

Johnny's Dairy from Kenya

Johnny Downing

Clara Bell Downing's Educational Foundation/Johnny Downing's experience

Just wanted you to know, I made it safe and sound to and from Kenya. It's as beautiful as I imagined. I have posted many pictures on F/B but nothing more than being there can tell the whole story. I still have trouble believing I was there.

Days 1-4

I have just returned this weekend from a two week from "you know where" and thought I might just share some of my experiences.

Day 1; made it in at midnight with an hour travel from airport to the hotel (Sunstar Nairobi)

First of all I might address my security concerns. On arriving in Kenya (Nairobi), I have to say that I was very weary. I planned to sleep with a knife under my pillow but have to say within minutes I was at ease and never once thereafter felt unsafe, I actually felt quite foolish that I had taken my knife and put it securely away. I was well looked after by the company in my present, more on that later. The Capital City mall we visited was security checked with armed guards at all the doors. Kenya has suffered a loss of tourism of late according to all I asked, but I would urge people to reconsider changing their plans to visit the capital city (Nairobi) of this country; best place I have ever visited in my life time. I was majorly excited to hear a lion roaring outside my hotel one evening; we were also visited by monkeys and zebras, all quietly shooed away by the hotel guards on duty each night.

Most nights were spent at the Sunstar hotel in the city of Nairobi as a pit stop and it was very comfortable. However, while visiting the children at their schools and later at their homes, I spent nights at the world famous Izaak Walton Inn, were everything I had dreamed about was at my disposal. The service was fantastic, food fabulous and one of the nicest hotels I have ever stayed in.

Day 2; traveling to see what the town has to offer.

Then onwards for a day safari searching; my team leader recommended we start on day one with a visit to the Nairobi National Museum. The decision was the perfect one for me. I was able to see the wildlife of what I was expected to see later but in real life form. While at the museum I was able to see such animals as; Rhinos, elephants, lions and giraffes, cheetahs, leopards and hundreds of other animals including their history which blew me away. The museum tour guide used was one of the Maasai

warriors whose depth of knowledge was immense and vastly superior to all other guides who were from all over Kenya.

From the museum I visited the snake pit, where hundreds of snakes brought in from all over the plains blew me away. Also included in this area were, exotic turtles and large size crocodiles.

Day 3;

Travelled into the Mara main reserve where my driver now acted as tour guide.

On the many occasions where I was lucky enough to be the only viewer of a private moments including a mother elephant nursing her calf. I basically stuck to a 10minute rule as I felt privileged to view these moments but felt that any longer would have been intrusive.

One thing I absolutely loved about the tour experience was the impact the tour guides, being professional or just as my driver acting as a tour guide; equally has had the same impact on the local community. I talked to many local people and I were delighted that the policy is to employ people as part of the conservancy agreement from the local community and they were very proud to be associated with any tour being conducted. I saw with my own eyes the school, clinics and water wells built with money from the provided tourism for the local community. The village elders I met proudly showed me their village and livestock.

I was delighted with the majority of the company I met through most of my travel. I was astonished to know the company I traveled with were named; Peter, Paul and John. Later I was joined by Moses and Abraham.

Day 4; Fun day at Historical Park (similar to our state parks).

It was off to the area which is called Hell's Kitchen, which has a mother load of history behind it. It turned out to be an obstacle course for me; lots of hill climb, rock dogging, and heart pounding sweating from running to the next obstacle. I later was informed it was a place where the special elite soldiers such as the African special forces used as a training site for conditioning.

This was a once in a lifetime experience for me, it was well researched and met all my expectations. In Kenya country people have smiles as wide as the Mara, so proud, so friendly and so very eager to help.

I learned from my tour guide/driver; Kiswahili is the national language and English is the official language. Most people from this country are well conversant in both English and Kiswahili. There are over 42 ethnic languages spoken, the most known being Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kalenjin. The urban youth have developed sheng which is delivered from a combination of the above languages.

Wow what excitement in my first 4 full days in Kenya. I had a blast learning and just observing the culture. Such a wonderful start. I posted a few picture from a few places I attended to include a culture dance; which was out of this world; a must see for anyone traveling to Kenya. Wow real cultural dancing and it was not just shake a leg hahahaha

Days 5-10 head for the world famous Izaak Walton Inn located in the city of Embu

Day 5; Presentation and awards given to students who have overly achieved academic standard at St Mary's Elementary school; grade 1 through grade 8.

Another great day in Kenya. I had a chance to visit and give out some gifts of love to the students of St Mary Elementary. These children are so bright and smart but are in much need for support to just get a good education. I didn't really feel as blessed as a child until after today. American children don't know how blessed they are. Here are children walking more than 3 miles to and from school, daily just to attend school, many don't even have shoes. Their school doesn't even have a floor, only dirt or broken concrete. However, the joy on their faces you would think they were attending a great university. It was a bitter and sweet day. I love these people.

Day 6; Visited the homes of children living in poverty stricken areas but desiring to obtain their education.

