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FERENGE ETHIOPIA

ProjectsAbroad

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The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Ethiopia

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Editor's Letter

Welcome to the November 2013 Projects Abroad Ethiopia newsletter. This newsletter aims to inform all our volunteers with news and information about the latest happenings in Projects Abroad Ethiopia.

Projects Abroad Ethiopia team is working hard to accommodate summer volunteers –which have great experience in Ethiopia. Thank you all the people who have volunteered with us – we really appreciate all for your valuable time and great help you gave at the different placements. And who decided to choose Ethiopia for volunteering through Projects Abroad.

Enjoy reading this issue and I hope that you will find something that you like. **Thanks to our volunteers who have shared their stories and photos with us.** We encourage everyone to join us in making the newsletter interesting and exciting by sending in your own written articles and pictures of your experiences here with us. Your stories and pictures will help others to understand and learn about Ethiopia. If you have anything you'd like to contribute, suggest, or comment on, please contact: bikeseegnhaileleul@projects-abroad.org

Enjoy!!!!

Street scenes in Addis Ababa

By Julia Nolles-Bienfait – Journalism Volunteer

Looking out from your taxi on China-Africa Square, in your first traffic jam having just landed from Europe, you become aware of the cars, blue-white minibuses and the people walking on the dusty, sandy sidewalks. Combined with the semi-tropical sun, greyish viaduct above and palm trees in the distance, you feel that you have just arrived in another world.

Driving into Addis Ababa you notice more the layering of society, the transportation and traffic system, and the struggle of the government with respect to improving infrastructure.

Looking on the sidewalk, you see a variety of clothes, western as well as traditional, differing headscarves reflecting Muslim and Orthodox Christian beliefs and the diverse crosses of the different regions, while occasionally you spot a woman with religious tattoos.

It is easy to notice the difference in wealth between the haves and the have-nots of Ethiopian society, more so than in Western Europe. On the other hand, the majority of people have cell phones, not unlike in Europe.

The poorest people come from all corners of Ethiopia to Addis Ababa, seeking a better life, but now struggle in their daily existence. Perhaps they are better off now, as they beg in the neighbourhoods of churches and slums. Walking on the streets you feel the poverty of these people, in their clothes, blanched and greyed by the sun and dust, worn-out. Their shoes, if they have any, have holes or are mismatched, and blankets are wrapped around their head and shoulders for protection against the cold nights. You should expect that they will approach you; a hand appears under the blanket, slender. . . 'Never give them any money, this begging will not stop and a lot of beggars will come to you, like bees drawn to flowers,' is the advice of some Ethiopian acquaintances. Turning back to the traffic, the number of pedestrians is surprisingly high compared to the number of cars on the road. Along the primary streets the sidewalks are broad and paved, but this is not the case on secondary roads where people are forced to walk on the street between parked cars. Walking is the preferred method of transportation for small distances up to two kilometers: 'It is just the way we do it here in Ethiopia, if the distance is too small to take a taxi, we will walk,' an Addis Ababan said. This is similar to what we do in Europe, only we would take our own car or bicycle.

Unexpectedly, a flock of sheep or a couple of donkeys may appear from an unpaved sandy side-alley. Donkeys are used to carry things, but what about the sheep: where do they find food? Why are they here in the middle of a big city? The sheep have been here for a long time.

The roads are crowded, with ageing taxis and minibuses among the number, full of dents, repaired with tape but still somehow functioning. Inside, the seat covers have long been worn out, replaced by artificial materials, which is also true for the floors, while door handles are generally not the original ones. If a minibus stops to let people out, the conductor calls out its destination, which is also visible on the roof in Amharic script. There are no taxi stops and no timetables.

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Donkeys are used to carry things, but what about the sheep: where do they find food? Why are they here in the middle of a big city? The sheep have been here for a long time. They will be slaughtered, sometimes even at home for a special celebration, like New Year's Day. Very rarely you see a bicycle, dangerous on these roads; it is perhaps a sustainable cheap alternative transportation method, although hard with ups and downs.

Along the roads you see different kinds of buildings, small stores housed in metal containers and construction sites for new multistory complexes, like apartments or hotels, alternating with sparkling new towers and gated residences. It is quite common that some areas of the new buildings are already in use, even though only partly finished. Properties older than 20 years are blached by the tropical sun, the bright colours faded, with maintenance only carried out for the most necessary damages: if it is still functioning, there is no need for replacement.

Considering the whole scene, it is an exciting experience to go around in Addis Ababa – by taxi, minibus or on foot. You become aware that Ethiopia is facing an almost impossible, never-ending task to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, build proper housing and sanitary environment for all the new arrivals. Meanwhile, there is a constant improvement to the infrastructure and transportation system, hampered by past neglect and rapid population growth. But by knowing that the middle class is growing, and workers are being recruited from the poorer areas, makes you optimistic about the future for Ethiopia. In three to four years, Addis Ababa will certainly look very different!

