

## Chris' blog from Kenya and Uganda, Jan / Feb 2019 – Part Three

Kampala is a party town. On my first evening I was taken by some other volunteers to an outdoor restaurant with a great jazz band (Thursday evening at Fuego's if you are passing this way).



By contrast I am staying at the guesthouse of a catholic theological college, which is one of the few quiet places in the city! Given the work I am doing with refugees, I had an interesting conversation at breakfast with a Ugandan priest whose parish is in Calabria in Southern Italy, where the volume of refugees is a big political issue. I can't say that we reached a simple conclusion to our conversation, other than we must treat each refugee as a fellow human and not as an inconvenient statistic.

I am struck by the statement of the African Union for which 2019 is the year of the refugee: "Whereas migration is a common phenomenon as people have always relocated for various reasons, in the case of Africa the continent is often painted as a miserable place because migration is as a result of civil strife, poverty and a myriad of other factors thereby promoting the narrative that Africa cannot care for its people. Africans and their governments have always opened their borders and welcomed into their communities their brothers and sister fleeing their homes for various reasons providing a safe haven as long as it is required. Africa knows how to take care of its own in each regard no matter what." I have heard of envy where refugees receive more aid than host communities, but I have not come across outright hostility to refugees in my travels here.

When not partying, Kampalans spend a huge amount of their lives in insane traffic jams. Heading to the city centre, you see thousands of motorbikes weaving impatiently through hundreds of minibuses and construction lorries, all pretty much at a standstill.



Crossing one of these Kampala roads on foot is an epic challenge. I have a “Safe Boda” app on my phone for booking a motorbike (“boda”) taxi – Safe Boda drivers carry a spare helmet (which I make use of, unlike the locals) and a supply of fetching orange hairnets. I tuck my elbows in tightly as we weave through impossible gaps.

I am getting used to arriving at a refugee centre, and then immediately saving the location on google maps. The final centre I visited in Nairobi – Refugee Care – was one where they were digging up the access road – so I completed the journey on foot. I noticed quite a few cars on the street which were trapped by the roadworks, there was no other vehicle exit. Many residential areas in Nairobi, including the one I was staying in – have just one entrance, so as to increase security.

Frank and Mapendo were my clients at Refugee Care – here is a picture of them in their library, where they loan donated books for a small charge. Refugee Care provides a combination of welfare services and adult language and computer training. They are based in a church hall.



In Kampala my client is Bondeko Refugee Livelihoods Centre. Paul brought 11 of his friends – all refugees - along to our first session, which was supposed to be a 1-1 interview! Bondeko are quite inventive in the services they provide in order to help refugees to integrate and raise money – mushroom farming, a Congolese-style bakery, and a boda taxi service, plus rental income from student volunteers.



My last two weekends here have kept me fit. While in Nairobi I did a DIY safari to a place called Hells Gate National Park, where I cycled (no fences) among zebras, giraffes and buffalo before walking through a spectacular narrow gorge. I visited the home and garden of the late Joy Adamson, author of Born Free, which is on the shore of Lake Naivasha – spot the black and white colobus. This area is

the centre of the Kenyan cut-flower growing industry, which is a huge export business. Right now, being the run up to Valentines Day, is the busiest period of their year.



The lioness in the photo is about to go off to find her breakfast at Nairobi National Park (not eyeing me from the edge of the cycle track at Hells Gate!). I also saw rhinos grazing on the savannah, with the skyscrapers of the city in the distance. Later that day I was in a crowd of 2000 people for a church communion service in the marquee in the photo, with many more people in the overspill building (the original church) on the left. The church is CITAM (Christ is the Answer Ministries). With a dozen similar sized congregations across the city, they are one of the fastest growing English-speaking churches in Kenya.



My final weekend here was spent at the Murchison Falls National Park in Northern Uganda. The big draw here is a thunderous waterfall where the River Nile passes through a tiny gap in the cliff.



Thanks again for reading my blogs, and for your interest in refugee integration in East Africa. This will be my last blog from Kenya / Uganda as I head home on Wednesday. Must remember that Kenyan rose for Hilary on Thursday morning!

*Chris*