

Tuesday, December 24, 2024

Happy Holidays from Dakar, the capital and largest city of Senegal in West Africa. I'm in Africa for two days (you read that right). I flew to New York, then eight hours overnight to spend 48 hours in Africa. Julia, my flight attendant daughter, had a work trip to Dakar, so I joined her. I arrived the day before her since she only has 24 hours in Senegal, and who would be crazy enough to fly all the way to Africa for twenty-four hours other than pilots, flight attendants and assassins? Lori opted out (I can't understand why), so I'm on my own today. Add another country and continent to my list of places visited!

Dakar is situated on the Cap-Vert peninsula, the westernmost point of mainland Africa. Cap-Vert was colonized by the Portuguese in the early 15th century when they established a presence on the island of Gorée off the coast. From 1536 to 1848

Gorée was a center and departure point for the transatlantic slave trade, during which over twenty million enslaved people were sent to the Americas from Gorée. France took over the island in 1677. Following the abolition of the slave trade and French annexation of the mainland area in the 19th century, Dakar grew into a major regional port and an important city of the French colonial empire. From 1959 to 1960, Dakar was the capital of the short-lived Mali Federation. In 1960, it became the capital of the independent Republic of Senegal. You may start to hear more about Senegal, as Dakar will host the 2026 Summer Youth Olympics.



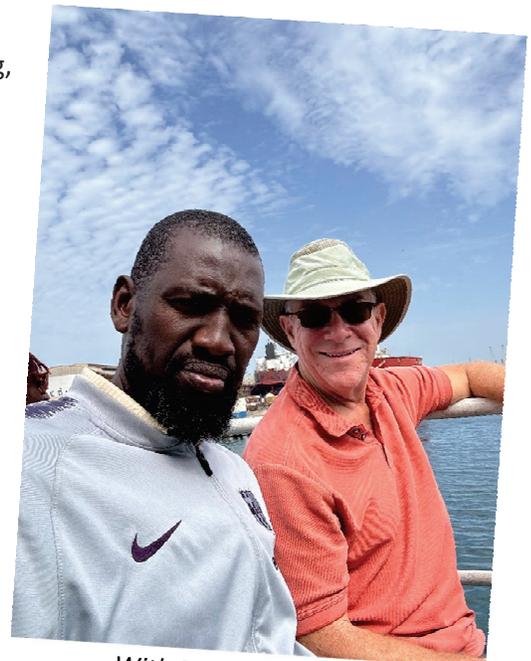
*Gorée Island*

After picking me up at the airport this morning, Mass, my guide, and

Babakar, our driver, first showed me around downtown Dakar. We drove by the Presidential Palace and the Parliament Building. Of course no overseas trip would be complete without visiting a church, even in a 90% Muslim country, so we stopped (very) briefly at the Cathédrale du Souvenir Africain de Dakar: This Cathedral is a memorial to African soldiers who died during the First World War and is the only church in Africa depicting Black angels on the facade.

Our next stop was Sandaga Market, where local people go to shop for clothing and other items. Bargaining is a sport in Dakar, and I tried my skill purchasing a couple of items. The back-and-forth banter was exhausting, and I'm pretty sure I still paid too much.

We then took a 25-minute ferry ride to the aforementioned Gorée Island, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Despite its horrific past, locals now go to the island to vacation or spend the day at the beach. That's called "making chicken salad out of chicken shit." I walked around the now-charming streets lined with colorful colonial-era houses and artists trying to sell their work. The main attraction of the island for me, though, was the House of Slaves (Maison des Esclaves), the only slave house left of the original twenty-eight that were on the island. They held the enslaved persons and auctioned them prior to departure. It's now a museum about the slave trade.

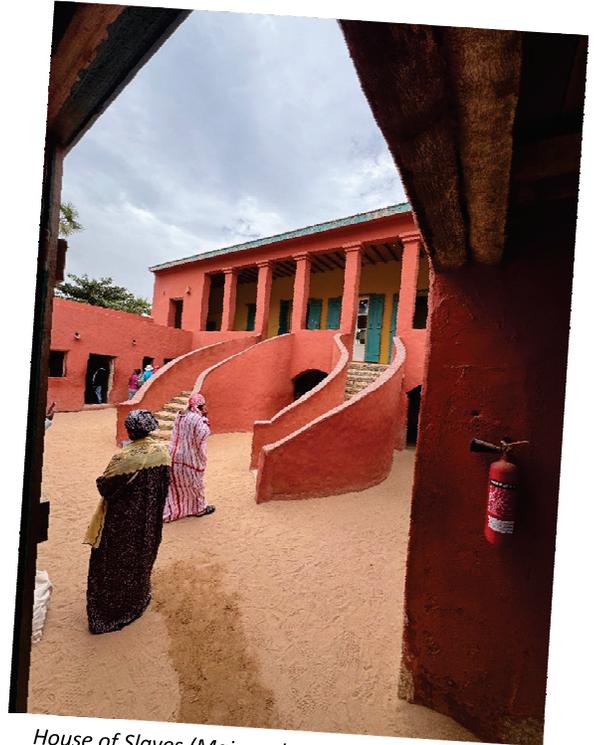


*With Babakar on ferry*



Afterwards, the drive to the hotel was interesting. Babakar (intentionally) drove the wrong way on a one-way street in rush hour because that was the shortest way

