

Ashley Delgaudio, '08
Nansana, Uganda



This summer I was given a once in a lifetime opportunity, as I traveled to Nansana, Uganda with Vanessa Parisi. We stayed in a Ugandan household with 10 other people. We found Ronald Magezi, our 22 year old main host mostly by chance, and although he spoke English, prior to meeting him we were unsure of what to expect. As planned ahead of time, we taught English and physical education in a nearby nursery and primary school (pictured above). Aside from this however, our unforgettable experience resulted from our time spent in the home, the village, and even the culture learned through our travels.



Pictured above is our Ugandan family! Vanessa and I are with the guys in the house, Ronald (second from the left), Ron's two brothers and four cousins. The other pictures are with Mom and Dad, and Jadress (our maid). These pictures were taken during our formal going-away party.





Above, you can see our house which is actually quite nice in comparison to surrounding houses, bedroom/living room, kitchen and our bathroom (the buckets). One of the hardest parts in the beginning of our trip was culture shock, as there was NOTHING familiar for us to feel grounded. To put it in perspective, the Ugandans had never even heard of a burger, let alone McDonalds. Our "bedroom" was also the living room during the day, and was shared with members of the household, friends, rodents, and many large insects! Our water was rationed and had to be pumped each day, with the well being dry on some days. The bathroom, well I feel that speaks for itself! In addition, we only had electricity every other day, if it even came on, and the entire country seemed pitch black on nights without electricity.

Cooking was another adventure for us! You can see me cooking over our "stove" and roasting corn, while the next picture is after I have come back from hoeing cassava, a root that can be cut up and either fried or boiled. Many times Vanessa and I literally had to go find food in order to eat. Our food consisted largely of cabbage, potatoes, carrots, chapats (you can see me making some, similar to a flatbread), fruit, and matoki (green bananas that taste like potatoes). These aspects of our trip truly made us re-evaluate "minimums," and appreciate simple things. A quick example would be the folded up newspaper we used in place of a potholder.

Weekdays we would work in Hope Primary and Nursery School teaching English and PE to the children. Our favorite class was our P7 class as they truly understood why we were there. The schools teach in English in Uganda, so the P7 students were able to communicate with us well, allowing us to become so close to them not only during school but also when they visited us at home. I am still in touch with

the "P7 boys" today, although now most of them have moved onto secondary school.

Education in Uganda is disheartening however. Every aspect of education costs money there, not only classes, but each exam, uniforms, and supplies all have to be bought. Also, since there are no jobs in Uganda, even if one has the means to educate themselves through college, their chances of attaining a job are slim. Further, every employee is paid monthly, with one's monthly wages commonly being withheld from them. In other words, families can go months without pay, but can not give up their job as they will not be able to find another one, and could easily be replaced.

In addition to teaching at the school, we were constant displays of learning material in the village, and anywhere we traveled for that matter. The village children pictured above were among the group that would gather in the evenings and weekends as we played outside. Through playing with balloons and bubbles, as well as teaching them wiffle ball, Frisbee, jump-rope, and English words, they were constantly being exposed to new things. One of the broader things they learned however was the difference between races, as the children would constantly stroke our white skin and long hair. Religion was another way in which we infiltrated the village, as we attended multiple masses at different Protestant and Born-Again Christian congregations, being formerly welcomed at each mass.

These pictures reflect our experience in the home which was probably the best aspect of our trip. We lived with 10 people as mentioned above, but there were always cousins and friends over as well. Through drumming and learning how to traditional dance (pictured above) at nights, playing with Ron's cousins, and talking about the differences in our cultures with the older guys, our eyes were opened. While we taught them many things, as in the difference between New York City and New York State, they gave us the gift of their culture. From how they lived to the corruption in their government, and how they date to their 3-day weddings, the wealth of knowledge I attained is phenomenal. While Americans recognize that many Africans are poor due to their low technological resources, they fail to recognize the richness of their culture and ability to live off the land, something that most Americans could never do.

The last aspect of our Ugandan experience was traveling. Aside from seeing beautiful landscapes and being able to go on a Safari and chase Giraffes, our trip to the national museum, Kasubi tombs (pictured above), Lake Victoria, and multiple trips to Kampala (the capital) as well as Kijabijjo (a more rural village) provided us the missing pieces to the country. Obviously the wealth distribution could easily be seen, but most surprising to us was that even the "nicest" places would not be considered "nice" by American standards. Many displays at their museum for example, were like my 3rd grade science projects. The beach (pictured above), although beautiful, was used by the Ugandans as a date-place where they enjoyed the view of Lake Victoria rather than use the beach. In fact, the water was mainly used as a means of doing laundry and bathing.

Summing up my trip has been difficult because there were so many unique aspects that added to my experience of becoming a Ugandan woman. While the culture shock was immense at the start, the culture I learned and ties I made with my Ugandan family, Ron, and the P7 boys will be eternal. I am still in touch with my Ugandan friends, and plan on going back this coming summer (2007) to visit due to Ron not being able to attain a VISA to come here. I have given a lot of random pieces of information from my trip, but to sum it up I will give a quote that I had written in my journal.

"If it were possible to combine Ugandan hospitality and culture with the technology and resources of the United States, the world would be a better place!"