

## TRAVEL JOURNAL BY JEAN BUTLER

For most of us in the US, travel means getting into a car, driving on mostly good roads in all weather conditions with minimal delays except for “rush hour” or accidents. Alternately, we take public transportation into the city or fly out of clean, modern airports. I thought you might be interested in hearing about some of our *travel adventures*. Think about this the next you are contemplating driving to the mall 30 miles away for one thing. Travel here really is an adventure every time.

Our first adventures were not out of the ordinary for flying from JFK to Africa, just the usual airport, luggage snafus getting to JFK. We flew overnight from about 6:30 pm to 6:30 am (including the time change). Upon arriving at Casablanca airport a shuttle drove us into the city to hotel rooms so that we could relax during our layover. Some of us slept, showered or shopped.

All seemed calm and under control until we were ready to depart the Casablanca airport for Dakar. All of a sudden a boarding pass and ticket home were not to be found...fortunately, the shuttle bus driver found the pass and ticket on the bus where they had fallen out. All seemed good with the world again.

This feeling of well-being was short-lived. The entire group went through security and only Tony and I were left to go through the gate. Suddenly we heard a loud scream of anger. A Senegalese woman shouted very loudly many times. It seems that the new airport official on duty had decided to charge Tony and Me and several others a fee of about \$100-\$200 for the very same bags that we carried onto RAM in JFK. There we were, with our carry on luggage and none of the group in sight.

After much haggling a compromise solution was found and we were on our way through security and onto the plane.

While in Dakar, Debby and I were in a taxi for nearly four hours locating an internet provider. This taxi had large radiating cracks in the windshield from a hole in the windshield glass that was held together with clear tape, the doors lacked latches, and the driver added water 3 times in that 4 hours. We made it safely with many little “beep-beep” horns along the way. Drivers in Senegal seem to lightly beep their horn to announce that they are coming through and want the right of way from other cars and pedestrians. It is not the angry, hard long blast of horns that we are familiar with during rush hour.

On our way from Dakar in the evening to Sobobade, we encountered roads in very bad shape, that the “bus” driver drove along the side of the road instead of on the pavement for a while. Shortly after we found Sobobade and got out of the bus, the power went off and we waited for the generator, but the stairway lights were not on as we attempted to find our way up and down the narrow twisting stairs to all of our rooms.

We had a couple of moments of concern last night as we were going to and coming, home from Baaba Maal's concert in Dakar. On the way north, we stopped in the middle of the road. I was up front and couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. Suddenly a man comes running up and hands a whole gearshift floor lever through the open driver's window. Merci, Jeri Jef, and Thank Yous were exchanged. Whereupon, the driver stuck the gearshift back into the floor and off we went. After the concert, the battery died outside Massamba's home and we all had to get off the bus and push it to start. Twice the engine stalled out while we were trying to go over a speed bump in the middle of the road. Twice we were surrounded by total darkness. We were crossing our fingers and toes. Finally, the engine started and the dim lights became slightly brighter and we finally made it over the speed bump. That would have been a very long walk in the dark...no street lights and no Triple A.

One of my concerns is the air pollution generated by all of the un-tuned cars, trucks and vans. They certainly don't meet any OSHA or California Emissions statutes.

All said and done, the people here are very friendly and helpful. We have never been in a situation where there weren't several Senegalese people ready to help out with directions, a smile and an offering of a gift for doing business with them. Senegal is synonymous with hospitality!