Differences in etiquette between Ethiopia, Japan

By Masumi Koizumi – Journalism Volunteer from Japan

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do” may be a lesson learnt from a negative experience resulting from differences in etiquette around the globe. Although foreigners are usually qualified for leniency shown by the locals, it is discreet of you to understand a manner different from your own before you begin your trip.

Imagine a situation where a first-time Japanese visitor to Ethiopia and a local person meet each other for the first time and go out to lunch. From the beginning, they would encounter cultural differences between them: the Japanese would bow as a sign of greeting his counterpart whilst the Ethiopian would extend his hand to shake his new friend’s hand.

In Japan, handshake with a new person even on the occasion of the informal meeting is not common, so much so that handshaking is more often than not perceived to be a foreign convention. Awkward though it may seem, we bow to one another as a way of demonstrating the absence of hostility by offering up our head to a new acquaintance. Although bowing is often performed without much reflection, those who are foreign to bowing custom will find us respectful because we also bow to



someone of our own age when meeting for the first time.

Having said that, handshaking as a form of greeting is becoming not unusual with more frequent exposure to foreign culture in Japan. However, the Japanese traveller would be startled if the Ethiopian offers his wrist for him to grip and shake because he thinks his hand is dirty. In my case, such a form of greeting has never been observed in the countries I have travelled to thus far and I would not mind if the fragrant smell of the orange gets on my hand after shaking a citrus-scented hand.

When I paid a casual visit to an orphanage, the caregivers rolled out the red carpet for me by letting me clasp their wrist when their hands were dirty at work. My clumsy hand faltered at first but I grabbed their wrist firmly knowing that it was the expression of their gracious hospitality.

After greeting shortly, the Japanese and the Ethiopian enjoy a lunch-table talk in a traditional Ethiopian restaurant. The Japanese rolls his eyes when the Ethiopian gasps every time he asks him a question. He takes a quick intake of breath – as if he had a sudden fit! – at least recognized as such by the Japanese-equivalent to a sign of agreement, or (and) affirmation in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the Ethiopian thinks it bizarre when the Japanese makes vertical movements of the head and says “un” (or “fuun”, “héé” etc) as a response throughout the dialogue.

The interjections of verbal cues such as “un” and head nodding signal an active involvement of a conversation because one focuses on the interlocutor by reacting to the speaker's response. The frequency of Aizuchi is responsible for the effective communication between Japanese people in a sense that one would feel ill at ease or uncertain if the recipient understands him without the use of Aizuchi.

The difference in frequency and the choice of Aizuchi relevant to a comfortable conversation for the Japanese may presumably correspond to the sharpness of a gasp for Ethiopians: some Ethiopians use a deep intake of breath whilst some Japanese head nod many times. In any case, the Japanese traveller will get acclimatized to the Ethiopian gasp given the frequent occurrence in dialogues with Ethiopians.

At the height of their talk, a platter of injera, characteristic of Ethiopian and Eritrean dishes, with side dishes served atop was laid out in the middle of the table. It is customary for Ethiopians to share a meal from a single plate; on the contrary, Japanese style favors different dishes served on their own individual plates; and you will be given your own territory of a set meal so that no other diners can officially infringe on your food sanctuary.

Nonetheless, Japanese people share food with someone by transferring a piece of food from one's plate to his friend/relative's plate or passing food from his chopsticks to his girlfriend (just like Ethiopian guy feeds his girlfriend a small portion of injera with his hand), for instance, depending on the level of intimacy.

A waiter wearing a neat dinner jacket brings a kettle to pour lukewarm water over their hands. That brings to mind the good old days when the Japanese mother repeatedly told him to wash his hands before meal.

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The hand washing habit has become increasingly irrelevant to his manners of eating due to the use of chopsticks, a pair of tapered sticks used as the eating tool in some Asian countries. A mastery of chopsticks makes it unnecessary for him to ever touch foods since he can even pick up tiny pieces of food with the utensils! As other Ethiopians do, the Ethiopian tears off a piece of injera and dips it into wot, a spicy dipping sauce, with his right hand. He urges his new acquaintance to eat more, with no close attention to the cleanness around him – now is the time to enjoy our meal.

Concluding with another round of hand-washing, they order after dinner coffee to finish off their meal with. The Ethiopian coffee tastes similar to espresso which takes pride in rich aroma and a heavy body. Anyone who drinks Ethiopian coffee for the first time must feel their emotions running high after a shot of Ethiopian coffee. The Ethiopian adds a large knob of sugar to his coffee and downs the thick fluid in a flash.

Fun-time with great company, the Ethiopian guy pulls cash out of his jacket pocket and says “it is my treat today” gently with his satisfied smile on his face and defeats the Japanese guy’s offer to pay for him. On leaving the restaurant, the Ethiopian scoops up the Japanese guy’s hand and holds it tightly before he says a thing – a token of camaraderie in Ethiopia.

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please contact us –**

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