

## A Kenyan Excursion

Long and uncomfortable are the only words I can use to describe my first international flight. I started this trip off the wrong way by eating some questionable food at the Atlanta airport and paying for it the entire way to Nairobi. But my discomfort was overcome with excitement as we arrived in the very hot Jomo Kenyatta airport. Our transport from the airport was unfortunately delayed due to an accident so we got to do some people watching while waiting. I find it funny that no matter where you go the attitude of the airport personnel never change. I thought that rudeness was a strictly American and European occurrence, but it isn't.....everybody that works in the airline industry is rude. Once John and Phillip arrived, I was immersed in Nairobi, Kenya during our ride to the University. I found myself staring out of the window just looking and observing my new surrounds the entire time we were driving to our new home. After about an hour, we arrived at Kenyatta University and met John's family for the first time. Jill and I stayed up late chatting with Jay and Nancy and getting to know our new roommates. The next morning I woke up around sunrise, which is unusual for me because I usually like to sleep in. But once everyone was up and awake, we headed off to the American Embassy to send some emails home to let friends and family know that we had arrived safely. Security is very tight around the embassy as it should be because the former embassy was attacked a number of years back. It was a nice experience and I thoroughly enjoyed the high speed internet. For lunch we went to a local restaurant in the city and I had some excellent tilapia over a bed of rice and a couple of currant flavored fantas....which are delicious. We arrived home early in the afternoon and lounged around for the rest of the evening. The next morning we headed off early to Westlands in which contains a nice row of curio shops. We walked up to the school gates to catch our first matatu, which is a Toyota minivan that holds 14 passengers, but very frequently holds 16-18 passengers. Saying it is crowded is an understatement. Things went well for Jill and I as we are the newbies, but Kitty and Jay both got pick pocketed. Fortunately they didn't lose a whole lot of money so we proceeded to the market. I really enjoy going to the local markets and haggling the price of items down, it was kind of like a game to me. I picked up a number of items for friends and family, I decided to wait to make any big purchases for myself until I got a chance to look around a little more. This turned out to be a good decision as I later landed some pieces that I really enjoy. Unfortunately we had to leave earlier than intended as Jill fell sick, probably due to a combination to the heat, dehydration, and the new surroundings. Luckily I had brought a bottle of water and we were able to get her to feel a little better while we waited for a taxi to take us home. We went to bed early that night as we were waking up early in the morning to go on a safari. As morning arose, we fought traffic heading towards Nairobi National Park with our matatu driver Mohammed. We arrived there and the park is beautiful. We saw many animals including giraffes, baboons, hyraxes, many ungulates, and even a rhinoceros. After spending many hours riding around, we headed towards the Rothschild Giraffe Preserve where we got to hand feed giraffes and in Nancy's case, got to mouth feed the giraffes. They are very beautiful and gentle animals and was definitely an experience I will never forget. We also visited the Kazuri bead center where they handmade the bead necklaces, and earrings. It was very neat to see and I picked up Alex a very pretty necklace with the matching earrings. Our last and my favorite stop of the day was at the Ngong Hills which are located in the Great Rift Valley. Words cannot describe the view I was given looking down into the valley at the cradle of life. My pictures don't give it justice and hopefully my mental images will stay with me for the duration

