



## **Madagascar (Not the Movie) Reflection**

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Skip ahead to my final thoughts to learn about how I learned how to deal with imposter syndrome!

Madagascar. Probably the first thing to come to your mind when you hear this word is the movie with King Julien, the animal escapees from the New York Zoo, and the ninja penguins. That's what I first thought when I heard about this place and what plenty of others thought when I told them I was going to Madagascar for two weeks. To be completely honest before going on this trip, I had no clue where this was, what kinds of people lived here, the temperature and climate of the place, nor considered even going here, ever. When I did a little bit of research about the place, it did not make me feel any better about going here. The U.S. Department of State released a travel advisory pertaining to Madagascar warning people to exercise extreme caution in Madagascar due to the civil unrest and the high crime rate. Oh my goodness. What was I getting myself into. I knew this was a community that would greatly benefit from my team and our ideas and impact but the thought that I could possibly die on this trip never left my mind.

## **Planning**

Planning the trip was quite stressful. There was quite a bit to do and a very short timeframe to do it. Getting vaccines up to date, getting visa application approved, mentally preparing for the trip, and learning about the culture and community that I was going to immerse myself in for the next two weeks was just a couple things on the extensive to-do list. To add onto that, a lot

of what we wanted to do was highly situational and required us to be on ground and figure it out while we were there, as it was hard to iron out the logistics from a whole other country. Because we were coordinating our planning with some local people, it was hard to get exact numbers of who would show up, due the lack of facilities to advertise and to hold registration. This limited my planning ability and added on stress to the whole planning process. In addition, the visa application process was quite stressful. It required me to send in documents by mail to the Madagascar embassy or to stop by the embassy, located in Ottawa, and submit the documents in person. I was unaware of this beforehand and had to travel to Ottawa to get my visa for this trip approved a couple days before the departure date. That was a whole other journey in itself, as the Madagascar embassy was tiny, hard to find, and the people running the embassy spoke very little English. Planning was probably the hardest and most stressful part of the trip, as I did not know what to expect traveling with a bunch of strangers to a place I have never been before. I was excited to travel alone without my family for the first time, but with the excitement came a load of fear and uncertainty. How was I going to get along with the other members of my team? What happens if something goes wrong? What do I do if I get sick? What am I going to eat over there? What if my documents are not correct or I don't have the necessary documents to come back to Canada? What are the people like there? What if I get robbed or scammed for my money? There was a lot of things to think about and stress about before I departed. Now that wasn't the only thing on my mind as I prepared for this trip. I wrestled with crazy, I mean CRAZY imposter syndrome. I mean I'm just an ordinary 20-year-old from Markham who was in his second year of undergrad. What made me qualified to go to a whole different country and run basketball camps, set up a basketball program over there, and

provide them with enough resources and help to get them started and to continue to help the local communities? These were real human lives that I would be impacting, and I needed to be perfect to make sure that I leave a lasting, positive impact in their lives. There are probably smarter, more equipped people out there that would be better suited for this task. It super prideful and egotistical to think that I could accomplish all of this. Who am I to do all of this? This last question echoed throughout my mind throughout the days leading up to the departure date.

## **Travelling**

Honestly, travelling by yourself, without parents is an amazing experience. You are in charge of what to do, when you do it, and how with no one telling you what to do. It made me feel really mature and getting through security by myself gave me confidence to tackle the huge task ahead of me. Meeting the rest of the team at the airport gave me a big sigh of relief as well. Everyone was very nice and welcoming. Honestly, I seem to always assume that these people that I am going to work with are mean, gnarly, and judgemental, causing a lot of unnecessary stress. But am always pleasantly proven wrong whenever I meet them. I talked to a couple of my team members, and they too were also nervous to meet everyone else coming along on the trip. My piece of advice when meeting strangers is assuming that they are the type of person you are until proven otherwise.

