on the plane to that tricky issue of little ones at game lodges.

Without his Mom the pressure was on. I'm very comfortable with caring for him solo, and have done so for weeks at a stretch before, but this was different.

More than ensuring the nappies and wet-wipes were packed, it was a list of never-ending questions; should I take a familiar blanket in case he wanted to sleep on the plane; enough bibs in case he drooled his shirt wet; his teddy, Baloo; maybe a colouring-in book; a spare shirt...malaria stuff...wet-wipes. And as the baby-bag is just too damn big, all of this I had to include in my laptop bag, which - yes - had work in it.

And the last time work and baby-stuff shared space in that bag my iPhone died. Just to top it off, I also had my camera back-pack, which isn't small. Plus Fynn himself.

Then came the 'how' in getting to the lowveld, the real 'bush', from Cape Town. It's not a cheap venture, and, working as an independent, the type of frivolous expense I'm fairly certain that his mother wouldn't encourage. So I targeted and approached a few potential 'travel partners' that I respected and would feel editorially comfortable including in our story. Luckily the merit of the idea was appreciated, and the trip was on.



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Despite a gentle dispute I once had with the airline over a column I once wrote about over-booking, we flew BA/Comair, because I generally like the way it operates. Its aircraft aren't always newer, and its fares can be pricier than its major competitor, but I take comfort in its consistency of service. And as I anticipated that I would be in need of a forgiving air-crew, more concerned with a passenger in possible toddler distress than their personal issues, this was a no-brainer.

The reason for booking an Avis car was stunningly simple.

I've met three of the company's CEOs over the past 15 years - Glenn, Noel and Wayne - and all had a common trait. They shared an enthusiasm, dare I say passion, for matters environmental.

When I learnt earlier this year that the company's South Africa office had saved millions of litres of water in its drive to reduce water consumption, any possible thoughts of 'greenwashing' were banished. As this trip was about introducing Fynn to real wilderness, hopefully further instilling in him a deep regard for his environment - the

bollocks of branding regardless - it seemed a good fit. Besides, the staff are consistently decent - they even hauled out a car-chair for me when I realised I'd forgotten to order one.

From Joburg to the Greater Kruger Park we flew with FedAir because, well, it flew where we needed to get to. It also agreed to go out of its way to collect us from an airstrip not on its regular route, and luckily gave us a reduced rate. Fynn was going to love this. Apart from roaring like a lion, howling like a jackal and hooting like an owl, he is obsessed by anything that flies.

At the hangars in Joburg, preparing to board the Beechcraft, Fynn was gobsmacked. 'Look Daddy!' were his words at every departing plane.

We stopped twice to drop off passengers before finally landing at an airfield in a game reserve - from where it was still an hour's drive to our destination. It was a lot of travelling for a young man of 31 months.

Dad was as excited as his boy. We were going to the bush together.

