

From: Chan Fong Kin [fkinchan@hotmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 27, 2003 3:26 PM
To: Rosy; LUI Hah Wah Elena (PS)
Cc: fkinchan@singnet.com.sg
Subject: SHAKALAND (Final Version)

Importance: High

SHAKALAND - HERE WE COME !

Certainly a trip to South Africa will not be complete without visiting Shakaland. One would not have seen the true blue African native without staying in Shakaland, Eshowe near Kwazulu-Natal along the north coast. A group of 44 adventurous graduate women (with four gentlemen!) participating in the celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the South African Graduate Women's Organisation, had the rare opportunity of a first-hand experience of seeing Shakaland in real African style. Chooi Peng, Katherine and I were thrilled by the cultural exposure from the beginning to end of the short visit.

Before that our guide told us the very interesting history of Shaka, King of the Zulus. And until today Shakazulu, the brave warrior king is regarded as the most powerful spirit in Shakaland. King Shaka was responsible for the formation of one of the most powerful tribes Africa has ever known. On the way to Shakaland we stopped by to visit the Shaka Museum. There we witnessed the history, culture and customs of the African native. It was so interesting to see how much they could improvise for themselves.

We arrived in Zululand by coach on 8 April 2003 at 4.30pm. As soon as we stepped down from the coach we were greeted warmly by a group of Zulu youths with the unique Zulu handshake. They had the warmest smiles and happiest faces to welcome us. After enjoying a few songs and some cold guava juice, it was time to explore the Zulu village.

As we entered the elaborately decorated Zulu gateway we were greeted by the village chief with a loud African "call of the jungle". We could feel the pulsating rhythm of the African lifestyle as we relived the excitement and romance of the days of Shaka. The large Zulu hut with a somewhat pointed and doom-shaped thatched roof of dried leaves reminded us of the Eskimo igloo except that it was brown and not white. All of us could sit quite comfortably near the circular wall of the hut as we witnessed the traditional dance and "beer-making" ceremony. Later a tribal dancer passed round a wooden cup for us to try. To reject it would be considered impolite.

In another smaller hut sat an elderly and much wrinkled tribal witch doctor who used traditional herbal medicine to cure her patients. You could name it; she had it. Anyone suffering from a headache, stomachache, toothache, or injury of any part of the body would make his way to her. Fortunately none of us fell ill then!

Spear-making and throwing was part and parcel of everyday life. The best warrior was the one who threw furthest, of course. The young maidens who were bare breasted, wore layers of colourful beady necklaces and mini skirts. No doubt they had good reasons for they were all very

well endowed. The married ladies wore brightly coloured cotton blouses, long skirts and elaborate head dresses. They were most creative as could be seen in their handicraft with extensive use of beads. Each morning the married women proudly spread their crafts on large mats to sell to tourists. These included earrings, bracelets, necklaces, glass holders and bags, just to name a few. Well, Katherine and Chooi Peng found it hard to resist such good bargains. They bought until they dropped!

That evening we were thrilled to spend the night in the Zulu bedroom. It was just fascinating; all Zulu units were scattered closely enough to see one from the other on a huge piece of level ground. We were happy that the water was safe to drink and each unit was furnished with a modern toilet with the flushing system as well. What a relief to all! Once inside the warm hut, we had the luxury of a ceiling fan and electric lights. The beautiful souvenirs with lovely designs hung on the walls of the hut were there for appreciation only although anyone might be very tempted to take them home. We really enjoyed the one exciting night in Zululand. We expected to hear the call of some nocturnal animals but we were rather disappointed for there were only insects of the night. The fan did a great job by driving mosquitoes away and there was a netting for each window, thank goodness.

Not only was the tour an eye-opener but we saw history right in front of our eyes! Our native guide who spoke rather good English briefed us on

- The beliefs of a Zulu
- Courtship of a young maiden and her future groom
- Zulu greeting
- Traditional feasting and dancing
- Design of a cultural village
- Zulu art and craft
- History of Shakaland
- Tribal legends
- African cuisine

Last but not least we were treated to a multi-media presentation of Shakaland in native-styled theatre. There we had a good dose of the background of Shakaland up to the present day. History was made alive. How amazing! The vibrant culture left us bewildered and yearning for more. In the evening before departure we watched with awe and participated in an African dance accompanied by the exotic rhythmic beat of the drum. The group consisted of four young men and only one girl. The challenge was to kick the foot as high as the top of the head! And the girl did just that to much applause. We were so thrilled when the girl invited us to have a photo with her for a fee!

Our exciting adventure has enabled us to bring back many happy memories which will stay with us for a long time to come. What have we done to deserve such a treat? What we have learnt within such a short time is beyond measure. It has humbled us to see such simple yet happy lifestyles, appreciate what we have and enjoy nature with its splendour and beauty. Most of all we had a wonderful stint in exotic Shakaland with so many interesting and experienced representatives from ten countries. We look forward to meeting some of them again at the forthcoming 28th IFUW Conference in Perth from 4-10 Aug 2004.