

Volunteers get active !



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## Learning French

We have been receiving many volunteers who come to Senegal to improve their French skills. Some volunteers come here to primarily take French lessons but many chose to have lessons alongside their placements. Each volunteer is allocated a local French teacher and usually they have three hours of lessons a day. Teaching is usually one-to-one and each teacher can receive a maximum of three students at a time. Here, two Danish volunteers, Celine Sorensen and Tine Meyhoff, give us an idea of what a French course is like.



### **Why did you choose to come to Senegal?**

We wanted to come to Africa but were undecided between Cameroon and Senegal. We really wanted to be able to use our French and when we did a bit of research into both countries, Senegal sounded more interesting!

### **Had you studied French before coming to Senegal?**

We both did three years of French in primary school and two years in high school so we had a basic level of understanding; however, it had been two years since we had used our French so it was a bit rusty. We were surprised how quickly it came back to us, and we were able to have conversations, which we didn't think we would initially be able to do.

### **How many hours of lessons did you choose?**

We did the 14-hour course, mainly for financial reasons. What was good, was that we had our week of French classes before we began our teaching project. We came to Senegal primarily to volunteer but it was great to have a week to practice our French. It also really helped us to integrate into our host family too as we had the confidence to speak with them.

### **What was your teacher like?**

Our teacher was great. He is a French teacher in one of the high schools in St Louis and he really taught us a lot about Senegalese culture. We had some interesting discussions about Islam and the various religious brotherhoods that exist in Senegal. Our teacher also took an interest in our own culture and we talked a lot about the

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differences between Denmark and Senegal. One important thing was that he established what level we were at really quickly, so the grammar we covered was just right for us, not too easy or too difficult. It was exactly what we needed.

**What did you do in the lessons?**

Lessons were usually three hours long but our teacher was flexible if we ever needed to rearrange a class. We sometimes wandered around town and he would give us useful local vocabulary. The rest of the time we had discussions or covered grammar. We really felt our teacher wanted us to improve our French, and it was also a great way of being introduced to the Senegalese culture. He even organised a weekend trip for us to visit the famous mosque in nearby Touba.

**Do you practice French with your host family and the other volunteers?**

At first, we were really tired after our lessons so it required a lot of effort to come home and make conversation with our host family. We also took a bit of time to get used to the Senegalese accent. Now we both feel that we understand a lot more than before and are more confident with having discussions. We often chat with our host family in French and to the French speaking volunteers, which gives us a bit of extra practice!

**Would you recommend a French course for future volunteers?**

If you are like us and only have a basic level of French when you arrive, then we definitely think it's a great idea to take some lessons. You can take a week before you start your placement or you can take lessons alongside your placement. It really helps you to get by for example taking taxis or buying things. It also helps you to make friendships with local people and generally feel more comfortable in your new surroundings.



*The famous mosque at Touba which Celine and Tine visited with their French teacher*

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### Leaving Party for Volunteer at AFE Centre

Action Femmes et Enfants (AFE) is a centre in Pikine, the poorest and most populated area of St Louis. It started out as a centre for young women in difficult situations, primarily unmarried pregnant girls who are a stigma in society here. The staff at the centre teach the young girls how to bake, sew and read and write. The goal is to teach them a skill that will enable them to sustain themselves. Now, the centre also provides care and education for young children who would not have access to education otherwise. Some of them are the young girls' children and some are from very poor families who live near the centre. The vast majority of these children do not have civil status and are thus not recognised by the Government.

Delaney Green, a 17 year-old volunteer from Portland, USA, has been working in the centre for the last 5 months. Her main activities have been helping the children with numbers, the alphabet and working on their reading and writing skills. She has even taught the children some basic English phrases. The staff and children at the centre grew very attached to Delaney and on her last day in the centre, threw a party for her and invited all of the Projects Abroad staff and volunteers.

The party was a great event; the children had prepared songs and demonstrated their English skills for the volunteers. The women at the centre had prepared cakes and bissap (a local drink made from hibiscus leaves), which were given out to all the guests. There was lots of dancing and drumming and the Director of the centre presented Delaney with a Senegalese dress and thanked her for her hard work and commitment.

*Delaney is pictured with the Director of the centre, Maodo Diagne*



## Weekend Trip

### Bike Trip to Reserve de Geumbeul



This month, the volunteers decided to get active and headed out on a bike trip to a near-by nature reserve. The 'Reserve de Geumbeul' is situated approximately 10-12km South of St Louis on the road which leads to a village called Gandiol.

The group of fourteen volunteers and staff rented bikes on the island and headed out, with some apprehension, over the Pont Faidherbe to the mainland.

