

My Africa - Kinga Freespirit, part III

Senegal

Atlantic coast

Thursday, 20 April 2006

Just quickly a couple of words... I have just spent some nice moments by the Atlantic ocean here in the Cassamance province of Senegal, in the company of three Swiss brothers and some musical local people. Heading towards Guinea Bissao tomorrow. I've heard it's not the most quiet country at the moment, not sure if I'll find much internet access there too, but hope it will be all right. There's a couple new photos in the new album. Greetings from the Atlantic coast...



Guinea Bissao

Guinea Bissao

Friday, 21 April 2006

Guinea Bissao, a small, green country that smells of slightly fermented Cashewnut fruit and where people speak Creol-Portuguese...

In Gambia locals told me: "Don't go to the Senegalese province of Casamance. It's full of active rebels, it's dangerous." All I found in Casamance was hospitable, drumming, happy people, wide beaches and warm ocean. But they warned me there: "Don't go to Guinea Bissao. There's a war there. And all the rebels from Casamance moved there." OK, when I was passing the border area yesterday, I saw a lot of heavily armed soldiers but here, in the interior of the country it's peaceful and quiet.

So, just quick greetings from Bissao, because internet is expensive here, powered from a massive generator - even here in the capital they don't have regular electricity everywhere...

Guinea

from Bissao to Guinea

Friday, 28 April 2006

This was really something - getting from Guinea Bissao to Guinea... Because I chose the less travelled path. I regret not being able to describe it right now, I realize even the photos won't convey what I went through, but just have a look and try to imagine. Imagine a big, heavily loaded truck making its way through thick jungle, not along a jungle road because that small ragged path can't be called a road. That was a ride through real wilderness. And only after I made my way from the island of Bulama back to the mainland, after I walked for kilometers to find a place with some transportation, after getting to a place almost like a town...

Anyway, I made it back to civilization. Internet is still powered by generators, even here in the capital of Guinea, but never mind, internet it is.

Greetings from Konakry!



Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone

Monday, 01 May 2006



I only passed through Guinea and just got a little glimpse of this beautiful country. While in Guinea's northern dry and arid neighbours like Mali or Burkina Faso I found beauty in colorful outfits of the women, in elaborate greetings and handshakes, and countless other little things, in Guinea and now in Sierra Leone the area is blessed with lush, paradise like beauty of green jungle covering gentle hills.

First thing in Sierra Leone - I headed towards the national park I spotted on the map. As usually, the journey there was at least as interesting as the destination. It took entire day of half hitching, half riding unbelievably overloaded bush taxis along bumpy dirt roads and seldom visited villages. Finally hiring a guy with a motorcycle for the last strand of the otherwise unaccessible path. Then yesterday morning a local man with a canoe took me along the river. That river, like most other rivers in this country used to be full of hippos but apparently most of them were hunted and eaten by the rebels in the recent war, the man told me. However, a handful of them survived and they were eyeballing us cautiously as we passed by. Once on land, my canoe man told me in peculiar local English: "No see them foot tracks? Elephants."

But this time the foot prints was all I saw of the elephants, because they apparently moved further up. But other wildlife abounded around - couple of different kinds of monkeys jumping in the trees, iguanas, turtles, some fluorescently blue birds... I wasn't lucky (or unlucky) enough to encounter chimpanzees, but now in Freetown, the capital, the big news is a couple of chimps escaped from the local ZOO and killed and wounded some people. It's a slightly wild country. There's no regular electricity or running water anywhere in the country. And yesterday I got picked up and am now staying with a small scale German gold and diamond dealer and his local friends. Heading towards Liberia soon...

climax in paradise

Sunday, 07 May 2006

No, it's not going to be a piece describing my African romantic adventures... I did experience climax in paradise though - climax being the name of a herbal power drink and paradise the name of one of Freetown's pubs on the beach.