Another bitter sweet day of helping in school. So much help needed. I haven't heard so much sadness in my life. Just to share a short story of what's going on here. Visited families where both parents had died from the AIDs virus and where the mothers had abandoned the children leaving them to fend for themselves at age eight. There's no one to help or willing to help but their already poverty stricken grandparents and the church.

Day 7; Continued visits to the homes of children living in poverty stricken areas but desiring to obtain their education.

It's been a week today in this land. I am still shocked at everything I see from day to day. However, I like to say, the people here are very proud and hard workers. They are not asking for handouts but help and directions on how to have a better life. The principle of; "give a man a fish, he will eat for a day but if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for a life time". That's exactly what we are starting to do here, teach them things that will help them for a life time. My sister had a vision as a little girl to help the children of this land. Well with the help of God and the vessel that God has chosen me to be, the vision from over 40 years are now coming true. My sister is given honor today as a visionary for the Lords work.

Day 8; Continued visits to the homes of children living in poverty stricken areas but desires to obtain their education.

Just had a wonderful visit with the bishop and priest of St Mary Catholic church. Had such a great time with men of God from another faith. It was great to get a firsthand experience of how others worship without showing prejudice towards another man worship and beliefs. These men may be of another faith but they are true worshipping men of God. Reason I know, because Jesus himself said that we should love one another that men may know you are his disciples and these men of the catholic faith have shown me nothing lacking of love since day one here in this land. Funny to know their names were

Paul, Peter and John. Also the assistance drivers names were Moses and Abraham. So I have been walking with apostles all this time and didn't notice until today. Wow!!! God is greatly to be praised.

Day 9; Sunday; had to get my church flow on.

Just returned from a first-time real African church, had myself a good old-fashioned time. It reminded me of when I was a child. It was the Church of God of this city. They made me feel so special as a visitor; they changed their service to English-language while the interpretation was in their own language. It doesn't get any more special than that. They really know how to treat a guest, made me feel like being among friends. Great service, singing and preaching. The pastor even allowed me to take a picture with him after inviting me into his studies.

Day 10; Transition from work to vacationing.

A day of travel back to the city of Nairobi to do some shopping and prepare to head back to America.

Day 11-13

City life and party time. Work was great and clubbing with these people was an experience I will always remember. They really know how to party. No one knew my age so I had no problem blending in with the younger people and shake a leg or two. I knew my old butt would pay for it later. You all pray for me; don't judge but I wanted the entire experience. Africans don't just work every day; they do have fun also. I didn't do everything I saw them do, However, I was surprised to witness, they played all types of music in their clubs, to include church music. The song "When Jesus says yes, nobody can say No" had to have played over 5 times in the two hours we were present at this club called Avengers. Furthermore, this song brought more people to the dance than any other song.

Day 12; Shopping for gifts to bring home. What a day....

Wow another meaning was discovered for the name bargaining. It was obvious by the locals that I was an American the moment I opened my mouth. Now you talking about the stakes being raised by everyone under the sound of my voice; the price just went up a 800% higher. Wow; Thank God for Moses and Abraham which are traveled with me. I did not understand what they were saying; however, I knew from the expressions on the salesmen and saleswomen they were not going to let these folks rip me off. Example; 6 very beautiful paintings were offered to me for the price of about 700.00 but when the haggling was all said and done, I got them for about 100.00. Before the day ended I was bargaining a bit myself. I never knew shopping could be so much fun.

Day 13; packing and relaxing.

Well of course with all the new additions I had acquired from shopping, I knew I had to pack smart because the airports are hectic enough. However, I managed to get everything in 2 bags and within weight limit restrictions.

Day 14; Heading home is another bitter/sweet moment. Hard to leave an experience behind.

Up bright and early, headed to the airport at 5am in the morning. Not looking forward for this 19 hours of flight to get back home and adjust to the complications of modern changes.

Back home and safe; now long hot bath and some seafood.....

As I take a longer than ever shower; I can only reflect back on one of the greatest chapters in my life.

The places I attended; some many in such a short time; can't be put on paper. Words just can never justly or give the right verbiages to what I have seen in the last 14 days; it's a must see for yourself.

The people I meet while in Kenya; astonishing and a lifelong friendship has begun. People such as Paul, Peter, John, Moses and Abraham will never be forgotten. I look at all the names I have come across and I say "God has a plan"

In conclusion;

Glad to be back home... this land was a real eye opener right! No matter how much one may have traveled in the U.S. going outside always seems to put things into proper perspective (words from a friend on FB). I believe that what I have done is a worthy cause; May God get all the glory.

As most of you have already heard me say this; my sister is the visionary behind the work being done in Africa. Her vision started as a young child to help the children of Africa; walking up to 3 miles to put a small amount of cash in the mail to aid in feeding the children of Africa. She has always felt the connection to Africa. With the directions and enablement of God will, the vision is being fulfilled. Honor to my wonderful and beautiful sister, who along with the will of God has chosen me as the vessel to go to Africa to do the Lord's will.

Thank you Africa (Kenya) for a beginning of a true friendship.

Johnny Downing