



Aspire to Africa 2012 Journal

By Corinne Mitchell

*In loving memory of our guide Bahatí.
Rest in peace my friend.*





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Day 1

After days, weeks and months of planning for this incredible trip, the day finally arrived. We were so excited but none of us knew what to expect.

We had a good flight, plenty of food on board and touched down in Qatar at 2.00am - even at this time in the morning it was so warm!

We were all so tired but managed to stay awake to catch our final flight to the capital of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam.

Day 2

Arrived in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam

The city is so busy. People-watching through the bus windows was an interesting experience. We saw people waiting for buses, others going to work to try and make a living in whatever way they could, some were riding bicycles balancing stacks of eggs, hay or



sugarcane. And there were people who just stood there watching the world go by. We saw a disabled man crawling around on the rough, dusty road wearing flip flops on his hands to

stop them getting scratched. All this was a real culture shock and made me realise I have so much to be thankful for.

The hotel was right on the white sandy beach, overlooking the clear blue ocean. Everything was handmade from wood - simple yet sophisticated. I've never experienced anything like this before in my life.

Everyone was so tired that we all collapsed on the sun loungers. With London 2012 still very much in our minds, we decided Maxine and Liz deserved Gold for the longest nap - 6 hours!

After our nap, we all gathered to watch the locals go out to sea to bring in the fish to sell and feed their families. We were amazed to see that they had no boat or fishing rods.



Everything was done by hand with a net and about 12 workmen. It took a good two hours to bring the fish to the shore. Gigantic crabs were being thrown across the beach as they tried to sort and hunt the net for fish. Wives of the fishermen strolled down to the beach with their beautiful vibrant dresses, accessorised with a bucket on their head to take home the fish.

After a lovely dinner and some 'group bonding' we all caught up on some much needed sleep.

Day 3

The day was planned for a final trip briefing and ensuring we had all educational resources for the schools. We all decided to take a boat trip to a secluded beach. Actually getting in proved to be a challenge with space for only four of us. The speed of such a little



boat came as a surprise, too!

Our meeting was held on Bongoyo Island. It felt as if we were in the film *Cast Away*, with not a soul around and a very eerie feel to the place

The meeting was useful and provided us all with further key information for the trip. After a few hours we had the rest of the afternoon to ourselves which was filled with a variety of sporting activities including Frisbee, tennis, volleyball, football, swimming races and diving.

Day 4

Travelling to Hondo Hondo

An early 7am start today. After we all had breakfast we had to go and collect the books Liz and Maxine had ordered from Oxford University Press, only to find that they weren't actually ready for us. After the initial disruption we were back on the road with driver Wilfred and Bahati, our guide.

The journey began with a red dusty drive out of Dar es Salaam, passing shanty houses and the odd shop. We stopped off after

about three hours for some very hearty African food. Once back on the road we didn't want to miss a thing. Sarah had been so bitten by insects she was covered in insect repellent and wrapped up like a



mummy. While driving through the game reserve we witnessed many impala at the side of the road and villagers casually sitting under a tree with a family of baboons. Then reality hit as we passed a herd of elephant, giraffe and zebra.

We arrived at Hondo Hondo campsite after many hours of travelling. Our tents were ready and waiting for us, and much to our surprise they were really cosy. The camp site was like something out of a Bear Grylls documentary! The food (fuel to the locals) was brilliant and with three courses every day we could be flying home heavier than when we arrived! The view while eating our meals was out of this world, and when we looked up at the blue sky we saw the top of the forest, hundreds of trees with baboons and Colobus monkeys swinging through the branches.



At night the camp fire was lit and local farmers came to celebrate and welcome us to the camp. The African dancing was amazing - for men, they could really

shake their bottoms! They had bells on their ankles which they played to the beat of the drumming band behind them, drums that were made from wood and animal skin. As the girls joined in with the dancers, the evening felt both surreal and unique, and like nothing we have ever experienced before.

Day 5

Mang'ula Primary School

We arrived at Mang'ula primary school where we were introduced to a class of children - 60 to be precise, to one teacher. Mang'ula had a visit from Aspire last year so they knew what to expect. It was brilliant though. I taught football with Rodders and Sarah and Lewis taught Frisbee. Then we switched around - Sarah did cheerleading and Rodders played softball.



The day was brilliant! We've never taught football like it - I went with a session in mind to practice passing and shooting, but as soon as she and Rodders gave out the footballs it was like organised

chaos! I don't think they had ever been in a situation when they had something to play with that they hadn't had to share. Some of them automatically started sharing with each other and doing kick ups. I've never seen any children pick up technical information as quick

as these children did. By the end of the session the children were teaching *us* tricks - handstands with four footballs lodged between their legs, walking on their hands and creating weird body positions with the whole weight of their bodies on just their hands!

