

# Worldschooling: Southern Africa As Our Classroom

By Steve Askin &  
Catherine Hanna

Readers who want to learn more about travel in Africa are invited to connect with tour leaders Steve Askin and Catherine Hanna through their [Small World Travel Africa!](#) Facebook group. Please say that you read about the trip in SEA Homeschoolers Magazine.



After a month in Egypt, it was time to journey south and continue our exploration of African civilizations both ancient and modern. But first we had to escape Egypt, which proved no easy task.

Still smiling after traveling 4000 miles together.  
Photo by Steve Askin

## Prepare for border crossing challenges.

On arriving at Cairo International Airport, Catherine and I discovered that our son Isaac had forgotten his passport in Luxor, 400 miles to the south, so he couldn't leave as scheduled. Retrieving that crucial document turned into a three-day adventure for him and mom. Lesson learned: for the rest of the trip I held everyone's travel documents in one big pouch!

Then came one of the classic border snafus that friends had warned we might experience journeying from one poor country to another. On a routine search of outbound luggage, an airport security officer discovered – to his seemingly horrified astonishment – that one of our teens had packed a necklace fashioned from spent bullet casings. “That’s illegal!” he shouted, prompting a crowd of his compatriots, some in business suits, others armed and uniformed, to surround our now-frightened teen. “Very serious” opined one. “We’ll sort this out,” promised another repeatedly as the minutes ticked away. “But wait a bit. We need guidance from the Interior Ministry.” Waiting, of course, was the one thing we couldn't do, as the time for our departure to Cape Town neared.

Was this a classic bid by badly underpaid airport staff for “baksheesh,” the local term for a bribe? Probably, but dare we risk making matters worse by offering money to cure what some fool might actually view as a serious offense? We decided the safest response was to turn to an expert. Fortunately, Egyptian guide, [Ash Shaer](#), immediately answered when I called and put him on the phone with the plainclothes official who seemed to be in charge. They soon released our traveler to continue the journey, sans necklace. As we later confirmed, bribery is too often part of the routine at [Cairo International Airport](#).

When Catherine and Isaac rejoined us, I learned that baksheesh, delicately proffered on our behalf by another local friend, had also been a necessary lubricant in the struggle to retrieve a lost passport. These were just two of the many occasions when having a local friend on our side made life run smoothly.

## South Africa as a classroom: Learning from a young democracy

**Cape Town.** No such irregularities greeted us in Cape Town, the bustling metropolis on South Africa’s Western Cape. But visitors traveling to South Africa with minors must prepare in advance for the entirely appropriate demands of that country’s ongoing campaign [to stop human trafficking](#). South Africa strictly enforces rules requiring special documentation for any child not accompanied by both parents. For a complete explanation of the rules, [click here](#).

The welcoming signage at Cape Town International airport taught us that the world has much to learn from South Africa’s “Mother City.” Faced last year with the threat of a “Day Zero” on which faucets would run dry, Cape Town brilliantly planned and implemented [the world’s most successful water conservation drive](#).



Water conservation posters greet visitors arriving at Cape Town International Airport.



Amon Tsabola , a tour guide who led us through southern Africa. Photo Credit Ancel Camacho

We were met at the airport by a warm and wise tour guide, [Amon Tsabola](#). Over the next two months we would cover four thousand miles, visiting four countries, in his well-equipped 12 passenger van.



Ocean view from our hilltop home in Cape Town.

Cape Town's unique position near the meeting point of a warm Indian Ocean current and the Atlantic's cool Benguela current contribute to the region's amazing biodiversity. "I could have happily spent a week hiking in the foggy mystical rain forest of the [Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden](#)," said 19 year old Dante Camacho.

This beauty cannot conceal the fact that South Africa remains a divided nation. For Americans, an honest encounter with South Africa is a look in the mirror. As visitors from a country still grappling with the wounds caused by slavery more than 150 years after the end of the civil war, we had no reason to be surprised that a so recently free South Africa remains a divided nation. It is a vibrant, multiracial, multiparty democracy, but one which still suffers from [the world's widest wealth gap](#).

