



Overlanding in Africa

Touring 10 countries in 93 days



Julia Parvin and Shemon Alam, a Bangladeshi couple now living in UAE and Kenya, love adventure travelling. They are now busy planning their next adventure: touring the world on wheels in 2 years.

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JULIA PARVIN

"Overlanding", might be more familiar to Westerners, but it's a concept anyone can embrace. It isn't a typical vacation or guided tour. It's a self-sufficient adventure travel style where one can conquer long distances, exploring for weeks, months, or even years.

Where did our overlanding obsession begin? It wasn't just about pushing our comfort zones; it was a yearning to experience the world on our own terms and to master new skills along the way. Overlanding's greatest allure lies in the freedom – freedom to choose our path, set our pace, and truly connect with the world around us. We believe it's the perfect way to test our limits and discover a deeper sense of self.

Our meticulous planning began with crafting the perfect itinerary, drawing inspiration from must-see destinations and independently researching routes to match our ideal travel style and timeframe.

before returning to Kenya.

We had been to Tanzania before, but this time was different. Instead of tourist spots and guided tours, we sought out the paths less travelled. The roads were rough, the landscapes unforgiving, but there was a beauty in the challenge.

If Tanzania was the start of our journey, Malawi was where it began to take shape. The country is called the "Warm Heart of Africa," for its friendly people. This narrow, landlocked country is home to the magnificent Lake Malawi, stretching two-thirds of its length. At 474 meters above sea level, the 580-kilometre-long lake is also called the "Lake of Stars" for the twinkling lights of fishing boats at night and the mesmerising reflection of stars on its calm waters.

Entering Mozambique, our first stop was the impressive Cahora Bassa Dam. The dam's sheer size and the breathtaking



Once higher than Mt. Kilimanjaro, this ancient volcano collapsed, forming a natural wonder home to diverse wildlife. It is often described as a "natural 7 wonders of the world". In addition to its wildlife, the Ngorongoro Crater is also significant for its cultural heritage. The famous Maasai tribe lives here, keeping alive their cattle grazing tradition for centuries.

As we crossed into Burundi from Tanzania, the weather turned bad. An eerie fog rolled in, shrouding the road to Bujumbura, Burundi's capital. Rain lashed down, and thunder rumbled in the distance, making the treacherous mountain road nearly impossible to navigate. Visibility dropped to near zero, forcing us to slow down and search for a safe place to stay.

After navigating several steep hills, we spotted a hotel perched above the highway, about 35 kilometres from Bujumbura. As Shemon went to check us in, a sudden jolt rocked our car. Before I could react, the vehicle lurched backwards, careening down the dark mountainside. I was still strapped in the driver's seat, the car teetering on the edge of a deep abyss. The realization hit me like a punch – we were one wrong move away from disaster. Shemon's screams brought me back to reality, and he pulled me out through the window. The car hung at a sickening 60-degree angle, threatening to plunge into the forest below.

In minutes, help appeared, but so did looters. The next three days were hectic. Somehow, we managed to call in a crane to pull our car from the precipice and transport it to Bujumbura. Despite all these, we refused to give up. The next 26 days were filled with anxiety and uncertainty, as sourcing parts from overseas became a major challenge. But our determination never wavered, and we finally got our car back on the road.

On April 5th, 2024, after 93 days on the road, we returned to Mombasa. The journey has ended, yet



our feet, we felt truly alive. It was a reminder of the raw power of nature and our place within it – small, insignificant, but still a part of the whole.

Our next destination was Botswana. From the arid Kalahari Desert to the lush Okavango Delta, this is a land of contrasts. Here, we embarked on safaris and saw elephants, lions, and other magnificent wildlife in their natural habitat. Exploring the Okavango Delta in a mokoro, yacht through its intricate waterways is an immersive experience.

Exploring Namibia was like wandering in an alien world. From landscapes to people, this country is full of surprises. From the bustling capital, Windhoek, you can explore the otherworldly Skeleton Coast

This country has so much to offer to someone who wants to explore.

Zambia offered both the highs and lows of our journey. A highlight of this country is undoubtedly a visit to Kariba Dam. This engineering marvel generates power for the region. It also created Lake Kariba, the world's largest man-made lake by volume. The surrounding Kariba Gorge captivates with dramatic landscapes, rugged cliffs, and lush vegetation.

However, our journey took a heartbreaking turn at the Nc'wala ceremony in Chipata, a cultural celebration of the Ngoni people. The theft of our belongings – an iPhone 15 Pro Max, backup hard drives, memory cards, and more – cast a shadow over the experience. Despite relentless efforts to recover them, we returned empty-handed. Though the precious visual records of the journey were lost, the memories are still fresh in our minds.

After setbacks in Zambia, we lifted our spirits by discovering the Isimila

January 2nd, 2024. The day we finally set out from Mombasa, Kenya for a journey that lasted 93 days in which we covered over 20,000 kilometres crossing ten borders. Starting in Kenya, we traversed Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Burundi and Tanzania before returning to Kenya.

The first hurdle was obtaining visas for East and Southern Africa, a task that tested the limit of our – two Bangladeshi passport holders – patience.

Transforming our Lexus 450h into a camper was the next challenge. We spent countless nights measuring and re-measuring, arguing over the best layout. We wanted our vehicle to be both a home and a fortress – something that could carry us through the harshest terrains while offering a sliver of comfort at the end of a long day. The final design, with its lower storage compartment and upper sleeping platform, felt like an extension of ourselves: practical, resilient, and ready for anything.

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views that surround it leave visitors in awe.

Our journey then took a dramatic turn in Zimbabwe, where pothole-ridden roads tested our endurance. Near Harare, tyre damage led to a potential robbery, reminding us of the risks of overland travel. A local helped us change the tyres at midnight and escorted us to safety. This experience highlighted the serious threat posed by Zimbabwe's roads, underscoring the importance of carrying multiple spare wheels.

But then came Victoria Falls, like a gift from the gods. The sight of the mighty Zambezi River cascading over the edge, sending up a roar that could be heard for miles, was enough to make us forget all our troubles. Standing at twice the height of Niagara Falls, Victoria Falls, with over 5 million cubic meters of water cascading over its edge every minute, is a truly breathtaking sight. Standing there, amidst the rising mists and the ground shaking beneath

and the vast Etosha Pan, the world's largest salt pan. Namibia's vast landscape has the world's oldest desert, the Namib, and the hauntingly beautiful Deadvlei, a white clay pan with ancient tree remnants. You can also see the Hoba Meteorite, the largest known on Earth. With only 2.6 million people, Namibia's sparse population contrasts with its rich diversity of indigenous tribes.

Stone Age site near Iringa, Tanzania. Estimated to be 60,000 to 100,000 years old, Isimila's ancient stone tools and towering natural pillars offer a glimpse into early human history in East Africa. Walking through the canyon, we marvelled at nature's incredible creations.

In northern Tanzania, the Ngorongoro Crater, the world's largest intact caldera, shelters one of the most stunning wildlife havens.

the transformation it sparked within us still motivates us. The path had uncovered our fears, our strengths, and our weaknesses. It tested our resolve, forcing us to confront the realities of life in a way we never had before. But it had also given us something invaluable: a deeper understanding of ourselves, and the world around us.

This, truly, is the essence of overlanding.

