

ONCE AROUND THE WORLD

Alone as a young woman through Africa

An inspiring travel guide with exciting adventure stories

from six months of backpacking in Africa

By Michaela Gruber

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Route

1. Uganda: 28.09. – 29.11.2015
2. Tanzania: 29.11.2015 – 07.01.2016
3. Malawi: 07.01. – 27.01.2016
4. Zambia: 27.01. – 08.02.2016
5. Botswana: 08.02. – 13.02.2016
6. Namibia: 13.02. – 19.02.2016
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You can see all details of my route [HERE](#) on my blog.

Prologue

Dissolving your apartment, terminating your job, leaving everything behind you and simply traveling the world – how does this sound? I dared to do it! In September of 2015, I packed my backpack and began a journey into the unknown. I started only with a one-way ticket to Uganda, into the heart of Africa, and with a proper portion of optimism. I had not the slightest idea what would await me on this continent, how my route would look like, or how long it would take me. It was my first real backpacking trip, my first time in the depths of Africa, and my first journey on which I was completely on my own. These were the best prerequisites for the adventure of my life.

I can still remember very well, how I sat in the airplane to Uganda – just then I realized what I was really up to. Suddenly, I got very excited and nervous. I had never sat on my own in an airplane before. The thoughts were revolving in my head. I was feeling helpless and alone, but I knew: This journey was a dream I had longed for quite some time. If I would not fulfill it now, when else would I? I was young, single, and did not have any children. There would not come a better time. If I did not start immediately, it would be too late.

My journey across Africa lasted roughly six months. I started my journey in Uganda and traveled on the land route all the way through to South Africa. Along this route, I traveled through Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho. Driven by my limitless desire for adventures, I traveled with a low budget and stayed mostly away from the worn-out tourist paths. I wanted to see and experience untouched nature as much as possible. I wanted to discover remote tribes, which live far from any civilization and are still hunting their own food. All that and a lot more, I have experienced in unforgettable ways.

When I left Africa, my heart bled. These mythical countries that appear to be so different to us, were something I really liked. I really fell in love with this fascinating continent. Most people know very little about Africa. When I tell someone that I have stayed there for half a year only equipped with my backpack, I always see horrified faces – “Africa? That is way too dangerous!” I want to put an end to these prejudices in this book. Above all, Africa is a continent, and each single of its countries is very different from another. Therefore, one can never claim that whole Africa is insecure.

Originally, it was never my plan to write a book. I started a blog, at the beginning of my journey, so my friends and relatives could stay up to date with my trip. Astonishingly, I had more visitors on my blog as I had imagined. Time after time, I received e-mails with questions about my trip. Since I love to write, one day, I decided to write down my impressions and tips in a book for interested and prospective Africa travelers.

I have never been the perfect backpacker from the start – it was quite the reverse. Principally, I have to admit that I started quite naive into this journey. But with time, I learned and developed more and more to a really professional backpacker. I want to share my experiences with you and would like to encourage you to also embark on such an adventure.

If you are unsure what any words or terms mean, please take a look into the ***Glossary*** at the end of the book.

In case of further questions, please visit my blog or write me an e-mail:

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Who is this book for?

This book is the right one for you if you are planning a backpacking trip or are interested in it. If you plan to travel on your own for the first time and still have doubts. If you feel the urge to try something new and adventurous. If you want to escape everyday life. But this book is also for those, who are simply interested in Africa or adventurous travel stories.

My goal is to give you general, as well as practical tips and tricks about backpacking with the main focus on Africa. I would like to guide you from the preparations up to what to do during your journey. Additionally, I want to share my travel stories with you, in which I write about my adventures in an Africa away from the worn-out tourist paths. This book should encourage you to dare to do the same.

1. Chapter – Why travel?

Why should one travel? That is indeed the first question that you will ask yourself. For most people, traveling means going on vacation – driving by car to Italy for a few days or going on an all-inclusive holiday to Turkey. That is quite the standard version of traveling for most.

But what I mean is a lot more than just a few days of recreation. I am writing about going on a long-term journey. Or you could call it a gap year.

Who has not dreamt about simply leaving everything behind and to escape the daily hamster wheel – as my dad used to call it? To never know, what the next day or even the next hour brings, not to have any liabilities, to be able to freely manage your time, and to experience new adventures every day – no more routine.

In the year 2013, I started on a somewhat different trip for the first time. No package holiday, no baggage, without booking anything upfront – I just went for it. Driven by curiosity for the big, wide world and by the desire for adventures. Together with a friend, I went to the Indonesian islands *Bali* and *Lombok* – only equipped with our backpacks.

We rented mopeds, which was a complete bargain thanks to the help of our couchsurfing host. On the other hand, they were in a corresponding state. To make the matter worse, we were still missing skill in driving mopeds. It did take only a few minutes, and we already had our first prang behind us. Not to mention the crazy road traffic in Indonesia.

In other words: It was a real adventure. What a feeling of freedom it was, when we drove along the fantastic coast roads of Lombok, only dressed in shorts and t-shirts and to enjoy the breathtaking place. All concerns and any stress seemed so infinitely far away. The first time in our life, we tried out couchsurfing and met the most lovely and craziest people. People that we otherwise would have never got to know. Daily, we had unforgettable experiences and met a lot of new people.

Amongst others, we got to know a girl from Germany. Together with her, we traveled a few days through the region. This young woman aroused my interest for traveling. She had already been a year on a journey around the world – solely on her own! For this courage, she received my whole admiration. Never could I have imagined this for myself.

But from that time on, a dream seemed to have awakened in me. This backpacking trip to Indonesia had given me the travel nerves. More and more I started to think about if I would indeed be able to go on a real journey around the world – on my own! Silently and secretly I started planning, how I could realize this dream.

There are so many reasons to travel.

For one, there is the desire for adventures and the curiosity.

One wants to see beyond the box.

What else is on this big, wide world?

How do people live in other countries?

Are people elsewhere also happy or even happier?

How are we different and what do we have in common with other people?

Traveling changes. You get more cosmopolitan and more self-confident. You learn that you are able to do the impossible in difficult situations, and that there are more good than bad people in this world. Before my journey, I always had the impression that the majority of people are evil and egoistic. But this journey has opened my eyes. More than once, I have been in hopeless situations and have been completely desperate. But always there has been a solution, or some person came that saw my problem and offered help. People shared completely selflessly the few they had with me. Also, I have learned to approach strangers, which had been a thing that has always been difficult for me, before. Partly, I have been really surprised of what I was able to do.

When I told my circle of friends and relatives about my big plans, naturally, I initially got confronted with lack of understanding, or some believed I was joking. Especially the fact that I wanted to start in Africa was completely suspicious for them. Traveling alone as a young, blonde girl with a backpack across Africa – something like that seemed completely impossible. Some cannibals from pristine forest would surely devour me.

Initially, I reacted somewhat insecure to such claims. But with time, they encouraged me even more. I wanted to prove them that it was indeed possible to travel Africa on my own as a young woman. And those wild tribes from pristine forest would not devour me. I wanted to leave my comfort zone, and to see how people live in simplest circumstances and still can be happy.

If you also ...

- want to make more of your life,
- are not satisfied with the idea of two weeks of vacation per year,
- want to discover the big, wide world – since you only live once,
- have a slumbering dream of Africa inside you,
- are dissatisfied of buying even more useless things *or*
- want to tell your grandchildren exciting stories when you are old

... then pack your backpack, and go on the adventure of your life. Simply DO it! Everything that you need is a tiny little spark of courage.

I do not know anyone who has ever regretted such a journey. It does not have to be a complete year or even more for the start. Dare to have big dreams and believe in yourself. Do not let yourself be

dissuaded from your goals by the doubts or fears of other people. Especially not from those people, who have not been on a journey for that long or have never been where you want to go.

Naturally, there is always a long list of things that will divert us from our dreams. Some of them are for example: an apartment or a house, that needs to be paid off, monthly fixed costs, a partner or a family, a pet, a job ... – the list could go on forever. Old habits die hard. It is our nature to be very critical about everything that is new. How many people are there, who do their job for their entire life, which does not even fulfill them; or who live in a partnership, in which they are unhappy? Mostly, the reason for this is their fear of change. Who knows, if a new job would make me really happier?

A very nice proverb says: „Nothing ventured, nothing gained.“ If we never give in to change, we can never get better. Time has become a luxury good in our western civilization, and stress controls our everyday life. Is this what we want until the end of our life? Many do not even know that there are other options. It is our own decision what we make of our life. Just because the others live by the norm – school, job, family, pension – it does not mean we have to do the same. Especially you should not wait until you are old to enjoy your life. We never know, when it will be over.

But you also have to regard a few things, when you plan a journey of this kind.

You have to:

- ... be absolutely cosmopolitan and respect people, regardless of color, culture or religion.

- ... inform upfront about the customs of a country and to respect them.

- ... be without any prejudices.

- ... be prepared for adventures that you surely will never forget again!

1.1 The difference between backpacking and package holidays

As you might already have noticed, this book is about a particular style of traveling, namely backpacking. But what is the difference between backpacking and package holidays? For most of you, backpacking is certainly a term that you might have heard at least once.

The following is a list of the most important **differences**:

- A backpacker is someone who travels the world only equipped with his or her backpack.
- Backpackers travel for a longer timeframe than a single week.
- Backpackers like to dive deep into the culture of a country and want to see more than only the pool from their hotel site. They want to get in touch with locals, try local food, etc.
- Backpackers mostly travel in a minimalistic way, meaning, they try to take as little baggage as possible with them and try to get through the days with a low budget. This also means they prefer longer bus rides over expensive flights. Some thrill seekers also travel by tramping. They mostly sleep in cheap hostels or use couchsurfing websites to find a stay at the home of locals.
- Backpackers often travel alone.
- Backpackers organize their journey on their own and individually.
- Backpackers love adventures.

The life of a backpacker also can be very hard:

- You sometimes sleep with fifteen other backpackers in a sleeping room, from which minimum one snores loudly, and five would urgently need a shower.
- You never know what the next day will bring, not even where you will sleep.
- You wait hours for a bus or for a car that stops for you and picks you up.
- You sometimes have to negotiate prices on the market for way too long.
- You will get weird or compassionate looks, when you are tormenting through the streets in the midday heat with your heavy backpack on your shoulders to find an accommodation.
- You will be squeezed in between people, living chicken, and dozens of goats, while almost not being able to move.

For some, all of these points will probably sound really terrible, but exactly these experiences are, what will make your journey an unforgettable adventure.

Additionally, backpacking also has many **advantages** compared to package holidays:

It will give you an incredible feeling of freedom. You can do or stop doing (almost) anything you want to do, and you will not be trapped in some giant hotel complex, where you will be told that it anyway would be way too dangerous to go on the streets.

You will experience new adventures every single day and will be miles away from your boring everyday life at home. You will have to deal with and overcome your own fears. It will make you more courageous. You will have a lot of time to reflect on yourself, by which you will grow as a human being and strengthen your character.

1.2 Traveling alone?

For most, traveling alone will be the worst imagination on a long journey. But exactly this idea impressed me from the beginning. It has been exactly this what fascinated me when thinking about the young woman that I had met some years ago in Indonesia: She traveled the world on her own.

Many associate the word “alone” with loneliness. But loneliness and being on your own is not the same. You can also feel alone when you have a partner. The majority of people does not even know what to do on their own or will feel helpless.

But in my opinion, it is very important to be able to get along on your own. After all we got on this world alone and will also leave it again alone. Also if we live in a happy relationship, one day it may come to a breakup or the partner dies before oneself.

For those people that have never learned to be on their own, in this point in time their complete world will break down. It is the same with good friends: The fewest will stay with us for our whole life. This is the reason, why you need to be able to be on your own. To feel good with yourself as a person. To be able to enjoy the time on your own and your own thoughts. To love yourself.

To travel on your own does not mean to travel unhappy. It is quite the reverse: You can enjoy your complete freedom. Every day you can do and stop doing what you want, and you do not need to take care of others. Especially on longer journeys, when you will be together for 24 hours a day, there will be small bickering or disagreements. Maybe one prefers to see cities and museums, but the other prefers to go into nature and on adventures. One wants to sleep comfortably, the other prefers to travel on a low budget and, so for example, to go camping or to sleep in hammocks. One likes to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning, the other wants to sleep until 11 o'clock.

There is an infinite amount of other examples. I do not want to claim that traveling with a friend, partner, or in a group, is always bad. You only have to think it through in advance. Everything that might cause disagreements should be talked through in advance, so for example the style of traveling or the budget.

Anyway, the first big problem is to find another person that wants to join you on such a long journey. If you have found someone, you need to talk through every detail with him or her. The best would be to agree upfront on splitting up, anytime you want, so that each person goes their own way from that point, should traveling together not work out as expected.

You see, it will almost certainly not be easy to find a companion for your journey. If so, it can really work out, and you may have an unforgettable time together. Indeed, it is really nice to be able to share great moments together. If you are on your own, you have the feeling that no one can understand all the things that you have experienced.

If you are courageous enough to start your journey on your own, or if you simply cannot find a companion for your journey, then: Congratulations! Ahead of you lies the best and most exciting time of your life. You will see that you are able to do things, you would have never dreamt of before.

Of course, this does not mean, you will be alone during your whole journey, just because you start on your own. It is quite the reverse. If you travel alone, it will be a lot easier to get in touch with other people – both with locals and with other backpackers.

For one, people will reach out for you a lot more often. No matter if you are sitting in the hostel or if you are standing on a zebra crossing – if you are alone, most often it will not take long before someone starts a conversation with you. You yourself will probably also approach a single person much easier than a group of people. When you get to know someone in a hostel, and you both have the same plans or preferences, it will be easy to join each other on the next part of your journey. This way the advantage of traveling with another person is that it will be more casual, since both sides know that the time with each other will be limited. If you notice that each other's interests vary too much, you can simply split up again without any disputes.

Traveling on your own allows you to learn the language of the country much faster. For example, when you sit in the bus, most often it will not take long until a conversation with your seat neighbor starts. And believe me, most Africans are very chatty. Additionally, you learn about a lot of secret tips about each country.

My experiences with traveling on my own

There has almost been not a single bus ride, on which I did not have a conversation with anyone. Africans are also a lot faster with making friendships than we in Austria. Most often, just after a few minutes, I was asked for my cell phone number. Since I bought a new SIM card in each country, I willingly gave out my number, anyway. To my astonishment, most of the people I met on a bus ride actually called me one day. Sometimes, just to ask how I was or to invite me to their home.

The absolute highlight for me was, when I met another person with white skin in the bus, since it was a very rare thing to meet other backpackers, especially in eastern Africa. I quickly made friendships.

I remember very well, how I got on an extremely jam-packed bus – with Alex, a young man from Germany – that would bring us to a small village of the Maasai near *Lake Natron* in Tanzania.

Since we wanted to see real Maasai and not just those who made a show for tourists, we asked around a little. Someone gave us the tip to go *Lake Natron*. We spent a few hours in this bus in the sweltering heat, pressed against each other and numerous locals – especially Maasai.

The street was not asphalted and partly led through raging rivers. I wondered how this bus was able to drive here. The speed varied between 5 km / h and 20 km / h. Besides us, living chicken and other belongings were transported.

The Maasai stared at us curiously. It was probably not commonplace that Mzungus (that is how Africans call people with white skin) got on a bus here. Also I never had the chance to see a Maasai at close range. Some of them were barefoot. Others wore sandals with soles made of old tires. They explained to us, those were supposed to be especially solid and durable. They were dressed in colorful cloths that they had wrapped around their slim bodies. Both men and women had very short hair. The women wore a lot of jewelry and earrings. The men all had a wooden rod with them. Some even carried a machete.

We passed numerous small Maasai villages. Additionally, we saw a small herd of zebras, which grazed only a few meters away, and ostriches, which ran over the dry meadows. Small children watched after their herds of cows and goats and waved very excited to our bus.

The heat became more and more unbearable. My clothes were already completely wet from my sweat. We were very glad when we finally arrived at the small Maasai village that had about 30 huts. Numerous people got off the bus.

Suddenly, Alex said: „Look over there, a Muzungu“. I did not trust my eyes. There indeed had been a blonde, tall, and young man with us on the bus. He also seemed to have discovered us. The young man instantly approached us and asked what the hell we were doing here. He had never assumed to meet other white people here. We thought the same. It proved to be, that the young man came from Lithuania, and his name was Danas. He loves to take photographs, especially far away from the worn-out tourist paths.

We instantly decided to continue traveling together. This was the beginning of a very good friendship. After a few days in the Maasai village, our paths with Danas separated again. Three weeks later, I met him again on the island *Zanzibar* in Tanzania. Together, we celebrated Christmas and had a lot of wacky experiences. The absolute highlight was, when I later discovered, that Danas was in Cape Town, the capital of South Africa, at the same time as me. We instantly organized a meeting. The world of those who travel can be very small sometimes.

I had another very wonderful encounter in the *Mpanga Forest*, a rain forest in Uganda. I was couchsurfing in *Mpigi*, a small place not far away from the capital *Kampala*. My host Etienne had recommended me to go on a hike through this jungle. So I searched for a Boda-Boda (moped taxi) with a driver, who could bring me there.

At the entrance to the *Mpanga Forest* was a small wooden hut. It seemed as if one was supposed to pay an admission fee to get into the nature reserve. But there was not a single person, as far as I could see. No cashier, nor any other tourist. I was a little surprised, since I had not expected that this was such a lost place. This small rain forest was not entirely unknown. But this was even better, since as you know, I love untouched nature away from mass tourism.

At the beginning, the way was very wide. But with time, it got very narrow and there were numerous junctions. Etienne had recommended me to hike across the jungle, and after about an hour I would get out on the other side of the rain forest. In the meantime, the way did not seem as if anyone had gotten through here in the last days or weeks – it was really feral and accrued. Time after time, it rustled in the bushes, and in the crowns of the trees I could see giant bird species I had never seen before.

When I walked along a pool, there suddenly was a loud splash, and I saw something giant and dark appearing. In complete panic, I began running. What could this have been? A crocodile? Or an anaconda? I had been on the hike for almost two hours by now, and it did not seem as if there was an end in sight. But turning around and going the whole way back, did seem pointless to me. So I hoped to get to the other end of the forest soon.

From now on, I only moved on slowly and looked in all directions. A few minutes later, it rustled above me in the trees. I looked up and stopped like mesmerized. I wanted to scream loudly or start crying right away. An about 1.5 meters long snake in poisonous green looked into my eyes. It was at most two meters away from me. It must have been the green mamba! My last hour had struck!

The animal only moved away from me in a strange way and then disappeared in the crown of the tree. Now it was completely over for me. I usually was not frightened of snakes, but completely alone in midst of the jungle this was too much for me. Especially, since no one would have ever found me if something had happened to me out here. I wanted to start crying right away, but tried to keep a cool head and decided that the only reasonable thing to do was to turn around and to go back from where I came.

Overcautious and a little paranoid, I started my way back. And you cannot imagine what my next encounter was. Like a miracle, I suddenly spotted a blonde mop of hair that appeared from the shrubbery. Visibly happy, a young woman of my age approached me. She greeted me friendly and asked what I was doing here. She must have had nerves. I could have just died. I still was completely perplexed. Running into somebody else was the last thing that I would have expected. And certainly not a blonde, young woman.

After short small talk, we decided to continue our way together. It happened to be that she was from Germany, and her name was Katharina. With her open and joyful manner, she immediately aroused my sympathy. We began talking about the life here in Uganda, problems with guys, as well as the entire world. This girl must have been sent by heaven. Katharina decided to come with me to Etienne, since he led a project in Uganda that she was interested in.

Some months later, she even started to work for him as a voluntary worker. Katharina and me always stayed in touch, and we still are. We met a few weeks later on Zanzibar, where we celebrated New Year's Eve. Later, when I went home for a short vacation, I visited her at her mother's place in Munich. In my smart phone, she still is saved as "Katharina Mpanga Forest".

Patrick, a young man from Germany, who I got to know on Zanzibar shall not be forgotten. He worked there since a few months for a development company that rented villas. Since my travel adventures impressed him so much, he instantly decided to quit his job.

We finally traveled to Malawi together with 17-year-old Sonja, whom I also met in Zanzibar. Sonja wanted to flee the orphanage, where she was volunteering.

Her mom did not like it at all when she found out. We spent some exciting days in Malawi, but then we parted ways again. I decided that I would rather travel alone again.

And as luck would have it, Patrick and I happened to be in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, at the same time. We met again and decided to travel together to Cape Town in South Africa. We spent an unforgettable and, above all, eventful time together.

You see that you get to know new people in all possible and impossible places. Especially in the most unlikely places, often much deeper friendships develop. If you stay in a hostel, you will always meet lots of people – if you want to.

