

Daisy Swiers' Story



When I received the email from Northumbria University with the news that I had received the bursary to travel to Kenya, my trip was now a reality. The only thing stopping me now was the rest of the money which I had to raise. I began by getting extra hours at my part time job and organised dinner parties for family and friends, and after a lot of hard work my trip to Kenya was getting closer and closer.

I arrived in Kenya, flying from Heathrow to Nairobi and then to Mombasa, where I met the other 6 volunteers and our guide 'Big Nige'. We were taken to our first destination of Diani Beach staying at our cottage 'The Lobsterpot', our most luxurious stay of the trip, in the fact it had a flushing toilet! Driving to Diani was breath taking not only because of Kenya's beautiful climate but because of the whole culture shock, the poverty but also because of the friendliness of the welcoming people.

The next day we were woken early and taken to meet our Scuba Instructor, Christian who would show us the ropes and then we'd be able to get our PADI licence to scuba anywhere in the world. The next couple of days we learnt what to do in an emergency, how to use the equipment and had several theory lessons too. In the time we weren't diving we spent taking in some of the culture and enjoying the beautiful beaches laden with shacks where the local people would sell souvenirs. After many days of the men hassling us to buy stuff we went back prepared to barter and managed to get a bowl for about £3 which they thought was a fortune. In the evenings our cook, Mohammed treat us to some delicious Kenyan cuisine as well as a few home comforts too.

On the fourth day we set off at 6am to dive in the ocean for the first time, the sea was so rocky and half way out we rescued some fishermen whose boat had capsized and they had been out at sea for a day! We finally got diving and saw some wonderful wildlife; sea turtles, octopus; lion fish to name a few. We dived again the next day; it was a remarkable experience and learnt a skill which I can now use for life. The diving week was over and ready to do some real work.

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The journey from Diani to Kasigau took about 7 hours and we stopped at Fort Jesus, the old town of Mombasa for some lunch and sightseeing around the fort, which is where the slave trade took place. We arrived in Kasigau and it was like another country from Diani, dry, hot and the people were different too, smaller and thinner from malnourishment, but just a friendly and welcoming. The village where we stayed, Makwasingi, was the final village around Mount Kasigau to receive a nursery and school. The man in charge of all this was Charles Coleman once a volunteer like me was so taken in by it has now completed 7 schools in the area as well as nurseries and libraries and is the biggest employer in the area.

We arrived at our Banda at the top of the village which was purpose built for volunteers and perfectly adequate but very, very basic, with no flushing toilet! We explored the village met by such friendly and welcoming people pointing at us, 'The Wasingu', the 'white people'. The school was finished and we saw the nursery and library which we would be painting for the next week.

Each day we would wake up at 6am and work until 12pm and worked as any other worker in the village the man in charge of us was called Gift, very friendly and we he was in charge of the painting of the buildings. The motto of the workers was 'Yes we can' the words of Barac Obama, as his grandfather was Kenyan and this gave them much hope. The first few days we painted the nursery until the 3 base coats were put on we also varnished the floors and painted the outside. The work was tough especially in the hot weather however the school children would come and sing to us and on a few occasions helped us with the painting too. The children who were aged between 3 and 14 were polite and welcoming they taught us songs and some Swahili, on one afternoon we organised a football tournament, where they well and truly nailed us!

On our final day in the village the women volunteered to help us move bricks from one building to another, it was amazing they carried them on their heads! One of the volunteers, Charlie got stung by a scorpion whilst doing this as it was hiding in the brick. To thank the village for their kind hospitality we paid for two goats to be killed, some rice and beans to be provided for the families in the village. We were placed at a 'top table' in front of the whole village with Charles and the Head Teacher, the women of the village sang and danced to thank us, which was lovely.

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From leaving the village we managed to finish a library complete with illustrations of the alphabet, numbers and nursery rhymes on the walls. We also finished decorating the library and varnishing the bricks outside each of the buildings. The whole experience although such hard work was well worth it, we provided them with much needed facilities which will benefit the education of the Children. The people who we worked with were kind and generous even though they had very little. I believe that the voluntary work opened my eyes to the real poverty of Kenya yet how happy people can be when really they have nothing, the men we worked with were paid 50Ksh per week which is about 50 pence.

Our next week was spent on Safari we arrived back In Nairobi for a night at the camp site and were picked up the next morning and taken to Nakuru National Park for the day and camped a few miles away from there. The Nakuru Safari was amazing to see animals such as Leopards, Rhino, Giraffes... in their natural environment.

After spending the night in Nakuru we went onto the Masai Mara, where we would spend the next 3 nights, the journey was about 6 hours and it was amazing to see the diversity of land and people in Kenya from wealthy to poor, dry land to fertile land. One thing remained the same was the positivity and friendliness of the people. We arrived at the Mara campsite which was next to a Masai tribe village (about the tribe) we were staying in small tin huts, and again the toilet was a long drop, which we were used to by now. The showers were also small huts it was really surreal we were surrounded by animals roaming free and had to be with the guides constantly for our own safety on one occasion I went for a shower and there was a snake in the shower – pretty scary! We had to make sure our huts were locked otherwise the monkeys would go in and steal food. It was amazing. The Mara is the largest national park in Kenya and one of the most famous in the world, and I was very fortunate to see and be in such an incredible environment. Within the Mara we saw everything you could imagine, we saw a pride of Lions, cheetahs kill an impala an 20 metre python as well as hundreds of zebra, elephants, warthogs and so on.

On our final days we were taken up to the Tana River where we white water rafted in two groups, we went down a huge waterfall and swam, in what we later learnt were Hippo infested waters. Later that afternoon we were given the option of doing a bungee jump over the river, which was something I thought I would never do but confronted my fears and dived down. The experience was crazy, and not something I would do again but a lot of fun at the time. All in all this is one of the most if not the most memorable trip of my life and I have gained skills that and seen and done things which I may never experience again all because of my travel bursary. The experience has gained me team work skills as well as interpersonal and gained me much confidence into meeting new people and working in diverse environments.