Following the main road out of St Louis for about 5km, the volunteers were forced to stay in single file and had to be very alert to avoid collisions with children, animals and other traffic. Fortunately, the rest of the ride took place on a much quieter country road. The group were able to cycle along beside each other and chat at the same time out of the bustle of the main road. It was a nice sunny day with a little bit of wind so it wasn't too hot.

After over an hour, the group arrived, exhausted, at the reserve. They had all prepared picnics so they enjoyed a much needed rest while they devoured their sandwiches. After lunch, the guide, Ndaga, explained to the group that the reserve was funded by the Senegalese Government to protect certain species. He showed them round the reserve and they saw a variety of animals such as gazelles, turtles, and antelopes. The reserve was very calm, peaceful and picturesque and the group enjoyed the opportunity to relax there for a while before they took on their cycle back to St Louis.



The journey back was eventful as the volunteers had to struggle against a strong wind. One volunteer, Georgina, was unfortunate enough to encounter a flat tyre. However, it was a good excuse to get the bus home for the last 5km and Desk Officer, Fina, was very pleased when she was nominated to accompany her.

Back safe and sound on the island, it was straight to the 'Patisserie', a favourite with the volunteers, for ice-cream, cake and many other delights!

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## Volunteer Moment

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**Name:** Joe Leather

**Nationality:** English

**Age:** 18

**Project:** Teaching – 2 Months

### First Impressions

Arriving in Senegal, still breathless from my 20 minute changeover at Lisbon, I was a bag of nerves. One ‘rendez-vous’ at the airport and one night in a hotel in Dakar later and I was out in the African heat on a rickety sept-place (seven seater taxi) to Saint-Louis. I arrived with another volunteer from Japan. Together, we chatted in our limited French, already surrounded by the unfamiliar; the sellers with bowls balanced on their heads, the tap of coins on the roof of our taxi, the sporadic cries of 'Toubab!' (meaning ‘white person’ in the local Wolof language).

When I finally reached my host family and home for the next two months, I felt a little lost. What was clearly a goat was introduced to me as 'le mouton' (sheep in French), my bathroom had no light and I couldn't find the door for my room. But with the arrival of Nicole, from the Projects Abroad Senegal team, things started to look clearer. The sheep was a sheep. The light switch was behind a curtain. I've still not worked out how I couldn't find the door, it was right there and still is now.

After Nicole had filled me in on various aspects of Projects Abroad including the social side such as the weekend trips and the quiz night, she left me to have dinner with my family. Having already done a similar placement with Projects Abroad in Ghana, I was no stranger to West African cuisine, however, it was a shock to discover on the plate in front of me was not flavourless mush as I had experienced in Ghana, but tasty couscous with chips and salad on the side!

That night, cocooned in my mosquito net, with a full belly and freshly out of my first cold shower, I could feel my inhibitions fading into excitement. Two weeks later, I have met amazing people from all over the world, danced to Djembe drums on the beach, been on a Muslim pilgrimage and lost the Wednesday Quiz Night. I am loving every second!

## Upcoming Volunteer's Corner

Ex – volunteer, 18 year-old Sara Baker, spent 5 months in St Louis last year. She has created a list of the Top 10 things to do in your spare time.

### 1. Scooter Outings

Exploring on a scooter is a great way to see St Louis. Driving up the peninsula gives you amazing views of the island and is also a good way to see the fishing village. If you're feeling adventurous you can even take your scooter out of St Louis and visit nearby villages like Bango or resorts such as Zebrabar where you can have lunch and relax on the banks of the River Senegal.



### 2. Beach Picnic

If you're feeling in the mood for a lazy day, I recommend buying food in town and heading down to Hydrobase (tourist beach on the peninsula, about 5km south of the island) for a beach picnic. It's great if you're on a budget; you can get a baguette from the boulangerie and go to any 'boutique' (corner shop) and ask for cheese spread. Another bonus is that the taxi to the beach is really cheap too!

### 3. Dance/Drum Lessons



Dance lessons are on Wednesday evenings at the French cultural centre. You don't have to be a good dancer to go as the teacher is understanding and slows the pace right down to show you each move. They are traditional Senegalese dances, so once you master them, you can impress your host family! Drum lessons are really good fun too, and you will be surprised how quickly you pick it up. The teachers are really friendly and will organise parties at the beach where they perform for all the volunteers.

### 4. Weekend Trips

Projects Abroad often organise trips to the Desert Loumpoul or to Mauritania. Both trips are definitely worth it; you can stay overnight in tents, climb sand dunes, ride camels and watch dancers around a campfire. Weekend trips are also a good chance for you to get to know the other volunteers better.

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## **5. Learn Wolof**

Learning basic Wolof phrases is interesting and extremely helpful, especially when you're shopping or your taxi driver speaks no French. Your host family will be a good resource for picking up the basic greetings but if you're serious about learning the language, Projects Abroad also have a Wolof teacher. The locals really appreciate it when volunteers try and speak Wolof and it's also a good way of getting rid of annoying street sellers.