But these are often only very superficial acquaintances, with whom one does the usual small talk: "Where do you come from? How long have you been traveling? ...?" But especially in unexpected moments and in unknown places, you often meet the most interesting people. People who love the adventure and traveling away from the worn-out tourist paths, as much as I do.



2. Chapter – Why Africa?

I had made my decision: I will go on a world tour. My employer had approved a year of unpaid leave. My eyes swept over the world map. Where would be the best place to start? Asia or Africa was the closest. So I would probably start my journey with one of these continents and end it with the other. I had already been in Asia twice. In Africa, I had been three times, but that hardly counts: These were all-inclusive holidays in Egypt, where I had seldom left the hotel.

But what is Africa really like? The first thing that came to my mind was the term safari, and the pictures of poor starving children. Otherwise, I knew almost nothing about this continent. Is it possible to go backpacking in Africa or is that too dangerous?

I started to get informed about the continent on the internet and with various travel guides. In addition, I read some testimonials from people who have been backpacking in Africa. Lo and behold, backpacking seemed to be possible. From then on, I knew where I would start my journey. After spending hours searching through all search engines for cheap flights, I also knew in which country: Uganda. One of the cheapest flights would bring me there, and it was one of the countries that I knew virtually nothing about.

When I told friends and relatives about my plans, one question immediately came up: "Why Africa?" – Well, why not? An excuse that I could not hear at some point was that it was too dangerous in Africa. This can only be said of someone who has never been there or has only spent a two-week package holiday in a club and left this for a guided safari tour, at the most.

For example, in Uganda, I was told how dangerous South Africa was, while the South Africans thought that Uganda was extremely dangerous. Many people in Africa also warned me to travel to Central America – far too dangerous! As soon as I arrived in Central America, the people there were shocked about how a young woman could travel alone through the dangerous Africa. People always classify the unknown as dangerous.

Much of the supposed knowledge of these people comes from the media. And, as we all know, people in the media tend to exaggerate a lot and show things from their worst side. Stories on poverty, famine, wars, and AIDS dominate the reporting on Africa in the news.

But what you rarely get to know is, for example, the irrepressible zest for life of the Africans, and the unbelievable beauty of the continent. The African wildlife is simply breathtaking. Nowhere else in the world is there such a variety of big animals as in Africa. The objections to this continent that I heard were about as diverse: "In Africa, you will be abducted by some jungle tribes and then they will eat you," and so on.

So honestly, such scenes are more likely to be found in a horror movie. "How do you want to get from A to B? In Africa, there is no public transport", - the doubts then continue. Africa indeed has public transport! It is a new adventure every time, but you can go wherever you want, and you get to know the loveliest people.

"In Africa, there are so many dangerous diseases. Many people die of it." Of course, there are many diseases in Africa, but also in Europe we have a lot of diseases. What sounds so frightening in Africa are these exotic diseases, which we do not know much about. For example: malaria. It is undeniable that countless people are dying of malaria in Africa. But the most important reason for this is that they simply do not have the funds necessary to buy medicine that helps against it. But, generally, every doctor in every small village in Africa has this medicine in stock. And, of course, you should also be prepared yourself and have a quick test and the necessary medication with you. If the disease is recognized and treated quickly, you usually do not have to worry about it.

Most of the backpackers that I met, loved Africa and did not have any bad experiences. Of course, I also met some who told me that they were robbed. However, such stories should be questioned much more carefully.

In Uganda, a 19-year-old guy, who was doing volunteer work, told me that one night a driver of a moped taxi threatened him with a knife and stole his iPhone and money. When I asked him for more details, it turned out that it had been three o'clock in the morning and he was drunk. Something like that could have happened to him in every major city in Europe.

Apart from all these prejudices: Africa is a huge continent and not a single country. Of course, it is not necessarily recommended to travel to Somalia. The individual countries sometimes differ fundamentally. In Cape Town, for example, I felt like I was in a big European city – the city is very developed, and countless white South Africans live there.

So, if you plan a trip to Africa, be prepared for tons of such objections and prejudices against the continent.

My first weeks in Uganda were a bit of a challenge, of course. Everything was so brand new and different for me. I often did not get very far with my European thinking. Certain Ugandan behaviors were completely incomprehensible to me. Especially their understanding of time often drove me insane, as I was used to being a punctual Austrian. I rarely saw working watches. If you asked three people on the street for the time, you got three completely different times.

And all too often, I already sat in a bus for an hour and waited until it would finally leave. The bus drivers usually said as a standard answer: "Ten minutes." However, in 99.9% of cases, the bus would not have left after ten minutes. Basically, in Africa buses only leave when they are so crammed that you can barely move. This can sometimes take hours.

I had to learn to accept things as they were. A saying that I repeatedly heard in Africa from locals or other travelers is: "TIA – This is Africa." What it means is that you should not be surprised about certain crazy things here. After all, you are in Africa.

My personal reasons to choose Africa as the destination for my journey were ...

... the mysticism of the continent. Thousands of backpackers travel to Southeast Asia or Australia. But what about Africa? Only very few travelers have countries from this continent on their list. That made my curiosity grow even more.

... the fact that most claimed that this continent was dangerous. How is it possible that women have already traveled alone with their backpack across the continent? I wanted to find out.

... the culture shock that would await me in Africa. Yes, I love culture shock. I know that there are wonderful countries to travel in Europe, too. But I wanted to see something completely different.

... the joie de vivre of the people in Africa, although many of them seem to live in the simplest conditions. How can they still radiate so much joy?



3. Chapter – Preparations

When you have decided to start a backpacking trip to Africa, then your preparations start. At first, I was quite overwhelmed. With what should I start? What would I need to think about?

It is quite normal for fears, worries, and questions to come up at this stage. If this is not true for you, you might approach the situation a little too blue-eyed.

I first started researching on the internet and the numerous travel blogs. There are so many things to settle in advance, so that you can later enjoy your travel carefree. I would like to make the preparation a little easier for you and will therefore explain my findings in detail in this section.

At the beginning of my journey, I still thought that I would spend only two months in Africa and would then continue on to South America. In a year I wanted to be home again.

Of course, everything was very different – as almost always when traveling. I fell in love with Africa and stayed there for six full months. In hindsight, I am really happy that I did not have anything that forced me to return home. I terminated the rental contract for my apartment in advance, sold my car, sold my furniture, and held flea markets to sell all the superfluous items that had accumulated over the years.

I freed myself from all valuables, before I would start on my long journey. In the beginning it almost hurt a little in my heart. But this feeling passed quickly. After that, I just felt free – free of all the unnecessary ballast, free of all the problems that a car or other valuables can often cause. I literally had nothing left to worry about. I only had my backpack.

For many, that may sound horrible. But believe me – that was the best decision I made in my preparations.

3.1 Organization

I would start organizing at least one year before the planned start of your journey, especially if it will be a long-term one. I realize, of course, that a year is a very long time, but believe me: this will save you a lot of stress shortly before your departure.

And it really is not great if all you want to do is say goodbye to your friends and family, and spend some time with them before you leave, but you have way too much to do to prepare your journey.

Here are some of the most important questions that arise before going on a long journey:

What should you do about your job?

Basically, you have four options:

1. Saving vacation days
2. Leave or unpaid leave
3. Sabbatical
4. Termination

Saving vacation days, of course, would be the easiest option. But this only works if you do not want to travel too long and know exactly when you want to come back.

Leave or the unpaid leave is the best and most convenient solution for employers, because they do not lose their employee, and, on top of that, they must not pay for the time of the leave. Or better said, as well as, after a termination, they must not pay for social benefits.

If you want to take a sabbatical or sabbatical year, you have to discuss this with your boss. Unfortunately, this is not an option in all companies. As an example, a sabbatical could work this way: You would work four years full time, but receive only 75% of your monthly salary. In the fifth year, you would go on vacation, but still get paid by your employer. In this case, the employer also pays the social benefits, as usual. Of course, there are also many other models.

The termination of your employment contract has the advantage that you are untethered, and your journey can continue for as long as you want or your financial resources allow. The disadvantages are that after your journey you have to look for a new job, and that no one pays for your social benefits.

At first, I was thinking about taking a sabbatical year, but my employer did not allow it. In hindsight, I was glad about it. It was suggested to me that I could take a year's unpaid leave. During this time, I would neither receive a wage, nor would social benefits be paid for me. However, I would keep my permanent job, and I could start again in exactly one year.

That sounded pretty good to me at first. But after only two months in Africa, I realized that I would extend my journey. For some reason, the thoughts, that I should be back at work in ten months, stressed me. Somehow, I always had the feeling that I would need to travel a bit faster.

For this reason, I decided to simply send an e-mail with my notice to my employer. When I had done this, I felt really relieved, and an unexpected sense of freedom spread throughout me. Now nothing could hold me anymore. I was free of all ballast. To this day, I do not regret this decision in the least.

What should you do about your apartment?

To answer this question, you primarily have to think about these two things: How long do you want to travel? What type of apartment do you have: rented apartment or condominium?

There are basically three options:

1. Leaving the apartment empty
2. Subletting
3. Termination

Of course, if you do not travel too long, it may be a good idea to leave the apartment empty until you come back.

However, if you are traveling longer, you could sublet the apartment. If you have a rented apartment, the advantage is that you do not have to pay the rent during your absence. Of course, first and foremost, you have to talk to the landlord about what he thinks about the idea.

If you have a condo, subletting would be an additional source of revenue. A downside is that you should know approximately when to come back. After all, you cannot easily throw out the person to whom the apartment is sublet from one day to the next. Or what if the person, to whom the apartment is subleased, wants to move out prematurely? Then you would have to settle everything from abroad. Another drawback is that there is a stranger in the apartment, and you never know how they handle the furniture and other belongings left in the apartment.

My first idea was that I could sublet my apartment for a year. My landlord even agreed. Unfortunately, it is not easy to find someone in my village that only looks to stay for a year. Besides, I somehow had the feeling that this trip could take more than a year. And, of course, it could have been that I get homesick and therefore would want to return earlier. What would I have done then?

Based on these considerations, I decided to terminate my rental contract. The enthusiasm of my family was limited, as you can imagine. *I would not have anything anymore. How I would imagine it all to work out.*

But in the end, I had made the best decision. I could carelessly transform my planned one-year journey into an open-ended journey. I sold my personal belongings at flea markets, and the most important things were stored in the cellar with my friends and relatives.

What should you do with your car?

1. Leave it where it is
2. Lending or renting
3. Sell

If you plan to travel only a few days or weeks, you can, of course, just leave your car in a garage and maybe shut down the insurance. For a longer period, however, this is not a good solution, as it is not good for the car to stand unused for so long.

Another option would be to lend the car. Best would be to someone you know. Whether you want / should, or should not demand something in return is up to you. But you have to think in advance what happens if the car would be damaged.

After a moment's thought, I decided to go for the all-or-nothing option and sold my car. That way, I even improved my travel budget a bit.

What insurances do I need?

On a longer journey, you do without comfort and have to pay attention to your budget. I would deeply recommend you to get an international health insurance. The costs of a hospital stay abroad can well exceed the five to six digit range.

According to my research, there are many cheap international health insurances for short trips. For long-term journeys, on the other hand, this can already be rather difficult. I really spent weeks researching and reading the fine print of all insurance providers. Eventually, after a detailed consultation in a "STA Travel" office, I decided for their international health insurance. For one, there is generally not much on the market for journeys that lasts longer than a year, and, secondly, their price-performance ratio had convinced me.

Important: You should also think of your statutory health insurance in your home country, since the international health insurance applies only to foreign countries. If you get a serious injury / illness, the health insurance company initiates a repatriation to your home country. If you have no job, you can – at least here in Austria, but as far as I know, it is similar in Germany – enter voluntary insurance. In Austria, this costs about 350 Euros per month. However, if it is possible to prove that you do not have a regular income, the amount will be reduced to about 100 Euros per month. Of course, that is still a considerable amount of money, especially for a traveler.

It is best to get in touch with the health insurance institution in your home country and to get informed in detail. In the meantime, I have terminated my voluntary insurance, but I do not want to recommend it to anyone, as you never know what will happen. Of course, everyone has to decide for himself or herself.

Other optional insurances (best discussed with your insurance advisor):

- Accident insurance
- Baggage insurance
- Legal protection insurance
- Trip cancellation insurance
- Liability insurance

What else do you have to think about?

- Inactivating unneeded insurances to save premiums
- Booking flights
- Getting vaccinations
- Terminating cellphone contracts
- Entering voluntary health insurance
- Getting a credit card
- Buying equipment
- Getting an international driver's license
- Applying for visas
- Saving important documents online
- Issuing general authorizations

3.2 Health

When I thought of Africa before my big journey, I was very worried about diseases. I think most of us associate this continent with malaria, polluted water, and poor hygiene.

But as soon as I landed in Uganda, I did not think much about all these "dangerous" things. Yes, sometimes I was even a bit careless, which caused me to get a parasite – presumably via drinking water.

I acted a bit on the principle of *what the locals can eat or drink, I can too*. Unfortunately, I was taught wrong. I used to have mild bowel problems, quite often. But this usually lasted only a few hours or days and was never so serious that I had to see a doctor. My body showed me now and then that I had eaten or drank something wrong.

For the past two months in Africa, I have had recurring nausea, stomach aches, and a bloated abdomen. It was not that bad, so I thought that it would be over soon. Unfortunately, it was not like that.

In South Africa, I visited a doctor for the first time. She said, that because of my symptoms, I would probably be pregnant or have gastritis. Since the former was pretty much impossible, she eventually prescribed the appropriate pills for the treatment of gastritis. Unfortunately, that did not help either. When I went home for a two-week visit, my family doctor diagnosed a parasite that I by then must have had in me for ages. Fortunately, after an antibiotic cure, everything was fine again.

In the end, of course, everything was half as bad, but still it was annoying to suffer from abdominal pain and nausea, again and again. What I mean by that is that, of course, you do not have to overdo it with hygiene. But especially with the drinking water, after this experience, I would only drink purchased, self-filtered, or boiled water. I even had a water filter with me, but was often too lazy to use it.

In Tanzania, after spending some days in a Maasai village near *Lake Natron*, I got peculiar vesicles in the area of my left cheek. It looked like herpes. But on the cheek, I found that somehow irritating. But good, I waited for it to go away again. After a few days, it had already reached enormous proportions and did not look like herpes anymore. After some research with the locals, they said that it would look like the bite of a "Nairobi fly". That was something completely new for me.

I started investigating on the internet. The symptoms listed there were really pretty much identical to mine. The Nairobi fly is a black and red beetle that contains a poisonous substance. In principle, it does not sting or bite, but it usually crawls over the skin at night. If you press it, as it can quickly happen unconsciously during sleep, the poison is released. This then causes the skin irritation. Usually this happens in the area of the face, the neck, or the arms.

The first 12 to 24 hours you notice nothing. Thereafter, the affected area of the skin turns red and blisters appear. I had them for about three weeks, which did not look very nice and hurt. Later, increased skin pigmentation persisted in this area for several months.

Regarding therapy, I did not find many clues on the internet. It seems to be something rather rare. The locals recommended me to put toothpaste on it to dry out the bubbles. That is what I tried then.

After my visit to the Maasai, I went to the Hadzabe, a very original hunter-gatherer tribe. I had the opportunity to hunt with them. When one of the Hadzabe saw my vesicles, he immediately led me to a tree, made a scratch in the bark with his knife and stroked the liquid that came out of it with his blood smeared fingers – he had just killed a dove with bow and arrow – on the bubbles. That gesture was really touching, though, I was not sure if it had made it any better or worse.

What should you do to stay healthy in Africa?

In my opinion, adequate vaccinations, a well-stocked first-aid kit, and the appropriate precautionary and hygienic measures are the most important things to keep in mind. It is the best to discuss all these issues in detail with a competent tropical medicine doctor.

What vaccinations do you need?

That depends very much on where the journey takes you. Since I had not set a precise route in advance, of course, I had to prepare for all countries.

You should already inform in advance about the recommended vaccinations of the respective countries. It is best to do this early enough in a tropical institute, since sometimes several partial vaccinations are needed. Some countries even require vaccinations to be allowed to enter the country.

I have got these vaccinations:

Cholera, diphtheria / tetanus, yellow fever, hepatitis A + B, meningococcus, rabies, and typhoid fever.

But please do not just simply imitate this. The best is to create a list of the countries that you plan to travel to. With this list you then go to a trustworthy and excellent doctor for tropical medicine to ask him or her for advice.

By the way, my health insurance in Austria did not pay any costs for vaccinations. It is also important to carry your vaccination passport while traveling. On one hand, one often forgets what vaccinations have already been received. On the other hand, certain vaccinations, such as yellow fever, are mandatory for some countries.

What belongs in your first-aid kit?

Although you can find the most medication locally, it is recommended to always have a first-aid kit with you. Especially in rural areas, there are often no pharmacies or they are very poorly equipped.

For example, when I was in a small village in Uganda for a few days, I curiously visited the doctor, and asked him what medicines he had in stock. He showed me a small shelf, and said he had two types of antibiotics, an analgesic, and an antimalarial drug. So the choice was relatively limited.

What I had in my first-aid kit:

Drug for diarrhea, malaria stand-by medication, disinfectant solution for wounds, plasters, bandages, disposable syringe, analgesics, antiallergic, broad spectrum antibiotics, after-sun, fever thermometer, sunscreen cream, water treatment pills, mosquito repellent, and an antifungal agent for the treatment of skin fungus diseases.

With regard to malaria, opinions often differ. Unfortunately, there is not (yet) a vaccine against this disease. However, you can take daily or weekly (depending on the preparation) special preventive medication, if you are in a risk area. Unfortunately, these have strong side effects in the long term, as I had to find out myself.

Even if you are only in a risky area for a short period of time, you should definitely consider this option so as not to spoil your stay with illness. Over a longer period of time, however, I would see it more critically. After all, the drugs are very strong.

I myself have been taking doxycycline for malaria prophylaxis on a daily basis for almost three months. At first, I did not notice any side effects, but over time I got stomach and bowel problems. Then I stopped the prophylaxis, and the symptoms disappeared rapidly. There are many different preparations that can be taken for prophylaxis, but all have serious side effects. Some travelers I met took a different medicine, which caused them bad nightmares and made them depressed.

When I stopped taking doxycycline, I then took Malarone tablets as so-called stand-by medication and always had a malaria quick test with me. Thus, when symptoms of malaria (such as fever) occur, one can start taking the medicine immediately.

Most important, however, is clearly a mosquito repellent. Using a mosquito net and spray or lotion to protect skin and clothing is something you should always do in risk areas. And, of course, discussing this topic with an experienced tropical medicine doctor. Although I realized that they are not all in agreement. But in any case, you can get some advice, and then base your own opinion on that.

Of course, it can be that you get sick on a longer journey. In this situation, it is important to allow yourself some rest and to look for a more comfortable accommodation. If it does not get better after a few days, you will probably have to go to a doctor.

3.3 Finances

Some believe that a trip around the world would be extremely expensive. This is complete nonsense. You do not have to be rich to travel. Of course, the travel budget depends on your travel style. There are people who have already traveled around the world for 5,000 Euros a year. Others spend the same amount for two weeks on the Maldives. Basically, the slower you travel, the cheaper it is. You usually need less money than you spend at home.

A small clue for backpackers is to budget about 1,000 Euros / month.

I have budgeted for a year and have been on the road for two years now. One reason is that I prefer the cheap and most adventurous travel style.

How do you save for a travel budget?

Once you have the plan to go on a big journey, you should create something like a travel fund or travel account. It is best to transfer a fixed amount that you can spare to this account on a monthly basis. First, of course, you have to think about how long you want to travel.

Most travelers plan, as already mentioned, with about 1,000 Euros per month. I ended up using much less than planned, so that I was able to double the time of my journey.

Nevertheless, it is recommended to generously calculate your budget. If you want something more comfortable, it should ever be 2,000 Euros a month or more that are available to you.

In addition to periodically transferring amounts to my travel account, I had begun to sell things from my apartment. If you plan a long-term trip, I would also recommend you to get rid of unnecessary bits and pieces and best sell them in the form of a flea market. Of course, the money you earn will go to your travel fund. Shortly before I left, I sold my car and furniture.

Plan upfront how much money you can at most afford to spend in a month, so you do not use it up completely. You should also keep a record of your expenses during your trip, and check them every one to two weeks. This is especially easy with online banking.

I also had a standing order from my main account to the account I used during the trip, with the maximum amount I could spend per month. For me, that meant 500 Euros a month. With the app of my bank, I was able to check regularly whether my expenses were within my limit.

Before you leave for your journey, make an appointment with your bank, and tell them about your travel plans. Some credit cards have to be activated, before they can be used in foreign countries. It is also advisable to get several cards, in case you lose one or it gets broken.

I traveled with four cards from two different banks: A credit and debit card of my bank in Austria, and a credit and debit card of the DKB (Deutsche Kreditbank).