My stay in Sierra Leone was short but every moment attraction filled - canoeing by the hippos and climax in paradise being just the beginning. I spent one whole day riding around the capital with my diamond dealing friends watching the process of them trying to get legal stamps and papers for illegally purchased diamonds. Spent one night dancing away to the latest Sierra Leone hits at a disco in a little town. Got a ride at the back of a pickup truck with the actors in the freshly released movie called "Blood of the country virgin."

Sierra Leone is a fascinating country – both rough and gentle, desperately poor and outrageously rich, devastated by cruel civil war but looking hopefully into the peaceful future.



As if passing through this country wasn't interesting enough, getting out of it and getting into Liberia was where real adventure began... (details in the Liberian chapter)

Liberia

crossing green border

Sunday, 07 May 2006

As if passing through Sierra Leone wasn't interesting enough, getting out of it and getting into Liberia was where real adventure began...

Because Sierra Leone's visa costs an outrageous almost hundred US dollars, I decided to save time, money and space in my passport and try and do it without. I managed to get into the country without problems but as I reached the bridge at the Liberian border it turned out they just wouldn't let me leave without the visa, and the officials weren't open to any talks or negotiations. As for me – backtracking along the bumpy dirt road all the way back to the capital and spending so much on that visa was just not an option. I had to find another solution, especially considering I didn't have the Liberian visa either.

So I talked to some locals in the border village and they directed me to the village about five kilometers deep in the jungle, by the same river. There, as the whole village saw me arriving, nobody would take me across the river without authorization of the local chief. The chief showed more understanding than the officials and without many questions asked accepted 20 dollars and ordered some boys to take me across the river in a wobbly narrow wooden canoe and on the other side to escort me all the way to the first Liberian village. I was glad they didn't just drop me there and didn't take off – because there the narrow path led straight through the bush so thick that I doubt I could find my way, and so wet from the recent tropical rain that I got completely soaked and muddy. We had to cross some streams and wetlands but it didn't bother me anymore, as I couldn't get any wetter and dirtier.

Finally we reached a little Liberian settlement where again, first thing – I was brought to the village chief. The chief whose country just emerged from the years of civil war, used some slightly military language to inquire about the purpose of my visit.

"What is your mission here, madam?"

"My mission is to see and experience Africa."

"So, you're patrolling Liberia?"

"Well, I guess you could say I'm patrolling entire African continent."

"Good. You're most welcome, then."

I was given a bucket of water to shower and was honored to receive a room in the mud hut of the chief himself. As I was sitting in the porch with the whole village gathered around me, one man told me:

"We only saw white people here once. They came in a UN vehicle, patrolled the area and left. We never saw no white people walking here on foot."

And when the lightening lit the night sky in the distance, another man asked me:

"In Portland, do you also have the sun light up the sky before the rain?"

I told him before it was Poland, not Portland but it made no difference, just as it was impossible to explain it wasn't the sun that lit the sky. Anyway, we had a nice talk until the storm arrived and I thought it would blow me away together with the shaky hut. The roof of my room leaked but the hut survived and the following morning welcomed me with sunshine.

One hour walk through the jungle brought me to the main road where... where a comfortable United Nations vehicle picked me up and drove swiftly through all the checkpoints without stopping. The day before wet and muddy, stumbling through the jungle, now I found myself checking my email in an air condition UN barrack, being fed French fries and cold drinks. Then within a couple of minutes I met guys from Romania, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Nigeria and Namibia. The Romanian guy gave me the phone number of a Polish UN observer team leader stationed in Monrovia, so here's where I am right now. Mirek happens to live in one house with the honorary consul of the Czech Republic who owns a Czech pub in town and says he can get me a free Liberian visa.

I'll never cease to be amazed at the path of mysterious plot of coincidences along which the life leads me.