A visit to southern Africa, therefore, involves more than just touring game parks (exciting though encounters with alpha predators and dramatic scenery will be), basking on beautiful beaches or visiting some of the world's earliest known human settlements.

Our own advance preparation included putting two founding documents side by side, [South Africa's Bill of Rights and our own](#). While neither country has fully achieved its human rights aspirations, we learned that South Africa, unlike the United States, recognizes universal education, food, health care and affordable housing as fundamental rights of every person. The South African Constitution starts, as ours obviously does not, by declaring the nation's core commitment to human rights and equality under a democratically elected government committed to "[non-racialism and non-sexism](#)." Because of the South African constitution's expansive view of human rights, its courts were also a decade ahead of the U.S. in recognizing gay peoples' right to marry.



Table Mountain and the Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden Photo credit Skyler McKinney

To understand this new South Africa, one essential stopping point is the [Robben Island Prison](#) turned museum, where Nelson Mandela and hundreds of other freedom fighters were confined for decades by the old apartheid regime. From the guides, some of them ex-prisoners, visitors learn why some call it "[Robben Island University](#)," the place where jailed anti-apartheid fighters debated and refined their ideas for building a just society. Some in our group prepared for the visit by viewing the Mandela biopic [Long Walk to Freedom](#) or reading the Robben Island chapters in Mandela's autobiography by the same title.

Vital though the visit to Robben Island was, for most teens, the most memorable moments around Cape Town came as an adrenaline rush. At the mountainous [Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve](#), clad in protective gear, travelers got a unique view of the region's majestic mountains and deep gorges on a zipline tour.



The Zipline tour at Hottentots Holland.

The road back from Hottentots Holland winds through the Western Cape's wine country. It is dotted with [chic hotels and world-renowned vineyards](#) that, incongruously, looked to our group of Californians like a more upscale version of Marin County.

In Cape Town, sadly, we also experienced one of the jarring realities of an economically divided society. While tending his trusty Nissan van in the middle of the night, Amon was set upon by three knife-wielding thieves. He bravely fought them off, but not before suffering a deep wound in his leg. This was the first of several reminders that violent street crime is widespread in South Africa's urban centers. We made it our policy to get local advice on places to avoid, especially at night, and to never have any group member venture out alone.

We rushed Amon to the nearest emergency room, at a government hospital. After waiting 30 minutes with nothing happening, I approached the staff – not as a complaining patient but as a comrade from the hospital workers union I worked for in the U.S. After commiserating about the understaffing that plagues public health workers in the U.S. and South Africa alike, I asked if there was a facility nearby with fewer delays. They immediately referred us to a nearby private hospital. \$135 was the full cost of speedy and efficient private sector health care (including ER fee, doctor bill and medication). This was a pittance by American standards, yet far beyond the means of the average South African. Despite a constitution which deems health care a fundamental human right, South Africa is as far as the U.S. from making that goal a reality.

From Cape Town, Amon pointed our van toward Africa's southern tip, Cape Agulhas. A climb to the top of one of South Africa's oldest lighthouses offers the best view of the rocky coastline and turbulent waters.



Dante & Skyler explore The rocky coast where two oceans meet. Photo credit Ancel Camacho



Our group looks out over two oceans from Cape Agulhas Lighthouse at the continent's southern tip. Photo credit Steve Askin

Though [South Africa's excellent national park system offers accommodations nearby](#), their cottages are often pricy. Here, as elsewhere in southern Africa, we found that a [comfortable, beautifully equipped Airbnb](#) which was much closer to the coast and less expensive than park lodgings.

Traveling east from Cape Agulhas, we were definitely not the only travelers on the road!

