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Pre-Departure Blog

So.. Uh.. Zambia?

13 people, traveling over 9,000 miles, all with a mission to learn beyond the classroom will leave for Livingstone, Zambia on Friday May 22nd, 2015. The three of us, as part of this group, will blog about the trip and our experiences. The group will spend three weeks in Livingstone volunteering with African Impact. We will work in local schools, with local health care practices, and with community programs. On weekends, we will have the opportunity to see some other parts of southern Africa such as Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. For some of us, this is the first time we have been this far from home. For most of the group, this will be our first time traveling to anywhere in Africa. For all of us, this trip is a dream come true.

Education abroad is often talked about and fantasized about, but at Colorado State University, only 13% of each graduating class actually participates in it. Some travels are anywhere from 2 weeks to an entire year; some are academic based or volunteering based; and some travel alone or with a group. It is so open ended that picking a program is sometimes the hardest step.

This is the first year that this program has been available for students. It will be lead by an English professor, Dr. Ellen Brinks. As the spring semester rolled on, the group increased its size to 12 students. Students had the option to complete an honors independent study, an independent study with the help of a professor, or just simply, to enjoy the ride. In order to feel more prepared for the trip, a majority of the group enrolled in some type of credit.

The honors independent study was the first contact with resources to better understand the world of Africa. We had monthly meetings to discuss literature that thematized Western bias and humanitarian service in Africa. Our conversations worked to bridge gaps and create understanding between our culture and that of southern Africa. After reading different works of fiction, satire, and autobiographies we all had a better sense of our place and what we wanted most out of our travels.

- Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe *



Two days to go!

The last six months of preparation and anticipation have now reached a surreal pinnacle. We are standing on the precipice, about to set off on an incredible adventure to Livingstone, Zambia. With little more than backpacks, soccer balls, and bright-eyed naïveté, we are preparing to enter an entirely new culture with the intent of serving and loving as best we can in the local community schools and health clinics.

Travel is a funny thing. Even concerning the most challenging and exhausting trip, no one ever speaks ill of the experience. No matter how many vaccinations or medications; no matter how much paperwork and waiting must be done; no matter how many hours the flights and layovers last... after the fact, it seems it is a part of the human condition to only speak of meeting wonderful people, seeing amazing things, and simply *being* in a world that makes you feel insignificant and invincible simultaneously.

Yes, we are all stressed beyond belief. Yes, we are immeasurably fearful of many, many potential catastrophes that we imagine might occur. Yes, we hope the *Zambian* people think

well of us and accept us into their lives. But we would not have it any other way. All the planning, all the money, all the time, and all the anxiety--it will all be worth it.



- Luggage at 89% complete *

Is malaria still a thing?

Well, yes... Unfortunately. According to the CDC, Zambia has a moderate risk for US travelers, but really *any* risk is risky enough. We “Zambianistas” have had to research and prepare which medications and vaccinations we might need for the trip. Malaria and Yellow

Fewer are the major ones to watch out for. We could go into the gory details of possible side effects, if you really want, but it's nothing compared to being infected with the actual disease.

Besides the medicinal research, we also had to hammer out the legal paperwork. Honestly, the experience of doing just the paperwork could be sufficient to embrace a cultural experience. It was a terrifying but knowledgeable adventure trying to differentiate between country policies and requirements. Even small things one might not think about, like having a different 9-1-1 equivalent (it's 999 in case you ever need it).

A lot of friends and family have been hesitant when we say we're going to Zambia, but we are in really good hands. Not only do they speak English and use US currency (although we are learning some Nyanja), they are familiar with visitors. The country itself is surrounded by countries undergoing heartbreaking battles and with a thirst for freedom, but Zambia remains peaceful. It'll be interesting to see how they maintain peaceful interactions between various ethnic groups in person.

Mark Twain said it perfectly: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

We must move to be moved. So now, we must go.

Tionana, America! Moni, Zambia! (Goodbye, America! Hello, Zambia!)

- Alexandra, Kathleen, and Jo



- Here are a few of our Zambinistas: (from left to right and back to front: Amira Noshi, Jo Buckley, Acacia Sharrow, Adelle McDaniel, Alexandra Orahovats, Kathleen Wendt, Nick Breland, Alex Pinion, Nicole Marie Sutton, Jackson White, and Dr. Brinks – Not

pictured: Morgan Bennett and Katie Wybenga)

