



### **3 AFRICA**





The area of Africa is more than 30 million square kilometers (11.6 million sq mi). The total population of 54 countries exceeds one billion (nearly 15% of the world's population). Africa is also most likely the place where the first humans appeared, some 3–5 million years ago, in the Great Rift Valley.

Nevertheless, there are two "black clouds" hanging over Africa, the relics of a sorrowful past: slavery and colonialism. Slavery existed in ancient times everywhere, and in the Middle Ages even Arabs traded African slaves. It was Europeans, however, who enslaved millions of Africans and sent them in large numbers to America to work hard in mines, on plantations and in other places where white people were not willing to work and the local people (the native Americans) were not physically able to work.

Europeans began to penetrate into Africa in the 15th century, but equatorial Africa and its tropical rain forest remained the "white man's grave" for a long time. Nevertheless, the expansion of the armed and technically equipped Europeans could not be stopped. The main colonial powers (Great Britain, France, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Spain) gradually divided the whole of Africa among themselves. Only Ethiopia managed to stay independent.

After World War One, the debate about the postwar world order included for a short time ideas that the newly formed Czechoslovakia could get the territory of what is now Togo in West Africa under its colonial administration. Fortunately both for Togo and for Czechoslovakia, this never happened.

Many colonists understood their mission as something which would help Africans and raise them to an equal level. Albert Schweitzer, the great humanist, doctor and the founder of the hospital in Lambaréné in today's Gabon, thought of Africans as of immature children: it was necessary to help them lovingly and guide them to adulthood. The writer Rudyard Kipling saw the administration of colonial territories (not only in Africa) as the "white man's burden". Local people, however, were of different views. Nevertheless, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the process of decolonization peaked and was gradually completed.

Freedom, however, does not automatically come hand in hand with prosperity. Revolutions do not bring to power altruists and the most capable people, but the most rapacious ones. Since gaining independence, African countries have bled many times. Rulers have often committed genocide against the people of their nations just for belonging to a different tribe. The sad fact is that since gaining independence, the economic situation has not improved and still no one knows what to do about it.

Jaromír Štětina, a Czech journalist and later a Senator, called Sub-Saharan Africa "a region which fell over the edge of the planet". On the other hand, Bohuslav Šnajder, another journalist and traveler, lived among ordinary people in Africa for one year. When he returned to Europe, after months spent in the bush, and got off the plane at the modern Frankfurt airport, he desired at first to turn around and return to where people live from day to day, but very intensively. He is not the only one. Europeans who have lived on the "Dark Continent" for some considerable time talk about a kind of African disease: "You will always want to come back to Africa and you will miss it".

Today, it is the Chinese who are pushing their way into Africa. China is in desperate need of raw materials for its development and Africa is the last continent which can conveniently provide them. When industrialization was under way in England two hundred years ago, it had 30 million people and sufficient resources of its own. When industrialization was progressing in the United States, it had 50 million people and abundant raw material and energy resources. Today industrialization is taking place in China. It has 1.3 billion people and its own raw material and energy resources are scarce.

China does not bear the stigma of a colonial past and it has a low regard for human rights. The impact of its presence in Africa on the local people remains a question for the future.

Africa is still very rich in natural resources, but this wealth is often more a curse than a blessing. Western Africa is the birthplace of the term "blood diamonds". Insurgents, who are rebelling against the central government, mine diamonds and sell them to the West. With the money they procure weapons, recruit soldiers (these are often still children) and ultimately engage in civil wars with devastating effects.

A telling example is Angola. Independence was declared here in 1975 after 14 years of guerrilla war when Portugal handed the government over to the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Shortly after that, a civil war broke out in which the MPLA as the ruling party tried to overthrow the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The war lasted until 1991. But the results of the following elections were declared by UNITA to have been rigged and fighting broke out again. It went on until 1994 and it was only in 1997 that a government of national unity was established.

The problem is that if the war lasts too long, people get used to it. A whole generation grew up knowing that war was an everyday reality. Consequently, war, not peace, was considered "normal". Since the government ran oil exploitation and the insurgents controlled mining for gold and diamonds, both sides could procure weapons and fight for two decades. The developed countries, including the former Czechoslovakia, benefitted considerably from the arms sales.

Angola has a population of 13 million people, but the number of mines planted in the ground as a result of the war is estimated at between 11 and 18 million. Minefields are not well mapped and so hundreds of people, especially children, are killed or maimed every year. Agricultural production is significantly limited in the entire area, because minefields cannot be cultivated. Even if the state had enough money, which it desperately lacks, mine clearance would take decades. Therefore, natural resources combined with a weak or collapsed state will paradoxically bring the country into misery, rather than prosperity.

Africans, however, possess a fortune which we in the most developed countries somehow lack – vitality, optimism, vigor, and the will to live. Mikuláš Huba, a friend of mine, visited Ghana and shortly afterwards went to New York. "It was one of the greatest paradoxes I have ever experienced," he says. "I saw very happy, smiling faces in impoverished Africa. A few days later I was walking in Manhattan on Wall Street and I think that in my life I have never seen so many frowning, hurrying and stressed people in one place."

Despite all the problems that are in store for the Africans, this "thirst for life" is their greatest hope.



### 3.1 The Republic of South Africa

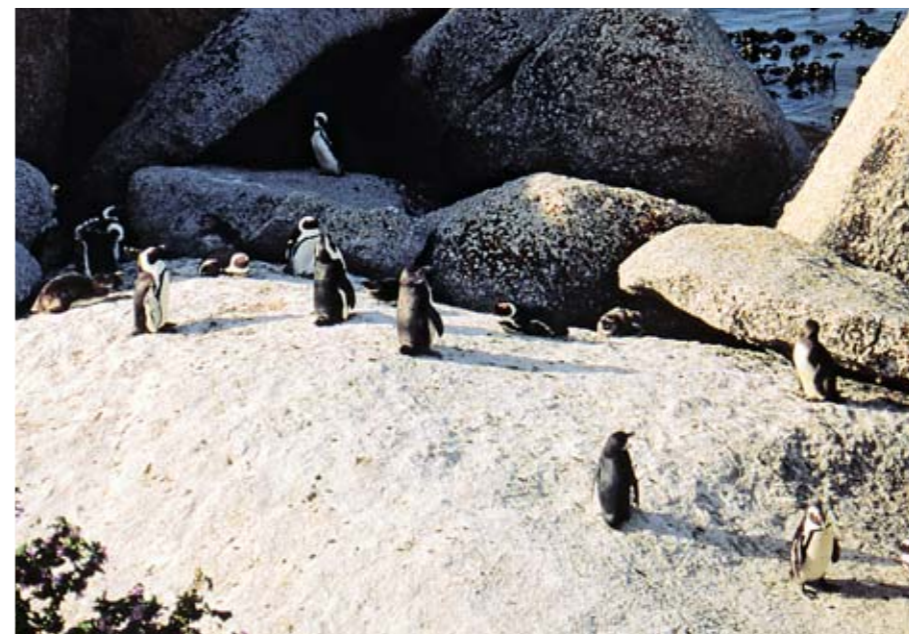


*In 1487 the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias arrived at the southern tip of Africa and named it the Cape of Good Hope. Eleven years later, in 1498, Vasco da Gama, another Portuguese, sailed around the Cape and got as far as India. This established the connection between Europe, India and the Far East by sea.*



*The Cape of Good Hope is a name that I like very much, as if it symbolized the situation in South Africa and perhaps also in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite all the painful legacy of the past (slavery, colonialism, and apartheid), there is always hope for a new and better tomorrow.*

*At the Cape of Good Hope, the warmer Indian Ocean and the cooler Atlantic Ocean meet. The result is highly variable and uncertain weather. The same holds true for the future of South Africa. It abolished apartheid as recently as twenty years ago and the society wants to be The Rainbow Nation, a community where blacks, whites, Indians and others can live together and build a better future. Their success is, however, still uncertain.*



*Boulders Beach is located near the Cape of Good Hope in the direction of Cape Town. It is known for its colony of 3,000 African penguins that live here. They look cute, but they are no pets. You should therefore watch them from a distance and let them entertain you, but nothing more.*



*Cape Town is the second largest city in South Africa (nearly 3 million inhabitants) and it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Unfortunately, it is also dangerous, especially after dark. The city is inseparably linked with Table Mountain, which forms part of a national park.*



*South Africa is by far the most developed country in Sub-Saharan Africa in economic terms. However, it needs a lot of energy which is obtained from coal and other fossil fuels as well as from a nuclear power station. It is, nevertheless, obsolete and the country lacks funds for its modernization or the construction of new reactors.*





Cape Town is a multiethnic and multicultural place. In addition to Christian churches you can commonly see here an Islamic mosque or a Hindu shrine.



