

## Africa

John Burke, MS, CFP® | October 2019

“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” These were the words of Lord Henry Morton Stanley to Dr. David Livingstone, who he had found in the middle of Africa. Livingstone, a British hero, had gone into Africa to find the source of the Nile. Lost for years, Lord Stanley was sent to find Dr. Livingstone.

Diane and I just returned from our own trip to Africa, and like Livingstone, we spent the majority of it “in the bush” so that, like Livingstone, we lost ourselves in the country. In this piece, like I have done for other international trips, I give the perspectives of an investor and an American seeing Africa for the first time.

Livingstone was a doctor and an explorer. Europeans were enamored with finding the source of the Nile River, but Livingstone was also a missionary interested in putting an end to slave trading. As he put it, “The Nile Sources are valuable only as a means of opening my mouth with power over men. It is this power with which I aim to remedy an immense evil.”

Livingstone did not find the source of the Nile or end slave trading, though he did find what the Africans called Mosi-O-Tonya, translated “the Smoke that Thunders”. This is what is now called Victoria Falls. We also traveled to the Falls and saw his statue there, on which he is credited with discovering Victoria Falls. Similar to Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America, I don’t see how we can say he discovered something when there were already inhabitants in the area.

It seems to me that the Africans are progressing in making their continent their own again. Our trip started in Cape Town, South Africa where we saw penguins and tasted some of their fabulous wine. South Africa, as we know, had a system of apartheid until the early 1990s. Despite the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa, the economic progress for blacks has sadly been slow to materialize and inequality remains high. Apartheid had systematized inequality in many ways, including that blacks were not allowed to go to school. It takes a long time to change that. The lack of education has led to diminished opportunities.

After our time in Cape Town, we visited Kruger National Park, Victoria Falls in Zambia and then to three different safari camps in Botswana. We saw the big five - elephants, lions, leopards, rhinoceroses and African buffalo. We saw the ugly five - hyenas, wart hogs, wildebeests, vultures and Marabou storks. The last two we often saw feasting on carcasses. Namibia and Botswana are suffering from their worst drought in 10 years. This made it easier to see the animals because they tend to gather at the water in dry season. In all, we saw over 30 different animals, plus many different types of birds.

We spent over 50 hours on game drives during which I continually misidentified just about every antelope looking animal, to the amusement of our guides. I have attached some of my favorite

pictures, some showing the animals too close for comfort. Concerned about that, I had asked about our safety to which all of the guides replied “we have not lost anyone ... yet.” Orders were to stay in the vehicle, because once out of the vehicle, it was explained, we would no longer be at the top of the food chain.



