



'Toubabs' in Touba...

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Meet the Diops : Life with a local host family

Staying with a local host family is one of the most exciting and interesting aspects of your experience abroad. Here, Camilla O'Beirne, an Australian volunteer on a Teaching project, outlines what life is like with her host family, the Diops.

My Family

In the family, there's the mum and dad, Aby and Khalifa, and their four children; Prince (20), Maman (16), Zahra (7) and Amina (4). Khalifa is a French teacher at the University and he and the son, Prince, both speak good English, which helped me a lot at the start when my French was a bit rusty. Aby is a school teacher in town at the school where the two youngest daughters go. She has a sister who



lives in town too, so whenever I'm passing by, I pop in and say hello. All of the children are at school so mornings are pretty hectic as everyone has to get ready for work and school.

My Room

Our house is on the mainland, on the Corniche. I can walk into town (to the island) along the river which takes about 25 minutes and is a nice walk. The house has a living room, study area, courtyard, bathroom, kitchen and 4 bedrooms. I often sit in the living room with the family and read or watch TV. Prince often makes nice Senegalese tea and the whole family sit around chatting. It's good practise for my French. In my room there are two single beds, and I share with another volunteer. We have a wardrobe to put our clothes in and we have both hung our mosquito nets above our beds. The family has provided us with sheets and a fan but it's not been hot enough to need it yet! We both have our own keys so we can come and go as we like, and the family are very understanding when we go out in the evenings to meet the other volunteers.

Food



The food is different to what I'm used to but I really like it. For breakfast we have coffee and bread with butter, or sometimes there's chocolate, cheese or jam. Lunch is always the traditional Senegalese dish 'thieb au dien' (rice and fish). Dinner tends to be more 'Western' such as omlette and fries or salad and sauce. My favourite dish is 'lakh' which is millet with condensed milk as a sauce. My family don't really have dessert but we sometimes have fresh fruit after our meal.

Cultural differences

There are lots of differences between life here and life back home in Australia, for example, I have to wash my clothes by hand as there are no washing machines. Fortunately the first time I did it, Aby took her time to show me how it's done properly. Another difference is the cooking preparations. Everything is done from scratch, from peeling vegetables to grinding spices with a huge mortar and pestle. The family don't have any kitchen appliances so everything is cooked using the gas cylinder. Recently, there has been a shortage so sometimes they've had to resort to coal! I've helped to prepare meals a few times and have even learnt how to gut fish which is something I didn't see myself doing. I like helping the family though and it's a good way to get to know them. One thing I do miss is a hot shower. Here, I have to heat up water on the gas cylinder to mix it with a bit of cold water in a bucket if I want hot water to wash with.



Overall Impressions

I've really enjoyed my time with the family, especially getting to know them and understanding their culture. They have been really accommodating and patient with me when I don't understand them, due to my lacking French skills. I'm closest to Maman and she has been really helpful, taking me to the market if I need anything and showing me a good tailor to get my Senegalese outfits made! Khalifa took me to visit the University and I spent a day at Aby's school. The family have made a big effort to integrate me, and I feel that staying with them has been a really unique experience.

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Project Profiles

First Aid visits in Daaras

Some of our volunteers on Care projects have been assisting a local First Aider, Touba, on visits in Daaras (schools where the Talibé street children learn the Koran and sleep overnight). Generally aged between 5 and 20, Talibés are often orphans or children from poverty-stricken families entrusted to a Marabout (Islamic teacher). A large part of their day is spent roaming the streets to beg for food and money, which is given to the Marabout in return for his teachings. The boys are exploited and are often in very poor health caused by living in very unhygienic, inadequate conditions with lack of access to healthcare.



Basic First Aid is important to treat cuts and minimise the risk of infection occurring. Touba, who works with one of Projects Abroad's Talibé centres, visits Koranic schools in the afternoons. A large part of the treatments are disinfecting and bandaging cuts, which occur frequently. Another important aspect is treating scabies, which is prevalent in the daraas. It is also essential that the children are

educated on hygiene such as the importance of washing their clothes and washing their hands before eating so as to minimise the prevalence of scabies. Volunteers who work with Touba help him with the basic first aid and hygiene awareness. Those who have worked with him so far have found it very rewarding and a good insight into the Talibé system, which is a major social problem in Senegal.

New Project: Project Daara Moderne

In March, certain volunteers on Care projects will be allocated to a new project: Project Daraa Moderne. The project aims to provide Talibés with socio-educational support and care. Volunteers will be going into the Daraas to carry out various activities such as education on hygiene, basic first aid and sometimes teaching the children basic French.