Sarah and I started with some cheerleading, the children were extremely excited with the vibrant colours of the pom-poms, they were so enthusiastic. Next, I moved into some street dance, the moves were very tricky and technically difficult but the children were so talented that they soon picked it up. We finished the session in a circle, the children were a little shy at first but soon their confidence flourished and the music and beat took over their bodies and they soon came out of their shell.



Softball was next - as soon as Dan and I demonstrated how to play the game the children picked up the rules incredibly well and we were off playing a game. The children's hand-eye coordination was brilliant. They didn't

believe in having a stronger hand to hit the ball with, these kids could use both! Their technical ability and awareness came into play with their batting skills. They looked to see where the fielders were and at the last minute changed hands and rocketed the ball in the other direction!

I also taught the children football and set up a match for them to play. It was full of children of all ages - the younger ones just had to

keep up. The way the children played the game was so different to the traditional way the English play.



Lewis taught the children Frisbee and they caught on so fast that I was able to teach them a term's worth of Frisbee lessons in half an hour! One child stood out, so I decided to play against him. The idea was to knock each other's cone over. I was 3-0 up but soon this young lad got the hang of it and he won 9-3. I decided to make it harder by moving his cone further back to challenge him, but he still managed to whoop me! It was a brilliant and very humbling experience.

Day 6

Tumaini Primary School (**"Tumaini" is a Swahili word for 'Hope'**)

As we drove up towards the school the children were running as fast as they could to keep up with the us, waving and chanting in the red dust created by the wheels of the bus on the road. They seemed so happy and so excited to see us.

The Head Teacher said they had never had English people in the school before. My eyes started to fill up as the children all crowded



around the bus. I couldn't understand why we were treated like we were special - we were nobody really, but to have such a warm welcome with drums and dancing was mind blowing.

We performed exactly the same activities as we did at Mang'ula primary school, adding in Dodgeball and parachute games as well. We must have had around 60 children around the parachute that normally would have only accommodated 20, and played lots of games.

We threw balls and bean bags into the air and caught them again. The children were mesmerised with the colours - it was like a volcanic eruption of colour. Every child had a smile on their face and worked really well together, all helping each other to rise to the challenges set. The teaching staff were a bit apprehensive at first, but we soon got them on side and by the end of the day were



asking lots of questions and were just as excited as the children!

Giving out football shirts and stationery was brilliant; the kids were the happiest kids I've

ever seen over a pencil or a rubber. I gave a rucksack to a 14-year-old girl, she came up to me at the end and said, "Thank you so much, you have made me so happy" instantly that melted my heart, me giving her the rucksack felt like nothing, but for her I suppose it meant everything.

Rodders gave away his 'Dan's Disco' CD full of Westlife and Boyzone tracks, hopefully that would come in handy for them to use as a Frisbee with the skills that Lewis had taught them. I noticed that he had also turned into a Masai warrior as he had started to teach with an African accent!

On the evening the teachers from both schools were invited to join us for a drink at Hondo Hondo campsite. It was really nice to talk to them and compare Africa to England. Liz and Maxine received beautiful shawls and Paul was given a very flowery shirt.

Thank you Tumaini primary school - always Hope.

Day 7

We finally had a lie in (well until 8 o'clock as all of the Hondo Hondo birds had woken us up). A nice casual freezing cold shower and then off to breakfast. After breakfast and

we were ready and packed to leave the beautiful, homely campsite of Hondo Hondo, but new adventures were in the near future. We were heading to Sanje Falls, a waterfall in the Udzungwa

Mountains. We were going to trek for two hours to climb to the top and camp there for the night - I couldn't wait! We met our leader Youstan, a very funny and very clever character. He used to be a

tour physiotherapist for Mount Kilimanjaro trips, so he knew his stuff.

After 45 minutes we reached the bottom of the waterfall so we could have a swim in the freshest of waters within Tanzania.

We then climbed through trees and along a dirt track to eventually reach the opening and the start of the waterfall. I really can't explain how I felt as I looked at the view from the top. Like a picture-postcard, only better, the colours of the fields of Tanzania and the mountains in the background. It was simply breathtaking!



We camped over the back of the waterfall and had our dinner sat around the campfire. We kept ourselves entertained in typical camping fashion with a few games including charades. Rodders typically provided the humour, unintentionally, by thinking Bridget Jones was an actress, not a character, and by almost taking out our armed guard via the campfire and a log.

A great day and night at the "top of Africa".

Day 8

We set off from Sanje Falls and made our way to Mikumi National Park for our second day of exploring this amazing country. This time we were lucky enough to go on a game drive. The weather became dreadful and it started to rain. However, on a more positive note the animals we saw were amazing. To see a wild animal in its natural habitat is something special. Lions, hippos, giraffes, impalas, elephants, wilder beasts, buffalos and birds of prey. I felt a little like David Attenborough!