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**U.S. missionary 'focused anger' against Transkei prison life**

*Paulsen remembered 'victims, victimizers'*

By STEVE ASKIN  
Africa Correspondent  
**Luveve, Zimbabwe**

KEENLY FOCUSED ANGER helped American Marianhill Father Casimir Paulsen survive foul physical conditions, demoralizing tedium and fear-provoking violence in a Transkei police station where he was held without trial or charge from mid-December until March 11 (NCR, Jan. 30, March 20).

Transkei is one of South Africa's ethnic "homelands" created, in Paulsen's words, as "the ultimate tool of divide and conquer." Transkei's 2.5 million people live on three noncontiguous tracts of overcrowded land set aside by South Africa. Three-fourths of the labor force are migrant laborers in South African industry, farms or mines. Paulsen noted, while Transkei's "independent" government — recognized only by Pretoria — is "used by South Africans to implement their apartheid policies."

A U.S. State Department spokesperson told NCR several Americans are detained in South Africa on criminal charges, but no case is comparable to Paulsen's detention as a security matter.

In detention, Paulsen disciplined himself to remember the victims — and the victimizers he hopes will one day be punished. He secretly scribbled names in his Xhosa language Bible, next to the words of the prophet Zaccariah. No other books were permitted in the bare 10-foot square cell he shared with up to three other prisoners for most of his 85 days of detention



Father Casimir Paulsen arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, March 12, the day after his release from a Transkei, South Africa, jail.

at Kei Bridge police station.

Christians are taught to love, Paulsen reflected after his ordeal, but "the other side of the coin is: If you love good, you must hate evil."

Paulsen methodically described his experience in six hours of interviews during two days — condensed and reordered for clarity here — starting after mass his first Sunday of freedom. He spoke to NCR at the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. By coincidence, the church is the namesake of the one he involuntarily left behind in

(See Paulsen, page 23)

1987 interview with Fr. Cas.



An elephant family near Port Elizabeth. Photo credit Skyler McKinney

**Durban.** Continuing along the coast, our travels took us to the port city of Durban. There an old friend from the anti-apartheid struggle, Catholic Fr. Casimir Paulson, welcomed us to [Tre Fontaine](#), a Catholic guest house built in 1965 as a multiracial retreat center which quietly ignored apartheid's segregation laws. Fr. Cas, age 83, is a Detroit native who has spent most of his life serving communities in South Africa. He shared the story of his arrest and torture in 1987 by South African authorities and his eventual return to a free South Africa.

At Tre Fontaine, we found a welcoming hub of community involvement, open to everyone concerned about building a caring community across lines of race, religion and class. Over tasty meals in the Tre Fontaine dining room, (our vegans even found a chef eager to learn about their special dietary requirements) we mingled with participants in a “healing of memories” workshop. They came to find mutual support needed to move their lives forward by communicating about painful past experience, under apartheid and more recent.

Here, too, we had our first encounter with African teens at St. Francis College, a Catholic high school. The students, neatly lined up in crisply pressed school uniforms, looked very different. Yet they immediately found common ground with our Americans with their informal and varied dress styles, as they laughed together and exchanged stories. “I learned that, whatever our daily lives may be, as teenagers we all are very much alike,” said Isaac’s older sister, Sophia.

Durban also broadened our understanding of the cultural and ethnic diversity of South Africa. This great port city has long been a center of Indian migration to South Africa, since even before a young lawyer named Mohandas Gandhi came here in 1891 to serve as counsel to an Indian-owned business. (We learned more about his time in South Africa later in our journey.)

A modern-day Indian businessman, introduced to us by the Catholic Sisters at Tre Fontaine, took our group on a tour through some of the richest and poorest communities in South Africa. “It’s crazy how wide the gap is,” said Isaac Hanna. “The poor areas are all black, and families live in tiny shacks like this,” gesturing in our own home to identify an area one-third of the size of our kitchen. “On the oceanfront, mostly white, they live in mansions.”

