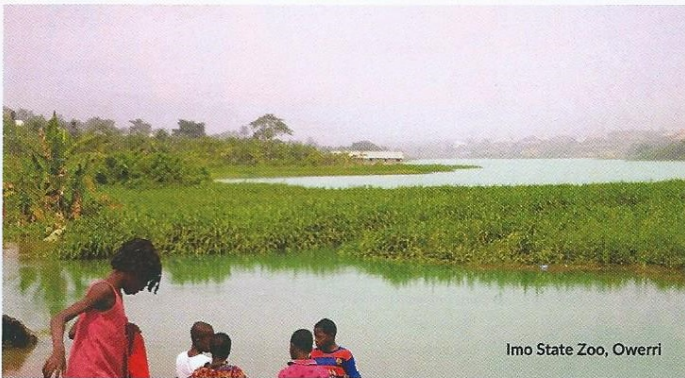


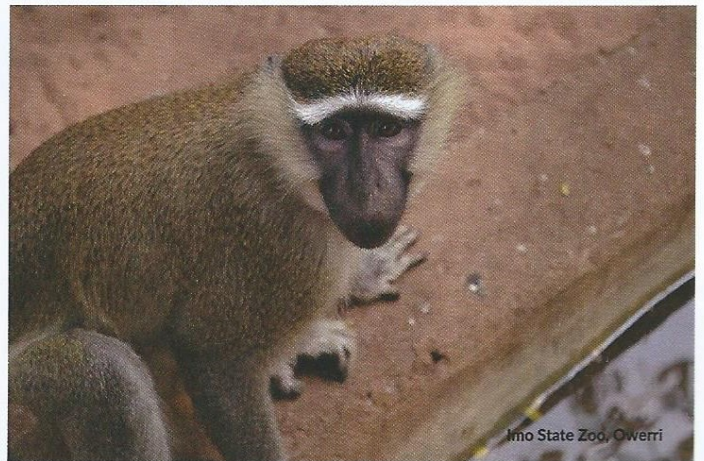
Model School, Mbaise, Imo State



Wuse Market, Abuja



Imo State Zoo, Owerri



Imo State Zoo, Owerri

the rural parts of Imo State, and my enjoyment was more so rooted in being able to show others that Nigeria had outing places such as this.

Going into the country, I was excited to experience the feeling of togetherness in the villages and a richness in culture, things we don't often hear about when it comes to traveling to Nigeria. A good number of first generation Nigerians living in America tend to receive and believe only a portion of what the country has to offer. Most of us who come to the village are only coming to see family--we wouldn't know the first thing about luxury hotels nearby. The hotels in Owerri, like the Links Hotel I visited, could easily rival those found in the States. Equipped with free Internet service, a swimming pool, 24-hour gym access, airport pick up, and room service running into the wee hours of the morning and beds like clouds, one could roll over from their sleep and request for jollof rice at three in the morning. Also, the shopping experience was never dull here. The newest South African-based economic venture, Shoprite, located in the Owerri Mall was a favorite meet-up spot. Furthermore, walking through the Owerri Main Market I felt like I was in a movie scene, stepping through narrow breezeways and being greeted by the shop owners offering me handbags and shoes.

When I wasn't feasting on Moin-Moin and fish, sleeping from the hot sun, or lounging around watching Big Brother Naija, I had my fair share of enjoyment riding through the country's capital, Abuja, and scoping the city-life scene. Where the markets are thriving, the land area is more spacious, and the mosquito population was significantly lower (thank God), Abuja had a completely different vibe than the village. Of course,

Shoprite found it's way into this city as well at the modern-style shopping center, Jabi Lake Mall. For tourist looking to browse through the familiarity of stores like M.A.C., Clinique, and Pandora, this serene setting was a perfect retail fix. Not to mention, the relaxing view of the lake was delightful as I devoured rice and jammed to some Naija tunes coming from the outdoor restaurants. Toward the end of that day, I browsed the stunning artwork at the Cyprian Ekwensi Art and Cultural Centre. This facility, built in honor of writer, pharmacist, and activist Cyprian Ekwensi had a room full of the most beautiful pieces of artwork I'd seen in a while. After filming and trying my hand at photography during a mini photo shoot there, I browsed the market conveniently located right outside of the entrance of the building.

Even with the few outings I did while in Nigeria, I was more so inspired by country's resiliency, even in the smallest feats: the strength in my grandmother's hands as she boiled and strained palm kernels for wine oil to sell, the refined skill of the young seamstress who crafted my perfectly fitted Ankara suit in only three days, and the poise of the women I saw effortlessly carrying their baskets of goods to the market on their head without even lifting a finger to hold it up. I wanted to float with joy and wonder like the school children I filmed at my aunt's Model Primary School in Mbaise, Imo State. More than anything, from the big bustling markets to the small village restaurants, I was proud to see my Homeland making the most of their resources and striving to build the best for themselves with what they had. It made me all the more proud to call myself a Nigerian.

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