The DKB is considered a favorite of many travelers, since the worldwide withdrawal of money is (currently) free of charge (as of 2016). Thus, it is also no problem to withdraw small amounts.

It is also beneficial to have both a Visa and MasterCard credit card, as in some countries, only one of the two types is accepted. I had no problems with my Visa card. However, I heard from some that their MasterCard did not work everywhere.

If you intend to travel longer, it would be good to grant someone in your family access to your bank account.

What costs do you have to expect?

1. One-time costs before the journey:

- Copies of IDs, such as a passport
- Vaccinations
- Copies of visas
- Backpack
- Equipment

2. Ongoing costs during the journey:

- Accommodations
- Food and beverage
- Excursions
- Transport (flights, busses, ferries, ...)
- Communication (internet, telephone)
- Purchases (cosmetics, clothes, ...)
- Insurances (international health insurance, health insurance in your home country)
- Active contracts that cannot be terminated
- Rent or other periodic costs

3.4 Packing list

What do you take with you on such a big journey? After all, you only live out of your backpack.

Basically, you should not take more on a long-term trip, as you would for a one-week vacation.

To be honest, I have always packed in a lot. It was much more for my one to two week package holidays than for this long backpacking trip. Most of the time, I was at the airport, and they checked the weight of my luggage. It was just barely below the allowed maximum weight. It was just unbelievable. Then in the end, I did not need 70 percent of the stuff.

This should not happen to you on a long-term journey, because it is exhausting to carry so much useless stuff around with you, all the time. The lighter the backpack, the better it is, and the more comfortable you will travel. I would say 12 - 15 kg should be the maximum weight of your backpack and its contents.

Of course, if you also bring a tent, a gas cooker, etc., you probably will not get below that. But I have also met people, who have traveled the world with a backpack that had a weight of only seven kilograms – which is only hand baggage. I always found that admirable. However, they have usually stayed only in warm climes and thus did not need to bring clothes for colder temperatures.

As a little help for packing, I would like to introduce my personal packing list below:

Storage:

- **Backpack:** For storing all your belongings during the journey.
- **Daypack:** A waterproof daypack is handy for day trips.
- **Belly bag or money belt:** To carry valuables close to the body under clothing.
- **Small handbag:** For the city stroll, restaurant visit or going out.
- **Toiletry bag:** The most practical are toiletry bags with a small hook to hang.
- **Zipper bags:** Best would be waterproof one, to store important documents and electronics.
- **Dry bag:** For watertight stowing of clothes and the like, as well as to keep order in the backpack.

The **backpack** is one of the most important backpacking utensils. After all, you wear it on your back almost every day. There are also travelers who prefer a suitcase. For me, that would not be an

option. The only advantage of a suitcase is that you do not always have to wear it, as it usually has small rollers. However, these can easily break.

In addition, not all roads are paved – especially not in Africa. Also, I oftentimes walked around with all my baggage for hours. That would be unthinkable with a suitcase.

What is really important when buying a backpack?

Let yourself be advised in a specialist shop. The backpack should fit well on the back – there are even special models for women.

What is important is a good waist belt, because the weight should be mostly worn by the hips, and not by the shoulders. Anyone who has ever worn a heavy backpack for a long period of time on his back can certainly understand that well.

The next criterion is the compartments of a backpack. It is a great advantage if the backpack can not only be filled from above. This can be quite handy when packing, because you always just need to press in more stuff. But if you are looking for something that is at the bottom of your backpack, it is going to be a problem.

The solution for this is a backpack that can be opened further down with a zipper. In addition, several storage and separation spaces in the backpack make sense to keep order.

Another important detail is the rain cover. I have somehow managed to always arrive exactly in the rainy season in almost all of the countries I traveled. And there really is not much worse than when the whole backpack and its contents get wet.

The rain cover also has other advantages: For example, the backpack will not get so dirty – because I almost always had the cover on my backpack, and it can be easily washed –, and it protects against pickpockets in crowded buses, as it is not so easy for the thieves to get to the contents of the backpack.

Finally, you should think about the size of the backpack. Under no circumstances should you buy a backpack that is too big, because, believe me: you will always overstuff it completely, and you will regret every gram of additional weight later on.

I am more than satisfied with my Deuter 55 + 10 liter backpack and have been traveling around the world for two whole years. Since the material is also very robust, it still looks like new. Of course, the price is not the cheapest. But especially with the backpack, you should not look too much on the price tag.

On the subject of a **daypack**, I have to say that I prefer waterproof models, because I love trekking, and it is not fun when the entire contents of my daypack get wet. In addition, daypacks are well suited for beach trips or longer city walks. The model of Exped, I found to be perfect for me, because the backpack with 25 liter has a good capacity, but can still fold really small, and therefore it does not need too much space in the big backpack.

Clothing:

You should definitely pack light and comfortable, as well as, quick drying and easy to clean clothes. Also, it is better to avoid white clothes, because you might have to wash your clothes by hand. That is why I like earth tones very much.

In addition, it would be good if the different parts can be well combined in color. Also, remember that in Muslim countries like Tanzania or Kenya, you should always cover your shoulders and knees.

- **1 fleece sweater**
- **1 shirt with long sleeves**
- **3 – 5 t-shirts:** Amongst them, one nicer t-shirt, which you can also use for going out or for restaurant visits.
- **1 shorts**
- **1 long pants:** Whether you decide for trekking pants, fashionable jeans, or cozy flattering pants is up to you.
- **1 leggings**
- **1 rain jacket:** Best is one that is 100% waterproof. At first, I had a rain jacket made of water-repellent material. But I soon regretted that. In the rainy season, it often pours out of buckets. But you can also simply take a rain cape with you.
- **1 - 2 beach clothes**
- **1 bikini**
- **5 underpants:** The more panties you have, the less often you have to wash.
- **2 pairs of socks:** Since I mostly walk around in flip-flops, two pairs of socks are perfect for me. But if you prefer to wear closed shoes, you should pack a little more.
- **2 bras**
- **Sleeping clothes**
- **1 sarong:** A sarong is a big cloth made of cotton, most of them with great patterns. It is one of my backpacking favorites, because it is very versatile. Whether as a towel, beach towel, light blanket or wrap dress - the sarong helps in all of those situations and is super light on top of that.
- **1 pair of flip flops:** My main footwear when traveling. Many prefer trekking sandals.
- **1 pair of trekking shoes:** Since I like jogging and hiking, I need shoes I can use for both. I chose a great Gore-Tex model from Salomon and was very satisfied with it.
- **Headgear**

- **Sun glasses**

Cosmetics:

The cosmetic products represent – especially with women – a not to be underestimated weight factor. Therefore, it would be recommended that you try to buy small sample packs of these products or fill them into small plastic bottles.

- **Sunscreen:** with a sun protection factor of at least 30
- **Tooth brush and tooth paste**
- **Razors and spare blades**
- **Hairbrush and comb**
- **Hair bands**
- **Deodorant**
- **Shower gel or soap**
- **Shampoo**
- **Nail clippers / Nail scissors and nail file**
- **Tweezers**
- **Body Cream**
- **Stock of contact lenses, contact lens fluid and glasses:** Of course, only for those who need it
- **Products for the monthly hygiene:** In many African countries, no tampons are sold, only sanitary towels. I myself have switched to a menstrual cup, as they are super easy to use and reusable for up to ten years, according to the manufacturer. They are simply washed out with soap or boiled after use.
- **Toilet paper roll:** Very important! There is usually no toilet paper on African toilets.
- **Pocket mirror**
- **Earplugs:** for people with sensitive ears, like me
- **Microfiber towel**

Travel pharmacy:

- **Disinfectant**
- **Plasters**
- **Bandages**
- **Pills for diarrhea**
- **Disposable syringe**
- **Bug spray**
- **Broad-spectrum antibiotic**
- **Pain killers**
- **Antifungal**
- **Antiallergic**
- **Clinical thermometer:** Very important in malaria risk areas.
- **Stand-by medication against malaria**
- **Water purification tablets**

Money and papers:

- **Passport:** This must be valid for at least six months upon arrival in the individual travel destinations and must have a sufficient number of free pages.
- **Visa:** Remember to get informed about any necessary visas, before you leave. On the website of the Foreign Office, you will receive all the necessary information.
- **Vaccination records:** Some countries require certain vaccinations (such as yellow fever). Be sure to inform yourself soon enough.
- **International driver's license:** If you intend to drive a vehicle abroad
- **Flight documents**
- **Copies of all IDs**
- **Cash**
- **Notepad**
- **Pen**
- **Pocket calendar**

- **Purse**
- **Important telephone numbers**

Electronic and digital:

- **Tablet incl. keyboard or laptop:** To keep the travel blog up to date and to answer e-mails. At first, I just traveled with a tablet from Lenovo and bought a small keyboard. I am really happy with that. However, as I started writing more and more, I ended up buying a small and light laptop.
- **Smartphone without SIM lock:** This allows you to buy local SIM cards in each country, which has the advantage that you can choose cheap packages for surfing the internet. WIFI is not available everywhere in Africa.
- **Electronic book reader:** Ideal to save the unnecessary weight of books and travel guides. On the electronic book reader, you can have all your books and guides with you without adding too much weight.
- **Required charging cables**
- **Power strip**
- **Headlamp**
- **Flashlight with crank drive**

Others:

- **Pocket knife**
- **Sleeping bag:** It is not absolutely necessary, but I used it a few times. Because I do a lot of couchsurfing, sometimes I sleep on a sofa, and the hosts do not always have spare blankets. In addition, the hygiene leaves something to be desired every now and then. In these cases you will be really happy, if you can sleep in your own sleeping bag. In some countries, it also gets pretty cold at night, as I discovered in Lesotho, for example.
- **Inflatable neck pillow:** Helps a lot to get through long bus trips, flights, and even at night as a cushion replacement.
- **Mosquito net**
- **Camping cutlery**
- **Foldable cup**
- **Small container with salt**
- **Duct tape**

- **Clothesline**
- **Sewing kit:** Has proven itself over and over for stuffing small holes in clothes, etc.
- **Lighter:** Mostly there are gas stoves in Africa.
- **2 combination locks:** Very handy to lock up your valuables in hostels.
- **Water filter:** Highly recommended for water treatment, since it is often difficult to get drinking water in the less developed countries. In the cities, it is usually not a problem to buy drinking water in a shop. Things are different in the rural areas. The people there often drink tea instead of pure water. If the water for the tea has been properly boiled, it is harmless.

If you are interested in the brands of products I bought for my trip, [HERE](#) you will find a list of links to the products in the Amazon online shop that I posted for you in my blog.

Before you leave for your big journey, you should absolutely try packing your backpack, so that you can see if there really is room for everything. When packing, keep in mind that things, that are often needed, are always at hand. In addition, heavy objects should be stored closer to the body and higher up.

During the trip, you should always pack in the same way, and give all things a permanent place in the backpack. This saves you eternally long searching, when you need a particular item very urgently. The valuables are best stowed away in your hand baggage, so that you always have them with you.

3.5 Route Planning

Most people feel the urge to plan every detail of their journey in advance. Initially, I also belonged to this group of people. The first few weeks, I had planned in detail from home. When would I be where, when would I sleep where, and what would I do?

But let me tell you, this is completely unnecessary, because in the end everything turned out quite differently, and I followed my plan for exactly two days. But that is also what is so great about backpacking: That you are flexible and can decide every day what you want to do. So in the end, I wasted a lot of time planning everything upfront.

I had already booked a hostel for two days in the village *Entebbe*, which is located near Uganda's main airport. In addition, I had arranged a pick-up from the airport, as I would arrive in the middle of the night and had previously read that the public taxis were not all trustworthy.

When I arrived in Uganda, completely exhausted, I waited in vain for my pick-up service. The taxi drivers besieged me already. I tried to get rid of them and told them that I would be picked up at any moment. They said that I was definitely forgotten. After all, we would be in Africa. So that could not be true!

After an hour of unsuccessful waiting, I was taught a lesson. I probably had to ask one of the taxi drivers for his or her services. Fortunately, when he told me the price, I remembered that one should negotiate in Africa. Quite hesitantly, I tried to lower the price a bit. And, lo and behold, he went almost halfway down the price. What a feeling of a first achievement.

When I sat with him in his rickety vehicle, I suddenly got concerns. What if he wants to kidnap me? Why else would he have gone down so easily with the price? Luckily, those were just fantasies. He took me safely to my hostel.

It looked quite nice and was painted in bright colors. The man at the reception asked where I was coming from at the crack of dawn. When I replied, slightly annoyed, that I had been waiting for my pick-up at the airport for a while, he apologized many times. He would have completely forgotten that. Then, with a big smile on his face, he added, "T.I.A., my dear." Please what? Later I found out that "T.I.A." stands for "This is Africa", which was supposed to mean something like: Typically Africa.

I suspiciously examined my hostel room. It looked totally neglected. The room was actually completely empty, except for the dirt on the floor and a small wobbly bed. Above the bed hung a mosquito net with countless holes. Also on the window, which incidentally had no windowpane, a holey mosquito net had been mounted. From the ceiling hung a light bulb on a power cord. There was only a thin bed sheet on the bed. I threw my backpack in the corner and laid down for the first time. I wanted to sleep, but I was just too excited. Not to mention the sweaty heat of course.

Soon, I was able to meet very nice people from the hostel. On every occasion, I bombarded them with questions about traveling in Uganda and generally Africa.

After two days, according to my plan, it was actually time to move on. But at the time, I hardly dared to leave the hostel, let alone to go on the streets, stop a matatu (= minibus) and drive with it to the chaotic capital *Kampala*. I took another two days to recover from all the culture shock. Then I felt ready to take the next step. You see that everything is always different, anyway.

On the other hand, a plan also gives you a sense of security. And if you do not have as much time, as you need, then you should actually plan the roughest clues. The emphasis here, however, is on "the roughest".

So do not plan too detailed, but rather your most important waypoints. I would only book accommodations in advance for the first nights.

How do you choose your destinations?

I have to confess that I really only chose my first destination for the cheapest flight. In hindsight, I realized that I was really lucky with that, because Uganda is one of the most hospitable countries I have ever been to. In addition, an extraordinary number of people speak English there, as this is the official language in addition to more than 40 different local languages. Sometimes, even radio and television are broadcast in English. Thus, the language barrier was not a big problem, anymore.

Of course, I often came to small villages. There it did not look so rosy with the English language skills of the residents. But mostly, I managed to communicate with hands and feet.

If all else fails, a piece of paper and a pen can help you to write something. Often, a translation app on your phone can also be of great help. Unfortunately, these do not include all tribal languages from Africa.

In Tanzania, I tried to learn the most important phrases in Swahili. That was really helpful. Especially at the market, it is of great advantage if you know the words for numbers so that you can negotiate. In addition, you usually get a better price and a big smile when people see that you speak their language a bit.

Besides the national language, travel time also plays a role. Generally, there is a rainy season and a dry season. With my misfortune, I managed to arrive just about everywhere in the rainy season. That does not sound so great, but in the end it was half as bad. In the rainy season, most things, such as hostels, tours, etc., are much cheaper. Moreover, "rainy season" does not mean that it rains all day. It usually does so only a few hours a day. Often there are even a few dry days in a row. But if you want to play it safe, plan your trip so that you arrive in the dry season. However, this varies from country to country.

Another important point to keep in mind is the security situation in the respective countries. To do that, it is best to search the website of the Foreign Office. The security situation of a country can change very quickly.

If you want to travel on a budget, it is an advantage to choose cheaper destinations. In my opinion, this includes almost all the East and South African countries. Price differences were rather low. I felt that the country Malawi was the cheapest. The maximum amount that you could pick up at most ATMs was only 40 Euros. But that was already a decent stack of banknotes, with which one got along for a long time.

Your exact route will develop on the way. If you like it well in one place, you will certainly stay longer than planned. Also, the people you meet on the way are often crucial for the further route planning. Not only once have I partnered with other travelers for a few days or even weeks. It is important, in any case, that you do not worry too much, because it allows you to travel much more relaxed.

4. Chapter – On your journey

You are finished with all your preparations, and you are sitting in the plane to your first destination. Now begins your journey into the unknown.

But how does it continue? Where will you sleep? How do you get from A to B? What should you know about hygiene and safety? What should you consider when planning your budget?

My very first piece of advice: Do not worry too much in advance about all these points. Once you have started the trip, and you arrived at your first travel destination, you will notice that everything is working out somehow. And usually everything will be very different than you had planned previously. Relax! Nothing will work out as you think.

Sometimes, your patience will be put to the test. Not only once did it happen to me that I waited almost two hours for the meal I had ordered. Always remember the motto: "Do not fret, just wonder". But the food is usually prepared really fresh.

For example, if you order French fries, it may well be that the lady in the kitchen first goes into the garden to get some potatoes. Then she begins to peel them very comfortably. After a short talk with her colleagues, the potatoes are then cut into fries in slow motion. And at the same speed it goes on.

Or your planned bus simply does not leave for any reason. It has a defect or there are not enough passengers in it. Or the bus driver just does not appear. All of this is part of everyday backpacker life. Please do not let it make you go upside down. Better stop planning everything exactly, and always take a little more time.

Nevertheless, in this chapter I would like to give you some tips on the most important points to consider for your journey.

4.1 Accommodations

How and where you spend the nights on your journey, of course, heavily depends on your budget. Here I would like to introduce you to some options:

Hostels

Hostels are probably the most popular type of accommodation for most backpackers. They are mainly targeted at younger people, backpackers, or individual travelers.

Typical for hostels are shared rooms. So you do not book a room for yourself – just a bed. Sometimes it is also a bunk bed. The room is then shared with several people. Some hostels have quadruple rooms, others accommodate as many as 20 people in a single room. A hostel usually has unisex dormitories – meaning men and women sleep in the same room – or occasionally gender-separated rooms. In addition, there are usually shared bathrooms, common rooms, and often even a shared kitchen where you can cook your own meals. Sometimes even joint activities or tours are offered.

Especially for solo travelers, hostels are an advantage, because you meet many other backpackers, and it is very easy to socialize. In the evening, people usually sit together or parties take place. That is nice every now and then. But if you are on a long-term journey, this can become exhausting. People often celebrate until the early hours of the morning. That means there is a corresponding volume throughout the night.

And it is not to everyone's liking to sleep in a room with so many people. Because almost always there is someone who snores loudly or stumbles drunk in the middle of the night with a full crash into the room. And, not only once, did I experience that someone suddenly came back from a party with someone else, and then they had unrestrained sex in the dorm. This is of course an absolute no-go, but due to the high alcohol consumption and being away from home, some people lose all their inhibitions. Anyway, you have to expect such situations in hostels.

Many book their bed at the hostel several days or even weeks in advance. Others arrive in a place and then look for accommodation. I myself have never booked a hostel in advance, but never had to look far until I found one. Of course, that depends a lot on the season and the country. While there are plenty of hostels in most countries around the world, this is often not the case in East African countries. In the big cities it is usually not a problem. But in rural, non-touristy areas, this type of accommodation is often not known.

Camping

Camping is certainly one of the cheapest accommodation options. In addition, one is relatively independent.

However, if you travel in the rainy season, a tent is not necessarily the best place to sleep, because it often rains heavily, which can cause flooding.

Since I had hardly planned my route, to my misfortune, I arrived at almost every country in the rainy season. Because of that, camping was not an option for me, although I am usually a camping fan.

Another disadvantage is the extra weight that you have to carry around with you. The weight that comes together quickly with a tent, sleeping bag, mat, etc., should not be underestimated.

In addition, it is said that every now and then, I met travelers with camping equipment. They invited me very often to share the tent with them. I only had to bring my sleeping bag.

Hotels and inns

I have noticed that in many African countries, there is not much difference between the terms "hotel" and "inn". In the very touristy areas, there are often huge and above all expensive hotel complexes. But of these I do not speak here. I mean the small, inconspicuous hotels that you find in every city and also in smaller places.

Sometimes they are also called inns. They are mostly tailored to locals and therefore priced very reasonably. Sometimes they are even cheaper than hostels. My cheapest inn, I can remember, was in a small village in Malawi. There, I did not even pay one Euro for a single room. There was no electricity and no running water. Instead they brought me candles into my room in the evening, and, if I wanted to take a shower, a canister of water.

The typical hostels are usually located in the tourist areas, anyway. However, if you travel off the worn-out tourist paths, you will often depend on inns or hotels. On top of that, they are always a welcome change if you long for privacy.

Couchsurfing

Couchsurfing (www.couchsurfing.com) is a website on the internet where people from all over the world can offer travelers a place to sleep. But it is also possible to offer only a joint meeting or a city tour.

This is mainly about the cultural exchange. The whole thing is completely free. Of course, it should not be the case that you simply stay with someone for free and eat from his or her fridge. Rather, it should be a mutual giving and taking. For example, a small gift is appropriate, or you cook a typical dish from your own home country for your host.