## **In Madagascar**

Oh, my goodness... I am in Madagascar! I won't go into too much detail about what I did, as I'll save that for the project report, I'll focus more on sharing my experience. It was an exhilarating feeling to step off the plane after an eighteen-hour flight plus a four-hour layover in the Paris airport. The first thing I noticed was the air. The diesel mixed in with the fresh clean air to create this aroma that I will never forget. On our way to the guest house from the airport gave me an idea of what to expect from the upcoming weeks. Driving through the bumpy dirt roads and seeing people pushing wooden carts barefoot with kids sitting on top with ripped dirty clothes, people sitting beside the road selling vegetables and fruits from a tiny booth, muddy and dusty kids carrying their baby siblings on their back, and more heartbreaking sights like this gave me an idea of what to expect the upcoming weeks. Driving through the city, narrow roads with small booths lining the sides of the street selling everything from slippers and old shoes to fruits laid out in the open to raw meat hanging to motorcycle repair parts. It was really sad to see, as these people with ripped, dirty clothes being barefoot or wearing sandals at best, cheerfully walking by carrying baskets of fruit and food, kids carrying heavy jugs of water, weaving through traffic clogging up the narrow, bump, dusty streets. Everyone turning their heads to look at us, always ready to wave and smile bac. Seeing the style of life, the way of living over there really puts life into perspective. We are actually so privileged to be living in Canada, blessed to wake up under a roof over our heads and to have clean clothes and intact shoes to put on before we walk out of the door. When we met the people we were going to leave in charge of running the Athletes in Action program in Madagascar, the joy on their face to see us was a sight I will never forget. They were so grateful that we were investing time and

resources to help them out and were very kind and generous. The camps we ran for the kids was such an amazing experience. I am truly grateful and blessed to have been a part of this. Teenagers and young adults all eager to learn basketball. In addition, kids from the local town came by to hang out with us. I actually got to talking to one of the kids and I got to know him pretty well. We still keep in contact to this day. Hearing his life story, and the stories of many other kids there really touched my heart. Like I said it really made me realize how fortunate we are in Canada. I can definitively say that it was a life changing experience for me, and I am definitely a more mature, happier, and grateful person after hearing their stories. All the camps we ran, no matter what city, everyone was very grateful for our help, excited to learn from us, and were all very happy that we were there. One heartbreaking thing that will stay with me for the rest of my life is seeing how happy the little kids were when we played with them and how their faces lighted up when we gave them our empty plastic water bottles, we were going to throw out. When we travelled from Antananarivo to Ansirabe, travelling through the countryside was an amazing experience. Seeing the beautiful hills and valleys, the gorgeous rivers, and the rock formation really showed me how beautiful the Earth was. In addition, playing with the U19 National team and the Division 1 University team was an experience I would never forget.

### **My Final Thoughts**

I really don't know how to express how incredible the trip was through words. All I can say is that I beg everyone to go on a trip like this, as I promise it will be a life changing experience. I

learned a lot of crucial things that have helped me in my day-to-day life even to this day. One of my biggest realizations was my solution to my imposter syndrome. This trip made me realize that every single one of us is exactly where we need to be and are about to do exactly what we need to do. Even if it doesn't work out and we fail miserably, there is something we needed to learn from that in order to prepare us for a better opportunity later on in life. Everyone struggles with imposter syndrome, and I am not the only one experiencing it. With that in mind, if other people don't think they are qualified to do it and yet they are still doing it, I should be able to do it as well. In addition, imposter syndrome relies on our internal desire to please and make other people happy. Once we shift our focus from what makes other people happy and what makes us likeable to what makes us happy and what makes us satisfied with life, then the imposter syndrome will go away. Confidence is a great tool to get over it and it should come from our internal belief that we are good enough to be where we are and to do what needs to be done. Having confidence is important to success in what we do, as if we believe we can do it then we will 'will' it into existence. In addition, confidence is crucial for leadership, as people respect confidence as it shows them you know what you are doing. If you don't believe in what you are doing how can you convince others to believe in you? Being a good leader and exhibiting good leadership starts with confidence internally and the implicit belief that you are indeed a good leader. This was something I was struggling with a lot before coming on this trip and I am super happy that I was able to learn a solution to this issue. I am very grateful to Matt Guynup, Athletes in Action, Shraddha Prasad, and Laidlaw Scholars for this life changing experience.