The picture shows one of the faces of Cape Town. A road to nowhere which ends literally in a "vacuum" because the construction project ran out of money.

The Dutch founded the first colony in the area of the present-day city in 1652. In 1806 the Dutch were defeated by the British in the battle of Blaauwberg and in August 1814 the British took Cape Town under their administration. This city had huge strategic importance at a time of overseas voyages to India. Today, the 350-meter-high (1,148 ft) Signal Hill with a gun battery is still a reminder of those times. From this place, the Noon Gun fires one shot from Monday to Saturday. Today it is more of a tourist attraction, but centuries ago, it was used to signal the precise time. Perhaps it also served as a hidden demonstration of force and readiness to repel potential invaders.



This picture of an African boy from the Art Museum in Pretoria symbolizes South Africa for me. Although he is most likely a poor boy whose life will be filled with hard physical work, his face radiates expectation and the joy of life.



Children are the main wealth and hope of South Africa and the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. If only as many as possible could go to kindergartens and schools like these lucky children in this picture can do.







*The 1,086-meter-high (3,558 ft) Table Mountain can be reached on foot or by a very comfortable cableway. Hiking down is more difficult. You need to hit one of the few safe trails. Most paths are dangerous or end somewhere in the rocks and several people die here every year.*

*A view of the hill Lion's Head from Table Mountain. Because the southern tip of Africa is the place where the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean and the cooler waters of the Atlantic Ocean meet, the weather here is changeable and unpredictable. It changes very quickly. If the fog comes in and a keen wind blows, there is a siren alert from the cableway and you should get back quickly because its operation will be stopped in 40 minutes.*

*Here we experienced the difference in the reliability of services and care for tourists in developing countries compared to developed ones. After the siren, we were back at the cableway in half an hour, but there was no sign of life. As the cableway staff members believed that all the tourists were already back down, they simply closed the station and went down too. It turned colder, it rained slightly and it was two hours before dark. The emergency phone obviously did not work. My wife and I had two options: either to try to hike down before it was completely dark, or to stay overnight but it was not at all certain that the cableway would resume operation next morning. We chose the former option. Fortunately, on our way back to the cableway we happened to notice a small wooden Exit sign near to a tiny path, and indeed it was one of the few trails which can get you safely down. Nevertheless, it was a lesson to us how easily an ordinary trip can become a big problem. When people without proper clothes and footwear get in a similar situation, they can panic easily. They know that they need to get down, but if they hastily choose a wrong path, it may end in tragedy.*



*A beautiful botanical garden with an area of 492 hectares (1,216 acres) is situated near Cape Town at the foot of Table Mountain. You can see here 9,000 plant species out of the total 22,000 species which grow in Africa. The only problem is its poor accessibility. Taxis are expensive and buses or trains should be taken only by day, not at night, because the route passes slum areas.*

*Three quarters of the area stretching from Table Mountain to the Cape of Good Hope is designated as a national park. Table Mountain itself can be walked around in about two hours.*







Mandela's cell. About 40 opponents of apartheid were "accommodated" this way. The total number was much higher because prisoners with shorter sentences were housed in cells for more than one person.

Robben Island is situated 11 kilometers (7 mi) from the mainland near Cape Town. It used to be a colony of people affected by leprosy and later during apartheid the island served as a prison, particularly for political opponents of the regime. The prison was closed as recently as 1996. Today, it is a tourist attraction, most of all because it was the place where Nelson Mandela spent more than twenty years. In 1962 he was sentenced to life imprisonment for his fight against apartheid and he was released in 1990, after 27 years.

Our guide in the prison was also a former political prisoner. He served "only" six and a half years, but he had been originally sentenced to 25 years. I feel great sympathy and admiration for him, because he was able to speak about his time in prison from a detached point of view. To this day, it is sometimes not easy for him when some of the visitors from South Africa itself – supporters of apartheid – suggest that the system was not so bad and that the country could be economically better off if it had not been abolished. They somehow neglect the great humiliation of black people during the time of apartheid.

The prisoners spent the working part of the day in this way. In the courtyard, they manually smashed rocks on gravel with hammers, but it was more acceptable to them than to spend time in their cells.



Period photograph of Nelson Mandela in prison on Robben Island.

Fifty kilometers (thirty miles) northeast of Cape Town is the beautiful historic town of Stellenbosch, the second oldest European settlement in South Africa. The town is known especially for its vineyards. The lectures at the local University of Stellenbosch are not only in English but also in Afrikaans.







The city of Kimberley is located in the central, dry part of South Africa. There is nothing very interesting about it apart from one major attraction – the mining of diamonds. They were discovered here in 1867. Originally, both whites and blacks benefited from them. Gradually, however, the mining concessions were bought up by whites and eventually mining became completely dominated by the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company. It was founded, with the help of European financiers, by Cecil John Rhodes, a 24 year-old son of an English pastor. In 1891, he already owned 90% of the world's diamonds. Later, Rhodes started his political career. He was a visionary; he wanted, for example, to build a railway which would connect Cape Town with Cairo in Egypt. In his will, he bequeathed most of his immense wealth for the creation of the Rhodes Scholarship which still supports selected candidates from the Commonwealth during their studies at the University of Oxford.

The landscape after diamonds have been mined.

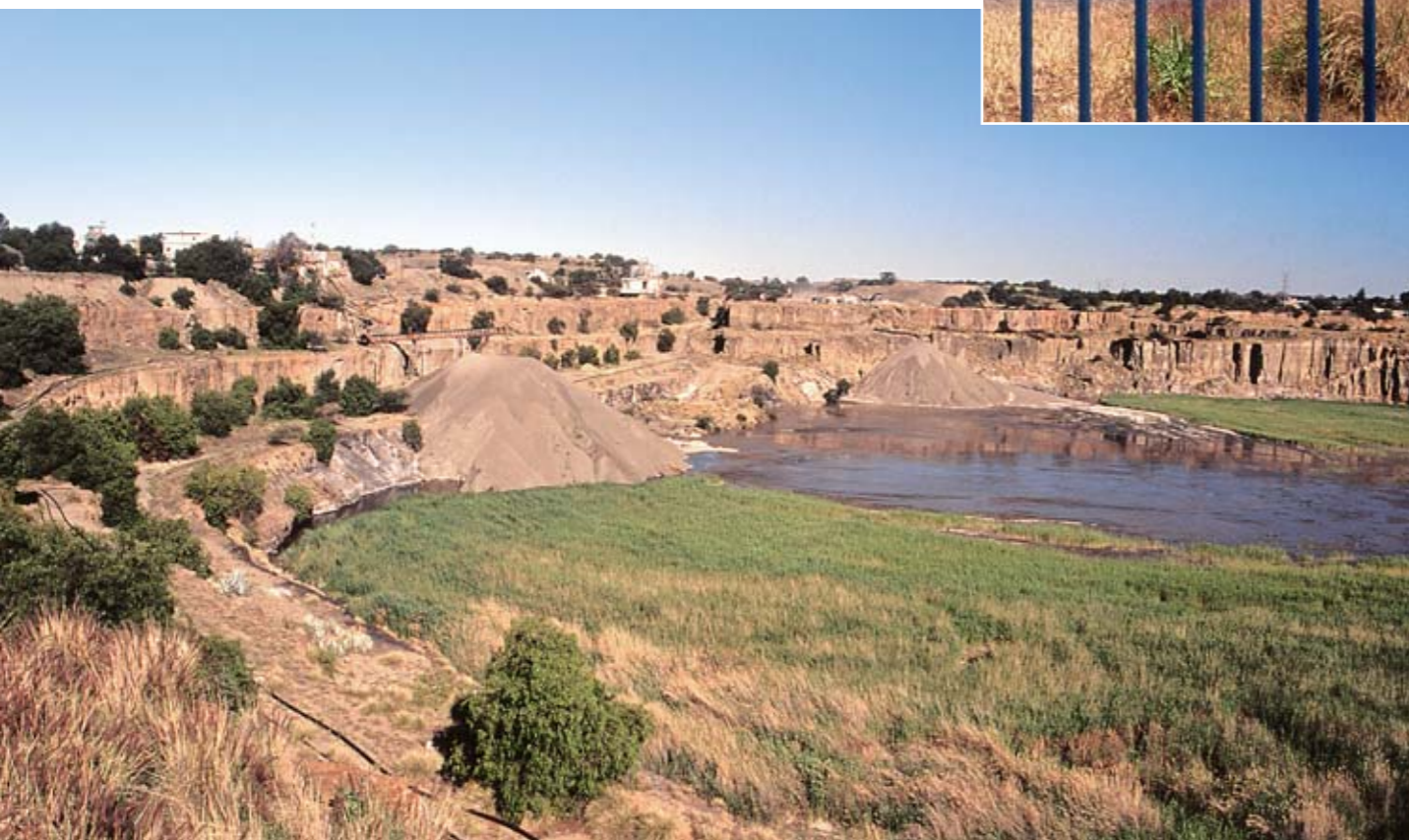


De Beers Consolidated Mines has recently completed a large-scale reconstruction which turned the surroundings of the mine into a replica of the mining camp of 1880. (In the foreground, there are the huts where the black miners lived.) This turned Kimberley into a tourist attraction, which is worth stopping at. Thanks to the mining of diamonds, Kimberley was also the first city in the southern hemisphere with a supply of electricity. It was introduced here in 1882.