Spending time with a successful, socially conscious Indian family also helped us reflect on the complexities of life under apartheid. As Ancel Camacho astutely observed, “we learned how whites under apartheid, even while oppressing Indians, gave them more rights in a way that moved blacks to see Indians as their immediate oppressors. This deflected anger from the whites who actually controlled everything.”

**Johannesburg and Soweto.** We continued to learn about South Africa’s contrasts in a great city of many names: eGoli in Zulu (“city of gold”), Jozi in local slang, Johannesburg and its sister city Soweto on our maps. These two cities form the core of South Africa’s most populous province, Gauteng (meaning “place of gold” in Sotho, one of South Africa’s 11 official languages.)

High School students at St. Francis College.



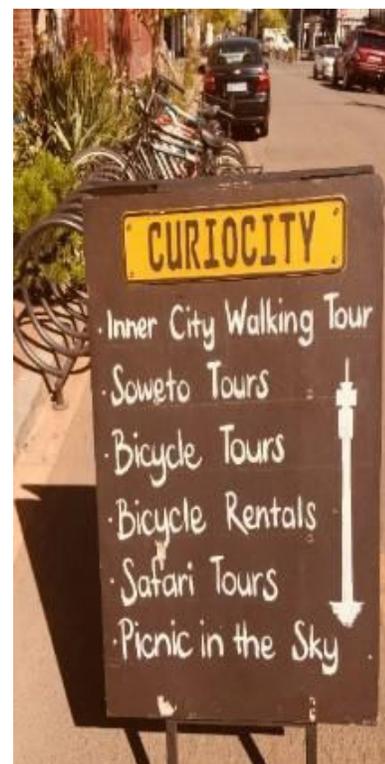
In Johannesburg, an arts and culture district known as Maboneng is the perfect base for exploring a lively and unruly metro area, home to about nine million of this country's 58 million people. There are multiple opportunities to see the city with other young people from South Africa and around the world by joining the tours organized by the [Curiosity youth hostel](#).

Within a few blocks of each other, you will find an experimental theater, an art house cinema, avant garde art galleries and wonderful restaurants: my personal favorite is the [Little Addis Cafe](#) which offers vegetarian and vegan options. In this delightfully diverse city we also found great [Japanese](#) and Thai cuisine and, of course, Soweto street food.

For solo travelers and small groups, the ideal place to stay is Maboneng's [Twelve Decades Arts Hotel](#), which offers 12 floors of uniquely decorated studio size rooms. For our group of 11, we opted instead for a nearby [suburban Airbnb](#) complete with swimming pool and game room.

South Africa's modern economy was born in an 1880s gold rush. Ancient and modern can both be found just outside Johannesburg at the [Cradle of Humankind](#), where in a single day you can tour both a depleted gold mine and the world's largest find of early human bones

Our own group's deepest dive into South African wealth was an underground tour of the [Cullinan diamond mine](#), still active in its second century producing precious gems. There we suited up for an underground tour. It was a muddy, hot and humid excursion deep beneath the ground. A great experience once, but something none of us would repeat a second time ... let alone as our life's work.



Knowledgeable local guides offer youth-focused tours of greater Jozi every day, disembarking from Maboneng's Curiosity hostel.



Our group dons protective gear to explore the Cullinan Diamond mine. Photo credit Ancel Camacho



Our travelers explore the Cullinan Diamond mine Photo credit Skyler McKinney

In the early 20th century, this still-active mine produced the largest gem quality diamond ever found. As will surprise no one familiar with colonial history, the Star of Africa and other gems cut from that chunk of rough stone became the most valuable trinkets in the British crown jewels. Some estimates place their value at [\\$2 billion](#). Wealth continues to flow to the surface here: the month before our arrival, miners dug up a gem quality stone valued in the [tens of millions of dollars](#).

