

# The West African Research Center--- Our Baobab Tree

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During our one-month study of Senegal, we had an experience unlike any other because of the very thorough planning and implementation by the West African Research Center (WARC). This host agency was our link to everything Senegal ! They scheduled our itinerary prior to arrival, met us at the airport, and served as our guide and interpreter during our entire stay! They provided our classroom for daily Wolof language instruction and for visits from expert guest lecturers on a multitude of topics. The staff prepared and served our daily mid-day meals and washed our clothes, while our guide oversaw each day's events and all travel outside of the city of Dakar which was our home base. WARC made our experience what it was; they were our life line---our tree of life while in Senegal each individual there, from the center director and guide to supporting staff. *As I say this*, I am reminded of the ancient African baobab tree and it's life giving purpose for the people of that land. *As I write this*, I am looking at an infant baobab tree sitting outside across from our classroom. How symbolic!



Even more symbolic for me is the fact that one of our first experiences in Dakar was a lecture on the magnificence of the baobab tree coupled with a guided tour to actually see this tree which sits outside the Presidential Palace. We were informed that this tree, with its large wide cylindrical trunk is known to be able to survive for 2,000 years. Not only does the tree survive, but it has been key to helping the people of Africa survive because of its ability to store large volumes of water for consumption by humans and animals during droughts. It is known as the giving tree! Indigenous people used the leaves and fruits as a nutritious supplement and the bark was frequently used for clothing and rope. Hence, the baobab is called the tree of life!

On this particular occasion, as our guide halted his lecture to provide an opportunity for our group to leave the bus for photographs of this large baoba which sat in the middle of the road just outside the Presidential Palace we were suddenly approached by a French-speaking guard who ordered us back on the bus as he spoke angrily to our guide. He ordered the bus to move to a designated place near the Palace guard station where he then confiscated the driver's license. Within a few minutes several other guards boarded our bus carrying weapons. They moved from seat- to- seat requesting to see the photographs on our cameras. Any photographs of the baobab or Presidential Palace were to be erased as they watched. All turned out well. The drivers' license was returned and the bus was allowed to leave the area. Our guide and driver were obviously as surprised by all of this as were we. The guide apologetically explained that this was a regular stop on their tour and never before had anything like this happened.

This was an anxiety-ridden experience for us all, however, I am convinced that the excitement and attention centered around this magnificent tree and its importance will always have a special place whenever I think of the baobab tree. Similarly any

time I think of my extraordinary experience in Senegal, I will think of WARC. Life giving, like the baobab!

Learn more about the [Baobab Tree](#).