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FERENGE ETHIOPIA

ProjectsAbroad

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Ethiopia

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on**



Inside this issue:

Volunteer Story	2
New Arrival Volunteers	4
Volunteer Story	5
Staff Contact List	8

Editor's Letter

Welcome to the April 2013 Projects Abroad Ethiopia newsletter. This newsletter aims to inform all our volunteers with news and information about the latest happenings in Projects Abroad Ethiopia.

Projects Abroad Ethiopia team would like to welcome our May volunteers. Thank you all the people who have volunteered with us – we really appreciate all for your valuable time and great help you gave at the different placements. And who decided to choose Ethiopia for volunteering through Projects Abroad.

Enjoy reading this issue and I hope that you will find something that you like. **Thanks to our volunteers who have shared their stories and photos with us.** We encourage everyone to join us in making the newsletter interesting and exciting by sending in your own written articles and pictures of your experiences here with us. Your stories and pictures will help others to understand and learn about Ethiopia. If you have anything you'd like to contribute, suggest, or comment on, please contact: bikeseghaileul@projects-abroad.org

Enjoy!!!!

My Ethiopian Experience

By Robert Mastroddi — Physiotherapy volunteer from UK

I only found out last minute that I had time between jobs to go to Ethiopia. Amazingly, Projects-Aboard managed to organise my placement/home-stay etc. extremely quickly. After a short week of preparation for the trip, I arrived in the middle of Timkat (Epiphany) - Ethiopia's biggest festival. This was a truly amazing welcome to Ethiopia, with thousands and thousands of people piling into the capital. The traditional music, dancing, singing and parades of the Ark of the Covenant represented an arrival I'll never forget!



The work placement was a fantastic experience. The enthusiastic staff welcomed me like family and we very quickly became great friends, not just work colleagues. Being qualified, I was delighted that there was so much opportunity to provide help. I was given the opportunity to train local rehabilitation field workers (physiotherapists) and was so happy to discover a huge eagerness to learn and progress. I also took great pleasure in training families and staff at different centres on how to help their disabled children. It was great to teach in context though, as I was training these people alongside treating patients. This gave me a great chance to see different and varied cases and develop myself as a practitioner as well.



Work was fun (but also taken very seriously) and extremely varied - from orphanages to Autism centres to medical centres to home visits. I was also lucky enough to take part in some awareness programs for disability in schools. The work was extremely rewarding and providing necessary support for very poor families in Addis affected by disability. It was a pleasure to meet all those wonderful people and get a really authentic insight into the city.

My host family was amazing and made me feel right at home. They considered me family and looked after me so well. I miss them! It was also very interesting to live Ethiopian-style and learn more about the culture and country by being immersed in it. I learned so much from my family and had an amazing time living with them. With my family, work friends and the other volunteers and social events, I didn't feel alone for one second!

I also had the opportunity to travel to some other areas of the country - Ethiopia has so much to offer (culturally and sights) so I would highly recommend spending some time travelling around the country after a good amount of time at a work placement. An amazing and diverse country with some of the friendliest people you are ever likely to meet!

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**If you have any comments or suggestion
please contact us –**

bikesegnhaileleul@projects-abroad.org

MY VERY FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARRIVING IN ADDIS ABABA

By Roberto Elefante – Journalism volunteer from Italy.

The first days in Africa for a westerner like me is like playing tennis with your emotions. If your destination is a big African capital like Addis Ababa, the feelings are even more amplified and complex.

Before leaving Italy I was excited because I was coming to experience a new culture and new places. Moreover Africa has a great appeal for Europeans because it's still a far off and wonderfully mysterious continent. On the other hand I was also a little bit worried; thoughts were passing through my mind like: would the city be safe and would the people be friendly to foreigners like me, what would I do if I got sick or if I got lost on a remote road at dusk?



When I arrived in Addis and I left Bole International Airport for the centre of town all previous ideas, hopes and worries, began to merge with this new reality and so new feelings and ideas began to take shape. From a blue and white shared taxi that was desperately trying to overtake an old truck in the midst of a chaos of cars, vans and buses,

I begin to perceive just how far my ideas had been from the reality I was entering. I immediately perceived that the African experience of a big town, and maybe the African reality altogether, is much more complicated than I had previously thought. Differences with European cities are striking but then I also began to discover similarities I hadn't expected at all. And when I started getting to know some people I found there were so many more similarities than I had previously thought.

One obvious difference between Addis and a European city is the climate; it's always warm here but not too hot, especially when compared to that of a continental European country. When I left Florence we were in the middle of winter and the hills around the city were covered in snow. Another difference, as I already mentioned, is the chaos of the traffic which does not seem to follow any specific except that of the strongest (then I learned that some rules actually do exist, however). A third difference and probably the most striking, is the contiguity between big prestigious buildings, modern and old and the small tin barracks which are still inhabited. A fourth difference, maybe the biggest, is the incredible amount of people walking along the roads from the dawn till dusk; sometimes there are so many you cannot even see the pavement.



Ferenji (as the Ethiopians nickname all white foreigners) is maybe the first word a foreigner will learn arriving in Ethiopia.

It seems to be a very exotic name but the word is an Ethiopian distortion for “French people”. Other words I have learned quickly are *salam* (hallo), *ciao* (bye), *injera* (the base of the Ethiopian food), and, with some difficulties, *amessaganella* (thank you). For the rest the language seems an absolute mystery to me. Moreover, with the fact the Ethiopians don't use the latin alphabet, it's quite impossible even to read the written texts and learn the sound of the words.

There are also a couple of surprising and unexpected aspects that I noticed immediately. The first, is that cellphones are largely widespread among the people here. I don't know the exact percentage but all the people I've met have one. Before leaving I thought that cellphones were a rarity in a developing country. The second aspect regards women and girls. Many of them are very smartly dressed, with hair and nails done in the latest American fashion, and in whatever way they are dressed, they also seem to be very emancipated in their behaviour. In the past I imagined Ethiopian girls wearing traditional clothing shyly.

However, the people I have met, even by chance, have been usually very warm and eager to help me. I would say to any foreigner; if you have no idea which shared taxi is yours, don't worry, you will easily find a commuter eager to help you to find the right one. And if you are lost around the side streets of the city there will almost certainly be a boy willing to help you to find the right road. This positive attitude towards foreigners seems to be one of the biggest assets of the Ethiopian people altogether. In fact, not being afraid of the new or unknown I believe is a great attitude for a better future of a people, especially in a developing country.

Last but not least, religion seems to me be very important for Ethiopians. There are a lot of churches and many people go there every day. The churches I have seen are mainly orthodox but there are also some of other confessions (i.e. Evangelical, Catholic, etc.) and often I hear the voice of the muezzin chanting the daily prayers. To see Christian churches side by side with Muslim mosques and everybody live in peace praying to their respective gods freely, seems to me, a western foreigner, really the most striking positive experience I have had since arriving in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.