The biggest attraction in Kimberley is the Big Hole Mine. Until mining was discontinued in 1914, almost 50,000 miners worked here in total. They dug a hole 463 meters (1,519 ft) in diameter and 240 meters (790 ft) deep, all by hand. Later, however, part of the wall slid down and also ground water constantly seeped into the pit. Therefore, the visible depth of the hole is now "only" 150 meters (492 ft). The surface extraction of diamonds on the site was substituted by underground mining which went down to a depth of 1,097 meters (3,599 ft). The hole yielded 2,720 kilograms (6,000 lb) of diamonds in total, but it was necessary to excavate 22 million tons of earth.



Johannesburg (nicknamed the City of Gold) has almost 6 million inhabitants and is the economic and commercial center of South Africa. It hosted the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The finals of the 2010 World Cup in football took place here. These parts, however, are not safe. Pickpockets consider tourists "walking wallets"; strolling around the city at night would be plain folly.







*If you are in South Africa, it would be a shame not to go on safari. If you do not have enough time for the huge Kruger National Park (350 kilometers, or 220 mi long, 65 kilometers, or 40 mi wide) or if you do not want to risk malaria, it is possible to visit the Pilanesberg National Park (only a two hour drive from Pretoria). This park was created artificially, in an extinct volcanic crater. In 1979, Operation Genesis was launched which gradually populated an area of 572 square kilometers (221 sq mi) with 7,000 animals imported from other parts of South Africa, including the Big Five – elephants, rhinos, buffalos, lions, and leopards.*

*Near the national park you can visit Sun City, which is South Africa's local version of Las Vegas. I cannot tell anything more, however, because I happily avoided this attraction.*

*Pretoria, the administrative center of South Africa, is located just 50 kilometers (30 mi) from Johannesburg. With its roughly 1.5 million inhabitants it is quieter, safer and more attractive, but even here the richer people (whites as well as blacks) build their homes in the form of small strongholds in order to feel safe. Tall fences with barbed electric wires on the top are standard and there are additional security devices in the houses.*

*I stayed with a black friend, a former South African ambassador to the Czech Republic, Noel Lehoko. The Lehokos have two teenage daughters and there is no way the daughters can go out alone. Their parents take them to school and activity clubs by car and they spend the rest of their time at home. The Lehokos admit that they actually live in a comfortable prison. We do not realize what wealth we have in Europe. I do not mean material surplus now, but the fact that we can still let our children out without too great a risk that they would be robbed or kidnapped.*



### 3.2 Lesotho



*Surrounded by South Africa and located in the area of the Drakensberg mountains, the small Kingdom of Lesotho, also known as the "kingdom close to heaven", can be found. Its area is 30,355 square kilometers (11,720 sq mi) and its population is nearly 2 million. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Like everywhere in the mountains, people are ordinary, poor, but warm and friendly.*

*Lesotho does not have abundant natural resources, just enough water to produce electricity that is sold to South Africa, and diamonds. The construction of dams is always controversial – it causes a loss of already scarce agricultural land, population movements, and so on. On the other hand, Lesotho has a stable source of income from the sale of electricity. The construction of dams has also greatly improved the infrastructure, particularly transport and telecommunications.*



*Maseru, the capital city, has 430,000 inhabitants which makes it comparable to some European middle-sized cities. At night, however, it feels like a village: it is dark, the street lights are rather sporadic and it is better not to go out. Unlike in Johannesburg, it is not life-threatening here, but you can quite possibly be robbed of your wallet.*

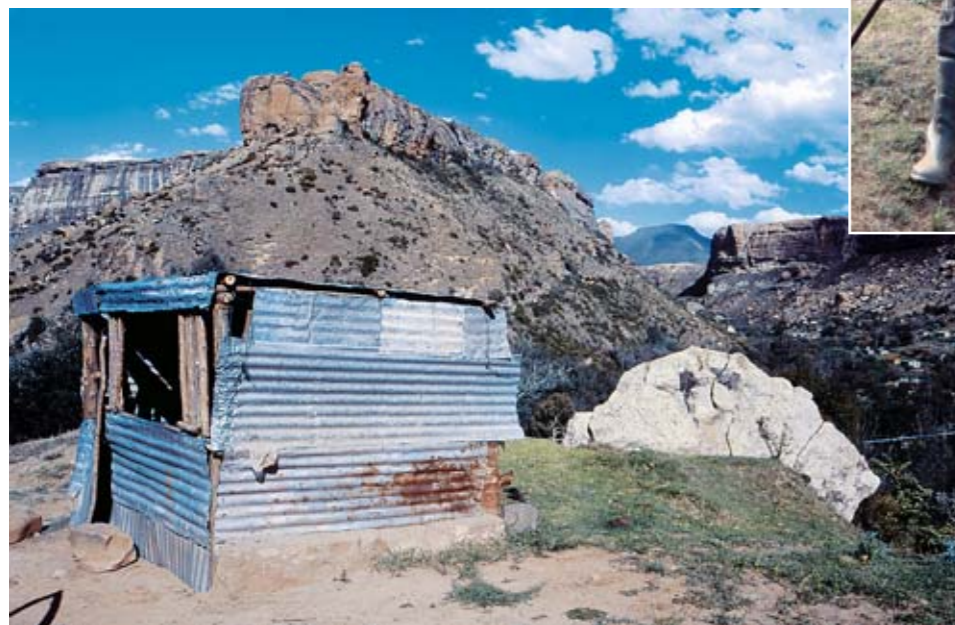




Most people working in agriculture make their living from breeding cattle. Herdsmen, often young boys who then do not have time to go to school, use blankets and caps for protection against wind. When they pull their caps over their heads, they look like hooded terrorists, but do not worry, they are nice and let you take a photo if you ask them. Today, unemployment is estimated at 45%, which is a problem. Earlier, up to 60% of the adult male population commuted to work to South Africa. At present, about one third of the population seeks a living outside the country. In the past, Lesotho also benefited from cheap labor and developed its textile industry. Now it has all been "smashed" by Chinese textile mills. Even extremely cheap labor in Africa cannot compete with them.



Unlike the roads and telecommunications, the shops in the interior look quite pathetic. This is one of them.



Virtually the whole country lies 1,000 meters (3,280 ft) above sea level and higher. Agriculture is therefore not easy here. There are almost no forests and other vegetation is scarce. Torrential rains cause intensive erosion of soil which is slowly but irreversibly disappearing.



Children are a great wealth and hope for the future. Today, education is not so problematic in Lesotho; only 15% of the population are illiterate. A visit from Europe was great entertainment for these children in a kindergarten and they happily showed off. Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS remains a major threat. It is estimated that about a quarter of the population is infected with this virus. The main cause of the disease is the work of local men in South Africa. The results are numerous personal tragedies and the undermined economic development of the country. Promiscuity is generally high in Sub-Saharan Africa. In brief, a man who works hard for several months for example in a diamond mine separated from his family usually spends his free time drinking or engaging with prostitutes so HIV infection is very likely. Afterwards, when he comes home, the man infects his wife or other women and, since promiscuity among women is also quite prevalent, infection progresses rapidly. No one knows how to deal effectively with it.











