

WORLD CHALLENGE 2023 – ESTWATINI

Putting our lives into perspective

Upon hearing about this once in a lifetime opportunity to visit South Africa and Eswatini, it was without question something I was willing to embark on.

Arguably the most challenging part of world challenge was the question of where to start to obtain a great deal of money in order to go. However, after 18 long months of cake sales, quiz nights and babysitting, I hit my goal and was ready to set off on this exhilarating adventure with a 30kg backpack and some of my closest friends.

I can safely say that after two strenuous and eye-opening weeks, I wouldn't change it for the world. From the tip of the mountain to Katherine's care home for orphaned children, every second of this trip taught me how much I subconsciously take for granted and most importantly to be grateful for all the small pleasures within life. I met some of the most inspiring and humble people who generously shared a part of their world with me and encouraged me to seize every moment of the trip. One woman stood out to me the most: Katherine. We met Katherine during our time in Eswatini, she enlightened us that she had opened this Neighbourhood Care Point in order to provide a place for orphaned children to go during the day, where they are supplied with education, food, and a group of kids just like them who support each other and help make them feel less alone. During our 4 days stay, we helped build a fence and a veranda on the school, not to mention brightened the kid's days with games of What's the time Mr Wolf and stuck in the mud. Here we learnt new skills such as resilience, determination, and how to mix cement like a pro, plus the ability to count to 5 in Swazi! On the final night of our stay at the NCP, Katherine generously cooked a traditional Swazi meal and sang traditional songs to enrich our understanding of their culture.

Hiking, building and animal spotting in Kruger National Park, there truly was something for all preferences and abilities. We uplifted and encouraged each other within our groups to achieve things we didn't know were possible and were rewarded with indescribable sights and feelings that we will hold with us for the rest of our lives. The most onerous part of our agenda was the 11km hike up a mountain with 65 litre rucksacks. We felt the affects exhaustion and frustration, having to carry heavy loads whilst cautiously trekking through lakes

and rocky paths. Surviving heat and sun exposure while maintaining an optimistic mindset. This was all soon behind us when we triumphantly made it to the rock lodge at the top of the mountain, the ultimate mark of our success. It was important that we worked as a team to perk up one another and used teamwork and cooperation in order to succeed as a group. Rewardingly, the next day we were treated with views of the canopy as we zip wired along 11 different wires, topping off the excursion with a suspension bridge to truly test our bravery.

Local citizens were pleasurable and welcoming as they toured us around their local village, a glass factory, a candle factory, and a creativity market perfect for stocking up on keep sakes from our trip. We learnt amazing facts about everyday life in Eswatini including the roles within a family. One notable fact the tour guide shared with us was that women weren't allowed to eat the head of the cow because they will become too smart, the tongue because they will talk too much, or the feet as they will walk away. We endured the pleasure of watching a performance of their cultural dance, and they even encouraged audience members to take part and dance with them.

As the best 2 weeks of our lives soon neared an end, we had one last stop to tick off of our agenda: Kruger National Park (1.5X the size of Wales). Our safari leader Tami guided our jeep into the depths of the park, where after just 2 hours of exploring, we had already seen the big 5! We scrambled out of bed at 5am in order to experience the notorious sunrise safari, with the hope that a pride of lions would appear. Sure enough, they did, along with elephants, giraffes, and a real-life zebra crossing!

Silently reminiscing on a trip we couldn't quite comprehend, the bus journey back was filled with laughs, tears and shared experiences that taught us the importance of not taking anything for granted and inspired us to be better people. The bittersweet sentiment brought us closer together as we took one last look at the unimaginable landscape just outside our window. We finally marked world challenge as conquered.