



A Sacred Mountain

Maria Dias



I camped once, 25 years ago and swore I would never do it again. Since then, I always told my family, my friends, and even the dog, that travelling is about eating, drinking, and wandering, knowing that in the evening I'll sleep like an angel in the comfort of a fancy room. So, how did I find my 51-year self, hiking, and camping, and hankering for more?

The first time I heard about an expedition to Monte Binga, I surprised myself when I said that I would like to try it. The second time, I surprised myself when I accepted an invitation to join a group of friends that was going to hike it on a four-day tour.

The moment I started to consider the practical side of a three-night stay in an almost deserted mountain, I started to flinch. But it was too late to retreat and as the plans were fixed and the day was approaching, assured by far more experienced friends, my mindset was well settled. I firmly decided to try and enjoy the experience despite the many challenges that I believed that we would have to face. And I am glad I did!

Yes, the typical camping challenges and African setbacks were all there.

The postponing of our departure flight for the next day, transforming our four-day into a three day stay.

The delays and usual stops to fuel the cars during transfers testing our patience.

The need for sneaking into the bushes to toilet for three days and two nights! (Thank God I'm a mother and good habits never leave us...neither the wipes!)

Eating almost nothing more than very basic pasta, canned tuna, and sardines. (Saved by treats that only very forward-thinking friends thought of.)

Drinking untreated water from the rivers knowing that most probably it will make you sick, which would require to sneak deep into the bushes more often. (If I knew, I

would have taken disinfectant tablets, but I didn't!)

The harmless falls on the river's rocks (soft aqua shoes would have made a difference), and the absence of proper emergency equipment that made us feel as if we were walking a tightrope with no net. (Fortunately, between my, and my doctor friend's emergency medicine kit, we were able to solve the few minor issues.)

But there were also the incredible moments and emotions offered by friends and senses immersed in Nature.

The soft talking around the fire. (Oh, yes...we also get cold nights during our pleasant African winter!)

Camping under a shining vault of stars in the most absolute absence of civilization, warmed by a glass of wine. (Thank God we took some bottles with us!)

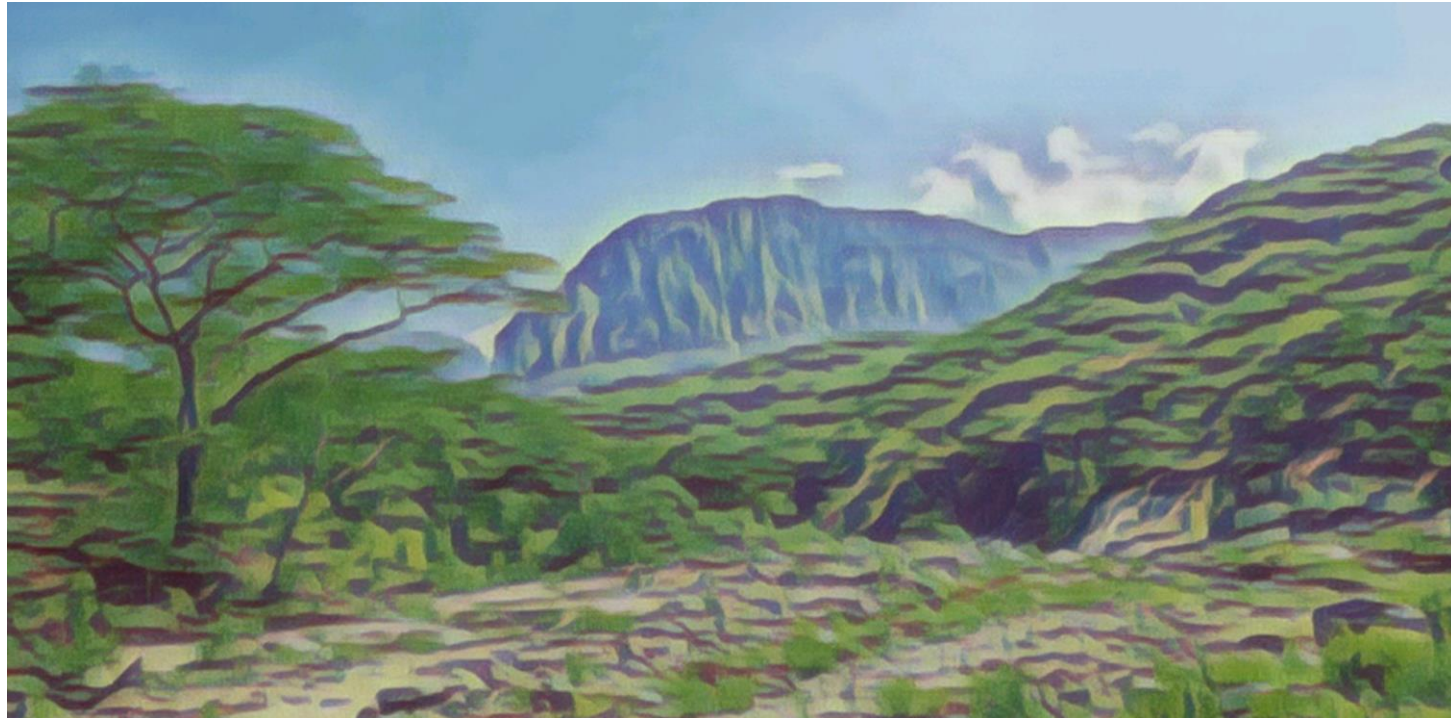
Taking bath in a natural cascade surrounded by the relaxing sound of water and frogs croaking.

Walking during hours surrounded by a permanent symphony of water running nearby, wind blowing, trees cracking, leaves rustling under our feet, birds whistling and crickets and cicadas singing to shoo the heat off their back.



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Listening to the soft cadence of our guides conversations, now in an incomprehensible litany, then in our language to tell us how Monte Binga derives from Monte Dinga which in the local language refers to snakes that used to exist in the Mosquito Camping Base. (“The Portuguese wrongly understood the name and it became Monte Binga.”)

Feeling physically challenged and exhausted and yet experiencing that immense peace allowing the inner conversation of our body and soul, merging to unveil the way up while the majestic mountains look from above defying our senses. (“How the hell am I going to get down,” I was tempted to ask at some points. “Just don’t think about that, it’s surprisingly easier,” assured my experienced friend.)

And finally, that amazing feeling of getting to the top of Monte Binga, the highest mountain in Mozambique, from which you can see the invisible line between two neighbour countries. Freedom, conquest and invincibility mixing in hoorays, relief and a sense of worthiness. All feeling glad we did it, at the very least for the breathtaking view from the top and the brief moments where we got a fragile cellular signal confirming that the world outside still existed.

Nobody gave up, we celebrated in the evening around the fire while we enumerated the motives of our success. Some were more experienced and helped the others to overcome the most difficult challenges. It’s not a difficult route, though at some points it may be challenging for those less used to exercise. The guides were superb despite a few small failures

and setbacks, we claimed, bearing the essential left aside.

“Monte Binga is a sacred mountain to which one can only point with a closed fist,” the Regulo explained when we arrived at the village to meet him and get blessed. Used to such formalities, we greeted him reverently and shook our heads as if we did understand. But it was only after walking in the depths of Nature and humbly remembering how small and fragile we are that we truly understood the wisdom of that ritual.

There were a million opportunities where things could have gone wrong. But we were blessed by the Regulo and welcomed to Monte Binga!

Ends