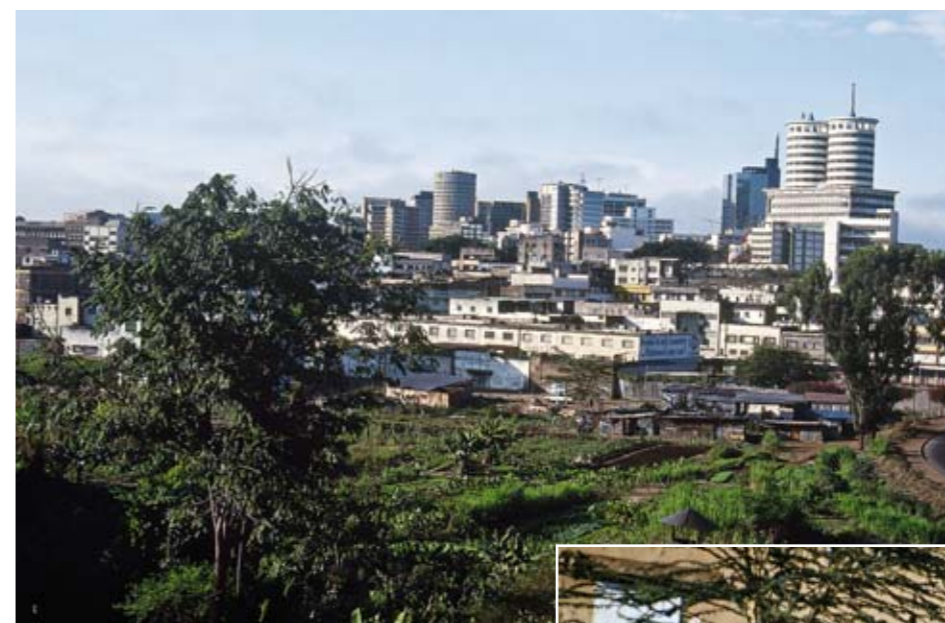
Lesotho is a Christian country. 80% of the population are Catholics or Protestants; approximately 20% of the population adhere to the indigenous natural religion.

My good friend, Dr. Noel Lehoko, attended this Christian school in Lesotho. In the 1970s, he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Olomouc. Apartheid prevented him from returning to South Africa, so he worked in Germany for some time and then he treated sick people in Lesotho where his wife comes from. After the abolition of apartheid and after the fall of communism, he served as Ambassador of South Africa to the Czech Republic. He was an excellent representative of his country and did everything he could to strengthen mutual relations and cooperation. He speaks perfect Czech and loves Moravia. He says: "Folks, I'm an African, but I'm also a Moravian." Today, he is Ambassador to Indonesia.

Lesotho is home to the National University of Lesotho, in African terms a very high-quality university which is attended by young people from several countries of southern Africa. At the time of my visit it was headed by a chancellor from Nigeria. The lecture halls and laboratories are very well equipped and the university seeks to develop international cooperation. However, it is not easy and sometimes you encounter a problem where you would not expect it. The Department of Development Studies at Palacky University in the Czech Republic wanted to establish an exchange program for students or teachers. The chancellor gladly agreed and sent one of the teachers to Europe. We paid for his flight ticket, but he only got to the airport in Frankfurt. He had not noticed that his entry date had been accidentally shifted by one month and therefore he was not allowed to enter the Schengen Area. After that, he never got in touch with us again.



### 3.3 Kenya



In a sense, Kenya is a kind of "Africa for Beginners". It is a relatively politically stable country. Its capital Nairobi is home to many international institutions, for example UNEP – The United Nations Environment Programme, and one can easily communicate in English here. Since Nairobi is situated at an altitude of about 1,700 meters (5,580 ft), there is no danger of falling ill with malaria. Although situated just below the Equator, temperatures are pleasant here even in summer.

Nairobi is surrounded by poor neighborhoods – slums. People who live here try to make their living by cultivating a piece of land, if available. Nevertheless, it is not possible in large slums where people live in horrible conditions and a number of teenagers seek escape from this reality by inhaling fumes from glue. They gradually become human wrecks and only a few of them will manage to avoid the trap of drug addiction.



The Great Rift Valley stretches from the north to the south across eastern Africa. It is probable that humans (genus Homo) emerged here a few million years ago. In a couple of million years, this valley will widen so much that it will be flooded by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea and Africa will be divided into two parts.







The biggest attraction in Kenya is not historical monuments, but the safari. Unlike in a zoo, it is people who are enclosed in a "cage" (car) and animals which move about freely. The most famous national parks include Amboseli (with views of Kilimanjaro) and the Masai Mara National Reserve in the southwest part of the country. It is actually the tip of the vast Serengeti National Park (located in Tanzania). In summer, millions of animals may be observed here as they migrate and seek food.

The Masai are cattle breeders who also used to be feared warriors. In the past, their diet consisted of meat, milk, and blood; approximately once in two months they cut a vein near the ear of a cow and collected about two deciliters of blood. Today, the situation is changing, which is evident also from the picture. Two men are wearing traditional red blankets, the other two prefer western style dress.

A typical dwelling of the Masai. Earthen houses are surrounded by fences of thorny shrubs, which protect them against wild animals at night.



As they migrate, zebras, wildebeest, and other herbivores are followed by their predators. The lion is called the king of animals, but it can also get into trouble. If injured in fighting its prey, it will inevitably die because it will not be able to hunt any more.

Another predator is the cheetah. It is a magnificent animal that can run for a short time at a speed of up to 110 kilometers per hour (70 mph). This cheetah is getting ready to hunt its prey, an antelope it has just seen. In the end, however, there was no attack, because the antelope had smelled it and ran away in time. For the cheetah, this hunt with an uncertain result would be just a useless waste of energy and therefore it had to seek different prey.



Perhaps the elephant is the true king of animals in the savanna. Except for humans, it has no enemy that could threaten it.







Lake Naivasha is located approximately 120 kilometers (75 mi) northwest of Nairobi. The famous Joy Adamson and her lioness Elsa lived here. Naivasha is a popular place for visitors from Nairobi and for rich people from this region who build their mansions here as evidenced by eighteen airfields in the area!



Hell's Gate is one of two national parks where you can move around on foot or by bike. There are no lions here, but you should still be cautious because it is not unusual to meet for instance a group of buffalo, and it is better to keep away from them. Hell's Gate is a tectonically active area with hot mineral springs. The Canadians built a large geothermal power plant nearby.

At Lake Naivasha you can see these plantations of flowers, which are then exported all over the world (the climatic conditions for growing them are much more suitable here than, for example, in the Netherlands). Seasonal workers from the surrounding area work here in very hard, even inhumane conditions. They often have no accommodation and sleep outside under a blanket. It is a modern form of serfdom, which is hidden and protected from the eyes of tourists by fencing.



Kitale is primarily a transport hub and a city of street markets, where farmers sell their products, or exchange them for goods they need.



Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa with an area of 70,000 square kilometers (27,000 sq mi). Kisumu, the third largest city in Kenya and once an important port, is situated on its shores. This, however, is already history; today you can comfortably make a tour of Kisumu in one day and there is no reason to stay longer. You cannot even swim in the lake because of bilharzia.







*We are moving on from the boring Kisumu along the border with Uganda to the north. We are passing through beautiful mountain scenery. Not far beyond the horizon lies the majestic Mount Elgon (4,321 meters, or 14,178 ft above sea level).*



*Children are restless, as everywhere in the world. The picture captures them as they are performing karate strikes which they have seen in some action film.*



*Wasteland and wilderness starts further north. We are going down from the mountains to the lowlands where the heat is exhausting. We are getting into the Sahel, a semi-desert area that is gradually turning into desert.*



*People of the Turkana tribe live in such harsh conditions. From our perspective, their way of life is primitive, but be careful what you say, in these conditions, we would perhaps not survive even one week.*



*Their typical companion is a camel. Social status is not based here on the balance of their bank accounts, but the number of camels which a family owns.*







*This is what the local boarding facilities look like. Students sleep in huts scattered around the school.*



*Kalokol and the town of Lodwar are connected by a surprisingly decent paved road which goes through the wilderness. Nevertheless, travelling here is like anywhere else in Africa. There were seventeen of us crammed in this local taxi. On my return trip from Lake Turkana, I did not even get inside and I spent a 50-kilometer (30-mi)-ride with three other guys standing on the rear bumper. There was no other option, because the car runs only in the morning and in the evening.*

*Years ago, the Israelis excavated an 18-meter-deep (60 ft) well in this wilderness as a part of their development aid. With access to drinking water a high school could be founded here for 200 children from the surrounding area. The school is actually a simple sheet metal building. At the time of my visit there was no electric power, only two (!) gas lamps for lighting.*



*High school students from Kalokol located near Lake Turkana (formerly known as Lake Rudolf). The boy on the right was my guide and on the recommendation of a local Irish missionary I paid his school fees for the following year. He was an orphan and took care of his three younger siblings. When I invited him to a "lavish dinner" (chicken with rice), he packed half and brought it to them.*

*Sunset over Lodwar.*









### 3.4 Uganda



Kampala, the capital of Uganda, has 1.2 million inhabitants. Population density is quite high here and especially the city center is crowded with people and cars.



