

Fulbright Hays GPA Senegal Week One

Saint Louis – July 1, 2017

Our weekend excursion to Saint Louis took us north along the west coast of Senegal. Saint Louis was once the colonial capital of Senegal until its independence from France in 1960 and for some time served as the capital of both colonial Senegal and Mauritania, the core of French West Africa. France's first permanent settlement in Senegal, Saint Louis sits at the mouth of the Senegal River, a key conduit inland from coastal Senegal and historically an important route for the Atlantic slave trade.

The Faidherbe Bridge connects old Saint Louis with the rest of the city. The contrast between the parts of Saint Louis on each side of the bridge is quite noticeable. While Saint Louis is said to now thrive off tourism, it was difficult to see how the densely populated and impoverished old town across the bridge benefited from any gentrification that has come with the UNESCO declaration in 2000 of Saint Louis as a World Heritage site.



The area is home to the Lebou people, who live in fishing villages along the coast of Senegal and who speak their own dialect of Wolof. Generation after generation continue with that livelihood in Saint Louis, with few families keeping their children in school. While a new road was under construction, it was not clear how the local economy and community's standard of living would be positively impacted.

We stayed in the Saint Louisienne hotel, an isolated ocean-side resort tucked in the recesses of the island. The traces of its old glory lay beneath the fading paint and the parched grounds, yet the place had an unmistakable charm. Anyone who has visited the French Quarters of Louisiana immediately felt at home. Owned and managed by a feisty Senegalese woman, the hotel offered a welcomed retreat from the city. We wondered how much of the grounds would be lost to the rising sea levels that now threaten the area. The tenuous connection between land and water was apparent as we navigated the sandy and often missing road as we traveled into town and back during our weekend in Saint Louis.

We stayed in the Saint Louisienne hotel, an isolated ocean-side resort tucked in the recesses