Johannesburg also was the site of our deepest encounters with South Africa's freedom struggle. Any tour of Soweto – the “black township” created to house black South African workers far from the whites who ruled them under apartheid - must include the [Hector Pieterse Museum](#). The museum honors those killed, wounded and arrested in the 1976 uprising of high school and elementary students which became a crucial turning point in the struggle to overthrow apartheid. For a lively account of life in post-apartheid Soweto, several of our group read Trevor Noah's [Born a Crime](#).

Ancel Camacho behind bars at Old Fort prison. Photo credit Steve Askin

We continued our education at the [Apartheid Museum](#), organized chronologically to lead visitors from the pre-colonization era, through the rise of apartheid, the decades of resistance and finally into the modern era.

We gained a still deeper understanding of apartheid oppression at the Old Fort Prison on Johannesburg's Constitution Hill, a blood-stained institution where freedom fighters from two continents were held more than a half century apart. At Constitution Hill, we opted for a [time travel tour](#), in which visitors change into prison uniforms and tour the facility with guides dressed as guards.



Here's an excerpt from [Nelson's Mandela's essay](#) drawing the direct connection between Mahatma's Gandhi's South African experience as imprisoned activist and his own more than a half century later:

*Gandhi threatened the South African Government during the first and second decades of our century as no other man did. He established the first anti-colonial political organization in the country, if not in the world, founding the Natal Indian Congress in 1894...*

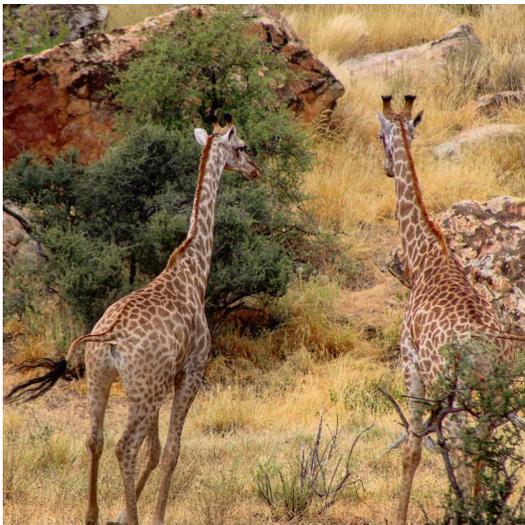
*During his 21 years in South Africa, Gandhi was sentenced for four terms of imprisonment... [As prisoners] there was practically no difference in the issue of clothing given to us in 1962 and that given to Gandhi in 1908. He records, that 'After being stripped, we were given prison uniforms. We were supplied, each with a pair of short breeches, a shirt of coarse cloth, a jumper, a cap, a towel and a pair of socks and sandals.' Our issue was almost identical. Neither was there any difference in the diet, basically porridge, save that we were given a teaspoon of sugar; Gandhi's porridge had no sugar. At lunch, we were served mealies, sometimes mixed with beans. He spent one and a half months on a one-meal-a-day diet of beans.*

To help South Africans remember their past, the Constitutional Court was built alongside this old prison. The court's art and architecture evoke the diversity of the "rainbow nation" and the dedication of its courts to, in the words of retired Justice and Albie Sachs, "expanding the scope of human freedom."



Art and imagery at the constitutional court.

From Johannesburg, we travelled north to our final South African stop, visiting the remains of an ancient African kingdom at [Mapungubwe National Park](#). The stone structures here are the relics of a community that might once have been home to 25,000 people. The national park also offered some amazing opportunities for viewing African wildlife.



Wildlife at Mapungubwe National Park. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

## Peace amidst poverty in eSwatini

Crossing South Africa's border to the tiny Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) some of the contrasts between democracy and dictatorship were immediately evident.

The first, but most superficial indicator, was the quality of the roads – among the worst I've seen in my 35 years of African travel. But poor roads matter less than the impoverishment of the people. Measured by per capita gross national product, Eswatini is one of the more prosperous nations of sub-Saharan Africa, but you would never guess that upon viewing the conditions in which the average person lives.