Ivory Coast

nice rebel boys

Friday, 12 May 2006

Travelling inside the country is good as always but it's been crossing the borders that's been the most interesting recently. My Polish friend, the UN observer who took a good care of me in Monrovia was trying but wasn't able to find out much about the situation on the other side of the border, in the rebel controlled region of Ivory Coast. So I left Monrovia and headed towards the border, hoping to find out more along the way. I asked the United Nations guys at a checkpoint in the north of the country. But that was a Bangladeshi team and their English seemed to be limited to sentences like: "You married woman?" So I just hitched on, at the backs of overloaded trucks and pickups on dusty, bumpy roads. Finally had to take a motorcycle bush taxi that brought me to the Liberian customs and immigration building by the little bridge in the jungle.

"Is that Ivorian immigration building there?" - I asked pointing to the other side of the bridge. "Used to be. It's the rebel base now." - they told me. But having got as far as this I had to go on. Rebels, however, turned out to be quite kind, and as there was no other transportation there, they gave me a ride to town in one of their vehicles dashing in a convoy through the jungle.



bitter taste of sweet chocolate

Tuesday, 16 May 2006



In the Lonely Planet guidebook to West Africa I read one thing about Ivory Coast that touched me. It says that almost half of world's cocoa comes from here. And... there are estimated about 15 thousand child-slaves working at the plantations around the country. Many of them brought from Burkina Faso and Mali, some lured with the promise of a paid job, some bought directly from the impoverished parents, others kidnapped as they play on the streets. They receive no money, are hardly fed and regularly beaten, not to mention they'll never have a chance to taste the chocolate which is made from the cocoa they pick. There's even a child-slave market where a child costs about 70 dollars.

I had a spontaneous, maybe crazy idea to find it and buy the most miserably looking child and... I don't know exactly what next, but somehow I would make sure the kid has a better future. The problem is - the guidebook doesn't say where the market is. Ever since I entered the country I was trying to find out, but it seems not to be an easy thing. In the village in the rebel controlled part of the country, near Liberian border, I met two teenage boys, orphaned slave workers, but they didn't speak neither French nor English to share their story. And later, whenever I touched the subject, people claimed no knowledge of the problem, including the local branch of UNICEF. I guess those who are not part of the business wouldn't know, and those who are - wouldn't tell.

I spent a couple of nice days with the locals in the scenically located town of Man in the north, then hitched across the country, arriving yesterday in Abidjan.

For a change, I decided to apply for a legal visa to the next country - Ghana - the process that I consider a waste of

time, energy and money. It takes two days, involves two trips to the far away part of town, filling in four identical detailed forms and supplying four (!) photos plus 30 dollars.

On the brighter side, here in Abidjan I'm hanging around with a Ghanaian prince whose father had six wives and 28 children. Normally Muslim men can have four wives but tribal kings are not limited in that respect.

Ivory Coast is lush and fertile, thus abundant with cheap, tropical fruit. Local street stalls sell good French bread and tasty African dishes. First tropical storms of the rainy season cooled down the hot atmosphere and life continues to be good.

conversation from couple of minutes ago

Tuesday, 16 May 2006

Continuing the subject of the last update...

Like I told you, whenever I mentioned child-slaves working at cocoa plantations with regular people, they claimed no knowledge of the subject. They said that it's possible that it exists but they wouldn't be able to neither confirm it for sure or deny.

However, here in Abidjan I'm staying with a local rastaman who turns around different circles, some of them not too official... He's a Ghanaian but has been living here for a long time. A simple, hospitable guy who'll do anything for you. Anyway, not counting on much, I just asked him about the child-slave market.

"Yeah, in Abidjan you can buy everything," he said in a matter-of-fact way.

"Can you take me there? Maybe I'd like to buy a child."

"No problem. You have a plantation in Poland?"

It took me a while to explain, because - if not for a plantation, why would I need a child? But when he understood the idea, he started giving different offers:

"I'll give you my boy if you want. For free."

Because he's got two little kids on his own, each one with a different girl, both being brought up by his mother and sisters in Ghana.

