

South Africa, 2019

Cultural Diversity Amidst Natural Surroundings

by Candy Carter, MLA 2014



MLA Community South Africa, June 21-July 6, 2019.

“It’s complicated,” incoming Stanford freshman Annie Boyle, summed up her thoughts at the end of the recent June/July MLA 2019 trip to South Africa. Ms. Boyle accompanied her parents, Class of ’88 alumni Rich and Catherine Boyle. She went on to explain that “we have learned about South Africa—the beautiful and the not-so-beautiful. Even in this safari park [Kruger], we have learned about the people who lived on this land, and the ugly story behind the beauty we are seeing.”

Ms. Boyle’s words typify the wide range of emotions and reactions enjoyed by 20 MLA travelers on this journey.

Travelers saw the unmistakable beauty of the landscape—including Table Mountain, the Cape of Good Hope, the Sterkfontein limestone caves, as well as the magnificent fauna and birdlife in Kruger National Park. But the group was also confronted with great injustices carried out in the service of greed and bigotry. District 6, the Apartheid Museum, the Slave Lodge Museum, Robben Island, and the re-enactment of their forced removal by Makuleke villagers were events that brought home South Africa’s long struggle with its colonial past and the lingering impact of the apartheid period.

Despite the troubled history, however, travelers saw triumph and joy in South Africa. The newly created Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art in Cape Town (a beautiful reconstruction of grain storage silos) showed a vibrant and dynamic art scene. The 100 statues in the Long March to Freedom that will form the basis of the National Heritage Monument—still a work in progress—depict heroes from Nelson Mandela (most recent) to 17th Century freedom fighter, Autshumoto. Spier Winery and the nearby Sustainability Institute demonstrated sophisticated methods for building equitable communities while maintaining profitable ventures. A visit to Parliament and a follow-up conversation with an MP, as well as a discussion with Jonathan Jansen, current Rector of the University of the Free State, were just two examples of witnessing South Africans working hard to create a new vision for South Africa’s future. And finally, travelers will never forget the beauty of Pafuri Camp, created as a post-apartheid partnership with the original inhabitants of the land, the Makuleke people.

None of this would have been possible without the enthusiastic guidance of the tour’s faculty leader, Professor Jim Campbell. With his wife (a native of South Africa) Andrea Van Niekerk, they were always available to help de-code the many mysteries of South Africa. Professor Campbell also commented that MLA travelers are exceptional: “Over the years I’ve had the opportunity to travel with lots of different Stanford groups—with students, faculty, and alumni. It’s always an adventure. But I can honestly say that I’ve never had more fun—or learned more—than I did when leading the MLA tour of South Africa. It’s hard to imagine a more intrepid, curious, and generous group of travelers.”

Tour members agreed. Fourth year MLA student Steve Blasberg said, “The trip was great because of the people. This tour was a wonderful combination of people, place, and history—both the people of South Africa and the people on the trip.”

The MLA journey to South Africa was “not for sissies!” according to 2010 MLA alumna Connie Howard, “because you really can’t go to Africa and call it ‘just a trip.’” Anders Tuxen Bisgaard, age 14, who joined his mother, MLA student Stephanie Tuxen Bisgaard and sister Ida on the trip agreed. “You get to experience everything first-hand, and we got to know a world outside our own bubble in Silicon Valley,” he commented.

Candy Carter and her husband Nick joined eighteen other members of the MLA community for an insightful tour of South Africa from June 21 to July 6, 2019.



View of Table Mountain from Cape Town



View of Robben Island from Table Mountain



African penguin colony, Boulders Beach



Lime quarry at Robben Island



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Muizenberg beach near Cape Town



Faculty leader Professor Jim Campbell with Andrea Van Niekerk



Descending the stairs at the Museum of Contemporary Art Africa



Prof. Nancy Kollmann and Dr. Linda Paulson at Spier Wine farm



National Heritage Monument, Maropeng, Cradle of Humankind



Domestic flight from Johannesburg to Kruger National Park



Gathering in the Makuleke Concession of Kruger National Park



Re-enactment by the Makuleke of their removal from their land



Herd of elephants in Kruger National Park



View from lodgings at Pafuri Camp, Kruger National Park



Group photo at Thulamela near Pafuri Camp