## **6. Market Trips**

I recommend going shopping for fabrics in the market on the peninsula. You will find a huge variety of gorgeous material, you can have fun exploring the maze of a market and if you go around lunch time there will be no end of people inviting you to join them to eat. I say go for it. It's a great way to improve your French and try some local dishes!

## **7. Make Friends**

Making friends with people at work is a great way to practise your French. You will also have numerous invites to parties where you can get a real feel for Senegalese life. I was always invited for dinner with work colleagues and they are always really keen for me to meet their families. It's another way of engaging in cultural exchange and getting the most out of your experience.

## **8. Cooking**

Learning how to cook the local dishes is a great way to bond with your host family. They will definitely laugh at you about the fact that you need a peeler to peel a potato, but they will appreciate it if you help out and take an interest in how they prepare their meals. It's also fun to make for your friends when you get back home. So far I've made 'Yassa Poulet' and 'Mafé' at home, not quite as tasty as my host mum, Maman Touty's though!

## **9. Touba**

Touba is a town about three hours drive from St Louis. It is famous for its impressive mosque, the biggest in Senegal. You can visit Touba as a day trip. I did this with some other volunteers and their French teacher came along to be our guide. It's a really interesting trip and you will understand the religious brotherhoods that exist in Senegal more.

## **10. Concerts**

There are regular concerts taking place in St Louis. Senegalese music is vibrant and the dancing is unlike anything I've seen before. Concerts are always a good place to see Senegalese dancing and have a go yourself!



## News and Updates

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...Information about what's been happening in St. Louis...

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The 9th of March, was a huge event in Senegal. To celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, most families travelled to various towns and cities around Senegal where their Islamic leaders reside in order to spend the night singing religious prayers. Everyone dressed traditionally and travelled to different parts of the country for the ceremony. The town which had the biggest turn-out was Tivaouane, which is situated between Dakar and St Louis. The 10<sup>th</sup> March was a national holiday to give people the chance to recover from the all-night ceremony. Some of the volunteers were involved in the celebrations with their host families.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, jazz singer, Pape Niang made an appearance at one of St Louis' well-known venues, 'La Taverne'. Many of the volunteers attended, and there was a great atmosphere with many people dancing to some classic covers. Pape Niang is blind and so is often referred to as the 'Stevie Wonder' of Senegal. He certainly lived up to his title and the volunteers all really appreciated his concert.

Jorgen Pettersson, from Sweden, visited the Projects Abroad Senegal team for a week during March. He works for Projects Abroad and is responsible for recruiting Swedish volunteers. Jorgen came out to Senegal to get a feel for the volunteer experience. He met many of the volunteers and visited host families and placements. It was his first visit to Africa and he really enjoyed it. He said the experience was really useful as he now knows a lot more about being a volunteer with Projects Abroad so will be able to inform potential volunteers from Sweden.

Programme Darra Moderne has been launched. Frances Clarke, a volunteer on a Care placement has been working with coordinator Papis Dioum in a darra (Koranic school) in St Louis. They are involved in various activities such as teaching the children basic hygiene and they hope to teach them some French. The Talibé (street children) seem very open to the initiative. Although it is still in the beginning stages, we hope that the Programme will be able to function in many darras in order to benefit as many street children as possible.

## Photo Gallery

Great pictures that have been taken by volunteers over the last month, in and around St Louis....



*Clive and John meet their football team and Natalie, Beth and Jorgen enjoy dinner with their host family.*

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH...



*Sunset from the South Point of the Island of St Louis*

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[www.resdagboken.se](http://www.resdagboken.se)

## APRIL DIARY

### 6<sup>TH</sup> -10<sup>TH</sup> RENOVATIONS

Volunteers on Teaching projects or those working in primary schools will be involved in a renovation programme during the Easter holidays. The Red Cross centre has recently expanded, with the creation of a maternity unit. Volunteers will help to paint this extension.



### 11<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> MAURITANIA

A trip to Mauritania is planned for the weekend of the 11-12<sup>th</sup> April. Volunteers will visit impressive sand dunes and local villages to get a taste of the culture and will spend the night under Mauritanian tents.

### 26<sup>TH</sup> BIKE RIDE

After this month's successful bike ride, another outing is planned for Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup>. Location to be confirmed!

# WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH AND ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR MAY

### Activities planned for May

- Camping trip to El Pharo
- Beach outing for all volunteers and staff



*If you have any ideas of how Projects Abroad volunteers can be put to good use within the Community then please contact either Moctar Ba or Nicole Johnston. We are always looking for your suggestions.*