

Painful paperwork

Of course, making use of the outfitter's rifles is perfectly acceptable, but I preferred the idea of using my own Sako .308 in South Africa, and firing my home-loaded 150grn ammunition on my first safari. For those who have little patience for bureaucracy, and perhaps have more sense than me, there is always the option of engaging one of the many firms that exist to arrange the importation and exportation of firearms to and from Africa. But in any event, make sure the airline you choose accepts firearms and ammunition – in airline-approved cases – on board your flight. My first choice of carrier was British Airways, which was fine, but I then discovered the provider of the connecting flight to Port Elizabeth didn't accept firearms. I eventually flew Virgin Atlantic to Johannesburg and then South African Airways onwards to Port Elizabeth.

If you are taking your own rifle, allow at least three hours between flights in order to retrieve your cases, and then to complete the formalities with the police at the receiving port of entry. The policeman in Johannesburg Airport's firearms department looked at all my paperwork, including the 10-page South African Police Service SAPS 520 document, and then held his hand out to me and asked for my export permission from the UK. "What export permission?" I asked, whereupon he produced a dog-eared piece of paper, which under the heading 'UK Border Control' gave a named individual permission to export and re-import their firearm. When I said with false confidence that this was not necessary, he said that I could not bring my rifle into the country without such a paper. Fortunately, I had heard that something like this might happen and I had previously corresponded with the Surrey Police Firearms department, which confirmed in writing that the issue of a UK FAC is in itself permission to do so. On production of this correspondence he relented and I was free to collect my

rifle and ammunition and scoot off to check in for my connecting flight.


On arrival at Port Elizabeth airport I was met by my professional hunter (PH), Craig Done, and we departed for Settlers Safaris' principal lodge some two hours away by road.

Ice-cold beer and some red-hot hunting

On arrival I was handed a cool glass of lager and was generally made to feel very welcome. After a quick introduction to the staff and facilities, I had a shower in my comfortable en-suite room and then went to check zero on the rifle, which even after plenty of rumbustious handling by airport baggage handlers, had remained perfectly adjusted at one-inch high at 100 yards.

The next morning, after a fine breakfast, Craig and I collected his tracker and skinner, Derek, and we drove about 35km to the first of several permissions, seeing many beautiful animals including zebra, giraffes and vervet monkeys along the way. On this piece of land I bagged two warthogs, at distances of 143 and 83 yards respectively. These animals are plentiful and regarded as pests by the farmers, whose fences are frequently disrupted by small groups of them. Derek happily agreed to extract the teeth for me to take home. We then returned to the lodge for dinner and much story telling.

This set the pace for each of the following four days, during which I shot impala, blesbok and another warthog, all in moderately challenging conditions.

It was an amazing experience and one that shall definitely see me visiting Africa again. Compared to commercial stalking prices in the UK, it is extremely good value. The package I was on was all-inclusive for accommodation, catering (including drinks) and five cull animals. Tips for the PH, tracker and lodge staff are extra, but once again guidance is available on the outfitter's website.  Settlerssafaris.com

Top tips for African hunting

- If you have your own rifle in an appropriate calibre and wish to take it, rather than use one provided by the outfitter, you must have a secure airline-approved case and a separate, equally secure ammunition case.
- Before rushing to book air tickets to your ultimate destination, check that the airline, including any connecting flight operators, accepts firearms.
- Allow at least three hours when arriving at the entry port to claim your firearm, complete formalities and obtain a temporary firearms permit.
- For South Africa, I recommend you download and complete – but don't sign – the 10-page South Africa Police Service SAPS 520 form before flying. Then sign it in front of the SA officer.
- A letter of invitation from the outfitter is needed and will be issued when the safari is agreed. A visa may be needed (not for South Africa). You may also need a notarised copy of your passport, a flight itinerary printout and a copy of your FAC (as well as the original).
- I recommend carrying in an accessible pocket some small denomination notes of the local currency. These might be useful for rewarding porters and encouraging airport staff.
- Take enough cash to tip the PH (professional hunter), the tracker/skinner and the lodge staff. Suggested rates are usually available on the outfitter's website.
- Practice shooting off sticks and err on the side of heavier bullets.
- Make sure you have a hat and the right clothing – dark green being favourite – and worn-in boots are a must.
- Camouflage clothing is fine for SA but not in many other African countries.

Warthogs are regarded as pests by South African farmers.

