

Saint Stithians College – Johannesburg, South Africa

Abby Shine '17

My name is Abby Shine and I am a grade 9 student at Lower Canada College. During the months of January and February 2015, I had the privilege to participate in a student exchange in South Africa.

During my stay, I lived in Sandton, Johannesburg, with the lovely Ayaya family, who welcomed me with open arms. I quickly bonded with my host, Rodina, a great 15-year old student, her parents, Gladys and Onesmus, her two older siblings, Vontner and Rollins, and their dog, Simba. They were experts at hosting, as they had already hosted two other exchanges. They therefore planned everything down to the minute and, thanks to this, I managed to tour an abundance of places during my stay!

I attended school at Saint Stithians College, an all-girls' Methodist school. The campus was absolutely beautiful; all of their hallways were outside and their classrooms were bursting with vibrant colours. It was a very different experience from LCC in that they started school at 7:20 am, brought their own food and went outside during their breaks. Since my exchange was in grade 10, I got to pick course options such as music, geography, and history. I was also introduced to my favourite class, Zulu. In terms of sports, I got to try a new one out: squash (the only one that was indoors and kept me away from the 35 degree Celsius weather!)

During my stay, I went to several places. The first week, I went to the Cradle of Humankind and the Sterkfontein caves where I learned about Africa, which is thought to be where the first human bones were found. I then went to Cape Town where, in the short span of two days, I managed to go to Robben Island, Cape Point, Table Mountain and much more. Following this, I went to Soweto, where we toured the cultural area and museums. On the fourth weekend, I went on my first-ever Safari, where I saw ostriches and lions. Finally, on the last week, I went to LeSedi, where I got to learn about Africa's eleven main languages and their four tribes, including Zulu!

While in South Africa, I definitely experienced a culture shock. For example – their food. There was no Nutella or maple syrup in Africa; instead, I got to try foods such as pap, biltong, melkert, and lots more. Also, their language was different; expressions such as "Oh my word!", "shame,", and "ratchet" were used frequently, for a variety of reasons I am still unsure about. Finally, I was stunned to discover that they drove on the left-hand side of the road and had "low shedding," which is when the government turns off their power for five hours once or twice every week (Can you imagine, no Internet for five hours!)

I'm going to be honest: it was not easy for me to leave my home and my family in January. I had never lived by myself, let alone with another family. However, the Ayayas made this experience so enjoyable for me. I especially want to thank Rodina's parents

for everything they have done. I am happy to have gained a new family! I have become very close to Rodina and I cannot wait to introduce her to everyone at LCC.

People may never fully understand what a great time I had in South Africa; when asked about my trip, I hope I don't simply blurt out: "It was great!" I hope I can communicate to others how much this experience has meant to me. It has been a great journey. I am coming home different and independent.