Old Taxi Park. The main means of transport is minibuses for 8 people, but they usually carry 15 or more passengers. There is no schedule, a minibus goes when it is filled up with passengers.



The first impression of Kampala is quite good. This does not mean that there is no poverty. On the contrary. The locals are very friendly, but they still have to deal with the consequences brought by the bloody government of Idi Amin who killed 300,000–500,000 people of his own nation. As elsewhere in Africa, the city is surrounded by slums.



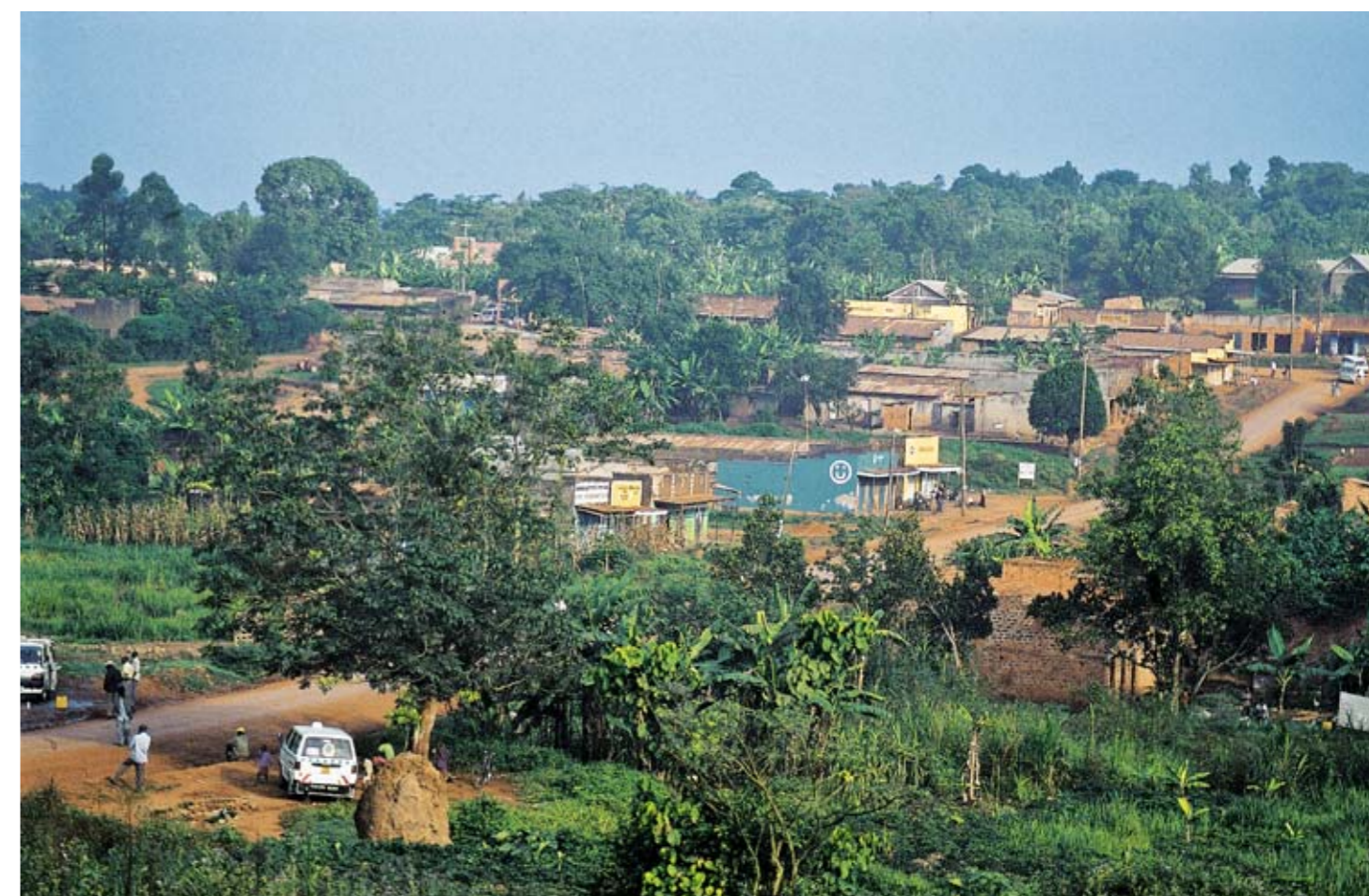




Uganda is one of the few countries that effectively fight HIV/AIDS, at least according to the official sources. Their statistics show that about 5% of the population is infected with HIV, but foreign doctors working in the country believe that the actual number is much higher.



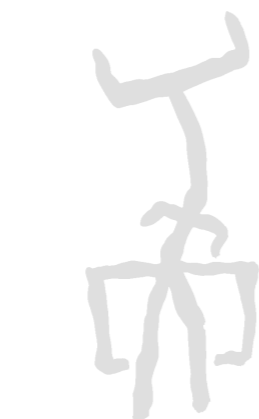
Most people live in rural areas and work in agriculture. Men cultivate fields using not quite modern methods. Nevertheless, the good point is that they are not dependent on fossil fuels. Women take care of the household, which also includes collecting firewood and bringing water in heavy, 10–20 liter (2.6–5.2 gal) containers. Even small children help. Teenage boys graze cattle and therefore they often have no time left for school education.







*In Buikwe, a town near Lake Victoria, the Czech Catholic Charity and the Slovak St. Elisabeth's College run a hospital. The project is very successful. A few doctors and nurses who take turns at intervals of several months provide basic health care here to people from the surrounding area. Unfortunately, the range of activities will have to be significantly reduced in the future due to a lack of funds and very limited assistance from the government of Uganda.*



*In addition to the hospital, the Charity also runs two schools in this area, one elementary and one vocational school. The situation is improving, but the hygienic conditions in the local kitchen are not quite optimal.*



*Buikwe and its surroundings. The vast majority of people are without electricity in this town (or rather village) as the infrastructure is not developed here. Darkness falls at about seven o'clock all year round, and people spend time after dark together on the streets, prepare their meals over fires and chat. Maybe it is better than watching endless mind-numbing series on television.*

*Breadfruit, probably the largest fruit in the world.*

*This restaurant is located not far from the Czech-Slovak hospital and the doctors often come here for lunch. The meals are modest, but good. It is most often rice, bananas, and a piece of poultry. Potatoes are rarely on the menu, because their preparation takes a long time and consumes too much energy.*