of my life. We ended the day with a visit to Carnivore which is a very nice restaurant that serves game meat when available. I had camel, ostrich, and crocodile meat. It was quite tasty and the camel meat was by far my favorite. Afterwards we retired for the evening while preparing for the research trip in the morning. We woke up early to go to Rachel's Orphanage which is right outside of Thika. It was there that we collected samples from HIV positive women. It was a sad sight there and the facilities there are not fit for animals. The next day we made our first attempt to go to Mombassa. We were unfortunately stuck in traffic not too far out of Nairobi and after a few hours a decision was made to head home and try again on Monday. Monday turned out to be much more pleasant trip and I thoroughly enjoyed the scenery while traveling through Tsavo, which is the Northern tip of the Serengeti. We saw many animals including a very large Bull elephant, zebras, baboons, and other ungulates. We stayed in a hotel in downtown Mombassa and had some very nice tilapia for dinner. The next day we traveled out of the city to visit a Government hospital which housed a Schistosomiasis clinic that we took a tour of. We also visited the beach and I had my first experience in the Indian Ocean. It was beautiful and we got to observe many marine creatures in the coral reef right off shore. There was a small gathering of locals on the beach observing us and waiting for us to come back to shore so they could attempt to sell us their goods. After having our fun on the beach, we headed back to Mombassa and Polycarp, Jill, Pearl, and I went to a local market to check out some of the goods. We ended up getting bombarded with people and had to leave earlier than intended. Afterwards we headed over to an internet café to send a few emails home. That night we ate at the same hotel restaurant and I had to get the fish again....its just too damn good. A few of us stayed up late enjoying some smirnoffs and good conversation. We headed to Malindi the next morning, which is a large tourist town with some very pricey mzungu curios. I didn't purchase anything there, but there was a lower class curio shop across from our hotel where I picked up my first mask for 3,100ksh and it is still my favorite. We ate at a fine Italian restaurant that night called I love pizza....which in America would indicate a sub par restaurant, but this one was a fine Italian restaurant with great food and service. We headed home the next day and had to endure the long ride home. Luckily we were bound for a weekend of relaxation at Canini's the next day and that made me feel very well rested. They basically wait on you hand and foot there and fed us 3 times a day with countless cups of tea and biscuits. We had a very nice time as we were accompanied by Liz and Dr. Otieno and his family. On Saturday we visited a carving center where a lot of the things we see for sale at the market is carved. It was really cool to watch the workers carve off those very detailed figures. We headed home Sunday and before heading to the Otieno's residence for tea, we stopped by the Masai Market at the yaya center. I picked up two more masks for myself and it was one of the first times in Kenya that we saw a sizeable number of mzungus. We then had dinner at the Otieno's house and we sat and visited for a while. We returned home for a good nights rest. Tuesday Pearl, Jay, Jill, and I visited the large Masai market and made a number of purchases while enjoying the hectic atmosphere. The next day we visited two research institutions, the first being ICIPE, which is an insect physiology center dealing with many tropical diseases and ways of their prevention. After a presentation we toured the facilities and watched silk cocoons get processed. After lunch we proceeded to the primate research center with Dr. Otieno who was once a member of the research team. The rest of the evening was spent preparing for our trip to Mt. Kenya in the morning. Only Jill, Jay, and I went and we woke up early to catch our matatu at the gate. After a long journey, we finally arrived in the afternoon and after getting acquainted with our guides, we began our 12km hike to the camp. It was a hard experience, but once I got acclimated to the altitude, I seemed to do much better.

We capped off our day by taking a swim in a 10C stream to supposedly acclimate ourselves to the cold. Whether or not our guides' views are correct is up for debate, but the experience was invigorating for me. Only myself and Jill braved the waters as Jay opted to stay nice and warm. After recovering from the bitter cold, we ate dinner and chatted with our companions into the night. The next morning we were up bright and early for breakfast and to start our hike. We then started our 16km hike to a rock climbing site high on the mountain. We started off with an amazing sight of a herd of zebra grazing around a pool of water. It was refreshing to see mother nature in all of her glory. We spent most of the day hiking and after about 12km, I was done with hiking and was able to drive around the range rover that one of our guides had driven to meet us for lunch. Jay and Jill hiked on a little further and I met everyone there with the vehicle. Jill decided she was done as well as Jay hiked the distance to the climbing site. I probably had the most fun driving the range rover and getting to do some rock crawling. After a long fight with the rocks, we decided we couldn't drive any further and we turned the truck around and started hiking again. Unfortunately it started raining pretty hard when we reached the climbing site and we were unable to climb. So we had to hike down the mountain in the rain and luckily we had turned the vehicle around or we would have had to camp out there. After battling the rocks again to get out, it finally stopped raining and I got to drive all the way back to camp...it was awesome. We changed clothes, dried our boots out and sat around the fire for the rest of the night. We left the next day and our damn matatu driver didn't show up to pick us up. So we had to hitch a ride back to Nanyuki where our guides found and negotiated a taxi for us to take us to the University. On our way back we stopped at a nice curio shop and attempted to negotiate a price a nice fetish with bronze stuck in it, but they wouldn't budge. We arrived back at home and after taking a nice long shower we called George and he took us to village market so we could get some Chinese food at Ro Ro's. The next day Jill and Jay went grocery shopping and we cooked Jill breakfast and dinner because it was her birthday. Polycarp and Elvis joined us for dinner and they seemed to like my American cooking. The next day we went to Westlands and made a few purchases and then had a delicious lunch at the Serit center. I had my first hamburger in weeks there, it wasn't as good as home, but it did the trick. The rest of the group arrived home from Lake Nakuru later that evening. The next day we went and had lunch with the AIDS Control group students on campus. It was a very good experience and we had a lot of fun. The next day we saw a presentation on the relationship between a woman's number of pregnancies and the occurrence of malaria. Thursday we went back to Westlands for one last hoorah and ate lunch again at the Serit Center. Friday we layed around the house most of the day and that night Jill, Jay, and I went out to village market with our driver George. We had a fine Italian meal there and then indulged ourselves (especially me) in some fine Kenyan smirnoffs. The next day I did my final preparation for leaving as our flight left at 10pm that night Pearl left the previous day, Jill and I left Saturday, John, Kitty, and the kids left Sunday, and Jay and Polycarp left the following week. Our ride arrived around 5:30pm and we said our final goodbyes to everyone and we got to smell Githurai one last time before we headed home.