King Mswati III, the man who last year changed his country's name by royal fiat, is Africa's last absolute monarch reigning under a State of Emergency imposed by his father in 1973.

Paradoxically, this oppressed nation was one of the most restful stops on our journey. We stayed in comfortably outfitted thatched rondavels (traditional circular dwellings) at the beautiful [Mabuda Farm](#). The 1000-acre farm is operated by Helen Pons whose family has farmed this region since the 1930s. Her ophthalmologist husband has devoted his career to curing blindness in a country that, according to recent reports, [suffers from the worst eye care in Africa](#).

For us foreign visitors, a high point of our visit was a lesson in harvesting honey. Dr. Pons showed our group how to decap honeycombs with surgical precision ... and without getting stung. The farm is part of a nature conservancy. Had we stayed longer, this would have been the perfect place to view indigenous wildlife on horseback. We enjoyed our peaceful stay in this beautiful mountain kingdom but, sad to say, learned the full extent of its suffering only through further reading.

Business analysts estimate King Mswati's personal wealth at around [\\$200 million](#), while the average person survives on less than \$2 per day. Forbes Magazine captured the essence of his reign: "He lives lavishly, using his kingdom's treasury to fund his expensive tastes in German automobiles, first-class leisure trips around the world and women. But his gross mismanagement of his country's finances is now having dire economic consequences." [The nation suffers](#) from the world's highest HIV infection rate and one of the lowest life expectancies, 58 years at birth.

## **Forging lasting friendships amidst the chaos that is Zimbabwe.**

No illusions blurred our vision of the final nation on our itinerary, Zimbabwe. After nearly four decades of one-party rule, Zimbabwe's people appear virtually united in their opposition to their thieving rulers following a transparently stolen election in 2018. In eSwatini and before that in Egypt, citizens would criticize their government only in whispers, if at all. In Zimbabwe, even strangers would unhesitatingly turn conversations toward their anger against the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Yet, as I told parents before we traveled here with their teens, Zimbabwe's autocratic government is a daily threat only to its own people. Here foreigners actually seem to face fewer dangers than those awaiting them in some South African cities. Indeed, one of the ironies of travel in developing countries (as we also saw in eSwatini) is just how wide is the gap between a foreign visitor's experience and that of local people.

Even amidst chaos, Zimbabwe remains a remarkable destination. Here you will find the best-preserved ancient ruins south of the Sahara, surprisingly well-maintained national parks with excellent opportunities for game viewing and the world's most dramatic waterfall. All these sights plus, most important, deep engagement with a group of Zimbabwean teens, made this final stop the high point of our journey for many participants.

## SIDEBAR A Zimbabwe travel how to.

Given the complications of travel in Zimbabwe, we need to offer some country-specific advice and also a link to local service providers who will make your visit a success.

Check current conditions before venturing into Zimbabwe. The country's economy is in freefall, daily electric power outages are the norm, petrol shortages are frequent. We've found that the [British Foreign Office travel](#) advisories are far more precise guide to current conditions than those offered by the U.S. State Department. As the advisories warn, foreign visitors should stay away from political demonstrations, as demonstrators always face the risk of violence by security forces.

If you choose to visit, you will also quickly learn that hardship has made Zimbabweans wonderfully resourceful. The nation's major cell phone company, which also functions as its principal bank via its phone-based money transfer service, has become one of the world's largest purchasers of Tesla solar energy storage batteries, which it uses to keep the money flowing. Since local currency is nearly worthless, we entered the country carrying about \$100 per person in US \$1 and \$5 bills, but we soon found that credit cards backed by U.S. dollars are also welcomed widely.

Visitors can rely on two microbusinesses that made our travel safe and successful. In this narrative, you've already met [Amon Tsabola](#) who wisely stockpiled enough fuel near his home to cover our entire stay in Zimbabwe, and always steered our group away from danger. Other Zimbabwean friends offer [a spacious full service guest house](#) plus the most amazing cultural immersion program.

