

CHART OF THE MONTH

MARCH 2014

My wife and I returned from Africa two weeks ago today. Our trip was an eye-opening and unforgettable experience.

We went on a three-day safari at the front end, then spent three nights in Cape Town, followed by a two-week cruise from [South Africa to Ghana](#) (with stops in Namibia, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cameroon, Benin, and Togo along the way). It was only the first or second time that a cruise ship had entered many of these ports.

Our safari took place in MalaMala, the largest private game reserve in South Africa. [MalaMala is on the Sand River, which borders Kruger National Park](#), one of the largest national parks in the world with an area the size of New Jersey. We saw the "Big Five" — lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhinoceros — as we were being transported to our camp, an unheard of feat according to the ranger. We also found the Big Five, as well as giraffes, zebras, hippos, wildebeest, impalas, kudus, nyalas, warthogs, and baboons (among others), on each of our four game drives. We witnessed all of these wild animals up close in our open 4-wheel-drive Range Rovers. It is quite an adventure to have a 13-foot tall, 14,000-pound elephant walking toward and then alongside your parked vehicle or tracking a lion or leopard side by side.

During our stay in [Cape Town](#), which possesses perhaps the most beautiful and bountiful coastline in the entire world, our group visited a [Cheetah Outreach](#) where we were able to pet these endangered animals. We saw hundreds of seals at [Seal Island](#) and scores of African Penguins at [Boulders Beach](#). We also took the aerial cableway to Table Mountain, a prominent landmark overlooking the city.

We boarded the Silver Wind and traveled to [Lüderitz](#) and [Walvis Bay](#), two coastal cities in Namibia that were distinctly different from the rest of Africa that we were soon to see. The latter included some of the biggest sand dunes in the world. Next up was [Luanda](#), the capital and largest city of Angola. Aside from the shanty towns in South Africa, Luanda was our first real exposure to the slums and poverty that dominate the landscape in virtually all of the countries along the west coast of Africa. Nonetheless, Luanda, which is experiencing a reconstruction boom in the aftermath of Angola's civil war, has the highest concentration of development on the African continent.

We were unable to stop on the main island of [São Tomé](#), the second-smallest country in Africa, due to inclement weather but spent the following day on the beaches of [Bom Bom](#), an islet located north of the coast of Príncipe in the Gulf of Guinea.

Our next stop was in [Limbe, Cameroon](#), where we were treated to tribal music and dances; a wildlife centre, home to 15 species of primates that have been rescued; and the [historic slave trade market in Bimbia](#). From there, we traveled to [Cotonou](#), the largest city in Benin. We took a motorized wooden boat to Ganvie, the largest lake village in Africa with stilt houses lining the waterway. The husbands catch fish for a living and wholesale them to their wives, who, in turn, paddle canoes (many times with infant children on their backs) miles to the shorefront to sell the fish to the townspeople.

We moved westward to [Lomé](#), the capital and largest city of Togo. The highlight of our trip was visiting an elementary school in rural Togo. The children, who come from so little, were nothing but joyous, smiling, waving, singing, and hoping to shake hands (along with some high fives and soft fist bumps from yours truly). Their only request was whether we had an extra pen handy to give to them (see photo of the girl below with the pen that my wife gave to her) because they are so eager to write.

Our last port was in [Accra](#), the capital and largest city of Ghana. We visited a few historic sites, including Jamestown, an old colonial district along the waterfront that has become one of the poorest sections of western Africa after decades of neglect.

At the risk of ending my travelogue with a cliché, our trip to Africa was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The diversity of the safari and cruise, including the animals, people, and places, was truly astounding. Although the flights to and from Africa were taxing, they were a small price to pay for such a wonderful journey.

Thank you for your time and interest. We will return to our normal Chart of the Month in which we discuss economic and investment news in April.

Best regards,

Richard