When you sign up for couchsurfing, you first of all create a profile with your interests and hobbies. This allows other people to get a first impression of guests or hosts.

Many are worried whether couchsurfing is safe. I personally would say that it is very safe if you pay attention to a few points:

- Always read your host's profile carefully to avoid any nasty surprises. For example, I heard a story about a girl who rang the doorbell of her host, who then opened his door completely naked. She had overlooked that he stated to be a nudist in his profile. Some hosts say you have to share the bed with them. If the person is same-sex, that is no problem for me. For example, in Uganda I slept in the same bed with my hostess and her cousin. In addition, one

should check the profile pictures of the persons, since these are often very meaningful. For example, if a man shows himself topless on a photo, you can imagine what his intention is. I would advise you to just listen to your gut feeling.

- Read the references of the host. After you have hosted a guest at home, or you were a guest with someone, people always post ratings about the respective person. This can be positive or negative. I usually act on the principle that I filter out all people who have less than five positive reviews (for women) or ten positive reviews (for men). Thus, I can be relatively sure that the respective persons are trustworthy.
- Especially, if you travel alone as a woman, it is better to stay with women or families. This is often easier said than done, because in my experience, there are many more men on the website than women.
- If you have the feeling of being hassled by your host, it is important to speak out a clear "No". This is almost always respected. If you still feel uncomfortable, you have to have the guts and look for another place to stay.

The advantages of couchsurfing:

- It does not cost anything.
- You get a very deep insight into the culture of each country.
- You get to know people from different social classes. For example, I lived in South Africa with a wealthy family in a luxury villa with all the amenities you could possibly imagine. In contrast, I lived with a family of eight persons in one small room in the slums of Zambia for a few days. I loved both experiences.
- You get to know people you might not even meet in your day-to-day life. By couchsurfing, you get to know completely different life attitudes. I have already met wild hippies, absolute sports fanatics, car enthusiasts, animal rights activists, extreme mountaineers, dancers, singers, extended families, eco-freaks, successful business people, etc. – and these were always very positive encounters, from which I could learn a lot and got insight into other lifestyles.
- You get insider tips or even get to know secret places that other tourists never get to know / see.
- You get to know the regional cuisine.
- You make friends all over the world.
- You get advice which regions you should avoid.
- You have company. That is why it is great especially for solo travelers.

The disadvantages of couchsurfing:

- You often do not know, where you land and how comfortable and clean the apartment and your sleeping place is.
- With some hosts, you are often not so on the same wavelength.
- You are always the guest and therefore often have to follow the schedule of your host.
- You often have little privacy.
- You need internet to connect with your hosts.

My personal conclusion about couchsurfing: I love it.

For me, it is the best and most authentic way to travel. There are so many interesting details about the culture of a country that you would never know as a hostel guest, who is surrounded only by other travelers. I have been shown secret places that are not in any Lonely Planet travel guide and cooked with my hosts the most delicious local dishes. I have received so much hospitality that I was partly moved to tears. Often these were families that did not have much, but nevertheless shared everything with me quite naturally and willingly. And best of all, I have found friends for life.

Workaway

Workaway (www.workaway.info) is a website where you can find volunteer work worldwide in a variety of areas, such as hostels, farms, etc. In exchange for a few hours of work per day, you will receive accommodation and meals in most cases – as negotiated with locals.

Since you have a lot of free time, you can easily do a language course or something along the way. In addition, you learn a lot in your work, such as the national language.

First of all, you have to create a profile on the website. Just like on couchsurfing, after you have worked in one place, you always leave references.

Many employers require a minimum stay of two weeks to a month. Longer stay is usually no problem. Often, you have two days off the week and work a maximum of five hours a day. The Workaway membership currently costs 29 USD and is valid for two years (as of 2016).

The website is very popular with many backpackers, as it makes traveling a lot cheaper. You also get to know foreign cultures and meet lots of great new people. So when you feel tired from packing your daypack, Workaway is the perfect way to spend a few days or weeks in one place.

Another plus is that Workaway is now represented in almost every country in the world.



4.2 Transport

How do you get from A to B in Africa? It is much easier than you might think, because there is public transport almost everywhere.

The next thing most people probably worry about is, how safe it is. Personally, I have to say that I never felt seriously at risk on public transport. Road traffic is nowhere 100 percent safe anywhere in the world. Everywhere, accidents happen each single day.

Having traveled several countries during the rainy season, flooded roads have often been the biggest problem. Also many roads in Africa are unpaved.

Below is a small selection of the most common means of transport in the countries I have traveled:

Moped taxis

Especially in Uganda's capital Kampala, the moped taxi – also called Boda-Boda – is very popular, because the traffic chaos there is simply the absolute horror. With minibuses you can be stuck forever in a traffic jam.

Moped taxis can get through these situations easily. I do not have to mention that there are some dangerous situations, now and then. In any case, some Boda-Boda riders are driving through the streets as if a wild monkey bit them. In such situations, do not hesitate to ask the driver to drive a little slower. If he does not comply, it is best to stop immediately. Sometimes, I had the feeling that the boys just wanted to show off their driving skills. But when I pointed out to them that I did not like it that much, they almost immediately throttled their speed.

The moped taxis can be found in Kampala and in some other African cities pretty much everywhere on the street. Simply wave your hand to get their attention. Others will also impose themselves on you.

It is always important to negotiate the price in advance. You should better ask other locals in advance, how much the planned route may cost. This avoids unpleasant rip offs.

Minibuses and buses

In addition to the moped taxis, there are usually also minibuses and large buses. Minibuses travel both in the cities and on longer journeys. The big buses are only for long hauls.

The minibuses – sometimes also the big buses – usually only leave when they are full. And I mean really full! So much, that they are stuffed with people, as well as, live chickens, and sometimes even goats, until there is really no space left.

It even happened to me that the driver simply put a few heavy vegetable bags of another passenger on my lap, because there would not have been any other space for them. My seatmate held on to five live chickens with his hands, which were tied together by their legs.

The larger loads are usually tied to the roof, so it sometimes even bulges down due to the weight.

So you see, sometimes, things in Africa can get pretty adventurous. But the people are incredibly friendly and usually immediately involve you in a conversation, or you will be bombarded with questions. If that is too stressful for you, then it is best to always have headphones with you.

Taxis

In addition to moped taxis, buses, and minibuses, there are also normal taxis in the cities. These are usually a bit more expensive. Again, the price should be negotiated beforehand, so it does not come to unpleasant surprises at the end of your ride.

In addition, it would be advisable to take only official taxis for security reasons. Which are the best, you will learn from locals, or you can read in your guide.

Bicycle taxis

What I found very unusual, were bicycle taxis, which I saw on my journey only in Malawi. They are basically normal bikes. You wave at the driver, negotiate the price, and then sit down on the baggage rack. Wearing a dress or a skirt, you have to sit crosswise, which can be pretty shaky while driving. But the drivers are fortunately practiced enough.

This means of transport is only suitable for shorter distances and not really the most comfortable.

Hitchhiking

In some African countries, hitchhiking is very common. Especially in Botswana and Namibia, I had to travel like this several times, because there simply was no public transport on my planned route. I simply stood in front of a petrol station and asked the drivers of arriving vehicles, where they would go.

Or I stood directly besides the street. The advantage at the gas station is that you can choose drivers. If someone does not seem particularly trustworthy, then you can just leave it alone and wait for the next one to arrive. You never know who stops at the street. Of course, there is also the possibility to say "no".

Carpooling

Otherwise, there are often carpools for routes where public transport is not available. It is best to ask at the gas stations, as they usually leave from there as soon as they are full. These are normal cars with a private driver, who wants some change for his services.

Ferries or boats

Another option is to travel via a ferry or boat.

For example, I crossed Lake Victoria on a ferry. It was not so easy, since I wanted to go from *Bukoba* to *Mwanza*. Both places are located in Tanzania. I bought my ticket for the ferry at about ten o'clock that day. The nice ticket vendor told me that I should come back today at eight o'clock, because the departure would be at nine o'clock.

I relaxed after lunch on the beach of Lake Victoria, when I suddenly saw the big ferry leaving. I thought that was a bit weird, because actually there is only one ferry leaving twice a week and so it was the only one scheduled to leave today at eight o'clock in the evening. I asked the owner of my accommodation. He explained that this was probably my ferry that left. Oh my god! The man at the port had clearly said that it would leave at eight.

The owner of my accommodation began to educate me about the Swahili time. The sunrise, which here at the equator takes place around at the same time all year – namely at six o'clock in the morning – is zero o'clock. As a result, seven o'clock in the morning is one o'clock and so on. The ticket seller meant eight o'clock in Swahili time, which corresponded to four o'clock in normal time. Great! So I had to wait another three days here in *Bukoba*, until the next ferry left. My tip to you: Always ask in Tanzania if the Swahili time or the normal time is meant.

Trains

There are also a few train routes in Africa. For example, one of them leads from Tanzania to Zambia. Unfortunately, the train does not depart every day, and you have to buy the ticket in advance. That is exactly why my planned train journey failed. All tickets were sold out, and I did not want to wait another three days.

The second time I was in Namibia, it all worked out. But then, unfortunately, it was a night train, so I could not see much of the area. You also have to expect that the trains need a lot longer than the buses and, in addition, almost always are delayed. My train needed full 12 hours, whereas the corresponding bus ride would have just taken four hours. At least it was worth the experience.

Car rental

If you prefer to drive yourself, you can also rent a car. However, I would advise you to do so only in countries with good road conditions. In South Africa, it is definitely not a problem. But keep in mind that many countries have left-hand traffic and that you need an international driver's license.



Central bus station in Kampala (Uganda)

4.3 Hygiene and health on the road

Amazingly, many people find the hygienic conditions very worrying when they think of a trip to Africa. "Was it not disgusting for you?" I get to hear all too often.

I do not know if it is because of my job as a nurse or something else, but it really takes a lot for me to be disgusted with something. I dare to say that my tolerance threshold is a lot higher than that of most of the people I meet. This can have both advantages and disadvantages.

Excessive hygiene, as we all know, is not good either. I usually acted according to this principle. I allowed myself food from the street, ice cubes, and even water from the tap or the well, because I thought: If the locals can handle it, it certainly will not hurt me either. But that is exactly what made me feel ill again and again. It expressed itself over and over with stomach and intestine discomforts. So I have to admit that I should have been more careful, especially regarding water. But still it was half as bad, after all, since most aches and pains can be treated.

Nevertheless, one's own health is our highest good, and we should by no means risk it carelessly.

In the following, I would like to introduce you to four major diseases, since I have met many people – locals as well as travelers – who have been affected by these:

1. Diarrhea:

Traveller's diarrhea is almost certainly one of the most common diseases a traveler suffers from. The reason for this is usually lack of hygiene, unfamiliar food, dirty drinking water, or raw food (fruit, salad, meat, fish). Due to our high standards of hygiene in Europe, we are not used to the germs in developing countries, which often pollute the water and food. On a long-term journey, almost everyone will sooner or later be affected by stomach or intestinal problems. Mostly, however, the symptoms are mild and are not dangerous. Diarrhea usually disappears by itself within one to two days. It is only important to supply enough fluid to the body. Particularly suitable for this are electrolyte-containing drinks, which are available in pharmacies. With strong abdominal cramps, sometimes painkillers are required. However, if the diarrhea persists, seek medical advice, as antibiotics or antiparasitic agents may be necessary for treatment.

2. Malaria:

Malaria is one of the most important infectious diseases in the world. There are different types of malaria, which also lead to symptoms that differ in strength. Most dangerous is the *malaria tropica*. This disease is transmitted by mosquitoes, which are active at dusk and night. Therefore, the main focus in malaria prophylaxis should be to protect against stings. This extremely reduces the risk of malaria.

In high-risk areas, it is often advised to take a chemo-prophylaxis. However, this should be discussed with a tropical medicine doctor. When fever occurs, the possibility of malaria should always be considered, even up to four months after the end of your journey, as the period of infection can often be very long. In most African countries, you can get tested for malaria at virtually every doctor in the risk areas.

On my journey through Africa, I met a lot of people who had been infected with malaria. While some of them had only a bit of fever for a few days, others had to suffer from severe symptoms for weeks.

3. Bilharzia (also called schistosomiasis):

Bilharzia is a worm disease caused by freshwater larvae. Snails are intermediate hosts for them. The free-floating larvae penetrate the skin of humans. They then migrate through the blood vessels into the liver and then spread mainly in the bladder, the intestine, the liver, the lungs, and the brain. The first symptoms include itching at the point of entry, often accompanied by a rash. The larvae can also penetrate into the skin unnoticed. After a few weeks, symptoms such as blood in the urine and / or flu-like symptoms often appear. If the intestine is affected, diarrhea occurs.

Although there are drugs for the treatment of schistosomiasis, unfortunately, the disease is often discovered too late, when it has already formed late effects. It is therefore important to find out in advance, which areas may be affected of schistosomiasis. Most of the time these are standing waters. Amongst others, *Lake Victoria* is a risk area.

Therefore, avoid swimming there, even if the locals do it or if they claim that the waters are free of bilharzia. Inform yourself from safe sources. Incidentally, the disease can also be transmitted via drinking water.

4. Sand flea disease (also called tungiasis):

Sand fleas may be unknown to many. I also did not know about these before my trip to Africa. They are, as the name implies, a species of flea that parasitizes mammals and humans as well. The feet are almost always affected most from this.

The flea jumps on victims passing by and then tries to drill into the skin to the next blood vessel. The posterior part of the parasite remains above the skin surface and is often seen as a small black dot. Now the sand flea begins to suck blood and swells up to twelve millimeters. If by chance, a male passes by, the female is fertilized, and this then lays several thousand eggs. The eggs fall through the exposed opening to the ground and develop into larvae within a few days.

Another three weeks later, the development of the adult sand flea has been completed, and new victims are being sought. Sand flea disease is a typical poverty disease that is extremely painful. It occurs mainly in rural areas. Affected are people who walk barefoot or in open footwear.

When I visited a very poor section of the population in Uganda, the Batwa, almost all children had tons of sand fleas in their feet. That looked terrible, as it usually came to pronounced swelling and bad infections, and the children could not even walk properly. I also saw the kids trying to cut the sand fleas out of each other's skin with a dirty little knife. Due to poor hygiene, it leads to even worse infections and diseases such as HIV being transmitted.

Unfortunately, you do not know as a traveler, in which areas the sand fleas occur. Closed shoes offer the best protection. The locals always warned me, especially in Uganda, to wear only closed shoes, when I was in a vulnerable area. Incidentally, they call the sand fleas "jiggers" there.

Some tips on hygiene and health

- Do not drink tap or well water! Not even if the locals do it. Mostly, drinking water is cheap to buy from local stores. When buying, make sure that the bottles are sealed in a way that

opening them would be noticed. Otherwise, you can just boil the tap water, before using it, or maybe you even have a water filter with you. Alternatively, there are water treatment tablets. Also, remember not to use tap water to rinse your mouth and to order your drinks without ice cubes.

- Wash your hands frequently. From my own experience, I can say that unfortunately this is not always possible. Especially on long bus trips, there is often no way to wash your hands before eating, or after going to the toilet. Therefore, it is recommended to always have a small bottle of skin disinfectant or wet wipes with you.
- Always have a roll of toilet paper with you. Toilet paper is usually missing on public toilets, as well as, in restaurants. On longer bus trips, the driver usually stops, so that everyone can go pee at the roadside. Since there are sometimes not even trees or bushes, I have since learned from African women, that it is advantageous to wear a long skirt – so you can pee undisturbed, without anyone watching you.
- Always use mosquito repellent in risk areas and sleep under a mosquito net.
- Inform yourself about possible health risks in each area. You can read about this in your guide and also ask locals. For example, not all water bodies are suitable for bathing (see the previous section on schistosomiasis!).
- If you experience symptoms such as fever during your journey, seek medical attention immediately, so that you can be tested for malaria and other illnesses. The earlier a disease is recognized, the sooner it can be treated.
- Be careful when wearing open footwear (sand fleas, scorpions, etc.).
- Only eat meals that are cooked and served hot.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean drinking water before consumption. Even better: Eat it only if you can peel it yourself.
- Take care when eating fish, meat, untreated milk, and eggs. However, if the meat is roasted or fried, then it is harmless.

Whether you buy dishes on the street or not, you have to decide for yourself. Many travelers avoid this because there are always cases of food poisoning.

I personally never had any bad experiences with it. The good thing about eating on the street is that you can watch while your food is prepared. When you see how the lady in front of you prepares the empanadas fresh and fried in oil, you can eat with confidence.

However, you should not buy anything from the girl who walks the streets, selling her ready-made chicken wings on which the flies are already buzzing. The same is true for restaurants – it usually takes just a quick glance, and you know if the hygiene conditions are more or less okay. It is not in your hands a one hundred percent of times, anyway. But usually it is enough if you listen to your common sense.

At the beginning of your journey, the body first has to switch to the unfamiliar food, so initially, you should be a little more careful.

4.4 Safety and security

In addition to hygiene, safety is certainly one of the biggest concerns of anyone who travels Africa. That has a good reason, too. After all, every day the media bombards us with reports of wars, abductions, accidents, and much more.

In addition, you get to hear all the horror stories from any possible and impossible people. The interesting thing is that these come almost exclusively from people, who have never been to Africa before or at maximum have been on a package holiday in a huge hotel complex. And then they did not leave it without a guide anyway, since that would have been "too dangerous".

However, if you talk to other backpackers who have already been to Africa, they mostly confirm that there is nothing to fear at all.

In the following, I would like to give you a short summary of my own experiences in Africa: During my six months in Africa, I never felt seriously at risk. Admittedly, I have traveled to a lot of countries in this world, where I felt a lot less comfortable than in the African countries.

Again, you just have to use your common sense, and listen to your gut feeling now and then. Some people are so worried about their safety that I am seriously wondering why they are actually getting into a car and are not better off building a bunker somewhere, to wait until their lives are over.

Theoretically, anything can happen to us anytime, anywhere. Personally, I think there is always a bit of destiny (or the will of God or whatever each one may call it) in when and where something happens to us. Of course, however, you should also not provoke your own misfortune.

My best safety tips

- As already mentioned: Use your common sense and listen to your gut feeling.
- Inform yourself on the website of the Foreign Office about the current security situation of the respective countries.
- If your driver is over-speeding, or if his driving style is risky, do not hesitate to tell him. When this does not help, please ask him to stop so you can get off.
- Avoid vehicles that are evidently already falling apart.
- Pack your valuables, such as a laptop, passport, money, etc., into your carry-on baggage, which you then always carry with you.
- Do not walk through the streets with your smartphone in your hand. Bear in mind that there is a lot of poverty in many African countries.
- Ask the locals where it is safe and which neighborhoods you should rather stay away from. They can also tell you where to walk around alone without hesitation.
- Always carry money and credit cards in a belly bag with you.

- Carry your handbag on your front and hold it tight, especially in the larger cities. On one hand, to help against pickpockets, and, on the other hand, I already heard stories in which moped drivers had stolen purses when passing by.
- Do not leave your valuables lying around in hostels – there are usually lockers where you can lock them in. Often, other travelers are the worst thieves.
- Do not trust everyone you meet on the street.
- Observe your surroundings and your fellow human beings. Do not run around with your headphones in your ears, so you will not hear what happens around you. Keep your eyes open to see if someone is following you or may be staring at you for a long time.
- If you really get robbed, do not resist and hand out the items you are asked for. Your own life is more important than a smartphone.
- It is an advantage to have another small wallet with some change. So you can give this out in case of a robbery.

I have consistently found that Africans are extremely hospitable people and want their country to be seen from the best side by tourists or backpackers. They even alert you when they feel you should, for example, take better care of your bag or do not move too far away from your backpack at the bus stop.

During my two-year backpacking journey, of course, I have heard a lot of horror stories from other travelers. For example, one girl told me that three guys robbed her at night in *Lilongwe*, the capital of Malawi. She was traveling alone, on the way home from a party and had not drunk much there. When I met the girl, she looked relatively dressed up, with beautiful gold jewelry and an expensive-looking bag. Truth be told, walking like this through a town in Malawi at night when drunk, I would not be surprised that she got robbed.

What I am trying to tell you is this: Just use your mind, and do not challenge the evil. Also, Malawi is a very poor country. Gold jewelry and expensive designer handbags generally should not be worn there. Personally, I find that very contemptuous towards the locals. So please, do not attract too much unwanted attention by valuables that are flaunted openly.

Even things from me were stolen twice

The first time was in a small village away from any tourism in Malawi. I found a cheap accommodation for the equivalent of just one Euro per night. Although this inn neither had electricity nor running water, it otherwise was quite nice. At about 8 o'clock in the evening I left my room to go to the washroom. Of course, I locked the door.

