

St. Stithians Boys College, Johannesburg, South Africa
Adam Vandenbussche '17

When I landed at O.R. Tambo airport eight weeks ago, I didn't know what to expect. Aside from an hour-long Skype call, I didn't really know who I was going to be living with. I could barely remember my exchange partner's name! As it turned out, those eight weeks were among the best weeks of my life.

I was lucky enough to spend my first week getting to know Michael Hern and his family in Plettenberg Bay, on their vacation. Right after that, we drove to Kruger National Park to go on game drives and see all the animals I could only hope to see in a zoo back home in Montreal, Canada. The very first animals we saw were a group of impala, and I was so excited I think I took a hundred pictures of them! I realized shortly after that impala were perhaps the least exciting animals that I would be spotting: I also saw elephants, giraffes, lions, rhinos, zebras, warthogs, buffalo. It was like going to the zoo, but I was in the cage and the animals were looking at me!

Two weeks into my trip, I joined Michael on his first days of school at the Saints. My first impressions were that the campus was stunningly beautiful and vast, fitted with fields, pools, and courts of all sorts. As I shadowed Michael to his classes, I saw how polite and kind the teachers were, and even the students were very respectful. I immediately felt at home.

Over the remaining few weeks, it seemed I went to/did/saw everything: The Apartheid Museum, Gold Reef City, Soweto, Nelson Mandela's home, the Hector Pietersen Museum, an action-cricket match, Lesedi, the Lion Park, and we even made it down to Cape Town for a long weekend!

Words can't describe how much fun I had in South Africa. But my time here went by way too quickly. This experience will stay with me throughout my life; it was transformational. It also showed me that back home in Canada, it is a bit like Disneyland. Compared to South Africa's social challenges, our world is magnificent, and almost devoid of any problems. The challenges that some South Africans have to live with (and only those that I witnessed) were sobering. I feel very lucky to have the life and the opportunities I have. Yet, nonetheless, South Africa is a beautiful country and its culture is enchantingly vibrant, warm, and welcoming. I am sad to have had to leave, but I can't wait to return one day!

Thank you, South Africa!