

EXPLORING SENEGAL WEST AFRICA

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THE MOTHERLAND

Africa is often portrayed as a poor country that has so semblances of modern living and the luxuries that we see in America. Nothing could be further from the truth. While Africa, as a whole, does not appear to be financially rich overall, it, just like America has its areas of which we are proud and areas of which we are not so proud. It possesses areas that we would like to see widely toured and showcased, as well as areas that we would not like to be referenced as a depiction of our country overall. My journey to Senegal was definitely an eye opener, a revelation. Many of my misconceptions were proven false and based upon what I have previously seen in various forms of media: television, magazines, etc. As a participant

in the Fulbright Hayes Virginia State University Study Abroad Cohort, most of my myths about Africa were debunked.

I found people from Senegal to be smart, intelligent, and beautiful people. They were poised, prideful, and reverent. They were kind, helpful, outgoing, and possessed many of the luxuries and technology that we have in the United States of America.

I have taken the opportunity to describe snippets of my journey to Senegal through pictures and journaling/blogging. I must admit that this is one of the best trips I have ever taken and I would do it all over again if the opportunity ever presented itself.



Men Praying



This picture does not do justice to the dedication that everyone that I encountered expressed towards their religion, Muslim. I witnessed hundreds and hundreds of men and boys kneeling in the streets at designated times. I have never seen so many people pay public homage to Allah at the same time in the middle of the streets. At designated times, Muslim men and boys stop whatever they are doing, bow, and pray. To witness such devotion gave me chills. It made me become more introspective. I saw these acts of prayer as great signs of devotion, respect, and leadership. To have seen men do this with no shame or thought of their surroundings demonstrated how sincere they were about paying reverence to someone higher.

The Renaissance Statue

A symbol of hope for many Senegalese people. The Renaissance Statue was built in 2010. It is a bronze statue of a father, mother, and child



emerging from a volcano and pointing towards the Atlantic Ocean to the "Free World," America, a symbol of hope. While at the Renaissance Statue, I saw many people visit this magnificent wonder. It had 204 steps that led to the top. It is 49 meters tall and 164 feet tall. One also had the option of using an elevator to get to the top, if they chose to.

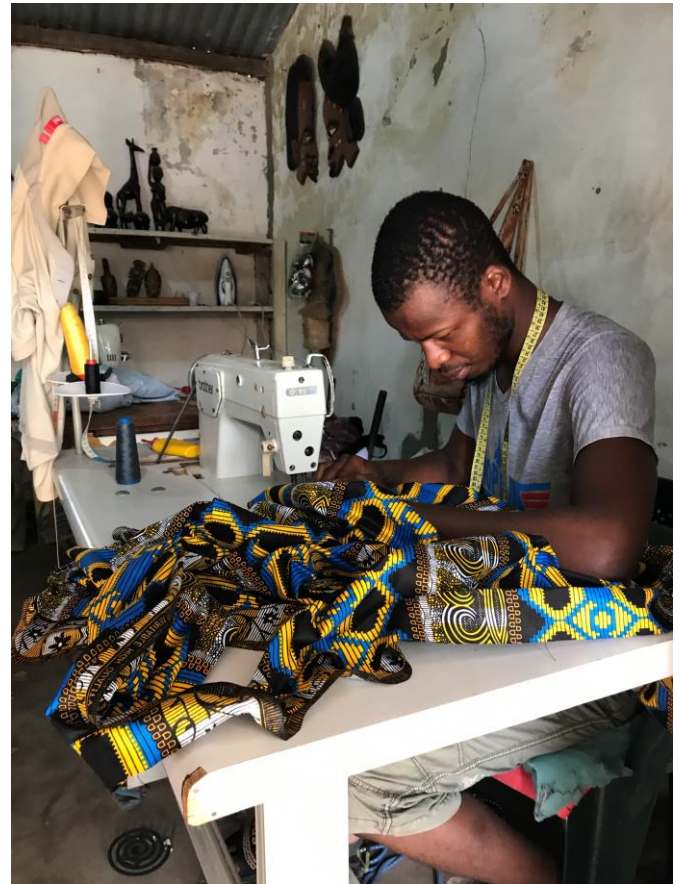
Extracting Salt from the Pink Lake

Men, women, and children spend time extracting salt from the Pink Lake. Each boat carries approximately one ton of salt. The men go deep out into the lake and scoop out the salt until they've filled a boat full. The women and children take the salt and put it in smaller buckets and carry it on their heads. Eventually, they sell the salt to make money to provide for their families.



Men as Tailors

In my experience, I have traditionally seen females as seamstresses/tailors in America. From my great-grandmother, to my grandmother, to my mother, to myself, I am accustomed to females doing all of the sewing. This is not true of present day Senegal. Each time that I asked about having an outfit custom made, I was introduced to a male who would make my fashion aspirations a reality. They lacked the fancy machines that we have in America. I neglected to see a serger or a hemming machine. Most tailors only had a sewing machine, iron, pencil, and measuring tape; which are very common tools for sewing in America. What I was most impressed by was the skill level of the tailor. Many of them were able to look at you and a picture of the outfit that you wanted and construct it with 100 percent perfection at minimal costs.



Peace and Tranquility



Day in and day out, I watched as hundreds of people took advantage of the opportunity to visit the Atlantic Ocean.

Whether it was for exercise, morning prayer, fishing, or playing, this ocean was used by many and meant many things to many people.

Personally, I found it to be one of the most beautiful and serene places in the world.

Daily, I ran from my hotel room at Otel D'Joloff to the Atlantic Ocean, approximately five miles, daily in order to join

others for a morning run. Sometimes, I found myself sitting on the bench near Muslims who were chanting, praying, and counting their prayer beads.

The Door of No Return



My ancestors entered these doors by force and never returned. It's a tough subject to discuss and I really don't know how to feel about it. Why? Well, because on one hand, had my ancestors not been forced through those doors, I probably would not have been born in America. But, on the other hand, because my ancestors were forced through those doors, I was denied the opportunity to grow up in my home land, Africa. Since America is the only place that I have ever lived, I am accustomed to its luxuries and amenities. After

speaking with my friends in Africa about the differences, they believe that America does indeed offer a better way of life.

Technology in Africa

I did not realize the degree to which some areas in Africa have technology. Some regions have some devices that I had not seen in America (not to say that America does not have them). Most schools had computers, iPads, (the African derivative), Wi-Fi, and cellphones. No matter how rural the regions, everyone seemed to have cellphones. The teachers were well versed in the use of technology. I was most impressed by the solar backpacks and the light box. The solar backpacks are used to charge electronic devices in areas where there is limited electricity. The lightbox was used for the same purpose. I, personally, had not seen solar backpacks and the lightbox in America. However, being the superintendent of a rural school district, those items could be helpful in my school district during select times.