We camped at Mikumi camp site overnight. We met a man called Peter who was the guide with another German couple who had been to Africa 17 times before. He had some very interesting stories, none of which could have prepared Maxine for her experience with an insect and the camp toilet!

Day 9



Back into work mode and on the road to our final school visit. It took a good 3 hours. Wilfred took us through a valley to the top of the hills where the landscape changed and the views were breath taking - bizarrely it felt like we were in another country. The bus was unable to make it up the winding roads of the hills where, apparently, our campsite was going to be. No one had ever camped there before ... maybe because there was no campsite!

We decided to camp on the school field, which was a little more inviting with a flowing stream for our bath and our own football pitch... what more could we possibly want?



Day 10

It was 8am and we were met by hundreds of children jogging up the hill, singing and clapping. When they reached the school field they made a circle and sang their hearts out. It was so warming and they sang with such passion.

We spent the morning there and again the kids were fantastic, so skilful. We did a circuit of parachute games, cheerleading, Frisbee and softball. At 6.00pm the caretaker (who has been looking after us while we stayed at Mgeta) blew a whistle which was the signal for everyone, including the footballers and the children, to stop what they were doing and observe the lowering of the Tanzanian flag.



Dinner that night was different and, for most, a first as it was in one of the classrooms!

Day 11

Next morning we were up early to prepare for our last few days at Mgeta. We finished off our sports with Sarah teaching Netball, myself football, Rodders, Dodge ball (where he got knocked down to the floor with a ball to the eye by a girl footballer, by the way!) and Lewis teaching Olympic events.



We finished off the day with a visit to the school classrooms and offices. I could not believe how basic everything was. Full credit to the teachers - they had virtually no support from the government which

meant a lack of learning resources. This would explain why the head teacher Victor was so overwhelmed when we presented them with the equipment and books.

I will always remember his reaction. So he said "This is worth more than money"! And he so meant it!

That evening the locals came down to the football pitch where we had a kick around. They were so good at just keeping the ball; we were running around like dogs trying to hunt down the ball. The locals even played on the rocks - they just didn't stop. To score a goal we had to touch the post with the ball as there were no goal kicks. We were so shattered we dropped out after 30 minutes of constant sprinting. Dinner had arrived on a motorbike which two

locals brought from the village - one man was driving the motorbike while the other on the back held two chickens!

Day 12

It was time to pack up our things and get ready for some much deserved R&R in Zanzibar. The people of Mgeta were lovely and welcoming but somewhat reserved. Bahati told us how for many, it was the first time that they had white people visit their schools before. Now it made sense!

We travelled five hours back to Dar es Salaam where we got on a 13 seater aeroplane, so tiny it was almost like being on a private plane. For me, the views over the different islands were mesmerising. Sarah

however was gripping on for dear life - I don't think she was impressed. We touched down in Zanzibar after a 20 minute flight. Driving through Zanzibar to get to Paje was a little different from the

mainland, people looked better off and they looked a lot healthier. The beach was beautiful though, the sand was so pure and fine, it wasn't even golden it was bright white.



Day 13

Everyone was so tired from the two weeks of intense work and travelling. We spent the whole day recharging our batteries.

It was so nice to reflect and look back at what we had achieved. Maxine and I must have been in the sea for about two hours just chatting away. We noticed what she thought were blue sticking plasters on the top of the sea. They turned out to be jellyfish.

On the evening we had a beautiful meal at The Coral Rock.

Day 14

Time for some culture and to learn more about Zanzibar. Our holiday moms Maxine and Liz had booked a trip for us all to Prison Island to see the tortoises and then on to Stone Town. Prison Island was used as a quarantine station in the 1800's. It was so beautiful and the tortoises were huge!! The oldest was 155 years old.

Stone Town was an experience. It's a world heritage site but was pretty dirty and smelly. Omar was our guide and his English wasn't great. Maxine and Liz were extreme shoppers and everyone struggled to keep up!

Day 15

Our last day. It has gone so quickly! Time to pack for our early departure and our 25 hour journey back to Birmingham.

Day 16

We left our hotel at 7am to arrive at Zanzibar airport for our 10am flight. A 20 minute flight from Zanzibar to Dar es Salaam, a six hour flight to Qatar, an eight hour wait in Qatar and then a seven hour flight to Heathrow. We arrived back in the UK at 7am and then got a taxi back to the office. We arrived at 10am - that was one long journey.

Aspire to Africa 2012 has been an emotional rollercoaster of a journey. I've met some brilliant people and made new friends.

As for the Aspire team ...we got on so well with lots of laughs and chats along the way and not forgetting our 'Chief'. He really looked after us and I saw a side of Paul that I've never seen before. I wish I could do it all over again. I've learnt to be more confident and patient while teaching, but not only when teaching, approaching people of all ages and origins and learning about their lives and realising that ours isn't so bad after all.

I've now decided to take on the African way of life...

Hakuna Matata!

ASPIRE TO
AFRICA

