

A Camdenian in Africa April 2009

I bumped into Kevin Pietersen the other day.

A slight exaggeration as I think it was the boot of the near by policeman that was actually in my way. As I apologised I turned to see Kevin (well we are not really on first name terms) who towered above me. Mind you at 5 foot 6 inches and one half people tend to be taller, but this was not just taller this was massive.

The experience taught me a couple of things.

- 1) The IPL 20/20 tournament was in town.
- 2) That the police cordon at PE airport, who outnumbered fans, clearly hoped I was not an AK47 wielding fanatic.

The team departed by coach with siren sounding police escort.

The next thing I knew was that I was watching them all on TV in crowded stadia.

There is a bit of envy going around SA as we can see how well the IPL 20t has been organised as evidenced by packed stadiums and wide TV coverage.

One has to remember that this was only given to SA this year following security fears in India and the threat of rain in the UK.

The envy comes from the desire to market the FIFA Confederation Cup and World Cup in the same telling manner.

India had elections that were feared to heighten already poor sub continent fellowship. On the other hand we had an autumn plus our own elections to contend with.

In PE it is about 24oC today and the elections were interesting but without violence (this certainly excludes the fatal shooting of a COPE member in PE by a group who escaped in a car marked with ANC banners with a speaker on the roof).It is thought to be politically motivated!

The Americans are organising a 20/20 tournament of their own and if this takes off, the USA may be able to challenge the supremacy of India in the international game at the moment. We watch the USA response with interest or amusement, not sure yet.

Now I must return to soccer or as you call it "football"

If you want a ticket to the Confederations Cup fixture between Iraq/ New Zealand then come along as only 1000 tickets have been sold so far. Remember the event is in June and is a trial run for the 2010 WC.

There is this great desire to organise ticket sales on the Internet but I think what has been ignored is the fact that SA only has about 5% of the population connected to the web.

The normal routine here is to pitch up a few minutes before the game and buy a ticket. Of course, this can lead to overfull grounds with angry fans left outside. It also makes any kind of planning rather difficult and hence the reasonable desire to sell tickets ahead of time.

Now June is not a good weather month and this includes 2010.

SA has a winter. June/July will not all be good and sunny but this will depend on where you are.

In Durban we have a sub tropical climate so even June/July will be reasonable. Let`s say 20`s. You may even swim or surf.

But Cape Town has a wet and wintry time and it is not the moment to sip a great South African wine on the patio. Rather near the log fire.

In PE we have missed the Confederations Cup as the new stadium was a little late but for 2010 we will be up and running. Actually one of the first events at the ground will be in June this year and involves the British Lions Rugby team.

But leave your swimsuit behind and instead include a pith helmet.

Now as you look up `pith` in the dictionary I will explain why.

It is a good time of the year to go on safari.

Unfortunately most of us do not have the money to do it the old way and by this I mean being carried by many local tribespeople in some sedate chair or upon elephants.

No, we mainly go by car. It is not as dramatic or romantic but you do get to see a lot more in a shorter time frame.

Generally the idea is to shoot the Big Five, with a camera, but we have many game ranches where for a princely sum you can do the other shooting that permits you placing a stuffed head above your fireplace when returning to the UK.

Our parks are out of the malaria zone and we also have a Big 7 at Addo plus you can go on horseback in some sections.

We recently came back from a short trip the other week and stayed in the tented Safari units. The park has improved a lot and it was great to be around the braai and hear the roar of distant lions and see the dark outlines of rhino and porcupine passing close by.

Porcupine!! Well yes, it was the first time I had seen one.

So this is what you should be aiming to do in June/July 2010 around PE.

Jhb has a wonderful climate with clear blue skies in winter but those midday shorts need to have some fur lining as once the sun goes down it may turn to zero and produce frost. One of the coldest places will be in a stadium full of concrete or of course in your shorts!

Rustenburg will be a bit warmer than Jhb but the same night story. Booking into Sun City could be good as it is very close to the Pilansberg and other game parks. Just steer clear of the centre of towns.

Bloemfontein will be very cold at night.

Some cost ideas for you with the Rand at around 13:1.

The safari tents at Addo were about £13 pppn, self catering.

Meals will cost you from £3 to £8 depending upon your wallet and your taste for restaurants. A beer is around £1 for 320 mls in a hotel. Wine is about the same. But if you self cater then Windhoek lager is about 30p a bottle and reasonable white wine goes for about £1/2 bottle and red from £1.50+. The better wines are closer to £2+ for white and £3+ for red. We drink the low priced stuff.

So on to politics and the economy.

As I have said the ANC and Jacob Zuma had a big win but just short of the important two thirds majority that would allow them to play around with the Constitution. The new party, COPE, had about 7% but the DA have taken the Western Cape and Cape Town. All those living in this part of SA can expect better times ahead based upon the good performance by the DA in running the city itself.

The rest of us (we are just outside the Western Cape) can only hope for better things. Mind you it must be very easy to improve upon the last few years of poor or non delivery of services.

Jacob Zuma got his charges dropped under most odd circumstances but an awful lot of people believe that he is guilty and he and others may still have their day in court.

For the moment we must accept JZ and keep fingers crossed that he will do what he says, which is to deliver and not tolerate incompetence, nepotism or bribery. We will see.

Of course crime remains big here even if the ANC will try and tell you differently. Having said that, however, you will visit here and go away and not see what all the fuss is about. But do not walk into the centre of towns or go blindly into townships nor carry obvious bling to attract would be assailants.

The economy is standing up well under the circumstances but retrenchments are only now happening and the worst is yet to come.

The motor industry here is suffering but they wish to resolve the problem by increasing prices!!

With only 3 million tax payers to 9 million on government hand outs the challenge for the new left wing Government will be to find the cash to pay for all those out of work (possibly 40%), homeless or sick. I suppose the fear is that the soft target i.e taxpayers may have to foot the bill. But once again we will see.

The other large area of concern is education, as the system over the last 15 years of democracy has not produced the skilled black people that the Government needs. They constantly remind us that they do not have enough black judges, engineers, accountants, doctors etc and actively try to fill the posts based upon the demographics of the country.

We know that a quota system does not work.

On the positive side is the huge infrastructure spend that was announced before the global melt down. We have the money and the civil works will go ahead and thus stimulate the economy.

Part of this is the Gautrain that will link up Jhb airport to Sandton and Pretoria. Part or most of it will be open by the WC 2010.

Other 2010 travel was to be via a new fast bus network called the Bus rapid Transport system. A big player here are the thousands of taxis (12 or so seaters) that currently terrorise our streets by way of poor driving, unlicensed drivers or vehicles plus territory wars that end up in shoot outs. Well, they went on strike because they suddenly thought that they might lose out with the BRT and JZ cleverly told them he would review the system after the elections. So this is up in

the air at the moment but I guess we will go to the stadia by bus. But not me as the new buses will not come out our way.

So life here is as busy as ever as history continues to be made and the struggle of a new democracy plays out in front of us.

We wait for the new Cabinet, will Hogan stay as Health Minister and will Manuel still be in charge of the money? Never a dull month goes by.

So cheers again from sunny South Africa.
Wishing you all well in this centenary year.

Alan Shearn