"Or you can take my sister's daughter, if you prefer a girl. Or if you want a baby, I have a friend who's a prostitute. I'm sure she'd rather sell you her baby. At least you're not gonna cut his head."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, not believing my ears.

"Because if she sells it to somebody else, they'll cut the baby's head. They make medicine out of baby heads here."

"What kind of medicine?"

"Black magic medicine. For getting rich."

So this is it, the conversation from just a couple of minutes ago. I needed to come to the cyber cafe to share it. Let's see what tomorrow brings.

brushing against child trafficking

Sunday, 21 May 2006

The morning after that shocking conversation my rasta friend took me to meet one of his friends on the roof. The thing seemed very straightforward.

"OK, you tell us if you want a boy or a girl, big or small and we'll find somebody who will organize couple of kids for you."

"How will you 'organize' couple of kids?"

"You don't worry about that, sister. We have our ways. We'll feed them well, then you come and choose the one you like." - the guy told me.

"See that woman over there?" he said, pointing to the fat lady in a sarong and a bra at the balcony in the distance, "she can get you a child."

"That woman?" I asked doubtfully.

"Yes. She's a powerful woman. A cocaine dealer. Deals with children sometimes too."

But needless to say, having a child kidnapped or bought especially for me was the last thing I wanted. I had to explain the whole thing again. And then we came up with a slightly different idea. The guy, also a Ghanaian, told me there are so many girls brought here from Ghana, not exactly slaves, but working hard as housemaids in quite miserable conditions. He knows one family with such a girl personally. Now, this coincided with Jason, my American friend, a young businessman, telling me by email, that if I find some family or a child that he can sponsor

or help in any way, I should let him know. We went together to that family, where in the crowded courtyard young girls were cooking huge pots of food, to be sold later on on the street. And among them, a girl called Akua, around 11 years old (she doesn't know her age). We talked to her landlady. A kind Ghanian woman who turned out to be quite understanding. She said that if it was really to take her back to Ghana and send her to school, then she wouldn't mind if I took her. The girl wasn't of such a great help, anyway.

So I told Jason. And not even getting up from his computer, he sent 150\$ through Western Union, to pay the girl's transportation, some new clothes, toys, food, school things, and maybe the first school fees. He says he spent 160\$ on a meal in a restaurant with a girl couple of days ago - and she didn't even finish her food! So this money will do more good and go much, much further. He intends to stay in touch and keep supporting Akua financially as long as she attends school, and maybe longer.

So this is it, just brushing against, but not really getting involved in the child slave trafficking market, I'm leaving tomorrow with one happy girl towards her village in Ghana.

Ghana

Malaria

Friday, 02 June 2006

Dear Friends,

I don't have good news for you this time. Kinga caught malaria. The cerebral malaria - the most dangerous one. From Wednesday she is hospitalized in SSNIT - The Trust Hospital http://www.ssnit.com/member_list.cfm?BrandsID=4 this is one of a few websites I found on the hospital. According to Polish Consular Representative in Ghana it's one of the best hospitals she could get into. The Consul visits her regularly taking care to secure constant attendance. The first days of hospitalization of unconscious Kinga she was under care of her Ghanian friends with whom she stayed before malaria broke out. The first day and night for all of us were a nightmare. Now Kinga is recovering and was moved out from an emergency ward and next days she will be watched upon by nurse on permanent basis.

The next days for us will pass on prayers and organizing all what's necessary for Kinga to recover as quick as possible. All your support will be very precious and appreciate. If you can send Kinga warm thoughts about quick recovery it will certainly mean a lot to her and to us.

Hoping for the best outcome of this situation and quick Kinga's recovery,
Yours

Chopin

Behind the last gate

Words cannot express what the world has lost with Kinga's death. With great sadness, we received the news that she passed away on June 9, 2006 in Accra, Ghana, due to complications caused by cerebral malaria. She was following her lifelong dream of going to Africa.

There has been created a [Foundation](#) of her name.

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