

## Falling Down Sand Dunes, Getting Stuck in Bushes, & Other Adventures from Namibia

Having the opportunity to go to Namibia is and will most likely always be one of the most incredible experiences of my life. From the beginning of this trip I was quite nervous because I felt as though some of the people in my group were not so happy with me, since I was the only international student. Hence, the classes were in English because of my presence.

At the airport there was a sense of excitement in the air as we prepared to board our first flight to Namibia. Everyone was amped up and ready for the adventure that awaited. Once we got to Namibia, everyone was with their friends and interacting with each other so I was a bit lost on what to do with myself. A few days later I was still feeling a bit left out from the Danes since I could not understand their conversations enough to add something insightful. But, this was the day one of the danes struck up a conversation with me, which I am forever grateful for. It only took one for the rest of the Danes to join in. It was then I realized the people I was traveling with were very good at English and they were just nervous to talk to me because they thought I would judge them on their ability to speak my language. I have since come to find that this is a common theme with the Danes in our school who don't interact with the international students. But, what they don't seem to realize is, we don't mind if they are not perfect at English, nobody is. Even I, with English as my first language, make mistakes. The quality of their English didn't matter, what did was the feeling when I finally felt included and wanted during the trip. There were many instances after this when I really felt the togetherness.

One of these times was during a hike our group took together through one of the properties at Neuras. Another student mistakenly hit me with a branch covered in thorns and they got stuck in my face and hair. I somehow kept my cool while Carsten asked for somebody to help. One of the students, who I had wrongly assumed that he did not like me from my bad interpretation of Danish immediately came to help. He spent a solid 10 minutes carefully pulling the pricklers out of my face and hair being kind enough not to tear any hair out as blood dripped down my face. The others talked to me the entire time, which was much appreciated. Afterwards, the student who had helped me out made it seem like it was no big

deal. But, it was a big deal to me. I was so grateful for his kindness, which continued throughout the trip as he made sure to let me know I was noticed when others may not.

Another one of these times was when we ran down Big Daddy, the second tallest sand dune in the world. We all acted like small children as we hopped, skipped, and tumbled down the mountain. Come to think of it, only me and another student did any tumbling. But, when we did students were there to make sure we were okay. After I fell flat on my face and rolled down the hill about a few meters, people immediately helped me up and asked if I was alright. Then, later laughed with me when they knew I was perfectly fine and found humor in my fall.

There were also more meaningful bonds made during this trip in which we talked about anything and everything we could think of. These are the talks you can only have in the middle of the night with those special people. I feel like the friendship I made with one of the students on this trip was so important. We both had the opportunity to talk about our feelings and things that were going on in our lives that we wouldn't necessarily say to anyone else. I am so glad we were able to express ourselves to each other and create a connection together.

Even though I did not have friends in this group when I started this class, I would like to think I came home with a few new pals and friendly faces in the halls. Now, when I see those I traveled with, I feel secure giving them a big smile as we pass each other in the hall. I am so grateful for these experiences and the people I got to share them with.

Word Count: 780