
Subject: Re: Out of Africa

Posted by [Scott\[1\]](#) on Tue, 26 Jul 2011 22:14:26 GMT

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A fascinating report. Thanks David!

Subject: Re: Out of Africa

Posted by [Craig Markwardt](#) on Wed, 27 Jul 2011 04:21:37 GMT

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On Jul 25, 1:01 pm, David Fanning <n...@idlcoyote.com> wrote:

> Folks,

>

> I've returned from Ethiopia and just wanted to give a short
> report on my adventure of teaching IDL classes in Africa. As
> usual in third-world countries, it is a combination of good
> news and bad news.

>

> First of all, let me say that I think *everyone* should have
> the opportunity to travel to a third-world country. It is
> eye-opening, to say the least. Ethiopia is booming, at least
> in Addis Ababa, where much construction is going on and the
> economy is growing in double digits. Alas, inflation is
> out-pacing the economy.

>

> One of the problems with global markets in poor countries
> is that farmers find it much more lucrative to export their
> products to richer countries who can pay more, and the poor
> in their own countries find it harder and harder to afford
> food and other goods. Government tries to help by implementing
> price controls and other measures, but the governing power
> there, as in most countries, resides in land-owners and
> businessmen whose wealth depends on growing the economy, not
> feeding the masses.

>

> Eastern Ethiopia is suffering from a 10-year drought. Little
> or no help is coming from the government. Rather, the government
> relies on International Aid efforts to help with the problem.
> When I toured the Afar region east of Addis I saw cows that
> couldn't possibly be any skinnier. If rain doesn't come soon,
> I don't see how the pastoral Afar people, and many like them,
> can survive.

>

> Education has recently become a government priority, and
> the good news is more people are being allowed to attend
> the universities. The bad news is there are no additional
> teachers, facilities, or support for the additional students.

- > I had lunch with the directors of the Institute of Technology
- > at Addis Ababa University, and they told me they had planned
- > for 750 students and had received 3500. They have NO idea
- > how they are going to teach this many students with their
- > current staffing budget. Their current plan is to video tape
- > a lecture in one class, and show it in 15 others!
- >
- > I was teaching IDL in a classroom that could perhaps hold
- > 20 students comfortably. I had 47 students in the classroom.
- > Each had a laptop that needed to be plugged into one of the
- > three outlets in the classroom. If any of us moved, we were
- > in danger of being electrocuted. Add to this the certain
- > power outages whenever the thunder and lightning started
- > (it is the rainy season in Ethiopia!) and you have conditions
- > for a most interesting and challenging classroom!
- >
- > Still, the students in the new Institute of Water Resources
- > were terrific! Very engaged. Very hard workers. No one complained.
- > Everyone just got on with it. We moved slowly, but we moved steadily.
- >
- > Addis is an incredibly safe and interesting city. I moved freely
- > in it and never felt the least bit threatened. I didn't move around
- > too much after dark, but not because I felt afraid of people. Rather,
- > there are few street lights in Addis and there are gapping holes
- > in the sidewalks that lead directly to the sewer 10 feet below.
- > There are no barriers or warnings to alert the unsuspecting walker
- > to these holes, so walking at night in unfamiliar territory
- > is *extremely* dangerous!
- >
- > Ethiopians are invariably friendly and open people. But, be careful.
- > The most friendly of them, especially those who engage you on the
- > street when you are walking along minding your own business, are
- > hoping you will repay their friendliness and helpfulness with money.
- > You get a sense for this after you have accumulated a couple of
- > especially good friends you hope you don't run into again!
- >
- > I had many interesting experiences in Ethiopia, but two stand out
- > in my mind. I stayed at the Bilen Lodge east of Addis in the Afar
- > region, along the Awash River. This is dry, dusty country, but
- > perfect for birds, which is what I was after. The "Lodge" is
- > slightly misnamed. It is a primitive place with screened-in grass
- > huts, basically, to stay in.
- >
- > One night, about 2AM, I was awakened from a deep sleep by a
- > lion roaring about 15 feet from my unlocked screen door!
- > Goodness! I jumped up and looked out my window in time to
- > see him moving away from me (thank goodness!) in the light
- > of the full moon.