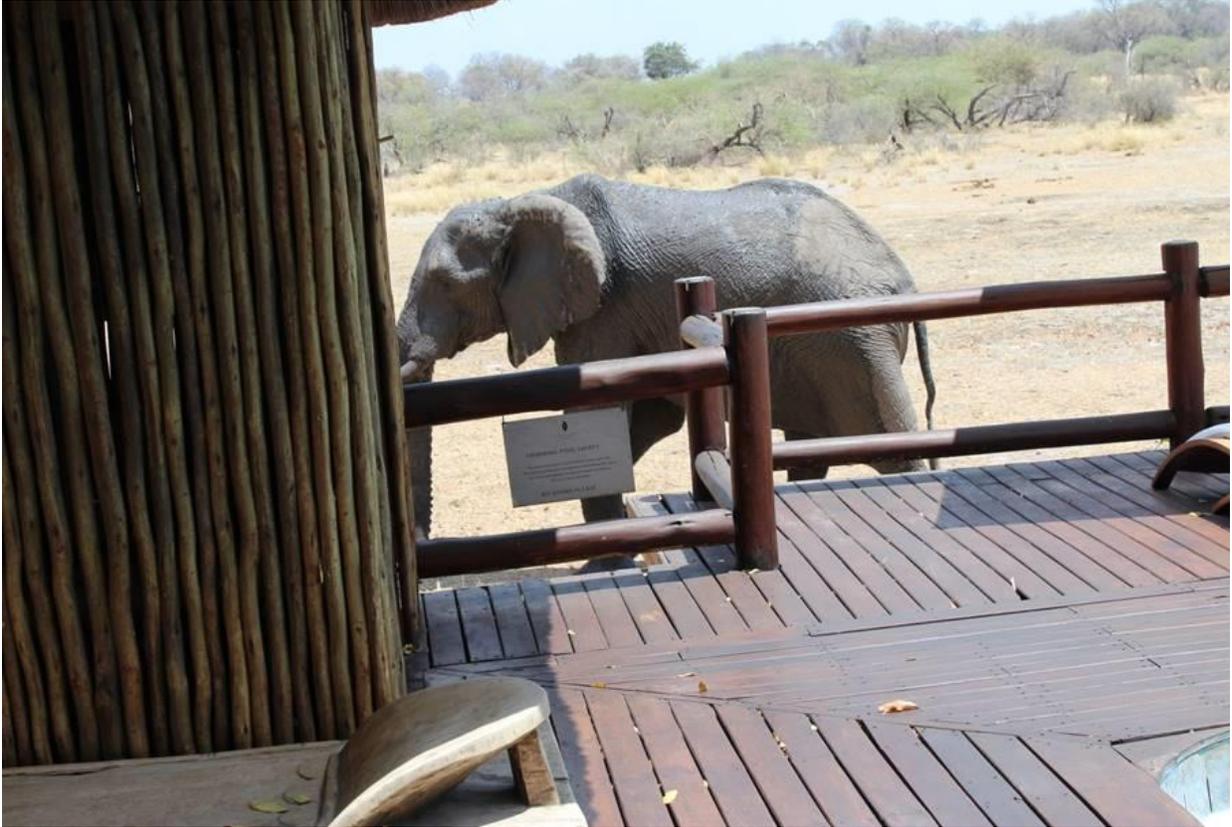
**He Is The Top of the Food Chain**

While I had heard in the past that the hippos were the most dangerous animal, we actually had an evening cocktail outside the vehicle right in front of a pod of hippos in the water. Apparently, as long as you stay out of the water or stay out of the way of a hippo not in the water, the hippos are not dangerous. The animal they most feared was the African or Cape Buffalo because once it starts charging, it won't stop.



**With Hippos behind us to the right**

But the elephant has been the most deadly animal, especially in Botswana where hunting is banned. The population has soared. Elephants are like deer in American suburbs - a nuisance. Actually, they are much more than a nuisance. More than 20 people have been killed by elephants in Botswana this year, including one villager that was killed while we were there. One of the members of our group saw the body. The villager had ridden his bike to get food. On the way back, the elephant smelled the food and killed him to get it. In order to reduce the frequency of these types of incidents, Botswana is in the process of revoking the ban on hunting. This has made Botswana somewhat of an outcast country with many outside of Botswana, but I think they should consider their predicament.



**Elephants a frequent sight, outside of and in camp**

One of the most fascinating creatures on the savanna, which not one of the guides mentioned, is the termite. It is the most prolific. The mounds are uncountable and reach heights of over ten feet with up to a million termites per mound. The African termite is 100 million years old. They don't eat wood, instead farming a fungus for food. There are various types of termites from soldiers to workers to the queen. The queen actually is subservient to the colony. Our world would be a better place if our leaders truly accepted that.



**This guy thinks he is the king – the termite mound is well over 10 feet tall**

Botswana, in fact, seems to get that. The country is the fastest growing economy in Africa with its people now enjoying a standard of living higher than that in South Africa. They have enough to eat, they have cell phones and improved homes and they like their government. As a long time, avid reader of the Economist, the continent seems full of countries whose leaders are pilfering their resources for their own personal benefit. Botswana is a clear exception, and an example of leaders running the country for the benefit of its people.

In fact, in Zambia, we waited in line to cross the border into Botswana and saw an example of the opposite kind. Hundreds of trucks were lined up as far as we could see. Our driver explained that some of them end up waiting for as long as four weeks for permission to cross the border. Apparently, the border crossing in Zambia is one more opportunity for the government to extract money from these truckers.

We also saw a bus depot in Kasane, Zambia, that has been under construction for over a decade. Near election time, construction picks up only to have the construction funds taken after the election. Unfortunately, Africans have gotten used to the idea that government is far more likely to be the problem than the solution.

At the end of our eighth day in safari, we were ready to go home. During our last game drive, we spotted a cheetah, which is a rare sight. We watched the cheetah up close until dusk, watching it get up, mark its territory as cats do, and head off into the sunset.



**The cheetah is the only big cat that purrs though we did not get close enough to know**

As we learned, the wart hogs signal to each other to get moving by running with their tails held high, hence the expression, time to high tail it out of here, which we did.

We spent more than two weeks away, so I want to thank Melissa, Steve, John, Chris, Tamisha and Melissa for allowing that to happen. Steve, Chris, Melissa Montalvo and I will soon follow this up with commentary about why we think the markets have started the fourth quarter on a down note.



He is trying to break into our room (for food I presume)



**The guides fear the Cape Buffalo more than any other animal**

*John B. Burke*

**Included on Forbes 2018 List of America's Top Advisors.**

John B. Burke, MS, CFP®  
President, BFS