

I Want Candy

I had spent nearly a month in West Africa recovering from food poisoning, navigating through rebel territory, coping with the rainy season and surviving a couple near fatal car accidents. I hadn't seen another white person in a month, so it was a bit of a surprise when I saw a group of Scandinavians who were volunteering in a variety of villages in Ghana. We walked around Accra and they talked about their experiences. What was more surprising is what I saw in a small grocery store – a Snickers candy bar! That may mean nothing to you, but the month preceding my arrival in Ghana was difficult and the country allowed for some normalcy and luxuries that were sorely needed.



Another surprise was seeing President Obama in Ghana. I had arrived in Cape Coast and had noticed several signs with the pictures of Obama and Ghana's leader, Atta. I thought they were just generic signs until I saw one welcoming Barrack and Michelle and then I realized he would be visiting. He spoke in Accra and visited the slave fort in Cape Coast. The speech in Ghana was more of a scolding to Africans saying that fighting colonialism was his father's fight but that's

long over and you can't blame colonialism anymore. The more important fight is nation building and that fight is being lost by Africans because of corruption, dishonest behavior and poor governments.

I had waited in Cape Coast for eight hours before Obama arrived and waved to the crowd. At first, the crowd was jovial but by the end I was nearly trampled as the locals were pushing ahead. The police moved the white people to another area as they were the ones that came early and were in front and thus getting pushed. So, the crowd was segregated, but it was for protection not because people wanted to be segregated. So apparently the Africans didn't listen to Obama's speech about good behavior as it was a near riot and people were carried out in stretchers. The head of security told his people to hit the crowd with clubs and I could hear the sound of tasers but people were laughing so apparently they didn't work. I was interviewed by the African News as well and was a mini-celebrity as a lot of people pointed at me saying, "I saw you on TV".

Cape Coast is a pleasant city on the ocean most known for the fort that exported the most slaves in West Africa. It was closed because they were planning for Obama's visit. Near the castle is Victoria Square which marks the independence of Ghana in 1957. Next to that is a revival style church where mass can take hours; there is no real set beginning and ending time just a lot of music and singing.

In nearby Elmina, there is a castle which is older and bigger than its Cape Coast counterpart. A guided tour gives a fascinating look at the Elmina slave fort and describes the nearby castle where the Portuguese soldiers stayed. The guide illustrated the posh area where the governor lived, both female and male dungeons, a cannonball where slaves were chained to and areas where the slaves were branded. More disturbing are the barracks where soldiers and slaves who misbehaved were sent. The slaves' barracks had a skull and crossbones over the door and a hole in the door but it was not for ventilation it was merely to see when they had died. The soldiers were held in another barracks for a short time and then would be released. Also haunting is the Point of No Return in the lower area of the fort in which slaves would be herded and then placed on the waiting ships for the New World.

In Elmina, there was the annual festival which included a parade with the chiefs and a lot of dancing and music. Some parade goers were dressed in Halloween wear, such as scary masks. The chiefs seemed to be quite proud as they were being paraded on top of mini floats elevated by people through the city streets. They were dressed in traditional garb and the different colors associated with the different chiefs were noteworthy. The city is enjoyable, dominated by the fishing boats. Between Cape Coast and Elmina, one could see the effects of the rainy season as standing water was nearly reaching the road.



The capital of Accra is named after okra which is a slimy, smelly plant often mixed in with meat and complimented with fufu which is a thick grain common in West Africa. This was a welcome change from rice and chicken. It was a relief to be able to walk around a city at night which I couldn't before because of lack of electricity or safety concerns. Accra was organized and had some of the luxuries I'd been missing including ice cream with milk not iced cream. Some of the

attractions are the stadium, the statue-filled Nkrumah Park and the National Theater, largely built in 1992 by China.



In Accra, the National Museum is one of the more comprehensive museums in West Africa. Included in the museum is a detailed look at textiles, stools, terracotta heads, ritual dolls, carvings, storks, more masks, fertility dolls, musical instruments (especially drums), leather skins, dances, excavations, West African art and slavery. The wood stools indicate high status in the various tribes and are decorated and shaped in a variety of ways. The African art includes the distinctive lined statues of the Ife people of Nigerian.

The WEB Dubois Center depicts the US civil rights leader who lived from the late 1800s through 1963 when he died. Included in the exhibit is a book signed by Einstein and given to Dubois, his academic hood as he was the first African American to gain a doctorate from an Ivy League school and a lot of Chinese items as a wife was fond of China and communism. He moved to Ghana in 1961 to publish an African Encyclopedia with the encouragement of the independence leader, Nkrumah. He died in Ghana as well and one can see his grave in an enclosed area near the museum.

A couple old, small slave forts are in the present-day shanty towns with the most prominent being Jamestown. There's a lot of beach to visit in Ghana but not feeling like talking a long walk, I just laid around the beach near the shanty towns. But on this beach, they were slaughtering goats and there are a lot of vultures. Past the makeshift slaughterhouse, truck after truck of sewage was being dumped directly into the ocean. Not the best beach and obviously not a recommended place to swim in. There was a creaky lighthouse to climb and look over Jamestown, but this isn't a place to doddle even in the day.

Despite the slaughterhouses and raw sewage, Ghana was a place for to "catch my breath" as it was about the halfway point of my West Africa trip. The ATM's took my card and usually dispensed money, the vehicles had tires with a good amount of rubber on and as it is English speaking, I was able to navigate through the country easily. I was also able to stock up on candy.