When I came back into the room, I searched my cell phone in vain. I was quite sure that I had left it on the bed. I notified the owners of my accommodation. These brought the security man. He seemed to have slept already. I did not want to blame him, because he seemed to be about 80 years old and appeared a bit demented. He began to defend himself, saying that he was sure nobody entered the property.

However, not far away was a small bar, from which you could hear loud music. There always were lots of drunken villagers. Sometimes one or the other got lost here to quickly use the toilet.

Since my room was at ground level, we stood in front of it and began to speculate on how someone might have stolen the phone. We also got behind it quite fast. The windows of my room in fact were only secured by bars, so there was no glass in the windows. In front of the window I found a forked wooden stick. My phone case had a loop on it. So it would not have been too hard to fish it out with this stick. Then it also occurred to me that my mobile alarm was set to 20:15 o'clock.

The story can be summarized very simple: Someone from the bar was probably just here to pee and heard the alarm of my cell phone. Looking through the window, he saw my smartphone lying on the bed. Of course, he fished it out.

Meanwhile, the whole neighborhood had already gathered around me. They all seemed outraged by the theft. One gentleman said, we should search the guests in the bar. That seemed very insane.

Whoever had my cell phone now, certainly already left with it or had at least hidden it somewhere safe. I was sure I would never see it again. Sure, at first I was very angry and also sad, because I had saved all my travel photos and much more on it.

Since I was already so tired, I only wanted to go to sleep. But the villagers did not want to give up the search. They seemed even more worried than me. They speculated and discussed. A new person – a young man – was now suspected.

They suggested that we visit and question him. Again, I did not understand how this was supposed to help, but well. We all went together to the house of the suspect. When he opened his door, he was completely sleepy – after all, it was almost midnight. Of course he knew nothing about where my phone was.

The next day, someone knocked on my door at six o'clock in the morning. There were a few guys from the previous day, who tried helping to find my stolen phone. They wanted to help me and escorted me to the police station that was in the next town. I was very touched by their helpfulness.

The people at the police station were extremely friendly. Although they really wanted to give me hope, I realized that they too would not bring my phone back. Actually, I just wanted to quickly get the papers for the insurance, as that day, I had planned to leave for my three-day hike to the highest mountain in Malawi, *Mount Mulanje*. But the African clocks tick differently. Nothing is fast here. At least, the policemen quite naturally shared their lunch with me.

In the end, I was there all day and then noticed at home that they did not write "Austria" but "Australia" on the confirmation for the insurance, although I had said several times that these are two different countries. Well, "T.I.A.", I just thought. I had no desire to once again go the long way to the neighboring town.

When I thought about the whole story in my bed in the evening, I was touched by all the compassion and helpfulness of the people here – from the villagers and the boys, to the police. In Africa, such manners seem to be self-evident. And I had the impression that most likely no one in my home country would have been interested in it, even if something had been stolen from the neighbor.

The second time something got stolen from me, it was something more unspectacular. I was in the small town of *Maun* in Botswana. There I stayed in the really great *Old Bridge Backpackers* camp.

Together with a young Chinese woman, I shared a tent, which was only a few meters away from the river. Real crocodiles were in it. Between the river and the tent was just a chain link fence – that was kind of scary. The owner of the camp told us that one of the crocodiles had eaten his dog a few days ago.

In any case, one morning, I decided to indulge myself, once again. I booked a horseback tour through the beautiful *Okavango Delta*. The lady who owned the horses was an American. She picked me up from the camp, and we drove to her farm. Two young African men were already waiting for us. One of them would be my guide.

The American said, that I should leave my backpack with the other young gentleman, so that it would not interfere with my riding. I briefly had a bad feeling, since I had my money and other valuables in there. But soon, I did not think about it anymore.

When I arrived at the camp in the evening after a wonderful day, I noticed that my money was missing. Fortunately, I only had the equivalent of 30 Euros in my purse. I was annoyed for a moment, but then thought that it was my own fault. It was a lesson for me to take better care of my things in the future.

So you see, I did not have really bad experiences, and both were opportunistic thefts. Getting threatened with weapons or being the victim of an organized crime is certainly an absolute exception.

In short: With the usual precautionary measures and a little common sense, you get along well in Africa.

Online backup of your documents

Before leaving home for traveling abroad, you should also backup a copy of all your important documents. This is best done online, because if you should ever lose everything – for whatever reason – then you can, at least, access your most important documents from any computer with an internet connection.

So you scan all your important documents like ...

- Passport
- Documents from your international health insurance
- Credit cards
- Vaccination card
- Important telephone numbers
- Medical prescriptions for birth control pill, contact lenses, etc.

... and save them in the internet.

There are a variety of options, such as Google Drive, Dropbox and many more. In addition, it is beneficial to carry some important documents with you as a copy in your backpack. This includes, for example, your passport. So when going on day trips, you can safely leave the passport in the hostel locker, and just take the copy with you. In the capital of Uganda, I sometimes went to a festival or a nightclub. Passports were often required, and they were satisfied with the copy of the passport.

4.5 Budget

How do I get money while traveling?

The easiest way to get money while traveling is by an ATM. You will always receive the local currency of the respective country. You should first find out what the exchange rate is, so that you do not withdraw too much or too little money. I usually withdrew for a week or two in advance.

ATMs can be found in Africa in most major cities. In the rural area, on the other hand, they are rather rare. So you should always plan ahead a little.

It is also important to consider whether there is a daily or weekly limit on your cards. Many people were already faced with unpleasant surprises when the ATM suddenly did not spit out any more money.

What will the running costs consist of on your journey?

I have already listed all the points in detail in the subchapter 3.3. Please check your spending regularly – preferably weekly – so you avoid that you lose track of your finances and that you are suddenly without money.

How do I travel cheaply?

A general rule of thumb for most backpackers is that you should budget around 1,000 Euros / month. If you sleep in hostels, you occasionally do guided tours, and you eat more or less well, then you will certainly reach this amount of expenses.

In the first few months of my journey, I even managed to partly outdo my budget. I did not know about possibilities like couchsurfing or workaway, and I was a bit too worried to try them out. But over time, I met more and more travelers, who gave me valuable advice. As time passes, you will learn more about how to save money. As a result, I was able to live well in the last few months with on average 300 Euros / month.

If you travel cheaper, you also travel more adventurous. Personally, I love the adventurous travel style as you experience a lot more.

For you to not spend too much money at the beginning of your journey, like me, I have put together **my best tips for cheap travel** for you:

- First of all, I generally try to travel in cheap countries, as I am more interested in these. I love culture shock!
- I try to avoid flights as best I can.

- I use the local public transport, which is also used by the locals, no matter how awkward it is or how much longer it needs than the more comfortable but more expensive tourist buses.
- Many swear by night buses, as they save one night at the hostel. However, I am not a fan of these, because I cannot sleep while driving. So this is a matter of taste.
- I have become more courageous while hitchhiking. Thereby, one makes unforgettable acquaintances.
- I try to cook for myself or buy cheap food on the street.
- I am mainly looking for accommodation with couchsurfing. Most often, I even plan my route to couchsurfing hosts, and I have to say: I love it! You get to know the best people, and I have found friends for life. In addition, you experience the culture first hand and see things that no other tourists get to see.
- I use the website *workaway.info*. People on this website offer diverse work such as helping out in hostels, working on a farm, etc. In exchange for three to five hours of work per day, meals and accommodation are provided free of charge, depending on your agreement. This is an ingenious way to take a break from traveling and to stay in one place for longer. You also have enough time for other activities. For example, I took a language course during the day while working in a hostel at the reception in the evening.
- My journeys do not consist of a series of parties. For many, it is a matter of getting drunk every day when traveling, especially if you are in hostels. Apart from being harmful to your health, it also puts a heavy strain on your travel fund.
- I only do tourist activities in exceptional cases, such as guided tours, as I do not like them very much (I prefer to travel far away from the worn-out tourist trails) and because they cost too much money.
- I mainly wash my clothes by hand. As soon as you have exercise in it, it works really fast, and in sunshine things dry up quickly. In most African countries, washing machines are a rarity, anyway. So if you give your clothes to a laundry, they are mostly washed by hand.

But, of course, you should not go crazy with all this saving, and you should not need to do without anything. Sometimes, you just need to spend a night in a single room of a hotel or treat yourself to a delicious meal, a cocktail or whatever – and that is what you should really do.

Where do I stash my money safely when traveling?

As already mentioned, it is better to withdraw smaller sums from the ATM and thus never carry around too much cash. There are some banks that offer free withdrawals worldwide, such as the DKB – the Deutsche Kreditbank.

You should always have some change with you, either in the pockets of your jeans or in a small pocket of your purse. Try to always have enough coins and small bills. Larger notes are usually not accepted at the market or on the buses, as there is no change.

Believe me, it can become a neat mission to get a bill exchanged for smaller bills or coins. Mostly, nobody wants or can change them. I always made sure that I got them exchanged in big supermarkets in a city.

On my reconnaissance trips, I usually had a fake purse with a small amount of money with me. If I had been attacked, I could have handed it over. Fortunately, I never had to use it before. If you carry large sums of money or a credit card with you, then you should stow them in a money belt.

Otherwise, you leave the money locked in the accommodation. Hostels often have lockers. When couchsurfing, then locking it up can be a bit more difficult. For the most part, I have simply trusted my hosts, but, of course, I have not left the valuables lying in open.

It is also good to hide the money in different places. A little bit in the backpack, e.g. in a medicine box, a part in the hand luggage, and another part in the money belt. So it can never happen to you that you suddenly lose all of it.

I also always keep a few Euros and US dollars with me for emergencies. If my cards were broken, I would at least have the possibility to exchange that money to get ahead. Euros and US dollars are exchanged almost everywhere.

How do I get the new currency when crossing a national border?

I always exchanged money directly at the border. Of course, you should never have too much cash with you, because you always lose a small amount when exchanging. Inform yourself in advance on the internet about the current exchange rate, so you will not be ripped off at the border. You will not receive the exact rate, anyway, but you often can still negotiate a little. I have to say that my exchange rates at the border have always been pretty good.

4.6 Crossing borders

How do you get from one country to the next?

This is quite simple, as in most cases there is public transport to the borders. At the border you get out, do the border formalities, and you get back on a bus on the other side of the border.

Occasionally, there are even long-distance buses that will drop you off on one side of the border and then wait for you on the other side after completing all border formalities. This has the advantage that you do not have to carry your big backpack across the border. I only once had the pleasure of traveling with a long-distance bus when I went from Namibia to South Africa.

The exact procedure at the borders looks more or less like this:

- First and foremost, find out about the border formalities on the website of the Foreign Office. How much does the visa cost? What do you need to get the visa? Maybe you have to pay in US dollars? Please also inquire in advance about the opening hours of the border posts, as they sometimes close at 17 o'clock.
- Then you take a bus to the border.
- You get off the bus and go to the first border post. There you will get the exit stamp of your current destination, and you may have to fill out a form asking for how long you have been in the country, etc.
- After you got the exit stamp, you have to walk to the next border post. Sometimes this can be a longer walk.
- On the way there, a security guard who wants to check your passport, might stop you.
- It may well be that you will be besieged by a few stubborn moneychangers. I always thought the exchange rate at the border was okay. Nevertheless, inform yourself in advance, what the current rate is.
- When you arrive at the next border post, you will need to fill out a form with questions about your expected length of stay and your personal details. You also pay for the visa – if one is necessary. Often only US dollars are accepted.
- The entry stamp will be stamped in your passport.
- You did it! Now you should be looking for a bus that will take you to your next destination.

For the first one or two times, such border crossings are still quite complicated and frightening. But you will get routine in it. It is actually quite simple. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be quite time consuming. Again and again, it happened to me that I first of all had to find a border official and then even had to wake them up.

I found it especially funny on the border from Tanzania to Malawi – I was traveling with two traveling acquaintances at the time. The border guards were enjoying their afternoon nap with loose-fluffy Robbie Williams music.

They were not particularly disturbed by our arrival. We had to wait two hours for our visa, even though we were the only people who wanted to cross the border.

What if a proof of continuation of your journey is required at the border?

This question has long occupied me before my journey. On the information pages of the German Federal Foreign Office, it is noted in almost all countries that entry is only permitted if there is a proof of continuation of your journey. But how should you do that if you do not know when or where to leave?

Before I traveled to Uganda, I bought a cheap bus ticket from Uganda to Kenya online to show it on demand. Since then, however, no one asked for it when entering anyway, so I stopped buying tickets in advance when entering the next countries.

From my own experience and the conversations with other backpackers, I can tell you that when crossing a border over the country road, usually no one asks for it. The only ones who usually want to see proof of onward travel are airlines on international flights, since they are not allowed to board people without it.

If you want to play it safe, you can buy a cheap bus ticket online and let it expire. As airlines often do not accept a bus ticket, you can alternatively book a cancelable flight.

4.7 Other customs and cultures

You have to expect a slight initial culture shock on a backpacking trip to unknown countries. For this not to be too serious, you should already inform about the culture of your planned travel destinations, before you start your journey.

Especially the first days in a foreign country are the hardest, because you will have to deal with everything at once – different time zone, different climate, unknown food, foreign language, and completely different customs.

It is best to spend the days quietly and do it like me: first stay a few days in the same hostel, and watch your surroundings. How do people dress? Is it okay to walk around shoulder or knee-free, or should you better cover them? Just find out how the locals do it and then do the same. This way, you can avoid a bigger faux pas.

Also get tips from other travelers in the hostel, who may have been traveling longer, and talk to the hostel staff. Be open to new things and show respect for other traditions and behaviors.

Here are my most important findings in terms of customs and culture in Africa:

1. The shoes are usually taken off the front door. The houses are entered only barefoot.
2. If there is no cutlery to eat, only the right hand is used, because the left is considered impure.
3. In Muslim countries, both men and women should cover their shoulders and knees.
4. Do not wear clothes that are too tight.
5. Nude bathing and topless sunbathing are absolute taboos.
6. Women prefer to wear dresses and skirts in most countries. Pants are more for men. When I bought my first long skirt, I even loved it, as it was nice and breezy in the heat and also very helpful on long bus rides at the pee breaks on the roadside.
7. If locals invite you, small gifts are always welcome. It should not be money.
8. One should learn a few words – such as "hello", "please", and "thank you" – in the respective national language. This shows interest in the culture of the locals.
9. Do not point fingers at people.
10. Do not take pictures of people without first obtaining their consent.
11. It is appropriate to negotiate on local markets. But it should be fun and not end in a dispute.
12. Tips are usually not expected in the normal restaurants.

13. Monkeys should not be fed. When I was at the Victoria Falls, an aggressive baboon stole my lunch. He just tore the whole food bag out of my hand. Reasons for such behavior are probably tourists who feed the animals.

If you commit a small faux pas, do not worry about it, and just take it with humor. A lovely smile usually causes miracles to happen. After all, you cannot do everything right.

For example, the whole restaurant laughed when Alex and I ate Ugali with both hands, because for locals, the left hand is the unclean one. In such situations you have to be able to laugh at yourself and stay relaxed.

What also stupidly happened to me was that I forgot to take off my shoes when I entered a house. I did not notice my mistake until the hostess looked critically at my feet. If you then respond with an innocent smile and apologize, the situation is almost certainly saved.

5. Chapter – My most exiting travel stories

“What were the most exciting experiences on your journey?”, I am often asked. Honestly, it were far too many to tell them all in a short time. In fact, every day was an adventure in itself. All too often, I did not know where to spend the night or where to go on the next day.

However, to share some of my experiences with you, I wrote down the stories that I remember best.

5.1 Invitation to a boat trip on Lake Victoria

Uganda, October 2015

How nice it was to be awakened in the morning by the crows of the rooster and the mooing of the cows in the garden. I even already heard children laughing. That is how you imagine the perfect start of the day.

I was couchsurfing at Meddy's in *Bugembe*, a small village near *Lake Victoria* in Uganda. Meddy lived there with his family: his mother, his sister, and three orphan boys they had taken in. The three boys were between eight and fifteen years old, and I immediately grew fond of them. Their mom died very early of AIDS, and they never met their dad. This is very common – the orphanages are bursting at the seams.

That is why Meddy's mom took the three in. However, I found it very scary how she treated the boys. They had to work from early morning until late at night. They were instructed to do all the household chores that needed to be done: scrubbing floors, washing clothes – by hand, of course –, cooking, feeding the animals, clearing out the stable, and much more. I really felt sorry for them.

But when I asked the boys about it the other day, they just said that they were very grateful to Meddy's mom, because she made it possible for them to go to school.

I once bought them a ball to play. They were endlessly happy, but had to hide it immediately, because Meddy's mom would not have allowed them to own a ball.

Meddy himself ran a school for orphans, in which I could help later. He also planned a project to build a school in a very remote village. Sometimes, I went there with him and was amazed at the miserable circumstances under which they were currently teaching children: There was only one room and one teacher for 90 students. Neither tables nor chairs were available. All children had to sit on the floor in the dirt.

When I woke up that day, the orphan boys served me a delicious breakfast – Chapati and African tea. Then I went for a jogging session, which was very sweaty at these temperatures. Actually, I wanted to be back in an hour, but it was once again very different.

First, I ran up the so-called backyard mountain to find a way to *Lake Victoria* from there. I wanted to see the lake at close range. At the top, I sat in the dry grass and enjoyed an overwhelming view.

A few yards away, a small boy was sitting and chewing on a thing that looked like a branch. He waved to me. I approached him and asked what that was. He broke the wooden thing in half and joyfully stretched out a piece to me. Carefully, I bit into it. It tasted sweet and was totally delicious. For the first time in my life, I chewed sugar cane. I did everything exactly as the boy. I first chewed on it for a while and then spit it out again.

Strengthened by the sweet stuff, I continued my run. Everywhere I went, the children chased me in droves and called in a choir "Muzunguu, Muzunguu!" Some hugged me and jumped at me. How I loved these joyful sweet children here!

At some point I reached the lake, but because the shore was overgrown with reeds, it took quite a while before I found access to the water.

Finally, I discovered a beautiful spot where a few fishing boats were moored. It was a real paradise here – the endless, sparkling blue shimmering *Lake Victoria*, the untouched nature, and the homemade wooden boats. I lay completely exhausted in the meadow and let the sun shine in my face.

Suddenly, I heard a loud shout: "Madam, madam! Come with me! Madam!" I straightened up and saw an around eight-year-old girl standing on one of the wooden boats. It waved to me. I approached the little girl, and she made me understand that I should come to her on the boat. Of course, I did not need to be told twice. Another 17-year-old boy joined us and began to row.

Although this boat was not very appealing to me at the beginning, I once again acted on the principle: "No risk, no fun!" We drifted through the reeds out onto the beautiful lake. Everything was so paradisiacal and perfect right now.

I really felt like I was in seventh heaven. I was in the heart of Africa in the middle of *Lake Victoria*, in a small wooden boat, with two incredibly lovely African kids. Could I have ever imagined such a thing before?

The boy rowed and rowed. At first, I thought it would only be a short trip, but in the end, it took us almost three hours.

The girl kept shouting at me, saying she had never spoken to a Muzungu before. She sat very close to me and touched my hair and skin, again and again. The boy seemed to be really proud that he was allowed to row around with me.

We arrived at a small, idyllic bay. The two apparently always came here to swim. It was not long before they jumped into the water with their clothes on. How I would have liked to jump with them into the cool water. But since my tropical doctor had explicitly warned me before my journey to swim in *Lake Victoria*, I let it be. The risk of getting infected with schistosomiasis was supposed to be particularly high here.

On the way back, we met some fishermen. They were amazed to meet a Muzungu and gave us some fish, right away.

When we got back to the shore, the girl asked me to come home with her. She wanted to show me where she lives and, besides, we could fry the fish at her house, she said. I could not refuse her wish. In addition, fried fish sounded excellent. After all, I was really hungry now.

We passed many small, very poor-looking mud huts. At times, a strong, rotting smell hit my nose, and there was garbage everywhere. The area reminded me of slums, the slums of a city.

The girl's mum was extremely astonished when she saw me. The rest of the neighborhood also seemed quite curious, and, within a short time, a lot of people gathered around me – mostly children. Everyone wanted to touch me or just stare at me. The children wore dirty and torn clothes. But they were in a good mood and smiled at me with their sweetest smile. How is it possible that so poor people radiate so much joy of life?

There was no electricity and no running water in the houses here. In the tiny clay huts, often ten people lived in confined spaces. The girl's house consisted of only one small room of less than ten square meters. There, she slept with her mother and three siblings. The meals were cooked in front of the hut, where one could sink ankle-deep in the mud, because it had rained a lot at the night before.

Before we could start preparing the fish, we still had to buy oil. So we went to a small shop, and I bought a bottle. The mother of the girl then thanked again and again cordially for it – the liter had cost only the equivalent of 25 cents. She started to prepare the fish on a kind of grill. She served the fish with Posho – the typical cornmeal porridge. The fish tasted really delicious. Everyone watched me eating happily. They were overjoyed when they saw that it was a pleasure for me.

