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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

Volunteer: Marvin Doondeea
Date: 26 August – 8 September 2012
Project: Sandele - Prepare a Marketing Brief
ASSET - Prepare Costings Analysis re viability of moving ITTOG, ASSET, GG, PB to one site

Pre-Departure Preparation

Due to work commitments I was only able to do a placement for 2 weeks. However it was something I really wanted to experience, utilising my skills and experience in insolvency and corporate recovery in another country. I had been looking for some time for an organisation that was both flexible and accommodating to not only the duration but the specific nature of the project, but having entered into various conversations with different organisations and been disappointed on a project in South Africa with another organisation I was beginning to get frustrated with the process.

I stumbled across the peoples and place website purely by chance and Kate was very responsive. When you are emailing someone it is often very hard to gauge their enthusiasm and when I spoke to Kate she instantly understood what I was looking for. Though my desired project was very specific and I really liked the way she was upfront in saying they were unable to accommodate that specific request but here are some alternative which I had not considered and which would utilise my skills and broaden my skill set. She suggested a project in The Gambia which would "turn your experience in insolvency on its head." And although it is a cliché I really liked the fact that she was able to think outside the box.

Kate sent me a wealth of information and previous reports from volunteers which were extremely helpful and provided advice in regards to vaccinations and insurance. As I was going during the rainy season I was thankful that I took the advice of a previous volunteer and took an umbrella and torch (it really does rain a lot). This being my first project abroad I was overly prepared on the vaccination front and sorting out my malaria medication and the insurance. I was fortunate enough to speak to Adama (*Adama Bah – our local partner at Faces & Places*) whilst he was in the UK before I flew out and we spoke at length about what I would be doing in the Gambia which was useful and comforting in touching base with him.

Orientation and Preparation at the start of the Project

I flew in late on a Saturday night and was met at the airport by Adama. He explained to me the geology and general environment of the Gambia on our journey to the hotel. My first day was spent with Adama showing me around Fajara. And then we made our way to SeneGambia where he showed me just how close Senegal was to the Gambia. We then went to the Sandele Eco Resort where I was to stay the night and gather information to prepare a marketing brief for the hotel.

I met the owners of the Eco Resort Maurice and Geri. They are without question two of the most inspirational people I have ever met. They explained to me their ethos and showed me around the resort explaining what they sought to achieve, and what they have done is create an oasis of tranquillity and calm. I could very easily talk about my experience in meeting them for several pages but do not want to spoil the surprise for future volunteers to the Gambia, in fact anyone going to the Gambia has to visit the Sandele Eco Resort and meet them, I would say if you have been to the Gambia and not met them you have not been to

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the Gambia. I would go so far as to say if, after the first night I spent with them to compile this marketing brief, I was leaving the Gambia the next day I would have been satisfied with my experience.



Maurice & Geri



Sandele – guest lodge

It is very difficult to explain how much of an impact they have made upon me and for that reason I will always have a fondness for the Gambia. So if you are going please please make sure you visit Sandele, you will be in awe of what they have achieved and what they seek to achieve and I found myself walking around speechless and inspired.

My Experience and Work

After meeting Geri and Maurice the second part of my project was to prepare a cost analysis of Guaranteed Gambia, ITTOG, Plymouth Banjul and ASSET moving to one location and how I would anticipate costing to be divided between the various divisions.

Note from people and places: these tourism organisations will be moving parts of their operations to a new custom-built business centre - e.g. ITTOG (Institute of Travel and Tourism Of the Gambia) will be operating the restaurant/cafe in the new centre and will also use it for the hospitality students' practical sessions.

Adama introduced me to the various heads of divisions and I was honoured that they were able to take time to meet with me. I was fortunate enough to attend the meeting where the plan to amalgamate all the entities onto one site was proposed and witness the enthusiasm behind the project. Adama also took me to the proposed site and shared with me his vision. He was very supportive and provided me with a lot of information to help me prepare the report.

With a Marketing brief for Sandele and a Cost Analysis report on the new proposed site it was about time I got cracking with some work. I was based at the offices of ASSET in Bakau and received so much help from Goney, Badou and Sia who were based there. Goney the Accounts Manager provided all the financial Reports needed to make my report more accurate.

I spent the next three days working on the marketing brief for Sandele and trawling through the various reports and information provided to me (and my illegible notes) and finalised my report on the Friday.

The following week was then spent preparing the cost analysis for the proposed site and preparing various excel spread sheets and a written report. Adama continually ensured that I was being provided with all the information necessary and that I did not feel to out of my depth.

We had a meeting mid-week where he showed me some architect plans of the site and the proposed restaurant they were planning to build. On Friday he informed me that I would be attending a meeting with him to discuss with Money Gram about installing a proposed money exchange booth on the site and the potential returns that could be made. This was really interesting discussing the mark up on transfers and potential profit split between Money Gram and ASSET.

Success/ Highlights and Disappointments

Without question the highlight of the trip was meeting Adama, Geri and Maurice. Firstly Sandele is a must to visit and I cannot stress this enough, any future volunteers going to the Gambia they must go to the resort and see the fantastic work they are doing environmentally and for the local community. They also have some fantastic stories. Meeting Adama and the vision for the future of tourism in the Gambia was also

inspirational. The preparation of both reports over my two week stay kept me busy, but not too busy that I felt pressured and the wealth of support from everyone was fantastic.

In terms of disappointments there weren't any really other than the "bumsters" who did get a bit annoying but are part of the fabric of the Gambia and it was a case of just dealing with them. I stayed at Safari Gardens which was pleasant. There were a lot of Peace Corp volunteers and I made a lot of friends there. The staff at the hotel were brilliant and very helpful especially Uzman and Sara.

Leisure

In terms of leisure time I spent many evening just walking around Fajara and soaking up the atmosphere. We (me and some Peace Corps volunteers) visited the wealth of local restaurants and bars. I was even able to keep track of Liverpool FC's progress.

I only spent one weekend in the Gambia so had to ensure the time was not wasted in sleeping in. I went to Banjul, and walked around the city and visited local markets (for present buying purposes and enjoyed haggling) there is also a local fish market in Baukau where the fish caught is smoked to preserve it. I was able to convince a seller to prepare a "tourist special platter" and got to sample different varieties of local fish at a relatively cheap cost.



Bakau beach – landing the catch

I wish I had organised a boat trip down the Gambia as that would have been very interesting however I enjoyed going to the beach and lazing by the pool.

I would definitely recommend going to the Gambia for future volunteers I had an eye opening experience and I thank everyone for all their support and assistance.

People and places were brilliant in supplying so much information before I went out there and I would recommend reading previous volunteer reports. I also thank Kate Stefanko for all her help, needless to say I am not the most organised person and she was brilliant in ensuring I was prepared.

My only advice would be to bring an umbrella if you are going during the rainy season and bring comfortable shoes as it can get quite muddy.

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Thank you.