

Africa 2010

The Trip of a Lifetime

Surina Mehta tells us about her recent adventure to Africa

On 10th July 2010, nineteen girls and two teachers arrived at school, excited about their upcoming African adventure. We arrived safely in Namibia after a long day of travelling, and were greeted by our guide, Vic, and a huge green truck that would be our home for the next seventeen days. After falling asleep under the stars, we woke up next to large sandy mountains. We walked to the top of a mountain (not your average morning walk!) and watched the sun rise over them, which was beautiful.

For our first activity, we arrived at Katora Primary school, a small boarding school in the middle of Namibia, ready to help repair the building and paint the walls. However, due to a lack of communication we had not managed to buy the materials so we helped teach the children instead. This was a unique experience and a way of seeing how well we actually listen in lessons! Whilst trying to teach the children about magnetism, we realised that there was only one magnet in the whole

school so they could not understand the laws of magnetic repulsion, something that we take for granted. That experience was a real eye-opener and made us realise how lucky we really are. However, the children were thrilled to see us and we quickly disrupted the class

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with our cameras as they all wanted pictures taken with us and wanted to play with our hair! We had arrived at the school with boxes of toys, books, pens and pencils; things that we take for granted but are so precious to them.

The children were overjoyed to receive these gifts and performed some traditional songs and dances for us to say thank you. Some girls became quite attached to them and others were reduced to tears after reading the heartfelt letters that the children had written to us.

Our stay in Namibia was an eventful one; we watched seals flop about at Skeleton Coast, rode quad bikes at dangerous speeds in the desert, sand boarded down sand dunes and saw numerous animals; almost every African animal except for a leopard! We also had the chance to stroke cheetahs at the Cheetah Park, and had an intimate encounter with a giraffe who tried to eat our food!

We spent a lot of time travelling in our big blue truck, sometimes stopping for toilet breaks or lunch. One morning we ate our breakfast on the beach, looking out at the clear blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean, an incredible view! We drove through National Parks some days,

seeing many wild animals in their natural habitats. They were often together at the watering hole and one day we saw a family of lions drinking near a group of zebras; Vic, our guide, explained that the reason they were so near each other peacefully was because the lions had killed an animal the day before and were still satisfied with that meat, otherwise this would not have been seen.

Over the duration of our trip, we crossed the borders of Namibia, Botswana and Zambia multiple times, adding to the number of stamps on pages in our passports, something all of us found quite exciting, especially as they were pink!

When we arrived at the Okavango Delta in Botswana, we met a group of polers who sailed Makoros, traditional African boats. We were all poled along the delta to our next campsite, an experience some of us found relaxing, whilst others were more anxious about the number of insects jumping into our boats or the thought of falling into the water! We arrived at a clearing in the land where we would be sleeping for the next two nights. Having been told there was a sandy beach and an open clearing for us to enjoy, we were a little shocked when we saw hippo excrement and creepy crawlies on the ground that we were meant to be sleeping on! However, it was experiences like this which helped us deal with (and sometimes laugh about) everything that was thrown at us during the trip, like trying to chase a mouse out of our cabin and having to sleep with a gecko on the wall.

We went out on the delta in the Makoros and watched the sun setting over the trees, another beautiful view that really made us appreciate the beauty of nature. Some of us had the chance to try poling one of the Makoros; it really is not as easy as it looks!

After going on another safari and seeing a herd of elephants stampede towards the river, we went on a river cruise where we saw other animals such as crocodiles, rhinos and hippos and also came very close to a baby elephant which kept falling over!

Next we went to the final country included in our visit, Zambia. Here we visited the Victoria Falls, one of the largest waterfalls in the world. Just the spray from the waterfall was enough to soak our clothes through as we stood on the viewing platform! This part of our trip proved the most exciting. Some of us had the most spectacular views of the waterfall from a helicopter ride, others went zip-wiring onto Victoria Falls Bridge and some daredevils even went for a bungee jump! I shouldn't forget to mention the elephant back safaris we went on or the chance we had to go 'walking with lions'!

During the last part of our trip we visited an orphanage, a truly humbling experience. We arrived with teddy bears for the children, which they very much appreciated. A lady proudly showed us around the orphanage and we saw where the children sleep, eat and wash their clothes, as well as a solar energy powered oven which was very impressive.

She showed us a building that had been built for the older girls and funded by some past visitors to the orphanage. There was a small living space, a kitchen and some bedrooms and she told us that this helped to make the girls more independent. However, although these facilities were very good, they were still lacking basic products such as deodorant and face wash. We, as girls of similar ages, felt that personally we could help them by raising money and sending boxes of basic products to them every so often and possibly help the boys in the orphanage too by raising enough money to complete the building work of a house for them as well.

I think it is safe to say that we all thoroughly enjoyed our trip, making new friendships and learning a lot about ourselves along the way. We had a chance to see the 'real Africa', whilst also having a great time accomplishing things that we would never otherwise do, and we will all remember this experience for the rest of our lives!