**Visiting an ancient kingdom:** Our first stop in the country was Great Zimbabwe.

The modern nation takes its name from this kingdom which thrived near the center of this country for 400 years before the arrival of the first European colonialists. Amon helped us understand why this mystical place has an important place in the hearts of his fellow Zimbabweans.

At its peak, Great Zimbabwe was an urban center of 10,000-20,000 people. Its stone structures remain the most impressive surviving ancient



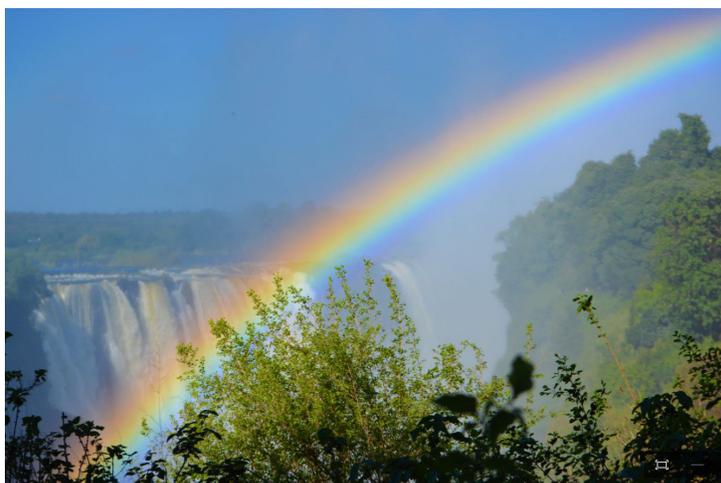
Exploring Great Zimbabwe. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

architectural achievements in Africa south of the Sahara. This city was the center of an inland African kingdom whose global trade links are evidenced by discoveries of Ming Dynasty China, Arabian glass and other imported goods. The kingdom's success as a medieval trading nation rested on its gold mines.

The site has been imperfectly preserved. During a century of white rule starting in the late 19th century, settlers and colonizers looted Great Zimbabwe, walking off with its iconic soapstone sculptures of native eagles and other treasures. The most famous colonist-businessman, Cecil Rhodes, even hired an archeologist to falsely "prove" Great Zimbabwe was built by Phoenicians or other foreign visitors. No wonder, then, that Zimbabwe has embraced this ancient city's heritage and made those soapstone sculptures its national symbol.

The [BBC's Guide to Africa's looted treasures](#) and a Guardian report on "[racism, ruins and plundering](#)" provide a great introduction to this amazing site and its place in history.

**Victoria Falls:** No mere picture can do justice to the roaring waters of Victoria Falls, which engulfed us in misty spray on a beautiful April day. Don't imagine that you can merely stop for a few minutes and then head on. Each of more than two dozen vantage points offers a different perspective on the roaring waters. While Zimbabwe offers the most dramatic view, some of our travelers walked across the Zambezi River footbridge to also see the falls from neighboring Zambia.



Victoria Falls. Photo credit Malia Day.



Together at Victoria Falls. Photo credit Malia Day.

Victoria Falls is a top international tourism destination on both sides of the national border. Walking down the main street of the tourist town that has grown up near the falls, you'll be bombarded with at least a dozen different options for add-on activities, including bungee jumping, white water rafting, sky diving, helicopter flyovers and sunset boat cruises.

Plan prudently or you can easily blow your budget. Here, unlike most places we traveled in Africa, activities are priced for the well-heeled foreign tourist. You'll also find some great restaurants here, but their offerings are priced with the affluent traveler in mind. If you stay for more than a day, we strongly recommend finding lodgings with a full kitchen. We found excellent, reasonably priced accommodations through [Zimbabwe National Parks](#) but understand that prices have increased since our visit.