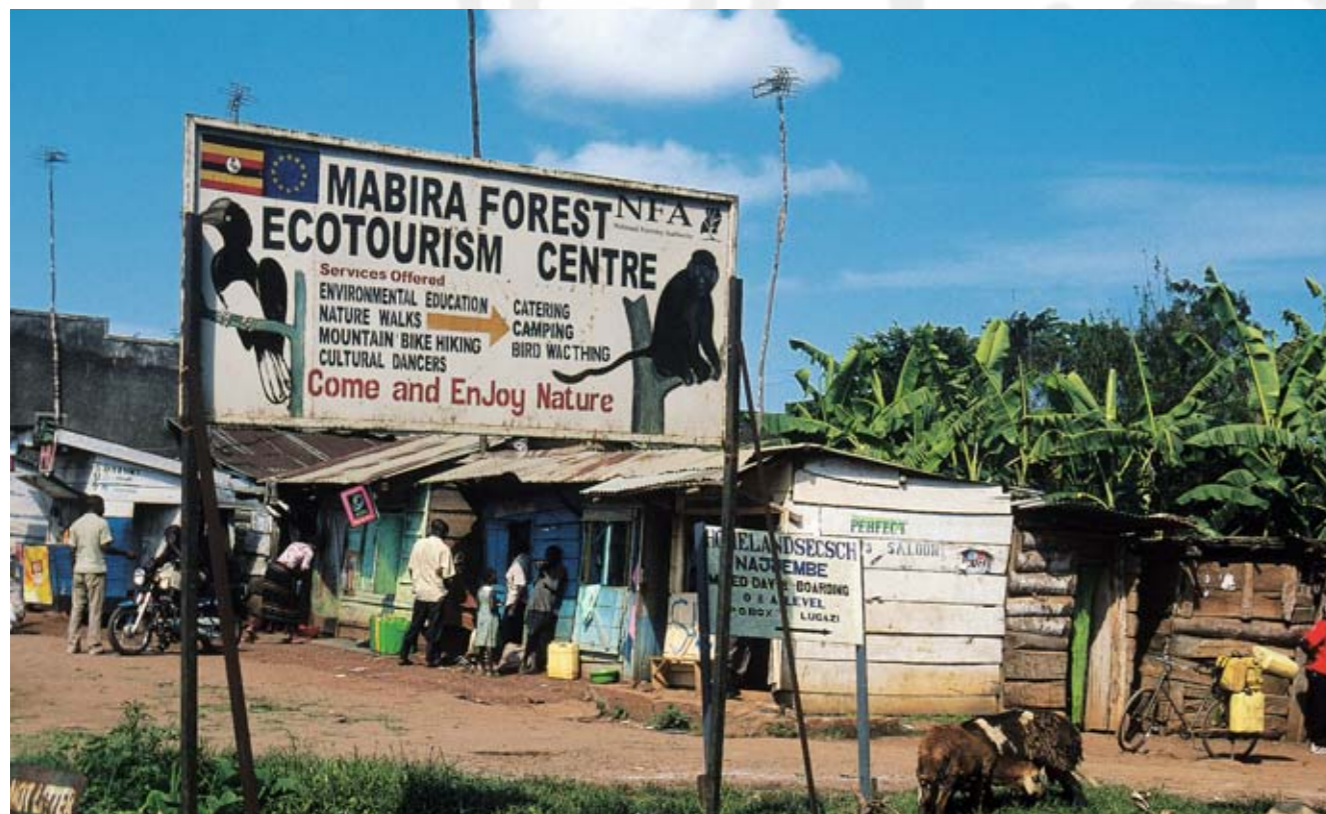






Buikwe lies on the famous railway linking Kampala with Mombasa, a port city in Kenya. It was built by the English, and I would not be surprised if the locomotives and wagons originated in the colonial era.

About 10 kilometers (6 mi) from Buikwe is Mabira Forest Reserve. It is one of the last places where the original rainforest has been preserved in a lowland area. You can stroll through it for hours on well-maintained paths and admire its beauty. However, watch out for the monkeys. Hold your bag or camera tight, otherwise they may steal it.



Before or after visiting the forest, you can freshen up at a nearby marketplace, but do not forget: hygiene first. It is advisable to buy only naturally packed products (bananas, oranges, and so on), otherwise you will probably get diarrhea.



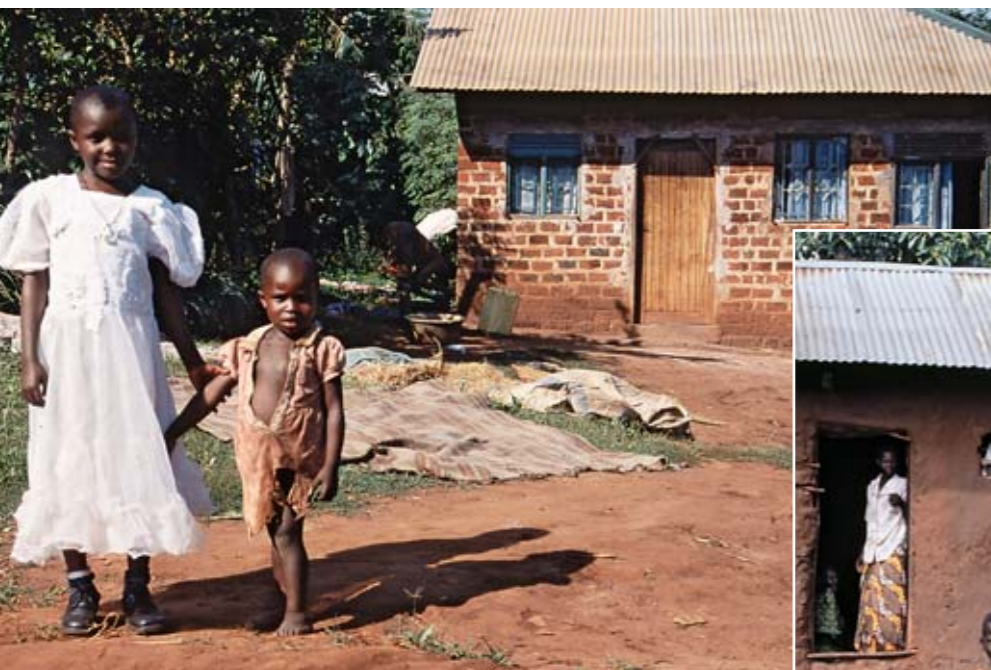
About 80 kilometers (50 mi) east of Kampala, near the town of Jinja, you can visit the springs of the Nile. The Nile flows from Lake Victoria. In the outlet area, very strong underground springs come out under water. This place is symbolically regarded as the beginning of the Nile.











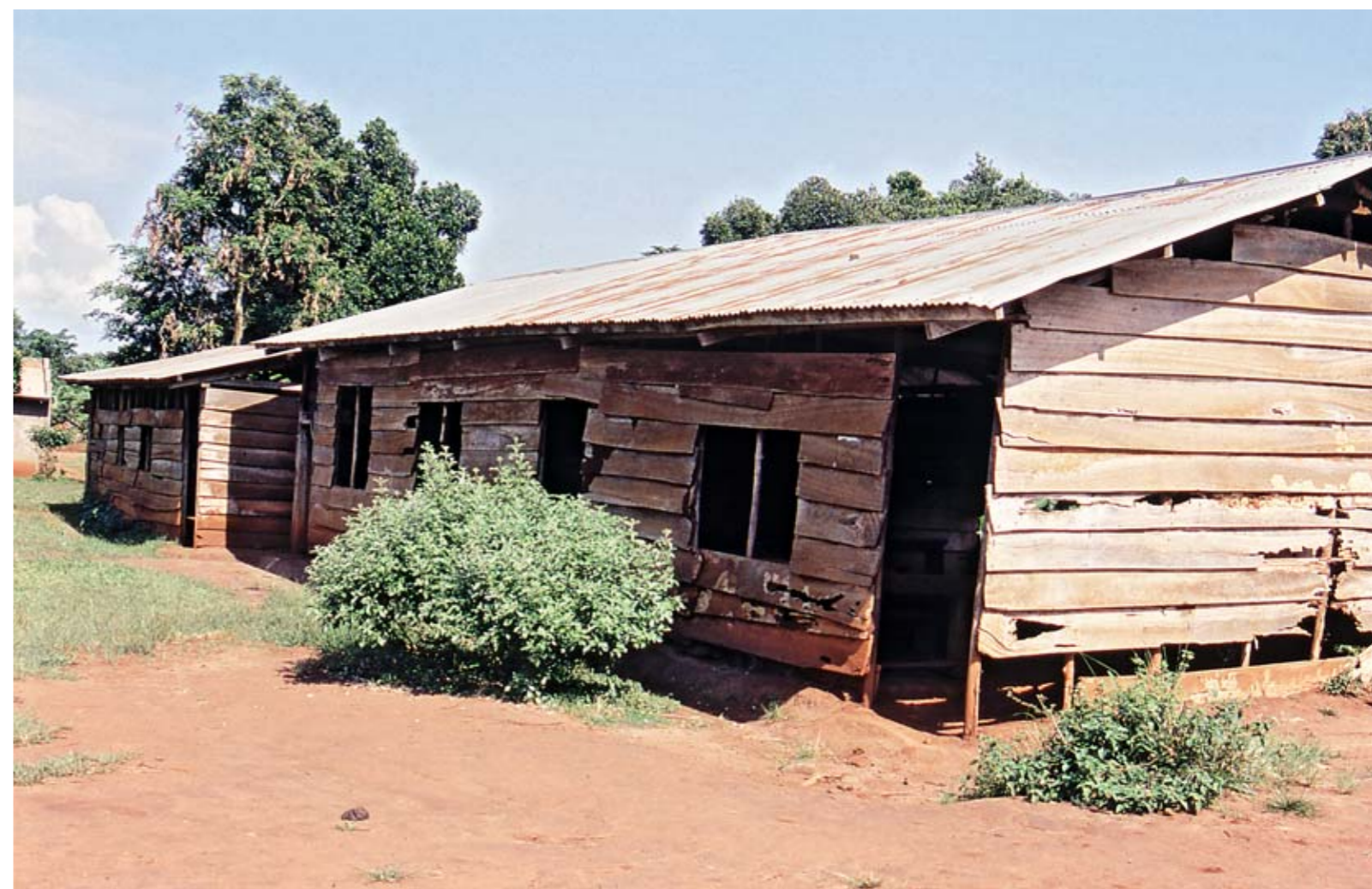
If the locals have some wealth, it is their children. There are many of them all around.



