

Friendship Force trip to Kenya November 2009

I went to Kenya with the Northumbrian Club. We were only 8 as a lot had dropped out after the pre election riots earlier in the year.

We were hosted by families in Nairobi and had very different accommodation. 2 of the older ladies were staying with Celeste, a paediatrician surgeon in the richer district. They had a virtual palace. Another couple were with her daughter's family nearer the centre of town.

Bill and Dorothy who were the organisers, another Christine and myself were hosted by families on the other side of town just on the edge of a big slum area which we had to drive through daily to our meeting place in the centre of town. This was a hair raising experience as the traffic was chaotic and everyone ignored the traffic lights. It usually took us well over an hour with hanging around and bottle necks but we were on "Kenyan time" and it was a fascinating experience people watching and observing the shop names like "Half London Pub" or a sign on dirty old shack saying "Elegant Homes wanted". I stayed in Nairobi 35 years ago and it was a different town. As most towns it was overdeveloped, there were massive slum areas and you were lucky to see a white face in town.

We visited museums, Karen Blixen's home - a bead making centre for single mothers, a flower farm as they grow masses of roses for export having the perfect climate and a centre where we watched African dancing. We went out to a restaurant "Carnivore" where we could try every type of meat and had a good dance session after dinner and we had a couple of lunches with Nairobi Friendship Force club.

For our second week Bruce Gow, the son of one of our party, had arranged a very varied trip to Lake Naivasha where we could see pelicans, flamingo, fish eagles and hippos in the lake. Then on to the Masii Mara where we stayed in ensuite tents and saw masses of animals and visited a Masii village. That was such an enjoyable day. Next on to the rain forest in the North West of Kenya, a much lusher area of the country. We were told about the medicinal qualities of the tree barks or leaves and stayed in a very comfortable old colonial building where we were treated to silver service dinners and excellent breakfasts.

Our final destination was in Thika near Nairobi - SACDEP - a centre for sustainable development. After a talk on the work that went on at this centre we went to visit the school for street children. There were a number of volunteers working with the children over their Christmas holiday. There were 4 classes taking place with children from 5 up to about 17. The children seemed happy and the volunteers loved being at the school. Next morning we divided into groups of 2 and Christine and I went to visit a couple and their child on the outskirts of town. They had had to leave their home in the rift Valley due to tribal violence and start again. Thanks to a loan from SACDEP they were able to open a small shop (shed) first selling cooked beans and then progressing to some vegetables and dried products. They had done well over the year and had managed to pay back their loan. It was really good to see the success of the centre.

This was such an interesting 2 weeks. Our group got on very well and we had lots of laughs. The only down side was that my case was mislaid on the in flight and I spent 5 days chasing it round Nairobi. On our return flight the lights on the airport runway failed and we were stuck for 6 hours in the airport finally flying out at 5.30 am. To top it all - the bottle of whisky I had purchased at Nairobi Duty Free was confiscated in Amsterdam as it wasn't sealed properly!

Christine