

Well, how do I start this article! It all started 2 years ago when Pam Pelsler, from George in South Africa visited the UK and asked if she could come along to our class – we've been friends ever since and she's been trying to get us out to South Africa ever since!

So finally, we got there! We went out to teach some of Alan's latest dances at some workshops and fit in a holiday – this is the furthest we've ever travelled to dance! But, I think I'll start at the beginning and tell you a bit about where we visited, the culture and then onto the dancing!

We arrived in Cape Town on the Sunday morning (8am) and our friends who lived in George came to pick us up – it's a 5 hour drive from their house so they had to leave very early. Soon after leaving the airport we saw our first shanty town – basically they are huts – mainly built from tin and some of them are literally joined together – we were later to find out (after seeing these types of communities everywhere we went) that some of the non-white South African people build these towns near to where there is likely to be work so that they don't have to travel etc. So some of these are in wooded areas where there are work opportunities etc.

On our way to George we spent the night at a Warm Water Spa – basically hot – and I mean hot – water from the mountains filled the pools, also there were private baths in private buildings if you wanted to get away from everyone else! It was extremely welcome after a long 11½ hour flight I can tell you!

The next day – still on our way to George – we visited a Wildlife Ranch where we were to see Crocodiles, Meerkats, big cats including White Tigers, Tigers and Cheetahs – here is where we had our fun – we got to go into the pen with 2 young cheetahs (about 2 years old) and stroke them! They were amazing – they purred like our household cats but a lot louder – amazing!

From there we went to see the Cango Caves which were just beautiful and then onto George.

Pam Pelsler and her husband Martin live on a farm – which has been split into about 6 plots – each plot owned by Martin's brothers and sisters who all have houses (all different) on the farm too – it is a most beautiful area. For miles just fields and mountains! Here we stayed for most of the week. On the Tuesday Pam has a 5 hour class where people come in and out and more people come in and out! And the levels get higher the later it becomes! Alan taught some dances at this class – not his own and I'll list later the dances he taught the whole time we were in South Africa. Just down the road from where Pam and Martin live is a single shak where a family of around 8 live. They walk for miles to get water and Pam and Martin give them supplements of food now and then. For instance if they buy a bag of carrots and are only going to eat half before they turn, they give the other half to the family – it would only get wasted anyway and it's helping the family. It was lovely to see them handing a bag of food over while we were there.

Wednesday saw us in Kynsna where we went to see the Elephants and to be honest, this was probably the highlight of my week! They are absolutely beautiful, gentle – amazing animals. The Kynsna Elephant park is a sanctuary for Elephants who have been orphaned and rescued if injured. It is a beautiful, calming place and I would recommend anyone to visit if in the area!

Thursday was our first workshop in George. I'd say around 50-60 people attended. We were hosted by Cynthia who is in fact British and from Blackpool! Cynthia has been in South Africa some 23 years but she hasn't lost her Blackpool accent!

We had a morning social where Alan taught some dances and we danced in between! Then there was a break at 1pm and people went away to eat etc. Then a social starting at 4pm – finishing around 8pm. Some from the workshop didn't make it back to the social and this was mainly because a lot of them had travelled miles to be there – we were to find out later on that these miles were around 100 or more!

In South Africa (and this applies to Cape Town too) they don't really have evening socials, they prefer to have afternoon socials. There are a couple of reasons for this – there are no men – or very few men – who do linedancing and ladies don't like driving in the dark on their own – plus the South Africans are very family-orientated and like to spend their evenings together! What was nice was that after the event, we still had some of the evening left to relax!

Friday morning was our travel back to Cape Town! We arrived around 6pm and was greeted at the flat by Karin who would be our 'guide' for the 2nd week!

We stayed in a place called Paarl which is 100km from Cape Town – very safe – it's not at all as people perceive to be South Africa. Yes, of course in Cape Town itself you have to be vigilant but I would say you have to be here in the UK in big towns too – especially in London (having come from there) but it's all about being sensible! In Paarl, it was safe to walk out at night, it was really quiet where our flat was and it was lovely.

Saturday was the all day workshop – running from 10am – 5pm. Again, the day was filled with Alan teaching and in between social dancing. In Cape Town, more so than George, they are dancing around the same circuit as we are in the UK – the dances that are in the Top 10 are almost all being danced so was great to have plenty to dance to! In amongst the circuit dances were a few great alternative dances – Amame Un Poquito is a great beginner dance to Amame and E Z Tango, a beginner dance to Tango Cha – I would recommend both of these for your beginner/improver classes. And also, some great dances to Africaans music!

Over the 2nd week, we were taken to see some great places, wine and cheese farms, the usual tourist attractions like Table Mountain and Waterfront and of course some shopping! Alan and I also attended 3 of Karin's classes where Alan taught at all of them. At the workshops he taught his own dances and at the classes he taught dances of other choreographers. So, as promised earlier, here's a list of all the dances taught (in no particular order) over the 2 weeks at the classes and the workshops!

Taking Back My Love	(Alan Haywood)
Action	(Darren Bailey)
Look What They've Done	(Alan Haywood)
I'll Take Texas	(David Spencer)
Those Girls	(Alan Haywood)
Unsung Hero	(Alan Haywood)
This and That	(Gary Lafferty)
N E Cha Cha	(Gaye Teather)
Sister Kate	(Ria Vos)
Twix	(Ann Harris)

We also demoed Everybody DJ (which Pam had learnt especially to demo it with us in George) and Love Equals Nothing.

We had the most amazing time there – Karin and Pam were the greatest hosts you could ask for – the South African people are so hospitable and I would recommend anyone to visit there! We hear that Maggie Gallagher will be out there in Johannesburg in May 2010 – which is an 18 hour drive from Cape Town but Karin and lot of her dancers are planning to make that trip – how many people would travel that far to dance in the UK? I would guess not many – but in South Africa – they just do it! Amazing!

Now we're going to save so we can go back for a holiday and I hope it won't be too long in the future!

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