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Weekend Trip

Mauritania

On the 7th of February, a group of five volunteers set off to explore Mauritania, a country neighbouring Senegal. They were picked up and driven 30km North to the Barrage de Diama, one of the crossing points from Senegal into Mauritania, then they were met by their guide for the excursion, Habib, a local who lives near the border. The group set off in a 4x4 van into landscape that was instantly very different from Senegal. There were no



main roads, just dirt tracks, and only a few small villages. The scenery was breathtaking and the volunteers spotted many animals, for example, several herds of camels, a flock of pink flamingos, an iguana and numerous warthogs playing in the mud.

The group stopped off in a couple of villages to meet the locals and explore their culture. In the first village, they visited gardens where the population cultivate various vegetables to sell. They also visited a traditional bakery and were surrounded by children the entire time wanting to shake their hands and greet them.

The volunteers then carried on through the sand dunes to the campsite where they were to spend the night. They were surrounded by untouched white sand, a truly beautiful environment.



After a delicious lunch, the group headed off to explore the surroundings. Habib took them to some impressive sand dunes where they had fun jumping, rolling and running down them. They then recuperated in a nearby village, drinking tea and trying on the Mauritanian women's traditional dress the 'Meulfa', which caused a lot of hilarity.

In the evening, the volunteers enjoyed some cous cous then played cards before heading to bed under a big Mauritanian style tent. Everyone was pretty tired after such an eventful day.

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Volunteer Interview

Name: Sally Davies
Nationality: Australian
Age: 23
Project: Journalism: RTS Radio Station

Why did you decide to come to Senegal on a Journalism project?

Firstly, I wanted to improve my French. I also wanted to gain work experience in radio and was excited at the prospect of a different cultural experience. I have travelled a lot in Europe but I wanted to live in another cultural context. I am also really interested in the French influence in Senegal.

Did you have any experience in Journalism before your project?

I'm interested in journalism as a career, but before my placement I only had experience in print journalism such as writing articles for University publications. I wanted experience in radio.



What kind of activities have you been involved in at the radio station?

Every morning, we have a meeting with all the journalists at 11 am to discuss potential news stories for the main bulletin, which is broadcast at 5.30pm. Each journalist proposes several ideas for news stories. After the meeting, I go out and about in town to conduct interviews. I have a Dictaphone which I use to record the interviews. Then I have to put the story together and write it out so it can be corrected. I also have to listen to what I have recorded and select which bits to use and where to put them in the report. I then record the bulletin that will be broadcast on the radio. Sometimes we have invitations for stories or the head office in Dakar sends us out to cover a story, otherwise we are free to propose topics.

Do you have a good relationship with your colleagues?

At first I was trailing other journalists, but now I work on my own 50% of the time. I have made really good friends with the journalists at the radio station, and if I was coming back to St Louis I wouldn't hesitate to stay with them. Although sometimes you have to take constructive criticism, they are all friendly and very supportive and I feel that we are all equals in the team.

How many hours do you work each day?

The hours I work are really up to me to determine. On this placement you can do as much or as little as you like, but in my case it's the former! It's up to me to come up with ideas for news stories so I have to be very active; whenever I meet people I'm always thinking of a possible story I could do with them. I think that for this project you definitely get out what you put in, so you have to be prepared to be motivated if you want to see results.

What has been the most exciting story so far?

I covered a story about goods being smuggled into Senegal from Mauritania, which was very interesting. I've also covered issues surrounding women sex workers and teacher and student strikes. Often there are members of the Government in town for various inaugurations and we are always invited along.

Have you enjoyed staying with a local family?

This has definitely been one of the best aspects of being here. I've had a really rich cultural experience, and my host family has always been warm and welcoming. I really feel like a part of the family. I've helped them prepare meals; they've been teaching me Wolof, the local language; and they advise me how much to pay for things in the market. It's been a great insight into Senegalese life that you could never get if you came and stayed in a hotel. I love just sitting with the family and chatting, and last weekend I helped organise a birthday party for one of the boys in the family. I prepared a treasure hunt for him and his friends and they loved it!

What do you do in your spare time?

I'm teaching Theatre in a centre for young women in vulnerable situations twice a week. This is a contact I made from being out reporting, and it turns out it's also one of the centres that Projects Abroad works with. We are preparing a performance that should take place in a couple of weeks. I don't have much spare time but in the evenings when I am free I meet up with the other volunteers or spend time with my host family. At home, there is always lots of activity and people around to chat to and I can practise my French and Wolof. The markets are good too but you have to be prepared to haggle. I've been out to visit the University with my host brother as he has some friends there and this weekend I'm going to Touba, one of Senegal's biggest towns, to report on an annual religious pilgrimage.

Useful Wolof Vocabulary/ Phrases

A salam maley koum Muslim greeting (say when you first see someone each day and if you go round to someone's house)

Maley koum salam reply to a salam maley koum (literally means 'peace be upon you' – answer means 'peace be upon you too')

In sha allah god willing

Alhamdulillah thank god (you will hear these two Muslim sayings used a lot)

Naga def? how are you?

