



'I'm leaving' for Kirsten and Edwin after an accident with severe aftermath: 'Africa is much better for my back'

BENNEKOM - Kirsten and Edwin Autsema will soon leave their Bennekom place to run a lodge near the Kruger Park in South Africa. They take this big step after a simple accident with serious aftermath sent their lives to zero.

Mathilde of Ravensberg 10-05-20, 10:00



0 COMMENTS

"Zebras and giraffes come right up to the pool. The sun is always present. The country is bursting with cultures. The people are very nice."

Edwin (51) and Kirsten (50) paint a paradisiacal picture of their new living environment with verve.

Delay, no adjustment

The departure to this Eldorado is still a long time coming due to the outbreak of the corona virus. They were actually supposed to go to South Africa on March 30th to take over the holiday residence in Hoedspruit from an Italian couple. That has now been postponed until next week.

But whether the airports will then be open remains to be seen. The couple can handle this uncertainty. Edwin:

„We don't put energy into something that is beyond our power. For the time being, we can still do sufficient preparatory work from the Netherlands.”

'We were laughing at him'

The couple is now able to withstand a bit of adversity. The choice to move to South Africa came at a time when their lives were said to have 'reached zero'.

Edwin, owner of a successful installation and consultancy firm, crashed in 2019 with his son's scooter in the meadow behind their house in Bennekom.

A seemingly simple accident. „We were still laughing at him from a distance”, Kirsten confesses.

Looking death in the eye

But Edwin was found to have seven broken ribs, a broken collarbone and a collapsed lung. After a few days in the hospital, he still had a lung hemorrhage. Three operations later, Edwin appeared to have looked death in the eye.

Once home in Bennekom, Edwin was unable to resume his business. He has to stop and is looking for a good solution for his employees.

“That was very painful,” he says. “A company that I have built up with love in fifteen years, standing empty.”



We have listed for ourselves what we could still do and what we wanted as optimum.

- Edwin Autsema



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'It is a paradise'

Kirsten had also been struggling with her health for some time and had to go under the knife a number of times. It makes them think. There must be bread on the table, but in a different way than before. „We have listed for ourselves what we could still do and what we wanted as optimum.”

Africa came into the picture almost immediately. “This country has been in our hearts since we vacationed there as a family in 2007.”

Edwin: „Before we went there in 2007, my brother-in-law already said 'God created the earth and started in Africa. Then came the rest of the world' and it turned out to be so true. It is a paradise.”

From Bennekom airbnb to African holiday home

The option to start a holiday home there is appealing. They also rent out a number of rooms in their home in Bennekom via airbnb and they like the arrival of international guests. South Africa is a big step, but appears to be an improvement on all fronts.

„The heat”, says Edwin. „ is much better for my still injured back than the Dutch cold and humidity.”



If we hadn't been standing still in our lives, we would never have taken this step.

- Edwin Autsema

And they don't have to run a holiday home alone. The South African government requires companies of this size to hire at least three employees.

No 'I'm leaving'-like scenes

By the end of November, they had both been strengthened enough to make an inventory trip to South Africa. They visit various lodges through a South African broker. The two-year-old complex in Hoedspruit immediately stands out.

„Within five minutes we were sold", said Edwin. They are not afraid of 'I'm leaving'-like scenes with dilapidated buildings. The house has functioned as a well-regarded guest house for two years. Only getting a mortgage took some effort.

South African banks do not want to act as guarantor for non-residents. They eventually succeed through a Dutch bank and can call themselves the proud owner of holiday accommodation The Baobab Bush Lodge.

'They think this is absolutely crazy'

The couple's two adult sons and daughter-in-law remain in the Netherlands.

„But they think this is absolutely crazy," laughs Kirsten. „Rather South Africa than a campsite in France, they don't think that is exciting enough."

The couple is sure about one thing: „If we hadn't stopped in our lives, we would never have taken this step. Then we would have stayed in the flow and continued with our company in Bennekom. Africa would have remained a dream, in the back of our minds."

Named after the baobab tree

The Baobab Bush Lodge is named after the well-known African baobab tree, known for its ability to fill up with water during the wet season before the dry season. „We hope that people here also fill themselves up with a wonderful game experience that they can live on for a whole year," explains Kirsten.

A renovation of the current large house in favor of two extra suites is the only thing they will have to do to their palace. In total, the lodge will have fourteen beds. The holiday accommodation must be operational on 1 June.

The Baobab Bush Lodge is located on the guarded Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate, adjacent to the wildlife resting area. The famous Kruger Park is half an hour away and the Blyde River Canyon is 40 minutes by car.