When it was time to say farewell, I bought a large pack of biscuits for the girl and the boy to thank them for the boat ride. They were happy about it. The girl even knelt down in front of me and kissed my hand. Tears were in my eyes. Once again, I experienced boundless hospitality, warmth, and joie de vivre and at the same time so much poverty.

The little one begged me to come back. And so did I. During my time with Meddy, I always came back there.



Children from the neighbourhood

5.2 The Batwa – A forgotten population group

Uganda, October 2015

Yoshi, a young woman from Taiwan and I were on our way to *Kisoro*, a place near a volcano in western Uganda. It also bordered on Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Now I have been traveling with Yoshi for a couple of days. She had been living in Uganda for several months now because she had started an aid project for children there.

We were on a stopover in the town of *Kabale* and tried in vain to find a matatu to *Kisoro*.

Finally, we got a lift in a normal five-seat car. By now, we were already five in the vehicle, but the driver did not seem to think about leaving.

More and more people got into the car, and in the end we were nine adults in it. Yoshi and I sat together in the passenger seat, the driver and another woman shared the driver's seat, and five people had squeezed into the back seat.

Fortunately, when we arrived in *Kisoro* two hours later, we were fortunate enough to find a very cheap place to stay – everything seemed to be quite cheap here.

In the afternoon, we started looking for information about the Batwa people, who were living close to the edge of a national park. Yoshi was planning a project to support them.

In the past, the Batwa lived as hunters and gatherers in the forests, leading a very traditional life, isolated from the urban population. In 1991, they were expelled from their homes, because the government wanted to make a national park out of the area.

Now they live in poor conditions on the edge of the national park. They have no money and no education. Partly they are mocked and insulted as stupid by the population. This is a not insignificant reason for their continued seclusion.

By chance, we actually found an organization that wanted to support these people through various projects. When we told them about Yoshi's plan, they immediately applauded our interest in the Batwa people, and they offered to bring us to our destination with their safari jeep. Otherwise, there would be no way to get to the Batwa, as no proper roads would lead there. We would just have to take the fuel costs. That was perfect. Of course, we immediately agreed.

So it started. Before we left, we stopped at a shop and bought 50 kilos of cornmeal and some sweets for the Batwa. The road was bumpy right from the start, but then it became more and more rough, and we were thoroughly shaken up in the jeep.

We had to walk the last part of the path, as it went up steeply and huge rocks were scattered everywhere on the mountainside. Our driver accompanied us, as he understood the language of the Batwa and thus could translate. The village consisted of about 40 families.

Once we reached it, the poverty of these people immediately caught our eye. Most children had swollen bellies due to malnutrition. Many also seemed to have some skin disease.

I also noticed that some children had problems with walking. Our driver told us that sand fleas had settled in the soles of their feet. These would cause severe pain. Added to that was the existing lack of water – they wore dirty clothes and could seldom wash themselves. Their dwellings were nothing more than simple tents.

The small-headed chief came toward us with a smiling face. He wore a very elegant but dirty suit. While he greeted us warmly, the other villagers seemed very shy and evidently hid from us. Over time, they became more courageous and came closer and closer. They looked at us curiously.

I noticed that there were many children. We could even observe how the little ones tried to cut sand fleas out of each other's feet with a dirty knife. That really was not for the faint of heart. But for them it seemed to be usual.

The chief summoned the whole community for a meeting. They all came in leisurely. Yoshi now explained her plans. She would like to support the village with her project and allow a few children a school education – as far as the budget allows. The chief interjected that it would be a very long way to school and that the children did not have any shoes. In addition, they would be excluded from the other children and would get mocked.

Yoshi promised to find a solution together with them. At the end, everyone applauded with joy and thanked them warmly. We gave them the cornmeal and the sweets for the children. Everyone seemed overjoyed with our visit. At the end they even danced one of their traditional dances for us.

Yoshi and I sat concerned on the way back in the swaying jeep. We had already seen a lot of poverty in Uganda, but this was beyond anything. Never before had we met people who had to live in such circumstances.



5.3 Katunguru and the hippos

Uganda, November 2015

The drive from *Fort Portal* to *Katunguru* turned out to be adventurous. First, I took a Boda-Boda from Pastor Bosco, where I spent the last days, to the minibus station of the small town of *Fort Portal*.

I was mortally afraid while driving through. The road was extremely bad. As if that was not enough, my driver had to keep talking excitedly with me all the time, regularly turning his head back to me, causing us to get off the track several times.

In addition, his motorcycle had some problem, and the engine died constantly in the steepest places. As a bonus, we finally drove in the middle of a huge mud puddle. I was splashed with dirt from top to bottom. I would have liked to say my opinion to the young man. But according to his expression, the situation was now very unpleasant for him, and he apologized several times. I tried to take the event with humor.

Luckily, he finally brought me to the Matatus, which are heading to *Katunguru* without a further incident. There was already a Matatu there, but unfortunately it was empty. Oh dear, that meant I had to wait until it gets full. In the end it took three hours to get started.

The other passengers asked me in astonishment what on earth I wanted in *Katunguru*. That was just a small fishing village and other than that would be nothing there. Well, since I often chose my destinations randomly, I could not give them a correct answer to that question.

If I were only following my travel guides, then I would only ever see the typical tourist destinations, and that is exactly what I do not want. Besides, somebody had told me that there should be hippos in the village, which was right by a river. I really wanted to see them.

The Matatu ride was very exciting as we drove through the stunning *Queen Elizabeth National Park*. I was so excited that I could not keep my face away from the windows and looked into the vastness of the savannah. A few dry bushes and a few barren trees were scattered across the land. The air flickered with heat. Also in the bus it was sweaty hot. Again and again, I wiped my face dry with my T-shirt.

Then suddenly I saw the first wild antelope of my life. They were grazing just a few meters off the road. The other passengers were totally unimpressed. They would see something like that every day, they said. Nevertheless, I could barely hide my joy. That is exactly how I imagined the true Africa.

When we arrived in *Katunguru*, I realized that this hamlet was really tiny. It did not take long, and I found a small and simple inn. There was no running water and no electricity, but I did not care about that.

The owner of the property spoke almost no English. First, she wanted to give me a room for the equivalent of ten Euros each day. That was a bit too much for the circumstances.

I already wanted to continue searching, but she suddenly said that she had something more favorable. Then she took me to a tiny room with a mattress on the floor for 1.50 Euro per night. That was perfect.

Some kids in the neighborhood immediately followed me to my room and begged for money. They all seemed to be between two and five years old. I wondered if they were really already interested in money at this age or if their parents sent them.

After a short rest, I went to the river, which flows directly through the town. There, I finally wanted to see my first hippos in the wild.

Some women were washing their laundry on the riverbank, and a few fishermen were on the water with their wooden boats. I found a small, narrow path and walked it along the shore. Close to the path, dense shrubs proliferated. I felt like I was in the deepest jungle. For the fear of any dangerous animals such as bats or spiders, I moved along very carefully.

When I was on my way already for a while, I suddenly heard voices. I slowly slipped between the bushes to the shore. A group of men was bathing. As I looked closer, I noticed that they were all naked. Ups. I grinned, but quickly made my way back before they could spot me.

I always watched the river from a safe distance. After all, I was here to see hippos. Although I was not sure if there were any at all, as far as I knew, the animals were very dangerous. So how could the men bathe and the women wash their clothes in the river so carelessly?

A little further on, I suddenly saw something appearing in the water. As I looked closer, I realized that it really was a hippo. It was only a few meters in front of me. Wow, I could not believe it! As a precaution I stepped back a few steps. Unfortunately, it immediately disappeared again in the water. I stopped for a while. And behold, it popped up again for a few seconds to catch air.

After watching it for a while, I moved on. Later, on my exploration tour, I discovered a few water buffalos in the distance, and I saw giant lizards sunning themselves along the way.

At a nice spot by the river, I sat down and enjoyed the breathtaking scenery here. I could even spot another hippo lying comfortably in the water. I was also fascinated by the incredible biodiversity of birds. They were available in all imaginable colors and sizes.

When I returned to my room in the evening, the landlady lovingly brought me a candle. When I set it alight, a swarm of mosquitoes whirled around the light. I sprayed myself thoroughly with my insect repellent spray and tried to sleep. It was a sweaty hot night.

After a typical breakfast the next day – Chapati and African tea – I walked right down to the river again. I just thought it was incredibly exciting what I could discover there. Today, I wanted to go in the other direction than yesterday.

After a short time, I came across a small bridge. I sat on it and watched the river below. A few minutes later, I was able to discover a hippo in the water. Upon closer inspection, I realized that it was a mother with her offspring. They lay very calmly without moving much in the river. Too bad they were so far away. I would have liked to take a picture of them. But it seemed too dangerous for me to be too close to a mother with her offspring.

A young man promptly tore me from my rest. If I wanted to do a national park tour, he asked me. Initially, I was very shocked by his presence. I did not expect anyone to find me here. Then I kindly explained to him that I was traveling with very little money and could not afford something like that. He said that was no problem at all. He would take me there for a ridiculous price, because he had his own vehicle. The only thing I would have to pay would be the national park fee and something for the gas.

That certainly sounded like an adventure. With an agency I did not want to do any safari anyway, because the prices were really insane. I also set myself the goal of seeing all the wildlife without an organized tour. After all, I had enough time.

After a moment of reflection, I tried to negotiate the price a bit, and I succeeded. The young man also seemed very nice to me. His name was Eddie. I took a closer look at him to be sure that he seemed trustworthy. My gut feeling clearly told me: Yes. I gave him a handshake. We would start at lunchtime.

To my astonishment, he picked me up almost on time with his car that looked like it was ready for the scrap yard. At the entrance to *Queen Elizabeth National Park*, I had to pay the entrance fee. Then we continued through an impressive steppe. I asked Eddie to slow down, because I wanted to see everything very carefully.

We passed a horde of giant baboons. I did not know that these creatures could become that big. They did not seem particularly bothered by our presence and continued to stay at the edge of the road as they studied us curiously. I asked Eddie if I could get out to see the monkeys at close range. He looked at me quite confused and asked if I was crazy. Baboons are dangerous. Well, you never stop learning.

Eddie told me about a boat tour in the national park. If I wanted, I could do one and he would pick me up in two hours. The small fee would pay off in any case, because you can see a lot of wildlife. It was clear to me that he would certainly take a commission, but I agreed anyway. The price did not sound too high and I was already here, so why not?

And he really had not exaggerated: The boat trip was a dream. I saw crocodiles, hippos, water buffalos, the most beautiful birds, and much more up close.

Together with other tourists, I was on a boat. But they all seemed to live in some fancy safari lodges. They could not believe that I was traveling through Africa on my own with my backpack. When I told them about the young man, who drove me through the park with his somewhat battered-looking car, they found this almost careless. Once again, I realized that my way of traveling was fundamentally different from other tourists. That did not hurt me. I just love this adventurous way of traveling.

Eddie was already waiting for me after the boat tour. We went on. Suddenly he stopped abruptly and yelled excitedly, "Jaguar!" Unfortunately, it was already too late and I could not see the animal anymore. It had already disappeared into the bushes.

Now, I got a little bit concerned about our car. If any of these wild animals attacked us, then that thing would just break apart – and it would have been over for us. On top of that, the windshield had so many cracks that you could not really see well through it. Beside that, Eddie had cranked down the window because of the heat.

Not only once did I hear media reports of stories that an animal had jumped through the car window during a safari and killed a passenger. He only laughed when I told him about my concerns. His vehicle was still in top condition, and locals would sometimes even drive through the national park with mopeds. In addition, the adrenaline kick is so much bigger than in a boring safari jeep. He was even right.

We then went past antelope herds, elephants, warthogs, and buffalos. Some of the animals were only three meters away from our car. I would have loved to see some lions, but as far as we were concerned, we had not been lucky so far.

We almost wanted to give it up when we spotted a jeep standing on the side of the road. Eddie thought they would have seen a lion. Fortunately for me, he was right.

The pack of lions was too far away, but with the binoculars you could watch them well. Unfortunately I did not get a usable picture of them. Eddie suggested he would still be able to show me a salt lake in the national park. It turned out that this was another highlight. The lake was so breathtakingly beautiful that you could almost believe it was not from this world.

That evening I fell on my mattress dead tired but overjoyed. What a great day was coming to an end. For me, the tour had more than paid off in any case.

The next day, before I wanted to continue my journey, I walked through the village *Katunguru* one last time. Once again, I had to deal with some annoying young men, of which one of them would have loved to marry me, and it was hard to get away from this wishful thinking.

The men finally wanted to persuade me to spend another night here in the village. They told me that apparently the hippos always walked up from the river after dusk and then slept behind the church.

They added that the animals on land are much more dangerous than in the water. Therefore, I should only dare to go to the church in their company. Too bad, I would have loved to see this spectacle. But I had already decided to move on. It also became clear to me why the people in the

river were not very afraid of the hippos. The reason was probably that the animals are mostly peaceful in the water.



5.4 Adventures in the bush of Uganda

Uganda, November 2015

I was just couchsurfing in *Kampala* with Nathy, a lovely Ugandan my age.

I told her about my preference for traditional villages, where people still live far away from any tourism. Then Nathy suddenly came up with an idea. She was working on a project to build a school in the remote village of *Mbrizi*. According to her, this village was "in the middle of the bush".

That sounded good. I wanted to go there. Nathy said it was not a problem at all. I could help out at the school and teach the kids some English. That sounded perfect. She warned me that it would not be easy to get there. But as you can imagine, this fact made it even more interesting to me. Nathy and her friend Lukas wanted to take me to *Mbrizi*.

So a few days later, we started with a private driver, because no public transport went into that direction.

In an inn, about two hours from our destination, we made a stopover. Here we also spent the night. The accommodation was a welcome change for me. Finally a little luxury awaited me again: a private room, hot water, electricity, and, to my delight, even full board was included in the price. That fit well into my budget for the equivalent of 5 € per night.

The next morning we started the extremely bumpy drive to *Mbrizi*. The village is far from any civilization – it has not even found its way to Google Maps. The roads there – unpaved – were really miserable at the moment due to the rain of the last weeks. From time to time we all had to get off and push the car because we were stuck in the mud again. Our driver was really great, and we managed to arrive without any major incidents.

In *Mbrizi* we were already eagerly awaited and even received a guided tour personally from the head of the village. The residents looked at me curiously as we strolled through the streets. They lived in very simple mud huts with thatched roofs. Rainwater was collected in a huge tank next to the school. There, the residents could get it with canisters.

In the village center itself were only a few huts. We were told that most of the residents lived scattered across the land. The children thus had long ways to school. The people here lived mostly from cattle breeding. I saw some very small children looking after cattle herds. It was noon, and we were served a good portion of matoke with rice and peanut sauce.

After we had eaten, we visited the school where I was to help out the next few days. It consisted of only three classrooms. The tiny school was supposed to accommodate nearly 200 students – unimaginable.

In the classrooms were a few dilapidated wooden benches, but unfortunately it was not enough for all children. There was also a lack of teachers, and the students attended the school very irregularly,

as their parents often needed them to work. "Nathy still has a decent project in front of her," I thought to myself.

The day before we had bought balls, chalk, and other utensils for the school, which we handed over to them. The joy was great. The boys immediately grabbed a ball and began kicking it back and forth loudly in the meadow, while the girls tried to take the ball from them again. They had such a joy with this game that the fun lasted for the whole afternoon.

In the evening, Nathy and Lukas had to go back to *Kampala*. They assured themselves that I had everything I needed here and said goodbye. Then I moved into my little room in the middle of the village center. The room was tiny, and there was no running water or electricity. Besides, the room was desolate except for a tiny bed with a rusty metal frame standing in the corner. For the first time since the beginning of my trip, I was glad to have a mosquito net with me because the bugs were quite aggressive due to the rainy season.

The only power source of the village was in the school. There they had a small solar panel attached to the roof. Unfortunately, the sockets usually were all occupied, because after all, they had to be shared by the entire village. Fortunately, the school was only 300 meters away from my new home. I only partially had cell phone reception – I guess so depending on the wind direction – but more bad than right.

The people of the village lived in very simple conditions in their mud huts, which mostly consisted of only one room in which the whole family slept. They cooked outdoors in front of the hut. The whole village shared a few outhouses, which were accordingly dirty. I must confess that I really preferred the bush toilet there.

The village community was delighted that I would spend a few days with them, and the children besieged me immediately. Some families asked me if I had brought money for them. Unfortunately, I had to disappoint them.

Nathy, Lukas, and I had bought a lot of school supplies for the village, but we had deliberately avoided donations. I have noticed that Muzungus are often associated with donations. But, fortunately, they did not blame me when I said no.

My neighbors, a young family of three – Arafath and Fatima with Arafath Junior, who was only one year old – took care of me from the beginning. Arafath and Fatima were both teachers at the school, but originally came from another village and therefore had other traditions. The whole family lived in a small room of approximately 8 m². When I was home with them in the evening, I was amazed when suddenly I saw three cackling chickens beside their bed. At night, they kept them in a box so wild animals would not eat them.

As soon as it got dark, the village was deserted. Everything was calm and dark, as there were no electric lights. It was quite different from what I was used to. To live completely without electricity

and only with a mini flashlight – fortunately mine had a crank drive. I often had no electricity in Uganda, but at least I had some candles, which can also bring a lot of light into a room. But here in this village, there were not even candles.

The next day, I helped Arafath write the certificates for the students. These should be distributed on Wednesday. Then the school year was already over, and the kids had two months of vacation. Among other things, I had to enter a behavioral note in the certificates. So I asked what I should write about each child. Arafath said, I could write "very good" or "good", as I liked. I only thought T.I.A. ("This is Africa"). As benign as I am, of course, I wrote only "very good" for each student.

The twelve-year-old neighbor girl named Murunschi accompanied me during all of her free time. She was a pretty thin girl, and her hair had been shaved off completely. The girl lived with her uncle in a very simple and small hut opposite my accommodation. Murunschi was coping with the entire household, washed the laundry, and cooked for her uncle. In return, he paid for her school fees. Her parents had died very young due to illness, she told me.

The little one always had a lot to do. But as soon as she was done, she already stood in front of my door and smiled at me with her beautiful big eyes. She loved to touch my hair and make hairstyles. The hair growth of Africans is, after all, a little more complicated because of their dense, curly hair. The women usually wear very short hair or dreadlocks.

In addition, Murunschi loved to rummage through my backpack. Many of the things she had never seen before, such as a deodorant spray. She regarded it with an incredible fascination. When I explained the meaning of the spray to her, she was quite surprised that we Europeans would need something like that. Here in the village, people would just wash themselves daily with a little water, so nobody would stink anyway. What did I have to laugh about her statements! I realized, once again, how many luxury goods we have in Europe.

The rest of the days, Fatima accompanied me from morning to evening. She was really nice and helped me get water, cooked daily for me, showed me the African way of doing laundry, and much more.

Meanwhile, she had also told me about all the intrigues in the village: Which man secretly met with which woman, who was enemies with whom, etc. – so it was just as at home.

Fatima told me some more exciting facts about life here in the bush:

- If someone steals a cow, that person is burnt alive. Not so long ago this was the case here in the village. Several people had already told me similar stories. It is gross to believe that such rituals are still approved by the majority of the population today.
- Even today, there are still miracle healers or persons with witchcraft. These people are feared by most. Fatima also only whispered when she told me about them.
- A young man can only marry if he or his family has enough cows – no cows, no wife. Usually, it is about the five to twenty-five cows that the girl's family expects. Of course, the exact

number always depends on the social status of the candidate. Many men cannot afford a wife. The parents also have a great say in choosing the partner. By the way, that does not just happen in the bush, but almost all over Uganda.

During my stay, I mostly made small hikes in the afternoon with Fatima. We visited some families who lived outside the village center. Sometimes, we had to walk to their homes for a few hours. The joy of our visit was always huge. After all, I was the first Muzungu in their house.

Guests were usually given a large pot of milk – about a liter – as a sign of hospitality. You were not meant to take it away, rather you were supposed to drink the whole pot during the visit. I did not want to appear unfriendly, but I could not drink a whole liter of milk. The milk tasted smoky. Fatima explained to me that the pots were fumigated here, so that the milk gets that special flavor, which is probably very popular with the people.

Another exciting fact about milk: The young girls in the village were usually really thin, but the adult women could be described as tubby.

The reason for this is this: If a woman is of marriageable age, you could say, that she is fattened with milk. According to Fatima, the girls then have to drink 10 - 20 liters of milk per day to maintain feminine curves and gain weight. And they had to do this for several months and were not allowed to eat anything else.

It is a sign of prosperity when a woman has something on her ribs. After the wedding, the woman is allowed to eat normally, but has to maintain her weight. Thus, they must continue to drink a lot of milk. If a woman is too thin, the man is said to be inadequate to take care of her. Crazy how different beauty ideals can be.