Ma-knee-fi rek I am fine

Nagen def? how are you (plural)?

Niou-knee-fi rek we are fine

Naka afferi? how are things?

Mou knee doch things are going well

Naka sa wakeur? how is your family?

Niou –knee-fi we are fine

Waw yes

De-det no

Nanga tudu/ No tudu? what's your name?

Ki nomu tudu? what's his/her name?

Mairi La tudu her name is Mairi

Dama hif I'm hungry

Dama marr I'm thirsty

Dama sonne I'm tired

Dama contan I'm happy

Sourna (merci) I'm full (thanks)

Jaffy-na it's hard

Wolof jaffy-na Wolof is hard



Nee-ata? how much is it?

Nierna it's good

Tchook very good

Dieu-re-dieuf thank you

Nioch-a-bok you're welcome

Sama my

Sa your

Hally child

Hally-e children

Fo diem? where are you going?

Ma-knee dem dochantu I'm going for a walk

Ma-knee dem knee-bee I'm going home

Dioch-ma/ My-ma give me...

Halis money

Dioch- ma halis give me money (Talibés will say this a lot!)

Dafa tang its hot

Tangana tropp its too hot

Kaye come!

Naka Senegal? how are you finding Senegal?

Senegal nierna I like Senegal a lot!

Legui legui see you later

News and Updates

...Information about what's been happening in St. Louis...

During January, two groups of volunteers have been to visit Touba, a town in Senegal that is famous for its spectacular mosque. Touba is around 3 hours drive from St Louis and the volunteers travelled there by 'sept-place' (seven seat taxi), accompanied by one of Projects Abroad's French teachers who knows the town well and acts as a guide. Both groups were very impressed by the mosque, which is the main feature of the town, and they were interested to learn about Cheikh Amadou Bamba who once lived there and is now buried in the mosque. He founded one of the biggest religious brotherhoods in Senegal.

One of our volunteers who is here on a Medical project, John Paul Davies from Australia, was involved in helping to receive a massive delivery of food supplies. These supplies are a donation from the Red Cross and are to be delivered to vulnerable populations in and around St Louis. John Paul has spent 5 weeks helping out at the Red Cross centre in St Louis, which is a public medical drop in centre that aims to provide consultations and general health care to the local community.

Adult English classes are off to a great start. Volunteers on Teaching projects are in charge of the classes under the supervision of Mr Brown, a local English teacher. There are three levels of students, beginner, intermediate and advanced, and the turnout has been good so far. Classes are free and available to anyone who is interested. The volunteers really enjoy preparing interesting topics and activities for these evening classes.

At the beginning of the month, a group of volunteers visited the famous 'Parc de Djoudj', a bird park North of St Louis. They visited the Park on a small boat and saw several species of birds. They also spotted other animals such as warthogs, a crocodile and its infant and an iguana, but the most spectacular sight was the huge pelican colony. The boat was able to get quite close to the colony so the volunteers could snap some souvenir shots.

Photo Gallery

Great pictures that have been taken by volunteers over the last month, in and around St Louis....



Daily scenes around St Louis; the famous 'Village des Pecheurs' and a photo from a street on the mainland, Sor

PHOTO OF THE MONTH...



A 'car rapide' approaches the Pont Faidherbe

FEBRUARY DIARY

CARNIVAL- 20TH

'Le Papayer', a local venue, is having a Brazilian Carnival night on Friday the 20th. Everyone is expected to get into carnival fever and dress up for the occasion. There will be various forms of entertainment including Brazilian themed music.



CAMPING TRIP 21ST-22ND

A camping trip is planned for the weekend of the 21st. The volunteers will spend the weekend at Ocean and Savanne, a campsite on the Langue de Barbarie island. The camp is very remote and picturesque and the perfect place to enjoy a relaxing weekend.

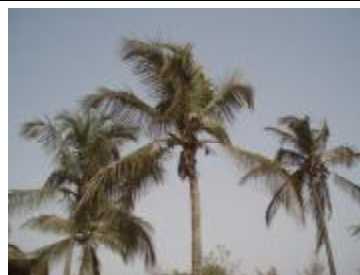
SEUN KUTI – 24TH FEBRUARY

Seun Kuti is a Nigerian musician who will be appearing at St Louis' Quai des Arts this month. He is the son of legendary Afro-beat pioneer Fela Kuti, and started playing with his father's band, Egypt 80, when he was just 8 years old.

WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH AND ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR MARCH

Activities planned for March

- Trip to visit Dakar and Ile de Goree
- Bike ride to Reserve de Guembeul



If you have any ideas of how Projects Abroad volunteers can be put to good use within the Community then please contact either Moctar Ba or Nicole Johnston. We are always looking for your suggestions.