

## *My adventure in South Africa*

Hello out there!

My name is Katharina, I'm 20 years old and I come from Germany. I was graduate from "high school" last year in March. In June 2014 I left my home country to work in the States as an Au Pair. Well, I love travelling and meet new people, so after ten exciting months in America I didn't want to go back to Germany. I decided to start another great adventure ...

The fact that I was born in Bavaria (South Germany) helped me to find the right place. My parents know Isabel's family very well and my mum was impressed by the work Isabel and Lloyd did. So my new destination was found → I was going to SOUTH AFRICA ☺

After a very emotional farewell party in Washington, D.C. and one week vacation in Florida my flight to Durban (South Africa) was leaving on March 1<sup>st</sup> from the International airport in Miami (FL).

I was so excited because it was my first time going to Africa. Of course it was stressful to organize my visit but Isabel helped me a lot. I was very thankful for that! I thought I needed to get a lot of formal things done but it wasn't even the visa I needed. I just booked the flight! ☺ I knew that both of them worked a lot with horses and that they did great work in the last years. I haven't had a lot of experiences in case of horsemanship, riding horses or anything similar but Isabel encouraged me. I also didn't have any clothes. So I bought pants and all the other stuff (for example a helmet) I got from Isabel and Lloyd. It was also very nice from them to borrow me those things.

After 32 hours, three times changing airplanes, four different airport visits and four different time changes I finally arrived at the King Shaka Airport in Durban. I was so glad to see Isabel at the airport, to get my two huge suitcases and last but not least I got my money changed into South African Rand.

I was happy that Isabel picked me up otherwise I needed to get a taxi which was expensive. I was tired but at the same time I was so impressed by the nature that I couldn't even sleep in the car when we drove to the Karkloof Area where Isabel and Lloyd have their home. She explained some basics about their work and about her experiences. I thought "Kathi, it was the right decision to come here".

After a long drive and some grocery shopping (All students pay for their own food) we got to my "new" home for the next coming weeks. It was a very nice little house on a farm. I met the other volunteer and she was very nice and cooperative. Another thing I really liked, Isabel and Lloyd had their home just across the street, so if we would've had any problems they were close to us.

We lived not far from the Karkloof Mountains; actually we could see them right in front of our farm.

During the five weeks I learned a lot about horses and their needs. I spent many hours with them. It's not just riding!! That's the main thing everybody should know.

Lloyd always said it's about 99% being with the horse, taking care for them and just 1% is riding a horse. I can tell, he's right! Having a horse means you have to work a lot. Lloyd and Isabel own 13 horses. Every horse is different and they all act in another way. The first days my work was limited by walking with the horses, spending time with them, cleaning them and watching them how they react on different body languages. And this is the main thing I learned from Lloyd. He never pulled or pushed a horse. I never saw him angry or impatient with those animals. Everything was about body language. And all of them understood that language. That was very special to me and it was so nice to see how Lloyd loved to do this work. Of course it takes time to get into this and you need to have a lot of patience.

It took me some days to understand everything, to get to know all of the horses and to know how to handle them. The first time riding was an experience I never forget. It was awesome to feel the movement of the horse and to see how calm it is. It seemed that not just I was happy to sit on his back, the horse had fun too. ☺

The following weeks we were riding every day, we were also cleaning and feeding them. Two or three times a week Lloyd, Isabel, the other Volunteer and I were driving to next small town called Howaik. We got some groceries and stuff for the horses. The nature there is beautiful. I came straight from Miami to the "bush" so it was very different for me. It was so quiet and I just saw the few people who were living on the same farm than I did. I never heard noises which I was used to heard in big cities, all that I was listening to was the sound of the birds and other wild animals. It was relaxing and very nice. It calmed me down.

While I was staying with Lloyd and Isabel I spent a lot of time in this Karkloof area. So both of them offered to drive up north to visit some reserves. They call it "get-away package" and they want to show their volunteers around. So I had the choice to choose a three to four day trip. We decided to drive to St. Lucia and to camp there, right next to the beach. It was a great trip! I saw all the wild animals I've ever dreamed about (they call it "the big five"), we saw the interacting (games) and I loved the nature. It was stunning. After four days we drove back home. I've never thought I could feel how I felt when I got back to the Karkloof. I missed the horses like crazy. I was so happy to see them and to smell them (haha). I can only recommend the get-away packages. You have the chance to see the real Africa!

I also visited Durban. It is a never sleeping city with a lot of people. You can clearly see the different lifestyle and the huge gap between poor and rich people. I went to the Sea Life Museum and I walked along the beach.

One event I will never forget is the new moon labyrinth. A friend from Isabel and Lloyd works also with horses. Instead of riding them, she is using them in a medical way. She helps people who have psychological illnesses and conditions. In the new moon labyrinth people can come and they walk through the labyrinth with the horses. It was a very different but a very emotional experience for me.

I think all of you know that both of them did great things in the last years. They were riding on horseback around Africa. During the time I asked a lot of questions about this amazing trip. They told me stories but they always said that you have to experience this by yourself to know how it feels and see all this beautiful places. I could always guess that it was exhausting to take care for yourself, for your partner and for two to four horses, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

But how exhausting it really was I learned when I went on a three day trip through the Karkloof Mountains with Lloyd and the other volunteer. I always wanted to know how it feels so he showed us. I can tell... it was the most amazing but also most exhausting thing I've ever done. It is so hard to take care for yourself and a horse. You need to find food and water and right place to sleep. You need to get up in the middle of the night to look after them and to feed them. So after two nights sleeping in the forest and three days riding them and walking with them I was done! I was tired, hungry, thirsty and stinky (haha). I have never been so happy to get a shower than on this day!

It was very nice from Lloyd to take us on this trip because for him it's way more exhausting. He has the responsibility for three people and three horses.

As a conclusion I spent five weeks with Isabel and Lloyd (march 3th till april 9<sup>th</sup>) and it was one of my best experiences I've ever had. It was a pleasure to be there. I am so thankful that they showed me around and I've learned so much. I got a totally different view on horsemanship and riding horses. I can only recommend taking part in this volunteer program that they offer. You won't regret it.

I will definitely come back someday! ☺

A big thank you to Isabel Wolf-Gillespie and Lloyd Gillespie

Katharina Hennig