To my astonishment, there was even a clinic in the village if you would like to call this about 4 m² small room that way. A relatively aged man – the doctor – sat in it in front of a few boxes with medicine. The choices were antibiotics, analgesics, and drugs to treat malaria. These were probably the most needed pills here.

Besides, the gentleman showed me a black stone. This would be used for snake bites. I had never heard of it before. But my research on the internet showed that this stone was indeed an effective treatment for snake bites. Otherwise, the doctor repeatedly treated small wounds. The hygiene level seemed not quite perfect to me, but how could it be expected otherwise.

On the penultimate day of my stay in the village, the certificate distribution was held in the school. It should start at ten o'clock in the morning. I was there on time, but to my surprise nobody else was in school. I had to know better – here in Africa the clocks tick differently. But at least on such an important day, I would have expected people to arrive on time.

In the next few hours, the teachers and the students with their families slowly settled in. At 14 o'clock the ceremony finally started. After a long speech by the director, the certificates were distributed.

The following day, the time had come for me to say goodbye. Fatima woke me up at seven in the morning with a delicious African tea. She said, I should leave early because the roads were very bad due to the rain.

I said goodbye to Fatima, Arafath, Murunschi, and the other villagers with tears in my eyes. I would miss life and the people very much. All the people here, who lived in the simplest conditions, mostly had to get by without medical help, had water shortages, lived without power, and had only two or three sets of clothes and a maximum of one pair of shoes. And yet, they were the happiest people I have ever met. They all radiated joie de vivre. Everything was readily shared without looking at one's own advantage. Yes, I think we can all learn a lot from such people. Here, no one needs PlayStations or iPhones to be happy.

A villager took me to the nearest village in his Boda-Boda. The ride there was a disaster. We only progressed at a snail's pace and got stuck in the mud again and again. Once more, I was splashed with dirt from top to bottom. From the next village, I could immediately find a ride to *Kampala* – what luck! So my adventure in the bush, which I will never forget again, had ended.



5.5 The Maasai at Lake Natron

Tanzania, December 2015

Lake Natron is a beautiful salt lake in the middle of the land of the Maasai. The Maasai are a very traditional population group. They live in huts made of cow dung with thatched roofs, which stand in their traditional, small villages. Their clothes are really colourful. The Maasai live mainly from the breeding of cattle and goat farming.

The area around the *Lake Natron* is touristically not very developed. This fact was the main reason I wanted to go there. I was traveling with my travel mate Alex – a young man from Germany. He, too, was not averse to the idea, so we decided to set out together without further ado.

Our couchsurfing host Jackson kindly offered to leave our luggage with him in *Arusha*, so we did not need to take it with us. We thankfully accepted. How a liberating feeling it was, when we could travel without heavy loads on your back. Since we intended to spend only one to a maximum of two nights there, I did not even take any clothes with me to change.

Jackson briefly explained how best to get to *Lake Natron*. It would not be easy, he said, as there were no regular transports to the village. If we were lucky, we could make it there in one day.

The first part of the route we could go in a Dalla-Dalla. Next, we should probably go by car. But lo and behold, as soon as we got out of the Dalla-Dalla and had just waited a short while on the road, a jeep loaded with a Maasai arrived that stopped for us. The driver only went to *Engaruka*. This small Maasai hamlet is still a long way from *Lake Natron*, but at least we approached our destination a bit.

So we could get on the jeep for some change. It was still overflowing with tons of Maasai and vegetable sacks deposited on the roof. Whenever I thought that now nothing and no one could really fit in, a few more corn sacks and people were added.

The trip took a good two hours and was quite adventurous due to the roads that were very bumpy. Since our vehicle seemed quite ready for the scrap yard, I was sometimes seriously afraid that it would just fall apart. In addition, the roof of the car bulged down under the enormous load (about 300 kg of vegetable sacks and six Maasai). In the end, we even crossed a raging river – how incredible!

When we arrived in *Engaruka*, we found a cheap accommodation for the equivalent of 1.30 Euros per person. It was quite simple, so only a room with bed and no electricity, but it seemed to be clean.

The bathroom was a bit further away: it was just a tiny room that served as both a toilet and a shower. In the middle of the room was a hole. You had to aim for this hole, and at the same time it was the drain for the shower. Although, the word shower probably still sounds too comfortable.

It usually worked as follows: First you had to fill a bucket in the yard with the slightly cloudy water and then carry it to the bathroom. With a smaller bucket, you now draw water from the bigger bucket and let it run over your head. But after a short time in Africa, you usually get used to this kind

of showering. I am not sure if you really get cleaner after that, but at least unpleasant body odors disappear when you use soap.

In the evening, Alex and I were looking for something similar to a bar to treat us to a well-deserved drink and something to eat. Finally, we found something that seemed right in this small village with around 30 cottages.

Mzungus probably do not come here often, because in 2-minute intervals, some villagers arrived to talk to us or just to examine us. That was almost annoying, because we were pretty tired and just wanted to enjoy the nice evening in this idyllic area. But you cannot blame them either, and it should be said that the Maasai are really friendly people.

We were letting us get surprised what would be served for dinner, because almost no one here spoke English, and the women cooked a dish that was now given out to everyone. It turned out it was Ugali with tough beef and indefinable greens. There was no cutlery.

Alright, then we had to use our fingers to eat. Our neighbors began to laugh as they watched us. We were not quite sure what could be so funny. They finally explained to us that you should only use your right hand to eat. The left is seen as the impure. Good to know!

The next morning, Alex and I were on time for departure at eight o'clock. We were told that at this time, a bus would go to *Lake Natron*. It arrived three hours later. So once again we had been taught that European punctuality does not bring you very far here in Africa. We should have known!

A very stubborn man had been following us for a while. He wanted to be our guide at *Lake Natron*. We tried to explain to him that we did not need a guide. But he did not let go and said that we would not be able to go there without one. Oh nonsense! We ignored him. He then just ended up in the bus with us. Well, that should not be our problem.

The trip took two hours. Live chickens and a lot of Maasai surrounded us. But we were rewarded with an absolutely impressive, steppe-like area. I somehow tried to get a look through the windows between the people. When we even passed zebra herds and giraffes, Alex and I were very really happy. Shortly thereafter, we also saw some ostriches, which ran through the barren landscape in a decent speed not too far away on their long legs. What an adventurous ride!

On the track we were stopped three times and had to pay a total of 35 USD. Curiously, only we Mzungus had to pay. These were probably fees to enter the Maasai country. Logically, we were not very happy about this rip-off.

Last but not least, we stopped almost an hour later as we encountered another bus that had a breakdown. We all got out of the bus to get some fresh air. But even outside it was not much better, because the sun burned relentlessly from the sky.

When we got out of *Engaresero*, the little village near *Lake Natron*, which cannot even be found in maps, we met yet another traveler. His name was Danas, and he came from Lithuania. We almost

could not believe it. That was really the last thing we had expected here. Together, we all decided to find a way to the lake.

The alleged guide continued to haunt us. This time, another young man with a motorbike joined him. Again, they demanded 20 USD, or otherwise we would not be allowed to walk through the village. So that really could not be true. We had already paid enough to enter this area.

Danas made it very clear to both of them that he had never needed a guide for anything. The furious men now threatened us to call the police. We thought that was a good idea. But the police had to be found first. No one knew where the policeman of the village was right now.

Some time later, the policeman finally trotted on. He did not wear a uniform, but we had no choice but to believe that he was the village policeman. But the nice gentleman was completely useless in this matter, because he – as he himself said – also had no idea what the rules for tourists were supposed to be. Apparently, there is a tourist office hut just outside the village. We should go there. It was an estimated 40 °C and we were tired and exhausted. To search for this tourist office hut for hours, right now, seemed like nonsense to us.

We decided to spend the night in the only inn in the village and leave tomorrow morning. The life in the Maasai village was really impressive but the welcome here was, unfortunately, anything but friendly. Besides, we did not want to be ripped off further.

At sunset we planned to hike up the hill behind our inn. But as soon as we moved 20 meters from our accommodation, the guy from before appeared again.

He began to insult us so wildly and said that we were not allowed to be here. I wanted to explode, but tried to stay calm. Being arrested here certainly is not funny. Danas, too, seemed quite angry and shouted some incomprehensible words – presumably strong expressions in Lithuanian – and then stomped off with a red face.

Alex and Danas suggested that we should have a beer first. We ignored the guy that was still screaming.

Fortunately, we immediately found a small restaurant – it was actually a straw hut – which sold beer. They even had something to eat: Ugali with chicken. We allowed ourselves a little cooling and tried to forget our anger. A nice elderly Maasai gentleman joined us, and we told him about our not very nice reception here in the village. He seemed deeply upset about it. The man in charge of the tourist office hut outside the village was contacted.

A little later, he appeared. He seemed very friendly and apologized for the inconveniences. It was a funny image that we three Muzungus discussed with a bunch of Maasai while drinking beer. Above all, I was the only woman at the table. It is probably not usual for women to sit in taverns here.

Finally, the tourist office official explained that we had to pay 20 USD. But this included a visit of the lake, a waterfall, and much more – also a guide was included. He would be very concerned about the unfriendly reception and would therefore reduce the price by half.

Actually, we had already decided to leave tomorrow, but the men here seemed really nice and like they meant what they said. Besides, we had already spent a lot of money to come here. Well, we were persuaded. We paid the ten dollars and were free to see the land from now on. We spent a few more fun hours with the Maasai. Danas even engaged in a drinking game with an elderly gentleman. After that, going straight seemed to be a bit difficult for him.

The next morning started quite foggy. We were promised the day before that today we were allowed to watch the slaughter of a goat. So we went to the hut where this was going to happen. Some Maasai were already standing next to the goat. It seemed to feel that something was going on, because it was extremely nervous.

Then, suddenly, everything went very fast: Three guys brought the buck to the ground. One severed his head with a somewhat rusty machete. The blood sprayed from the throat, which the men immediately caught in a bowl. Half of it was mixed with milk and a little salt while constantly stirring.

Now came the moment of truth. They handed us the bowl to drink the body-warm blood-milk mixture, as is customary among the Maasai. At first, Danas dared to take his turn. It did not seem to be a problem for him.

Then it was my turn. First, I just sipped. I tasted salt and milk. It was not as bad as expected. Then another big gulp followed. The aftertaste was metallic. Wow, I just had some fresh goat blood! Not many people can say that. Above all, it should be noted that we drank it on an empty stomach early in the morning. Alex seemed a bit outrageous. He stood a little offside.

To my surprise, Danas suddenly pulled a bottle of vodka out of his jacket pocket – "For rinsing," he said. That was once again so typical for Danas. Since I, too, did not trust the hygienic conditions one hundred percent, I joined him.

Then we climbed the hill behind our inn and enjoyed the fantastic view over the Maasai country. We could see a volcano in the distance. We had been told that this should represent the sacred mountain of the Maasai. Besides the volcano, we could only see the empty steppe. In addition to the huts of our village *Engaresero*, we saw a few small straw huts that were close together – so there seemed to be another small village nearby.

In the late morning we met our guide. Fortunately, it turned out that he was really nice. It was planned that we hike to the waterfall that was nearby.

The way there was exceptionally beautiful. We crossed a small village. The children ran barefoot and played with stones. The older ones herded their cattle. When they discovered us, they immediately pursued us, screaming happily. In the end, we had a huge pile of kids in tow.

The last part of the way, we really had to climb a lot though. The little kids did not dare to follow. We went through a deep canyon. Sometimes we had to go in the river or along the steep cliffs.

When we arrived at the waterfall, the guide unceremoniously got rid of all of his clothes but his pants and jumped under the waterfall. I immediately followed him along, but left all my clothes on. After

all, the temperature was pretty high. In addition, at least my clothes were washed once again, since I only had one set of clothes with me. Alex and Danas followed us as well. Fantastic!

In the late afternoon we set off for *Lake Natron*. Our really casual guide accompanied us. He told us many interesting stories from the life of the Maasai. We listened intently and bombarded him with questions.

We had imagined the way to the lake to be easier than it was. Besides, the lake previously seemed to be so close to the village. As it turned out, we were wrong. There was not even a real way. We crossed swamps and rivers. Once again, I was glad to have been on my flip flops, because the sturdy footwear, that Danas and Alex wore, got completely soaked and soiled by the mud in no time.

When we reached the lake, it was already dawning. In the distance you could see hundreds of flamingos, and the salt lake shimmered in the most beautiful colors. Then it was already dark. So we did not have much time to enjoy there. Fortunately, I had my flashlight with me, because the way back in the dark was very difficult.

Back in the village, we inquired how best to get out of here the next day. The locals told us that we had a lot of luck, because a big truck had just arrived. We should ask the driver if he could take us with him. When we found him, he immediately agreed with our plan. The next day at 6 o'clock in the morning, we would start our way back – perfect.



5.6 The Hadzabe tribe – 10.000 years into the past

Tanzania, December 2015

Did you know that even today there are still people living in caves? Who get their food exclusively through hunting and gathering? No cell phones, no electricity, no school, no money, no law, and no calendar? – Oh yes, they still exist: the Hadzabe tribe.

I learned about them through my Lithuanian travel mate Danas. He is a totally wild guy, who is always on the lookout for some secluded tribes who are still largely spared by tourism. A few weeks ago, he met someone on the street who told him about this wild nomadic people.

Of course, Danas did not hesitate to visit them. I too was fired up when he told me about this. That sounded almost unbelievable. I was still traveling with Alex at the time. He, too, seemed enthusiastic about the idea of visiting this wild tribe.

A few facts about the Hadzabe: The tribe today is estimated at under 1,000 people. They are one of the last ethnic groups of traditional hunters and gatherers. The Hadzabe do not grow plants and do not breed cattle. They live very isolated in Tanzania around *Lake Eyasi* and have their own language, which consists among other things of clicking sounds.

In addition, they lead a nomadic life. Incidentally, some of the oldest fossil remains of humans were found near *Lake Eyasi*. The Hadzabe probably go directly back to the main root of the human pedigree.

We first drove to the village *Ghorofani*. That is where a man named JJ lived, who had already brought Danas to the tribe before and agreed to take us there. After *Ghorofani* we went with a public, grossly overcrowded jeep. We had to take all the baggage of our fellow travelers on our laps, like sacks of vegetables and bananas.

We arrived after one and a half hours of very bumpy ride. Unfortunately, we could not reach JJ on the phone, so we started looking for him in the village. It was not that easy to find him, because the houses all were miles apart. The area looked barren.

After not too long search, we found what we were looking for – JJ suddenly stood in front of us. He immediately took us to his simple stone house. Here we would spend the night, and in the morning of the next day, we should start. His wife greeted us warmly and served us a delicious dinner.

At dawn, Alex and I were woken up by our alarm clock. I had waited a long time for this day. I was so incredibly excited about the extraordinary Hadzabe tribe. When we walked to the front door, it was still dark, and it was raining a bit. We heard an eerie howl from afar. Now JJ had also got up. He explained that the howling would come from the hyenas.

We quickly brushed our teeth, and then we started – three people on the moped. The road conditions were a disaster. It was not actually a road, but rather a path that you could not even identify as such. Several times, we sank deep in the mud and passed raging rivers.

JJ seemed to be a good but very risky driver. I was seriously afraid of not surviving this ride, even though I am not really anxious. Several times we were on the verge of falling and twice we really fell into the dirt. Luckily we survived the ride without major injuries. We were just drenched by the rain and the river crossings.

When we finally arrived, Alex and I were overwhelmed. It seemed like we were going back 10,000 years to the past. We left the moped next to a tree that was hung with tens of baboon skulls. This place felt so mystical. And it was exceptionally quiet, except for the birdsong.

We followed JJ through the forest towards some rocks. There they were: the caves. There were baboon bones and skins everywhere. A group of about ten young Hadzabe men sat around a campfire. The whole situation was so unreal – almost like a dream. I somehow felt out of place with my modern clothes.

The Hadzabe greeted us warmly with a handshake. They wore cloths and animal skins. Their skin was dirty and partially stained with blood. JJ told us that these people hardly ever wash themselves. We sat with them at the cozy warm campfire and tried to warm ourselves a bit. That was really good.

I was so fascinated by these people that it was hard for me to take my eyes off them. Their movements, their language, and generally their whole living space – everything was so new and overwhelming for me. The speech consisted mostly of a tongue click. I listened intently to them talking animatedly and laughing loudly over and over again.

JJ joined us and started to talk. About 30 people lived in this tribe. The oldest man was estimated at about 35 years. The Hadzabe do not have a concept of time, as we know it. Life expectancy is very low due to the lack of medical care. Every day, the women collect berries and fruits of the baobab tree. In addition, they dig out root tubers. The men are looking for honey and are hunting. They kill pretty much everything that appears before them – from birds to baboons to zebras and buffalos.

The government had tried several times to build houses for them, but after a short time the Hadzabe moved back into their caves, as they preferred them. They have no education. They reject stock farming. They do not want to change their life. Unfortunately, this tribe is now threatened with extinction.

The Hadzabe now began to prepare their arrows and bows for hunting. Meanwhile they smoked a pipe with marijuana. Even the kids were smoking. They were estimated to be eight to ten years old. These people radiated a lot of warmth and friendliness. They sat close together by the campfire and talked animatedly. Everyone of them had a smile on their face – why?

Now it should start – with four young men, about ten dogs, and us. I suddenly felt like I had actually arrived in the Stone Age. We started to walk through the dense forest – or rather to run. It was very

fascinating how attentive the men were. They noticed every noise, noticed every breaking branch, and saw every movement. In addition, the Hadzabe can imitate animal sounds really well. If they sensed something, they could suddenly run fast. Yes, they moved so differently than we do. They were much faster and more agile. I think I have never seen people running so fast.

Within a short time, they had shot two birds. The arrow was pulled out, the blood was wiped on their trousers, and the poultry were put into their jacket made of fur. They already plucked the feathers of the animal and tasted its raw meat. Then they went on for hours running through the jungle.

The situation had little to do with hunting, as we know it. It was more like high performance sports. I had a lot of trouble following the guys through the thick scrub. Several times they took a break for smoking.

Suddenly, one of the boys saw baboons far away on the other mountain. Oh dear, they were too far away. I would have been so excited about monkey meat. We did not have much luck hunting any more. A wildebeest and a warthog crossed our path, but unfortunately they were too fast. Too bad.

We returned to the caves. I would have loved to stay here for a few days and spend time with these extraordinary people. But I suspected that sleeping in a cave without a blanket or sleeping bag with so many people would have been a bit difficult for me.

Finally, the Hadzabe – this time including the women – danced for us. Then we had to say goodbye.

I was completely overwhelmed by today's experience. I had already visited some tribes in Africa, but I had never experienced something so extraordinary. Even the Maasai already had cell phones. The Hadzabe, however, still live like complete cavemen. In a few years, they too will no longer exist in this form.



5.7 Hitchhiking at the border of Botswana to Namibia

Botswana & Namibia, February 2016

After only a week in Botswana, it would now continue to Namibia. Somehow, time seemed to run away. Usually this super fast travel style was not so to my taste.

My day here in a camp in *Maun* started already at four o'clock in the morning. Shortly after five I was already on a bus to *Ghanzi*. Once arrived, I had to wait nearly two hours for a bus to take me to a petrol station about 8 km away from the border to Namibia.

Originally, the bus driver had promised to let me get off directly at the border. But when we reached the gas station, he suddenly stammered something about he did not feel very well and urgently needed to go home.

At the gas station, I then tried in vain to find a ride to the border. However, only every half hour a vehicle came by, and they were not headed in direction of the border. Five exhilarated native women sat at a table in the shade and were already drinking a lot.

They finally waved me over and told me to sit with them while I waited. Since there was not much else left, I joined them. Of course, they immediately encouraged me to join in the drinking. The alcohol tasted pretty strong.

As soon as a bottle had been emptied, they opened the next one. I always just sipped a bit. Getting completely drunk at noon in the glistering heat did not seem like a good idea to me. Besides, I was very hungry. And lo and behold, one of the ladies served us a nice lunch. They did not want to miss sharing this with me. These were cow guts with giant intestinal villi. I do not know if I had ever mentioned how I feel about this delicacy. Actually, I am relatively hardened, as far as food is concerned – only with these intestines, I just do not get warm. For the sake of politeness I forced myself to eat one of these pieces. It almost turned my stomach around.

After waiting for longer, another car finally came by. An elderly woman got out of it. I immediately ran to her and hopefully asked if she would drive to the border. Of course, she would not. But she said, she would take me there for a little change. Well, thank heaven.

The border seemed dead. First and foremost, I had to look for a border official. After I found one, I let him stamp the mandatory exit stamp into my passport. On we went to the Namibian border post. This was about 2 km away. So I tortured myself through no man's land in the brooding midday heat of about 40 °C while wearing my much too heavy backpack on my back. The area around me was completely flat and desert-like. The air flickered from the heat.

