

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Volunteering in The Gambia – Nigel Pegler – 27th July to 21st August 2011

Placement / location - GIG farm *(a new site for the farm was found to be necessary, and the GiG operations were moved to the new site about a month before Nigel's placement, but this was all discussed with Nigel during his final preparations and his planned placement was achievable at the new site)*

Pre departure preparation

Find availability and cost of flights, warning to all future volunteers do not use Royal Air Maroc!! My departure flight from Heathrow was delayed by three hours and I missed the connecting flight to Banjul which meant spending an unplanned two days in Casablanca.

I arrived in Casablanca airport at about 1am, there was no one from Air Maroc to give me any help or information, not speaking French or Arabic didn't help and I couldn't take my luggage out of the airport. I eventually found out what hotel I was being sent to and from what I learned from other travellers this is a common situation, in fact at least half the people in the hotel were on Air Maroc flights.

Note from *people and places*: flight delays or cancellations seem to occur more frequently these days ... there are alternatives for Gambia flights: during peak season (winter) there are several direct charter flights each week from UK airports; other European hubs such as Brussels also offer alternative routes. We will discuss travel options with you when your placement is confirmed.

We made sure that Nigel and our local partner had each other's mobile numbers, so they were able to liaise and rearrange arrival, orientation and placement scheduling.

Visa

A visa is not necessary for The Gambia if you are staying less than 30 days and are an EU citizen, but please check with your foreign office.

Medical information

Obviously you have to check with your local surgery but personally I needed a top up of some of my vaccinations. You will need anti-malaria pills and if you are staying in The Gambia during the rainy season (as I was) you will get eaten alive by mosquitoes (twenty bites on one leg in an evening!).

I was advised to have a course of anti-rabies vaccinations by my travel clinic but felt, after seeking independent advice, that this was not necessary. There were various dogs in The Gambia but from what I could see they weren't wild and you just need to exercise caution with any animal in Africa. There was an overfriendly donkey on the GIG farm and apart from trying to eat my hat he was no problem!

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Volunteer travel insurance

Important and compulsory, Kate won't let you go otherwise! I used one of the companies found on the people and places website.

Orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

<http://blog.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/?cat=17&submit=Go> that's my blog – all the posts I made when I was in The Gambia – and before !!!

Obviously arriving two days late upset the time table, I had already been emailed my itinerary by Adama Bah of Faces and Places but this had to be amended. Adama showed me where the banks etc. were in Fajara on the Thursday and I transferred to Sandele on Friday.



Siffoe – the new GiG farm & beekeepers' training centre

Adama showed me the GIG farm where I would be working and told me a car and driver were at my disposal and although he told me I could drive with someone beside me, I declined!

Gambians have NO road sense and will cross a main road without looking and the less said about the assorted dogs, goats and cows the better, I ride a motorbike so don't scare easily!

Work experience

Being in Africa you have to expect that everything takes its own sweet time, except Adama who was always at least five minutes early for every meeting! Gambians have more important things in life, such as family and community but all of the GIG farming community were hard workers and seem to have a belief in the GIG project.

The first week at the farm was frustrating as we had no materials to work with, sand and cement for example, and the poultry sheds were stored at Kelly's home since the closure of the previous GIG farm.

Because Kelly the manager was on holiday during my stay I think it was difficult to get funds released for materials and transport, and Dan who was in charge in her absence was looking after two farms so he was busy elsewhere. I know that at one point Adama lent Dan some money to get things moving.



GiG delivery & promotion fleet



... and Siffoe transport for materials



Buba & Musa – my co-workers at Siffoe



farmers preparing for seed-planting

What did people and places do well? Any question I needed to ask were answered.

What could people and places do better? Well apart from booking my flights nothing really, as a volunteer organisation and not a holiday company flights aren't your problem. Hopefully future volunteers will learn from my experience.

Note from people and places: as above – if you need help to source Gambia flights, please ask us

Recommendations for the input of future volunteers

Difficult one this as the situation at GIG is very fluid at the moment as the new farm is being set up, but I do know that Kelly is keen to get a urine diverting composting toilet built, this was not my area of expertise - but if anyone has experience of doing so I am sure they would be welcomed by Kelly.

The bio gas tank has been set up and there is a solar powered pump to fill the irrigation tank on the farm so I think anyone with experience with renewable energy would be useful.

The guys working on the farm know how to mix cement and make bricks, the problem is they use far too much water in the mix which weakens the cement, something that was constantly pointed out to them by Bakary (a Canadian living in The Gambia) unfortunately as soon as he's gone they add too much water, so maybe someone with building experience who could give a practical demonstration on how cement is weakened by too much water and who's middle name is subtle!

Kelly seems to be the driving force behind GIG and she would be better placed to say what's needed.

Note from *people and places*: and all future placement inputs will be discussed with volunteers and our local partners during the matching process!

Successes

The bio gas installation, sorting out one of the poultry sheds, helping tile the ovens and floor in the kitchen area. Maybe helping to inspire the GIG farming community to carry on the great things that are happening there, it was mentioned to me by Kaddy the farm secretary that her mother said "how welcome it was to have a white man from England showing an interest in the farm"

Disappointments

Not getting more work done because of lack of funds and materials, things got a bit hectic during the last week when everything started arriving. Booking my flights with Royal Air Maroc and arriving two days late.

How did I spend my leisure time?

I was quite happy spending it at Sandele, beach 300m from my room, seawater at 27f, get the drift!

The place was alive with wildlife - everything from otters to monkeys and insects that I have never seen before and a resident kitten that kept us all amused!

I went down to the local village, visited some Concern Universal projects such as a paper re-cycling co-op, visited the local snake farm and generally chilled out.



Kartong village – fishing



Sandele – my 'home from home'

Accommodation See above!! Awesome and then some!!! Geri and Maurice who built Sandele were the perfect hosts, the food was great, locally caught fish always available and my room was nice although prone to the odd leak in heavy rain.

Anything else?

One problem was my driver - the first one that turned up had no licence with him so Adama, quite rightly, wouldn't let him drive so on the Monday Geri drove me to the farm and when I did get a driver Adama negotiated a payment with him.

The time I spent at the GIG farm at Sifoe was really enjoyable and everyone was so friendly and helpful, there is a real community spirit and they seem to see the future in the farm.

I know they all had a problem understanding how I could be single and childless at 52 and they did try to find me a Gambian wife but to no avail! The Gambia is a wonderful country and the people are great.

So hopefully I have covered everything if not let me know and of course any future volunteers are welcome to have my details, email, and telephone number and address if necessary.

To sum up I have no reservations about recommending The Gambia to future volunteers just remember it's Africa and works on its own time, things are not going to happen as quickly as they do in Europe and The Gambians have more pressing priorities than work.

Please note – this report is supplied by a former volunteer and the contents are intended solely for your information and personal use.

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Please check with us if you would like to publish it beyond your own circle of friends and family.

Thank you.