to the other street we needed to get to. It was crazy, but I sensed not unusual in Dakar, as Babakar was yelling back at all the people yelling at him. After checking into my hotel, I had a protein bar for dinner in my room and passed out from exhaustion for the night.



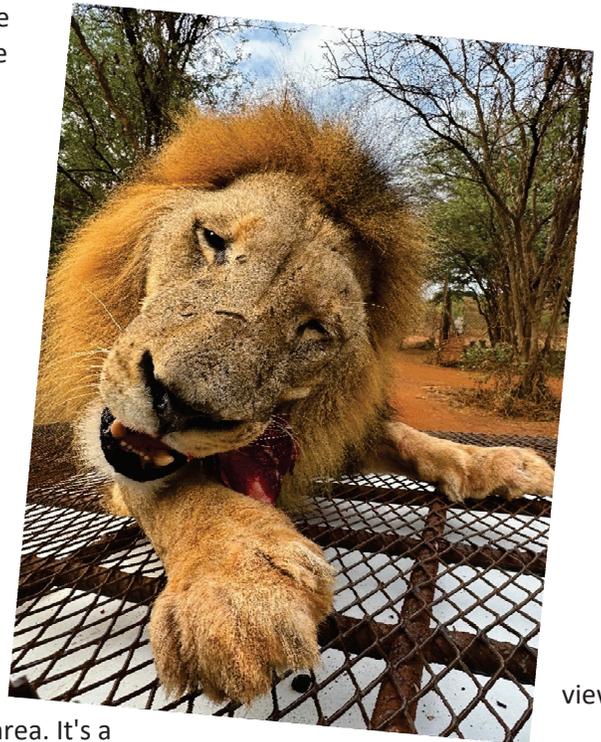
*House of Slaves (Maison des Esclaves) Auction Area*



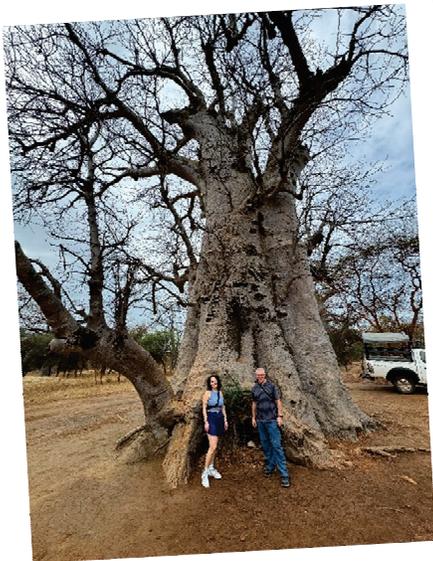
Wednesday, December 25, 2024 – Happy Hanukkah and Merry Christmas!

After being picked up at my hotel this morning, we went back to the airport to pick up Julia, then headed to the Bandia wildlife reserve for a safari. We spent the first part of the visit with the lions, observing them from inside the safari vehicle while they climbed (and

procreated) on the protective cage surrounding us. In the next park we drove around and saw giraffes, antelopes, gazelle, rhinoceroses, zebras, buffalo, crocodiles, ostriches, hyenas, and other animals in their natural habitat.



view



Since we had time, and I can't stand down-time while traveling, we drove to the African Renaissance Monument (Monument de la Renaissance Africaine), one of Africa's tallest statues. Standing at 49 meters, it's taller than the Statue of Liberty and offers a panoramic view of Dakar and the surrounding area. It's a symbol of Africa's emergence on the world's stage. Interestingly, it was built by a monument construction company from North Korea.



*African Renaissance Monument (Monument de la Renaissance Africaine)*

Dinner was at a fish restaurant on the beach watching the sunset, a nice ending to a great, though short, trip.

Dakar is a vibrant city and not as chaotic as I was expecting. While Senegal ranks 102 of the 167 countries in the Prosperity Index rankings, downtown Dakar shows well. It's relatively clean and the buildings aren't falling apart everywhere. I've definitely seen worse. It was a long trip to make in a short period of time, but I'm glad I did it.

Assuming I get on my flight tomorrow as a standby passenger, I fly back home tomorrow. Happy Holidays and I hope to talk to you soon.

Love, Stephen