Life around Lake Victoria is very simple and local people are poor. Under the criteria of the World Bank, most of them belong to the group of people living in absolute poverty whose daily income is less than \$1.25 per capita. This does not mean that they cannot enjoy their lives.



Many children cannot go to school. The school building also sometimes looks completely different from what we Europeans imagine. Its equipment is more than simple, too. If a new school is built from the gifts obtained from a development aid, you can be sure that your money has been used wisely.







Sunrise over the Nile in Murchison Falls National Park. Although most tourists in Uganda go to the mountain areas in the southwest of the country to see the mountain gorillas, which has become an unreasonably expensive attraction at \$500 per day, the Murchison Falls, about 200 kilometers (125 mi) north of Kampala, are also worth visiting.

The Nile pushes its way through a rocky gorge only 6 meters (20 ft) wide. It is perhaps the most magnificent sight of the whole Nile which flows 6,700 kilometers (4,160 mi) from Lake Victoria to the mouth in the Mediterranean Sea.



You can see here plenty of baboons. They are sometimes cheeky enough to jump on the hood of a car and clamor for food.



Driving a car in the park is not easy sometimes. Roads are unpaved and if it rained heavily on such unfinished roads, you could get stuck in the park for several days.

Originally, 15,000 elephants, a lot of rhinos and lions lived in the area of the Murchison Falls. Poachers armed with automatic rifles exterminated these large animals, so that they cannot be found in the park any more. Only a few groups of lions roam here. Nevertheless, there are still many things to look at, for instance there are large groups of crocodiles and hippos along the Nile.



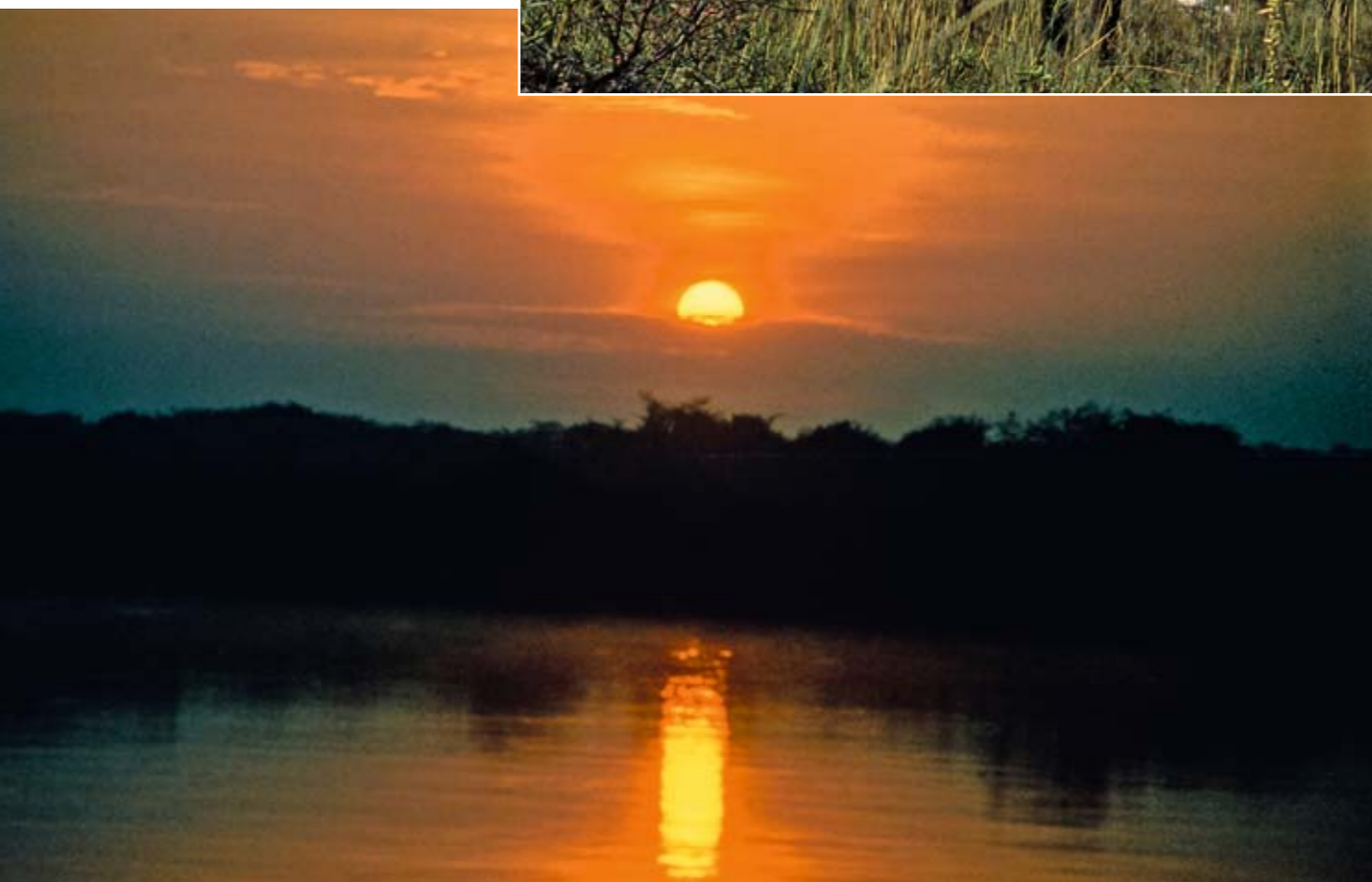




Other large animals that you can easily watch include buffalo and giraffes.



Sunset over the Nile.

