

Mark's Diary – Visit to The Gambia February 2016
2/22: Monkey Park and Maksuto Cultural Forest

Going to the monkey park was not all about the monkeys really. We had been through the tourist “village” which is very crowded with white people who came to get tan. The buildings are different, there are special taxis for the people, and everyone seems to be oblivious to what is truly there. Everything is coming easy to those who come as a tourist. The Gambia is a beautiful place if you only want to see the beach and eat the food, but the real deal is out where the struggling really happens. At the monkey park there were only a few monkeys but the forest and trees were beautiful. Even though this is for tourists and visitors, it gives you a sense on what it's like outside of the city. I wish that those who come and visit for the scenery could look at the people who are around. The Gambians that worked at the hotels or stores in that area, are much different from the ones we saw down by Essa's.



The Bijulo Money Forest in The Gambia. To the far right, Tim and Tammy Straub, our travelling partners in The Gambia. Tammy is a Pediatrician helping farm worker's children in Yakima and Tim is a Microbiologist at Hanford Labs in Richland, WA.

2/23:

Very hot day, it's amazing how people still work in heat like that. I stayed back with the women except for mom and Tammy. The women of the household are always working on cooking or cleaning or washing clothes, and they always seem very energetic. They never seem to sigh or get worn out easily, unlike a lot of people back home who won't work an entire day cleaning.

A very short, lazy day. Eventually had to go to Tim and Tammy's hotel's pool. Getting into water really cooled our bodies down.

2/24:

An early wake up for school. Yay... First we went to Essa's office which is where people are always asking for him. When he says, "in and out in five minutes", it's more like, "in and out in 1 hour." He is the manager so everyone needs him for something. After what felt like an hour, we went to the Baptist School which was very organized, unlike a lot of other schools. We chatted for 15 minutes about how they need to expand or need to get more materials.

Unfortunately, we had to leave for the school that I was going to attend. It was a private high school that was large and almost high class. I only visited one class for 45 minutes but it was a very important class for them. Home Economics which is a class I believe we NEED back at home. Learning how to cook basic meals or learning how to clean is something many don't know. Why do we need to learn stuff that will rarely be of use in our adulthood if we can be learning how to make essential meals? They even have an exam in the class. It's all girls in the class even though some boys CAN take the class. For the exam you are given meal options and you must prepare them in at least two different ways. You write a small, one meal menu for the teacher then present your meal at the end of a two hour period.

2/25:

Essa took us to a Food and Drink Festival for at least two hours. It seemed very disorganized and chaotic. I guess being a white person at a Gambian festival is very odd since nearly everyone would turn to stare. We didn't stay for the concert but Tim and Tammy decided to get tons of food for the house. They got enough food to feed the family for a week after we leave.

After that we went to a rotary club meeting which started late and ended late, but the topics were interesting. Mostly talked about AIDS but they seem to have a good grasp of how to prevent and/or treat. Essa wanted us to go back to the concert but it was 12 at

night and we were tired.

2/26:

Today, we first went to pick out a cow for my naming ceremony. Normally, one would get a chicken or a goat but I'm not very sure why I got a cow instead. We got it for a very good price and it looked healthy. Maybe because my mom is a "big" name, I would get something special. Once that was finished we drove to Makasutu Cultural Forest which was a nature walk/river ride. The river was calm and the sound of kid's laughter was easy to hear. People make a living selling the oysters that grow on the roots of the mangrove trees in the water. The nature walk was lovely. There were a lot of tree roots and bark that can heal many health problems. Kinda makes you think twice on what's in the pills we are given. At a pit stop we saw a "real" fortune teller. We say real because he is spiritual and believes in voodoo. He read my palm and gave me my fortune. (Written in my phone). Then we went home to rest and eat.



Mangrove tree roots growing along a bolong of the river Gambia serve as a place for oysters to grow. Harvested by women and sold along the highways.



This picture was taken from our canoe while traveling along the bolong through Maksuto Cultural Forest.