

african adventures

by Sam Willcocks

The word 'safari' means 'journey' in Swahili, a beautiful main language of several countries in East Africa. Safari; most people think of lions and giraffes, elephants and buffalo, bumping along past herds of zebra across the savannah in an open top four-wheel-drive. Though when I hear the word 'safari', I think of the momentous journey, both inside and out, that I have experienced on my African Adventures.

Of course there is the physical expedition, halfway across the globe with three kids and a baby in tow. The airport checks, giant aeroplanes, shiny airports, turbulent transfers and many public toilet escapades (seriously it can be possible to fit five humans in a tiny cubicle) all becomes a distant memory when settled back into the village of our Kenyan family.

Once on African soil the adventures take a new twist of unknown time frames, unexpected outcomes and

immeasurable joy. The loud rattling of the small plane that flies us from Nairobi to Kisumu stirs up emotions of excitement and reminds me to trust in who we are and what we have chosen to do.

Landing near the shores of the great lake Victoria (the beginning of the river Nile) we are collected by my brother-in-law and drive two hours to the village. Roaming down bumpy dirt roads in the dark with the seven of us plus over 200kg's of luggage squished into his sedan.



Children sleep on my lap and shoulders as I balance a suitcase with my foot. Each bump sends us flopping forwards but we soon reshuffle and snuggle up. Even I have few seconds of snooze here and there (we had been travelling over 30 hours straight) before my chin fell down onto my chest and I awoke with a start.

Soon I can see familiar trees... the school... the little mud huts... and we are back with the smiling faces of our family. It is very late so we carry the children inside and nestle in under the mosquito nets.

Progressing parallel to our adventure is the inner journey out of my usual comfort zone and into the depths of my own conditioning, a voyage through judgments and fear, arriving at a place of peace and compassion.

On the surface, in a village with no

electricity, and water that is pulled up from a well using a bucket and rope, it is easy to see poverty; and that can be sad and challenging to experience. But after spending more time with the people of Nyangidi village I cannot deny the true wealth at the heart of their existence.

Families live close together and spend most of their days outside in nature - gardening, cooking, sweeping the dirt floor with a broom made of twigs. It seems much easier to find contentment when faced with a lifestyle of simplicity.

I experienced many positives from living this way for two months. My body grew stronger from carrying 40 litres of water up a slope several times a day. My life-force energy became alight from all the

Adventures into town by motorbike



Some cultural school kids wear their new t-shirts from a Taiwanese friend and supporter of traditional cultural preservation.



In a place where they are being told, "west is best", we would like to sing loud and clear, "we value your culture and you should too!"

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singing and dancing and the intensity of joy to be found in so many faces.

On our return back to Australia I was hit with severe culture shock. Our six-year-old said it well, “why does everyone here have a grumpy face?” It felt so strange to pre-arrange meeting with friends, to be driving everywhere, to see the chaos, confusion and varying degrees of depression that is characteristic of our modern consumer culture. A cascade of questions, why are things so different? I came up with a concept: the continuum of coexistence.

In the village, people of all ages co-exist in all realms of life that ebb, flow and unfold organically. Grandmothers and grandfathers are vibrant and still very much part of the community. Friends visit each other all the time, without invitation.

They may not have many material possessions but children play freely and chase chickens. However, in our more ‘developed’ country this continuum of coexistence is often so complex it is fragmented and in state of flux. We have friends and family all over the country. A different group for school, work, clubs, neighbourhood and so on.

It does make a rich and colourful life but I find myself wondering, could we be more content with less? Is simplicity the key? When it all falls away, I find peace sitting under the mango tree, watching little ones climb above me looking for their morning tea.

When on our most recent African adventure we were engaged in Community Classrooms Collaborative projects that included permaculture education, cultural school, the Rafiki Penpals program, and hosting two Aussie volunteers on their ‘gap year’.

Other highlights of our African adventure include family, food, building a mud brick and cement house, and witnessing the birth of twins in the bed next to me while in hospital overnight with malaria.

A combination of this soul-strengthening safari and the return to Australia has led to transformation inside and out and a commitment to continue the journey.

Elders of Nyangidi have given permission to host village immersion experience trips for foreigners to visit and volunteer their skills while living in community and learning traditional drum, dance, songs, cooking, basket weaving, permaculture and more.

The benefits here are threefold. Firstly, the visitors from overseas can have a life changing experience and hopefully take some of that back to influence the positive, holistic growth of ‘Western’ societies.



Volunteer, Alice, making friends with the monkeys



Alice having her life changed, one hug at a time.

Secondly, participatory sustainable development projects receive a boost of resources – financial, time and energy – to reduce poverty and enhance quality of life in the village.

Thirdly, the cultural validation that occurs when tribal people see ‘Westerners’ coming to experience and enjoy their cultural way of life and learn traditional arts is magical and can help reduce the homogenisation and infiltration of our unhealthy ‘modern’ society.

Participants can enjoy traditional African culture as well as some popular safari destinations. We plan to hold the first Village Immersion Volunteer Experience (VIVE) trip in 2015, please contact us if you are keen to join in!

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Sam is an evolving entity enjoying this earthly experience. She is a optimist, mother, writer, futurist, co-founder of Community Classrooms Collaborative, Freed-OM Family Dance teacher and student of life with a yearning for learning. She was born in England and is now based in south east Queensland though regularly spends time at ‘home’ in Kenya and Taiwan. She loves nature, adventure, playing guitar and spending time with her kids.

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