>
> In the morning, I wondered if this had just been a dream, so
> I went out to investigate. No, sure enough, it was a lion, as
> big cat prints were everywhere outside my hut.
>
> Later that morning, I also saw a cheetah moving in the dry river
> bed below the Lodge, along a path that during the day carried
> a never-ending stream of people, cows, and goats. Before I left
> the area I had seen spotted hyenas, a jackal, and a crocodile
> in the river.
>
> And, of course, birds. In four days I had identified about 40
> new species I had never seen before in my life time, and probably
> saw two or three times that number, which I wasn't able to identify.
>
> The other interesting experience was attending a local Muda
> celebration in the Bale Mountains. Ethiopia is about evenly
> divided between Christians and Muslims, but a surprisingly
> large number of local people still follow their traditional
> African religious celebrations. The Muda celebration is one of
> these.
>
> It appeared to me to be a combination of a Southern Baptist
> revival meeting and a rave. It was held in a two-room smoky
> hut, about the size of my kitchen here at home. There were
> 60-70 people in attendance, all dancing and singing around
> the small fires set on the dirt floors in the center of the
> rooms. Two drummers provided the trance-like atmospheric
> effects. The idea, it seemed to me, was to sing and dance
> yourself into an altered state of reality, or maybe just
> religious ecstasy. It brought my own Pentecostal religious
> upbringing back to me in a very real (and surprisingly
> pleasing) way.
>
> The celebration started about 8PM, with the singing, dancing,
> clapping, and drumming being interspersed with short quiet
> times where various individuals offered prayers and short
> speeches. Occasionally there was a break for specially prepared
> foods. The celebration went on until 4AM, when I was finally
> able to catch a few hours of sleep. What a way to experience
> the real Africa!

Hi David-- It sounds like you had quite an adventure!

Who knew that Ethiopia was such a hot-bed of IDL-using water resource analysts!

I'm also curious to know if authentic Ethiopian food is anything like

what you get at home in the States.

Craig

Subject: Re: Out of Africa

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Wed, 27 Jul 2011 11:32:42 GMT

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Craig Markwardt writes:

> Who knew that Ethiopia was such a hot-bed of IDL-using water resource
> analysts!

Indeed. This is a five year USAID grant to bring some attention to this critical program in developing countries. If it goes well in Ethiopia, it will be extended to other developing countries. IDL will soon be in every nook and cranny of the developing world. ;-)

> I'm also curious to know if authentic Ethiopian food is anything like
> what you get at home in the States.

Exactly like you get in the US, only much, much better!
(There is a HUGE contingent of Ethiopians in the US, mostly due to an anti-intellectual, Maoist-like government, the Derg, which was in power before the present administration.)
I think the food is so good because it is absolutely fresh, local, and mostly organically grown. The only exception is the goat meat, which tastes pretty much like you would expect these often abused animals to taste. You could wear your teeth out chewing it!

I'm told (I haven't eaten enough Ethiopian food in the US to know for sure) that the injera (the sponge-like bread you use to pick the food up with) tastes different in the US because it is hard to get the grain, tef, to make it here. Tef is only grown in Ethiopia, and since it is used extensively, there are export controls that require most of it to be sold locally and at a price the locals can afford.

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.
Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.

Subject: Re: Out of Africa
Posted by [war](#) on Wed, 27 Jul 2011 15:24:51 GMT
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Hi David,

Very happy to hear you pretty much enjoyed your stay in a developing country. And also very happy to see that IDL is trying to get its way into those places. As you saw, people in those countries do not have a lot but with some help and some advice from experts like you things can change and improve a lot. However, price of softwares will always be an issue in these countries.

I hope you can see and enjoy more foods and cultures using IDL as a means.

Andry

Subject: Re: Out of Africa
Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Thu, 28 Jul 2011 01:10:56 GMT
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Andry writes:

> Very happy to hear you pretty much enjoyed your stay in a developing
> country. And also very happy to see that IDL is trying to get its way
> into those places. As you saw, people in those countries do not have a
> lot but with some help and some advice from experts like you things
> can change and improve a lot. However, price of softwares will always
> be an issue in these countries.

To ITTVIS's credit, they understand this is a problem and they worked with us to provide everyone in the program an IDL license. This was **extremely** generous of them and greatly appreciated.

Yes, I agree with you, given a chance things can change in these disadvantaged countries. The students are willing and able, and with a bit of support will be able to do important things for their country.

> I hope you can see and enjoy more foods and cultures using IDL as a

> means.

Yes, me, too. :-)

I'm heading around the world in a different direction in October, when I head for Australia. This is going to be another interesting year for me. :-)

Cheers,

David

--

David Fanning, Ph.D.

Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.

Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: <http://www.idlcoyote.com/>

Sepore ma de ni thui. ("Perhaps thou speakest truth.")