When I arrived on the Namibian side, the formalities were quickly finished without problems. But what should I do now? I asked the police officers, who were taking a nap in the shade, how best to

get to *Windhoek*. They looked at me confused and said, I could be glad if even today a vehicle would pass the border. Those were great prospects. So I joined them and sat in the shade.

I was lucky. After a long hour, a huge truck stopped. I immediately addressed the somewhat scary-looking driver. He told me that he came from South Africa and was on his way to *Gobabis*.

Gobabis is only halfway to *Windhoek*, but at least I would approach my goal. The guy did not seem so trustworthy, but what else was left for me to do? As a precaution, I asked the policemen how they felt about this guy. They replied that he looked okay. All right, I decided to go with him then. Normally, I am not an anxious type, at all, but for some reason the driver made a bad impression on me.

So I sat next to the guy in his huge truck. He lit one cigarette after the other. After a while, he asked me if I would like to watch a movie. He had a small portable DVD player. Sounded good. When I saw through his DVDs, I noticed that about half of them were porn. Again, a strange feeling came to my mind. I put them aside and told him that I would rather read.

After about half an hour, he suddenly asked me if it would be okay for me when he took off his T-shirt. Oh my god! I just nodded nervously. What should I have said? If he really was a crazy criminal, then he could have done whatever he wanted, anyway.

After about an hour's drive without any incidents, he suddenly stopped. The truck has a technical problem, he said. A cold shiver ran down my back. It all just reminded me of some bad horror movie.

The guy got out and started repairing the vehicle. About 20 minutes later, he came back covered in sweat and with a smile on his face. Everything was fixed. A feeling of relief came over me. Maybe my feeling had deceived me, and the young man was actually very nice. We ended up having some really nice conversations.

The truck driver asked me, how I wanted to get from *Gobabis* to *Windhoek*. Well, by hitchhiking, otherwise there would be no public transport, I replied. He explained that this was too dangerous, and he did not just want to drop me off somewhere. He would try to stop another truck for me, because he thinks truck drivers are good people.

And really, the guy was seriously waiting with me on the side of the road to find another ride. What a good soul. And I had previously thought he wanted to harm me. Now I almost felt guilty. In the end he was a good guy.

After about an hour, a truck arrived. It stopped. Two young Africans sat in it. Luckily for me, they were on their way to *Windhoek*. The two said, it was forbidden to drive in a truck with three passengers, but if I hid in the bed behind their seats, they could take me with them. Said and done.

I had to go to my couchsurfing host in the center of *Windhoek*, and they did not have to go to the city center. But they did not want to leave me somewhere on the outskirts in the middle of the night. That is why they took me safely to the meeting place I had arranged with my host.

One should normally listen to gut feeling, but as I was allowed to experience, one can also be fooled by it. This day brought me unforgettable and beautiful acquaintances that I will never forget again. Sometimes you just have to believe a little in the good in people and not always expect the worst.



5.8 Being thrown out of the slums by the police

Namibia, February 2016

Finally, I arrived in *Walvis Bay*, a small town on the coast of Namibia. My current travel companion, Patrick, craved a cold beer – typically Patrick. But actually, I was not averse to that at the moment.

As we got out of our rickety bus, Patrick immediately pointed to the other side of the street. There was a small pub, from which loud music boomed in the mid of the day. Yes, there we could get beer.

The street was dusty and dirty – and generally we seemed to have arrived in a rather neglected neighborhood. But that did not bother us, because in one point we both agreed: Where there are never other tourists, it is always the most exciting.

We entered the pub. It seemed to be quite full here. There were a waitress and a couple of guys who – to say the least – were in a good mood. We ordered a beer, which the waitress served us in a 1l bottle, which pleased Patrick very much. It was also super cheap.

It was not long, before the first guys spoke to us. They made a very likeable impression and joined us right away. They told us, that they had never seen a white person in the bar, and that it would be unlikely white people get here. This seemed funny to me, since I remembered that there are many white residents living here in *Walvis Bay*.

A young man told us, that the whites would all live in the richer districts and would never come to this place. The men gave out a round of drinks for us, and we had fun with them.

Later, another man spoke to us in the bar, and he also told us, that normally no white people came here. He also said, we should take good care of ourselves, because it was dangerous here.

That did not seem reason enough for us to leave the place, until the police finally got us out. We were sitting at a table in front of the pub, when a police car drove down the street. Then they stopped next to us and waved us over. Could it really be that they meant us? We had not done anything.

Patrick went to them first. They talked for a while. Then Patrick called me over. When I asked what was going on, the police officer told me, that this was the most dangerous part of the city. They would take us to a safer area. For the time being, I did not think so and found it very discriminatory.

Patrick hissed at me to calm down, and he did not want any problems here. Alright! Reluctantly, I got my backpack. We said goodbye to our new friends. They said we should come back soon, which we promised them.

The police were very nice and took us directly to a hostel. They explained to us, that with our entire luggage, we would have been a good target for thieves. Yes, they really meant well, and, who knows, maybe we were better off that way. Nonetheless, this strict separation by skin colors made me very sad.

But Patrick and I still lived up to our promise and returned to the pub the next day. This time we came without any of our valuables.

We met the guys from the previous day and celebrated with them until late into the night.

They even showed us their homes and introduced us to their families, who actually lived in the slums. All of them were really nice people.



Patrick and me with the policemen

5.9 Adventures in the mountains of Lesotho

Lesotho, March 2016

The sun was just rising over the small village of *Ha Moshebi*. I opened the door of the stone house where I had slept and stepped into the cool morning air. Rarely in my life had I seen such a beautiful sunrise. The impressive landscape, consisting of deep ravines, mountains, and picturesque stone houses, shone in the dawn.

Besides, it was so quiet and peaceful. The only sounds I could hear came from a herd of cows. A little boy rode past a horse some distance away. He was wrapped in warm blankets and wore rubber boots. Curious, he looked at me from afar. Yes, you will not often see a Muzungu here.

In *Ha Moshebi* there were only a few houses. All stood a good distance apart and were connected only by narrow paths. Harry, who had slept in the next room, now woke up as well. He lived here.

To tell you how I met him, I have to back up a little. I used to do couchsurfing in South Africa with a man who lived not far from the Lesotho border. We had exchanged our travel stories.

He told me, among other things, that he had been hiking and fishing in Lesotho about a year ago. But then he got lost and had to sleep in a cave. The next day, as sent from heaven, Harry – a native, elderly gentleman – appeared in front of him.

Harry had invited him to his home. That is how the two got to know each other. And he said, that a friendship developed between them. Since I am very interested in these non-tourist areas, I immediately asked my host if it might be possible to visit Harry. He then talked to him, and Harry was extremely pleased.

So I did not hesitate long and wanted to visit him the next day. It did not turn out to be as easy as it sounds, because Harry really lived far away from any civilization. Public transport to get to his place is very irregular – not even daily. Finally, however, I arrived two days later without any incidents.

On that day in March, Harry and I wanted to start a two-day hike. Harry brought me a bowl of hot water. I could wash myself with that, he said. I was glad about that, because here in Lesotho it was really cold, especially at night!

After that we had breakfast together. When we were done, Harry jumped up and said he was going to search for a donkey to carry our baggage.

After about an hour he returned – without a donkey. He probably could not find any. But since we did not have much to carry, anyway, that did not bother me much.

So we left. We crossed many small mountain villages. These were not even connected by roads. There were only small walkways from one place to another. But no one had a car here, anyway. The most common means of transportation was the horse.

From time to time, we met locals who rode past us on horses, and we greeted each other in a friendly way. They were all wrapped in blankets, wore a woolen cap and mostly wore rubber boots. The men usually also held a wooden stick in their hands. Since it was not particularly warm in Lesotho and there was a lot of rain, this style of clothing was very practical. The meadows around us shone in a lush green.

On our way, we even briefly visited some friends of Harry. It was really a beautiful experience, as all of them received me very hospitably. A white, young woman was almost never seen here, so I was the ultimate attraction.

All of them wanted to cook the cornmeal mush and put hot tea on the table for me. In addition, they proudly showed me their stone dwellings. Next to it was usually a round mud hut with thatched roof, which served as a kitchen. About 100 meters from the house, there was also a wooden hut in which the outhouse was located.

Around noon, we passed the last village for today. Now we continued on a hilly landscape. It all seemed heavenly beautiful here. More and more, something like a canyon opened before us, in the middle of which a crystal-clear river meandered. From time to time, we encountered shepherds guarding their flocks. The area was so impressive that I could not stop wondering.

In the late afternoon, we came to a rocky ledge, which seemed like a perfect place to sleep. We decided to stay there. We could even find some straw, which we put under the sleeping bag as a mattress. Someone – probably a shepherd – had built a small stonewall here, which gave us protection against the wind that was sometimes quite strong.

Looking at the rock walls, I discovered something like a rock painting. It had a reddish color and seemed to represent cows and other animals. I called Harry and showed it to him. He said that it was already hundreds, if not thousands of years old and was made from a mixture of animal blood and mineral earth. That sounded really interesting.

Harry seemed to be quite tired. He rolled a small cigarette and relaxed a little. I found the area so exciting that I wanted to explore it. As I walked along the imposing rock walls, I discovered a ruin complex. Oh, how interesting would it be to know how old they were. Since I have a great interest in such ancient things – especially if the public has not discovered them – I climbed over the stonewalls and began to explore the ruins.

They mostly seemed to be really well preserved. It was too bad that I did not have my flashlight with me. Otherwise I would have climbed into one of the corridors. But since they were quite narrow and completely dark, I could not enter – I had too much fear of wild animals or maybe even snakes, which could seek refuge there. Who knows what dangerous things I could stumble on in this area?

My way led me down to the river over big stone blocks. After I had been sweating a lot on our hike, I could not resist a refreshing bath. I looked around me to see if anyone was watching. No, there did not seem to be a single soul around. Without further ado, I got rid of my clothes and jumped into the extremely refreshing, cool wet.

It was already dawning and getting really fresh. I quickly put my clothes back on and decided to climb the canyon. That was really exhausting because the canyon was pretty deep. Besides, I had to climb a decent way upwards.

At the top, I could not believe my eyes. I had the most paradisiacal view ever – I saw an imposing canyon, over which gigantic birds of prey orbited, lush green hills rising behind them, and the sky glowing blood red in the sunset.

I sat down on a stone and enjoyed this almost magical moment – somewhere in nowhere of Lesotho. It was one of those moments when I realized once again why I was traveling. There are still so many undiscovered, wonderful spots on this earth.

When I got back to Harry, he was already worried about me because it was already dark. He sat by the campfire and made soup. I really needed that, because my stomach was already growling properly.

The night was calm, with no rain and no storm. My sleeping bag had also served me well. Previously, I feared that I would be cold. The only thing that robbed my sleep was sudden serpent paranoia. I had probably thought too much about venomous snakes in Africa in the last few days.

In the end, some donkeys were giving me a real shock at night. When I woke up, the animals stood right in front of me and snorted loudly. I turned on my flashlight in panic and could only see their shining eyes in the dark. The horror was written all over my face. I screamed loudly for Harry. He woke up and started to laugh heartily.

The morning started cloudy and soon it started to rain slightly. We therefore decided not to make a big tour that day. We hiked along the canyon. Later we passed some stone houses. Since, by now, it was raining a lot more, we had to stay in houses again and again to avoid getting completely soaked.

It was too bad that this day was so rainy. When we got back to Harry's home in the late afternoon, we warmed ourselves with hot tea – what a treat!

I asked Harry if I could charge my phone somewhere. He explained to me that there was electricity in the village only via solar cells or generators. He himself had solar cells, but since there was no sun all day, there was no electricity. He suggested visiting the village pub, because they have a generator there.

It took us almost an hour to walk there. To my great misfortune, the generator was broken – well, this is once again only T.I.A. But Harry still seemed happy with our visit to the bar and quickly emptied a few bottles of beer.

When we got back home, we let the evening end comfortably and cooked. Of course, you can guess what it was: the cornmeal mush, which is very popular in Africa and called Papa here in Lesotho, with a small piece of chicken.

The following day, I already had to get up at four o'clock in the morning, because a bus to *Qachas Nek* – the next larger village – was supposed to drive at five o'clock. Harry was so nice and got up with me. He made me warm tea and water for washing. It was a freezing cold, rainy morning.

Harry walked up to the path where the bus was to pass. I had to wait an hour in the freezing cold for the minibus to arrive – although that was almost on time for African conditions. I said goodbye to Harry. He repeatedly emphasized that my family and I were always welcome here at his home. The experiences here in this small, remote paradise, I will probably never forget. And who knows, maybe I will really come back one day.



6. Chapter – How has this journey changed me?

On the day, when I made the decision to make this journey, a workmate told me: "I am curious how this trip will change you." I looked at her in surprise. But yes, she was right. Such a journey would certainly change me. But how?

At that time, I did not know that exactly. For a long time during my journey, I thought that I was still the same. But now I know better: Of course, my journey has gradually changed me, and it did so in a consistently positive way.

I have become more confident and courageous

That is one of the changes that I noticed first and foremost. In the middle of my journey, I suddenly realized how extraordinary it was that I was traveling completely on my own through Africa only with my backpack on my back.

I never imagined that I would be standing in the desert of Namibia in the middle of nowhere at 40 °C besides the road to hitchhike, because there is no public transport there. Or that in Uganda, I would live in the bush with a tribe far away from any civilization. Or that I am the only white woman to spend six nights on a ferry. I could continue this list for an infinite amount of time.

My journey showed me that I am capable of much more than I ever dared to dream of before. I have also become more self-confident in the sense that I am now more open to other people. That had often been very difficult for me before. But traveling alone leaves nothing to be desired. I now know that I can do anything if I really want it.

I became more patient

At the beginning of my journey, how many times would I have liked to jump on the back of a bus driver, because he had already assured me for three hours that we would leave in ten minutes, and yet we still did not move a meter from where we were before.

Meanwhile, I have developed an extraordinary patience in such situations. Although I do not want to say that I cannot be impatient, anymore, it has definitely improved a lot. And believe me, I have often been a very impatient person. That is probably also due to our stressful European life. Everything has to go fast, and nobody has time for anything.

A man in Tanzania once told me a very nice saying: "The Europeans have the clocks, but the Africans have the time." – How true that is. And how bad our impatience sometimes is. But this is simply because we are often constantly energized. In the first few weeks in Africa, I had to admire the locals, who remained completely calm and were talking excitedly to each other, even after they had been waiting for almost an hour at the supermarket checkout or had been waiting on a bus for two hours to leave. Meanwhile, I can say that I have learned a lot from these people. Impatience is not worth the trouble.

I got to know myself better

When traveling on your own, of course, you spend a lot of time with yourself. This gives you plenty of time to think about a lot of things. What are my goals in life? What makes me happy? Plus, you get into situations you have never experienced before.

I now know how I react in certain situations – especially in situations that seem hopeless. I got to know myself better. In addition, I make all the decisions for myself, usually without consulting someone. I used to ask friends or acquaintances for their advice almost as soon as any decision was made and thus usually acted according to their opinion.

Traveling has taught me to make important decisions on my own every day, so I learned a little more about myself and about what I really want.

I need less material things to be happy

I have to admit that I loved shopping before my journey – whether it were clothes, shoes, decorations for the apartment, etc. And I could never get enough of it. Clothes were piled in my wardrobe that I had never worn before.

Such material things may make you happy in the short term, but the emphasis is on "short term". You always strive for more and more, but you are still not satisfied. However, traveling has opened my eyes to the essential things in life. A swanky car, a luxury villa, or a wardrobe full of expensive designer clothes will not make you happy. How else could it be explained that people in the world's poorest countries often radiate the greatest joie de vivre while some career people suffer from depression and burnouts? And all too often I could see children sitting in the street, playing for hours with a few stones and pieces of wood. At my home country Austria, the children have their rooms full of toys and often do not know what to do. In general, I noticed that the African children almost never cried or screamed.

Of course, when traveling, sometimes I had the desire to just spend a day shopping. However, this was only partially possible, because I was traveling with my backpack and just did not have any more space than that. Whenever I bought something new, I had to compromise and give something else away.

I learned a lot of new skills

Here is a small list of the things I learned during my trip:

- I now speak English almost fluently.
- I have learned Spanish and am already able to communicate well in this language and to have conversations.
- I have gained a basic knowledge of Swahili, the national language of Tanzania.
- I learned how to negotiate profitably in markets.
- I learned how to live without electricity.
- I learned how to take a shower without running water.
- I can wash my laundry properly and quickly by hand.

... and much, much more!



7. Closing words

My yearning for freedom and adventure is far from satisfied. I have been on the road for more than two years now. After I have been to Africa, I went to Central America for half a year and then through South America for almost a year. The normal everyday life, as most people know and live, is something that I cannot imagine living at the moment. My life is too precious for that.

Sometimes I think about where I would be in life today if I had not started traveling in September 2015. Probably everything would be like always: I would have my little flat and would drive to the hospital every day to work. And that is how I would spend all those years until my pension. Maybe I would marry in between and possibly divorce again afterwards.

But is that what I want? Would I be happy with that? I do not think so. And once I knew that there are other ways to shape your life, I really do not want to go back to my old, boring life. Sure, I have to admit that, right now, apart from my backpack, I do not have a lot of material things like others, who can show off their expensive cars, houses, clothes, etc.

But that does not matter to me. At the age of 29, I have already experienced so much that others will not do all their lives. I can look back on the most incredible adventures and have friends spread all over the world. I have gained more self-confidence and have become more courageous. Nobody can take all that from me.

I hope that the tips and advice from this book have been of help to you, and that my travel stories even may have motivated you to pack your own backpack and to travel to my favorite continent, Africa. But I also would be very happy if my stories have just made you dream about it.

Thank you for choosing this book and for supporting me. If you liked it, then please recommend it and leave a review for it on Amazon. That would really help me.

Meanwhile, the second part of *Once Around the World* has already been planned. The book should then be about my six months of backpacking in Central America and Mexico. So you will hear from me soon.

If you are interested to see photos from my journey, you can find them [HERE](#) in my online photo albums. Enjoy them!

For other questions, or if you simply want to say “hello”, send me an e-mail:

michiumdiewelt@yahoo.com

... or take a look at my travel blog, where I write an almost daily travel diary:

<http://www.michiumdiewelt.com/>

Well then, bon voyage and bye!

Yours Michaela

8. Glossary

African Tea: A typical African drink. It is made from black tea with spices and milk. In many countries, this tea is the favorite and often the only drink that is consumed.

Backpacking: This refers to a way of traveling that allows you to see much more of a country and its culture than if you book a conventional package holiday. In addition, backpackers usually stay at the same place only for a short time to see as much as possible of the country. Also they mostly travel by public transport or they sometimes hitchhike. Many backpackers travel on a budget and for a long time. The journey is organized individually.

Boda-Boda: This is a very common public transport in Uganda and some other African countries. This refers to a motorcycle taxi, whose driver you simply beckon over on the road. They are quite cheap, but their safety factor is controversial.

Chapati: A typical East African flatbread made from wheat flour, salt, water, and some oil.

Couchsurfing: A website based on hospitality and cultural exchange. Here you can find free accommodation or host travelers in your own home.

Dalla-Dalla: That is the name of the public minibuses in Tanzania. They run on fixed routes and usually leave only when they are completely full or even overcrowded.

Hostel: The hostel is an accommodation that is mainly used by backpackers or individual travelers. Cheap beds are usually offered in large shared rooms. Hostels often have a shared kitchen and other common rooms.

Lonely Planet: One of the most popular travel guides among backpackers.

Maasai: An East African population group, which is located in parts of Kenya and Tanzania. The Maasai were originally nomads, but today are mostly sedentary. They still lead a very traditional life.

Matatu: Is the same as the Dalla-Dalla, except that in Uganda and Kenya it is called Matatu.

Matoke: One of the national dishes of Uganda. Matoke consists of cooking plantains that are wrapped in banana leaves and then steamed for a few hours. Thereafter, the plantains are mashed to a pulp.

Muzungu: This is how foreigners and white-skinned people are named in many African countries.

Nsima: see Posho

Pap: see Posho

Papa: see Posho

Posho: Probably the most widespread dish in Uganda, as well as, other African countries, where it has a different name. In principle, it is cornmeal porridge. It is on the daily menu and tastes a bit boring in my opinion, since it is not even spiced – but you get used to it. Among the locals, this porridge is so popular because it is cheap, and one gets full from it.

Stand-by medication: Drugs for emergency self-treatment of malaria. Stand-by therapy is started when you develop malaria symptoms such as high fever. A doctor's visit is still necessary.

TIA – This is Africa: This saying is heard all too often in Africa - both from locals, and also from other travelers. It is used when something is different, more complicated, slower, etc. than in other places in the world. So it should be called "typically African".

Ugali: see Posho

9. Imprint

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