





AFRICA

Walvis Bay -
N'Djamena - Ljubljana

distance: 8328 km ■ flying time: 33:08

The city of Walvis Bay, meaning Whale Bay in Afrikaans, gets its name from the large numbers of whales that visit the coastal regions due to the abundance of plankton. As it is the only natural harbour protected from the ocean, it has been an important trade point for ships travelling around the Cape of Good Hope for a very long time. Receiving only 10mm of rainfall per year it is one of the driest cities in the world, near which the ephemeral Kuiseb River flows into the Atlantic during rainy periods. The ravine made by the river also forms a natural barrier along which the constant north wind accumulates the largest sand dunes in the world.

My stop in Walvis Bay was wonderful as I had regained some faith in the engine, the airport had high-quality fuel and a friendly air traffic controller gave me some useful tips for flying in this part of the world.

Because of the cold Benguela Current which flows from Cape Point towards the equator, the conditions above the hot desert are similar to those at the Pacific coast of Peru. Therefore, the foggy morning in Walvis Bay did not come as a surprise. The layer of low clouds was relatively thick and persistent, and there was no hope of it clearing up any time soon. After a few wet minutes of flying blind under instrument flight rules I emerged from the clouds which were already clearing up far to the east. I followed the imaginary lines of the flight routes. The clouds did not disappear until I was above the Brandberg, or Fire Mountain, which is famous for its millennia-old paintings made by various Bushman tribes. The sun was high, making the colours of the mountain quite bleak in comparison to the glowing colours that can be seen in the evening from which the mountain gets its name. The Doros Crater also offered but a dull view of grey and brown shades.

The landscape to the north was undergoing visible changes. Everything was already green on the Huíla Plateau in Angola, which lies at an elevation between 1,700m and 2,200m and has a subtropical climate. On the eastern edge lies the old Portuguese colonial city of Lubango, and 1,000-metre-high precipitous cliffs descend all the way to the Namib Desert in the west. The mountainous terrain was soon replaced by the wonderful wetlands of the Quicama National Park and the Cuanza River lying south of the Angolan capital of Luanda, which has a population of 5 million and whose bay was crowded with dozens of ships, making the scene reminiscent of a naval invasion. A good hour and a half later, the enormous 4,700-kilometre-long Congo River appeared at the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The river is the second largest in the world by volume of water discharged and the deepest in the world with depths in excess of 220m, and which also has the greatest potential for hydroelectric generation. It flows through an extensive tropical rain forest, creating vast mangrove forests before emptying into a deep underwater canyon at Muanda. The middle reaches of the river also form a political border between Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo.

◀ 346
S 08 55 14 E 13 15 33
BC = 49 ng/m³

Luanda, the capital of Angola,
with a population of five
million, lies on the Atlantic
coast of Africa.

■ 348
N 07 54 48 E 16 11 45
BC = 360 ng/m³

The grassy southern part of
Chad receives more rain and
has better conditions
for agriculture.

Pointe-Noire is the second largest city in the Republic of Congo and is connected with the capital city by an almost 100-year-old railway, whose construction in the impossible conditions of the tropical rainforests took thousands of lives.

To my great surprise, the air traffic controllers at the Agostinho Neto Airport already knew who I was and where I was coming from. After landing, I was directed to the Aeroclub, where I saw an almost brand new Pipistrel Virus SW parked under the canopy. Julien Benatouil, the owner of the aircraft and a Pipistrel representative, had taken care of the necessary arrangements with the officials and so the entire procedure, including quality fuel and customs formalities, went very smoothly and quickly.

The next leg led across the whole of Congo, Central African Republic to Chad. I departed under instrument flight rules in poor visibility and continued through the layers of rain clouds to an area with somewhat better weather above the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, a vast, uninhabited tropical rain forest lying at the border with Cameroon in northern Congo. The entire region, which includes the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve in the Central African Republic and the Lobéké National Park in Cameroon, forms the Sangha River Tri-National Protected Area (STN).

The view of the impassable forests was indescribably beautiful, but I had not yet forgotten about the engine failure in Namibia. The wreckage of my tiny aircraft would never have been found under the tightly packed canopies, especially if there was no one around with the proper rescue equipment. In the central region of the Central African Republic, the forests gradually thinned out and transitioned into a savannah which quickly turned into a desert to the north. It became quite hot in the cockpit when I encountered a wide belt of bad weather and had to zigzag around to avoid the storms. It was already hot at 2,000m in Chad, and the airport was boiling at a searing 44 degrees. The reason for my landing in the capital city of Chad was fuel, as other suitable airports did not have it. With the help of my online friends and supporters, I was able to come into contact with Mrs. Viviane Memingar who knew someone at the N'Djamena International Airport who supposedly had 200 litres of suitable fuel. By evening, the tanks had been filled with the extremely expensive fuel which sadly appeared to be of dubious quality and highly contaminated.

Because of the high morning temperatures, I climbed slowly above Lake Chad which has lost as much as 90% of its surface in the recent decades, endangering the lives of the 30 million people who depend on this natural reservoir. The climate changes have also caused a decrease in the water levels of the Chari and Logone Rivers which merge near N'Djamena at the border with Cameroon and constitute the main source of water for the terminal lake.

North of the lake lies the endless Ténéré Desert in Chad and Niger, which is part of the southern Sahara and was actually once the bed of the prehistoric Lake Chad. It continues into the Libyan Murzuq Desert to the north, where the visibility improved and revealed the peculiar scenes of Libyan desert agriculture with the centre-pivot irrigation systems around Sabha.

Some 2,300km later, I finally spotted the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea east of Tripoli. 200km before the island of Malta, engine problems turned the flight into a real nightmare. The next day final leg was short, only a good four hours long, but the poor weather in Italy made it seem like an eternity. It was not until I was above the Adriatic Sea that the weather cleared up, allowing me to land safely at the airport in Ljubljana where I had started my journey exactly 100 days earlier.

351 ■
N 24 13 55 E 14 35 29
BC = 23 ng/m³

The southern Libyan Desert
near the Al Wigh military
airfield.

352 ►
N 01 30 23 E 16 12 04
BC = 199 ng/m³

The Sangha River collects the
waters of north Congo, the
Central African Republic and
Cameroon and flows into the
great Congo River.

354 ►
N 04 46 40 E 16 39 35
BC = 125 ng/m³

The town of Chen-Boupane
in the south-west Central
African Republic, in a zone
of transition from equatorial
rainforests to the Sahel.

356 ►
N 09 35 30 E 16 07 05
BC = 370 ng/m³

The Logone River collects the
waters of the Central African
Republic, Cameroon and
Chad and carries them to
Lake Chad.











■ 358
N 11 56 59 E 15 06 37
BC = no data available

The desert of Chad is rapidly spreading south and causing mass migrations and ethnic tension.

► 360
N 26 38 19 E 14 28 33
BC = 15 ng/m³

The ground beneath the Libyan Desert hides enormous quantities of ice-age drinking water, which was discovered while looking for oil in 1953.

► 362
N 35 56 53 E 14 27 50
BC = no data available

The island of Malta is the largest of the three major islands of the Republic of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea.

► 364
N 45 43 00 E 14 26 30
BC = no data available

When the water levels of the intermittent Obrh stream rise, the Loka Field, which lies under the forest-covered northern slopes of Snežnik, transforms into a lake.