To avoid cost overruns, we asked our teens to pick just one of the many offerings, and they chose wisely. We enjoyed an elephant encounter, which fully lived up to its promise of an intimate experience with these gentle giants at a wildlife rescue center and orphanage. These pictures tell the story far better than words.



Elephant Encounter

## Forming Lifelong Friendships.



Photo credit Ancel Camacho.

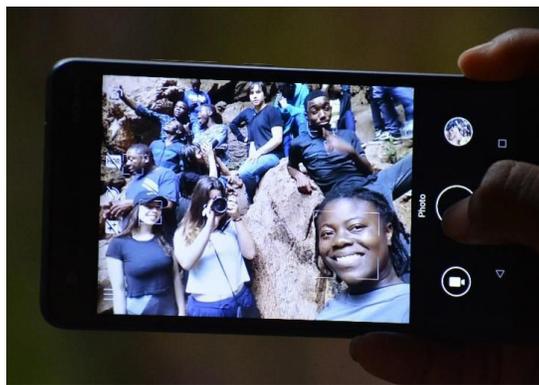


Photo credit Malia Day.



Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

Ask our teens where they had their most meaningful African experience of Africa. Not, they will say amidst the surging waters of Victoria Falls, not among apex predators or giant herbivores in beautiful national parks, not climbing through ancient ruins, not even when learning about the horrors of the old apartheid South Africa and the most hopeful features of its new Democracy.

Instead they will point to a spacious suburban home on an acre of land at the outskirts of Zimbabwe’s capital, Harare. Our hosts, Mary and Jonah Gokova, operate [a well-catered Bed & Breakfast \(& lunch & dinner!\)](#) which doubles as a retreat center for cultural immersion programs. Here our eight teens shared 10 days of their lives with about the same number of Zimbabwean youths.



Our group with the support team at Mary & Jonah’s Bed & Breakfast

The Gokovas call their program “Total Sensitivity.” They, and facilitator Elaine Chiedza Manyere, brought a global perspective to a thoughtfully designed experiential learning program. Jonah is founder of a men’s anti-sexist movement in historically patriarchal Zimbabwe. Mary works on long-term community development programs for an international aid agency. Elaine, only a few years older than the teens, is a grad student who has worked on women’s rights issues in Zimbabwe.

The encounter across continents started awkwardly, with the participants sitting down in a circle to try to explain to each other what it’s like to grow up in their respective countries.

Then Elaine found the perfect way to bring them together. She took the teens to [Pakare Paye Arts Centre](#), a performance and education center created by one of Zimbabwe’s most admired musicians. There they picked up some guitars and started singing and playing music together. They returned from this experience full of laughter and animated chatter.



Pakare Paye. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

This mix of exploration and conversation continued throughout, building lasting bonds among the teens. They could get close to nature at the nearby [Lion Park & Snake World](#) in the morning, and discuss youth culture in the afternoon. Repeated visits to Pakare Paye brought the group closer together and culminated with the teens sharing a song they wrote together.



Lion Park & Snake World. Photo credit Malia Day.



Lion Park & Snake World.  
Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

“We bonded around humor and music,” Ancel Camacho explained, “but also around the conversations we had about culture, gender rights and other issues.” They found much in common but also enormous differences. “Their school culture is strict, harsh and sometimes even includes beatings,” Ancel said. Most striking for Ancel and others was the impact of living amidst poverty and scarcity far beyond their American experience. “We can think about our future. For their families, life is about scrounging for what you need to survive another day.”

Despite the differences, “they’re also just like us” every teen told me in her or his own words. “We’re the same age and we all like to do the same things,” explained Sophia Hanna-Askin. “To reach this level of friendship with foreigners is beautiful,” said Dante Camacho.

If you missed Part 1 of this article, click the title below to be taken to SEA Homeschooler's August edition. The article begins on page 3.

# Planning and Leading the Trip of a Lifetime