



Advice to the next volunteers in South Africa

By Julie Marchand, ICYE volunteer 2007 - 2008

✓ Learn both Afrikaans and Xhosa:

There is a budget for it, so make use of it! It will give your stay an additional dimension, which you didn't suspect! People are so happy that foreigners make the effort to learn their language that it enables you to make a great first contact and to enter into a much deeper relationship with people. Moreover, you'll receive a lot of smiles and sometimes laughter by speaking their language; something that just makes your day!

Always remember this quote from Nelson Mandela: *"Speak to a man in a language he understands, it will go to his head; speak to a man in his language, it will go to his heart!"*

✓ Be patient:

This is Cape Town!!! Enjoy! Take your time and expect people to take their time too!

✓ Make things happen, don't wait for them to happen!

✓ Don't expect the same safety standards as Europe:

Read cautiously about the precautions that need to be taken on your embassy website, be aware but don't let insecurity undermine your stay. Just be reasonable and follow the advice like hiding your valuables, not walking alone after hours or in quiet areas, etc.

✓ Culture shock

It is more surreptitious in South Africa than in any other country, because it somehow looks like home, but it is still Africa (e.g. Internet access). So sometimes you might feel that you are not feeling very well, but you don't acknowledge that it is the cultural shock, because your eyes are telling you that it is like home here. In fact, it might be that you are experiencing the cultural shock phase, without even knowing it.

✓ "Just now"

To avoid any misunderstanding with South Africans, just bear in mind that when they tell you that they are arriving "just now", it means any time in the day, and possibly never!

✓ Read and watch movies about South Africa, BEFORE and during your stay:

Read about the history (it is paramount to understand the geography of the area, people's psychology, things that you might find shocking, etc.), read about Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Steeve Biko, about the TRC, go to District 6 museum and the Slave Lodge, watch many movies and documentaries about SA during your stay (*Yesterday, Tsotsi, Classified people, Good bye Bafana, Red dust, In my country*, etc.), read *Cry the beloved country, My traitor's heart, Bang Bang Club* for example, and talk about it with your friends and colleagues. Listen to the debates on SABC News radio station, and don't read *The Voice* too much, if at all!

✓ Speak to your supervisor

If there are things that you don't understand about your work, or the culture, don't hesitate to speak to your supervisor, in order to avoid any misunderstanding. Don't draw conclusions on your own. South Africa's deep culture is not accessible instantly and the locals will be happy to explain its specificities.