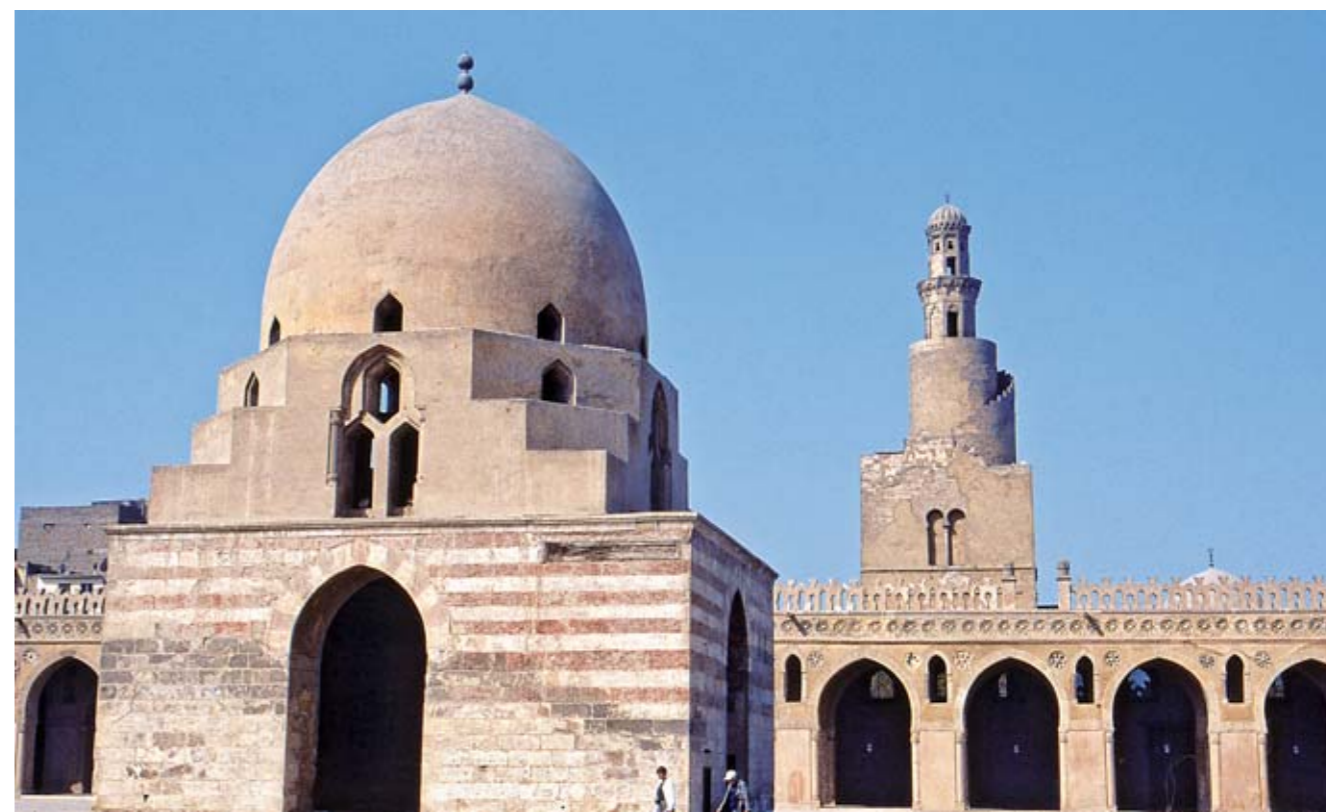


### 3.5 Egypt

Cairo is the capital of Egypt with a population of about 20 million people. Given the poor and cramped conditions in which most people live, the city has a surprisingly low rate of violent crime.



Arab Muslims make up 90% of the population of Egypt. The oldest Islamic building is the mosque of Ibn Tulun built in 879 by Ahmed ibn Tulun, the ambassador of the caliph of Baghdad. A part of the mosque is a sort of open minaret which is very interesting for its outside staircase.







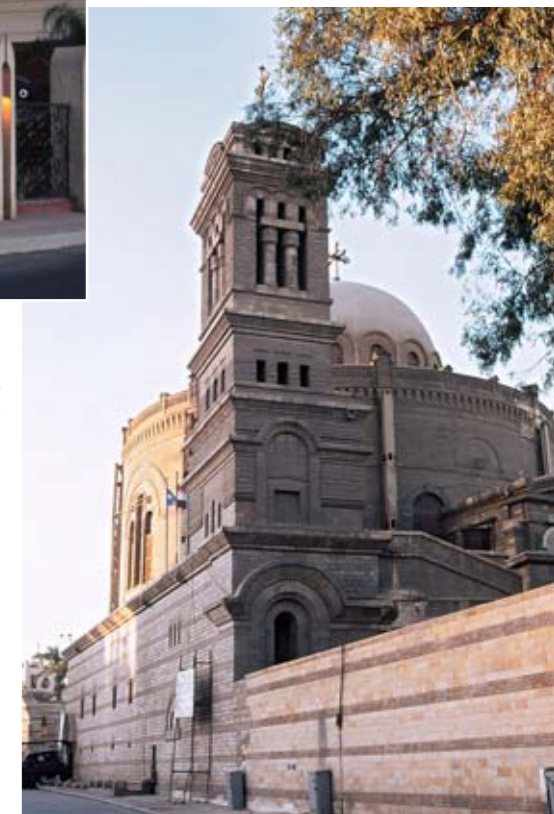
The town is dominated by the Citadel. The Muslim general Saladin began its construction in 1176.



In addition to several mosques, the Citadel is also home to the National Military Museum, which serves as a demonstration of the power of the Egyptian state.



There is, however, a much grander spectacle; a work entitled "The October War Panorama", which is situated near the suburb of Heliopolis. Artists from communist North Korea built an exhibition of the "victory of the Egyptian Army over Israel in 1973". The problem is that they documented only the first three days of the Six Day War and omitted the remaining unsuccessful course of events. It is a nice example of how some individuals as well as whole societies refuse to perceive reality as it is and selectively choose only what they can psychologically assimilate.



Coptic Cairo is situated on the southern edge of the city. After the end of the dynasties of the Pharaohs and before the arrival of Islam, Egypt was a Christian country. Coptic Christians are the descendants of the original, non-Arab population. The narrow streets and buildings are somewhat reminiscent of the Old City in Jerusalem. When Jerusalem was seized by the Romans in 70 AD and the Jews were expelled from the country, some of them found refuge in Egypt.

It is surprising how people do not care about the public places in Cairo, but also in all other cities. They sometimes look like junkyards. The most striking example I saw was the restrooms at the bus station in Hurgada, where you could not even enter.





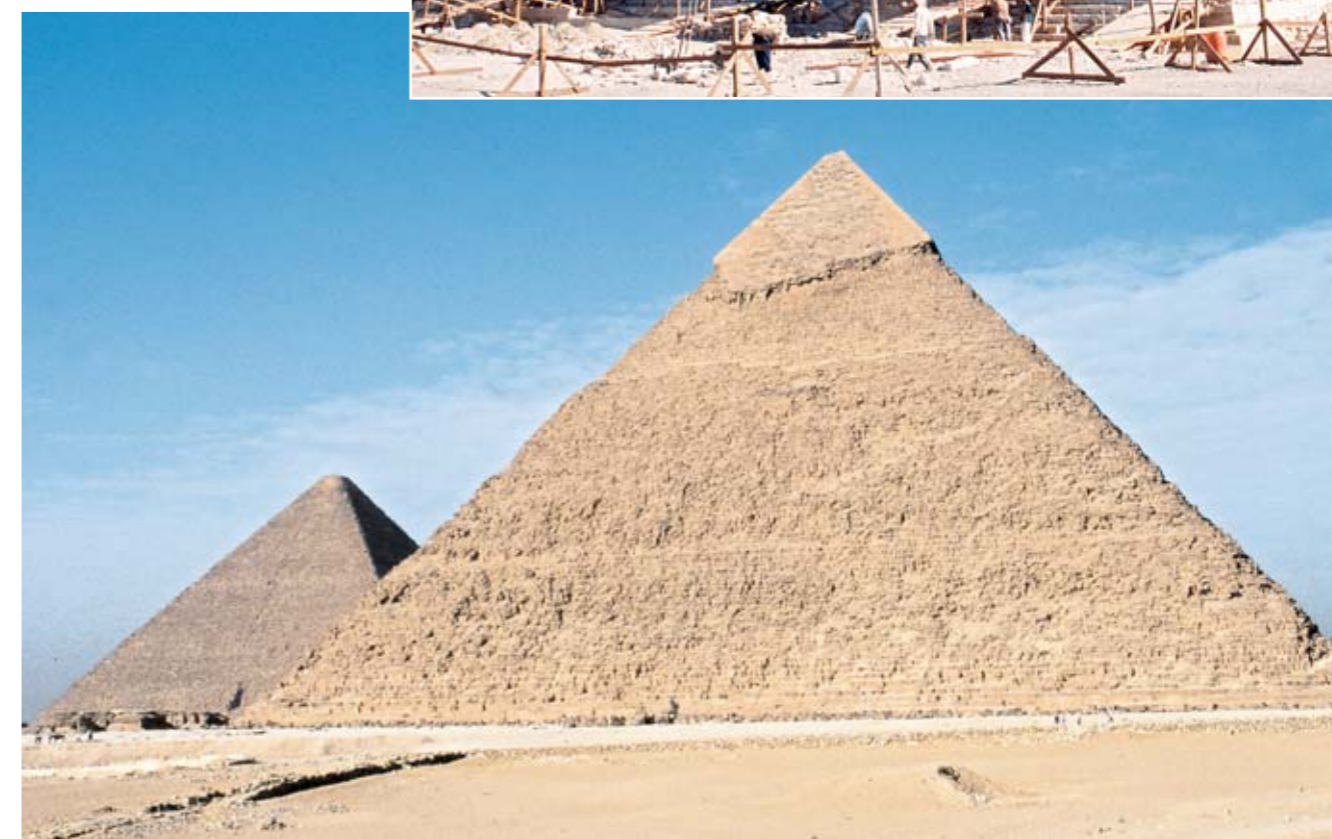


A picture typical not only of Egypt, but of all big cities in the developing world. People live in poor conditions and are often unemployed. So they escape into the virtual world of stupid endless TV series which they reach through satellite receivers. Regardless of anything else, getting money to buy them is a must.



The step pyramid in Saqqara is the oldest.

Egyptian civilization emerged as early as 6,000 years ago in the Nile Valley and it is the oldest known civilization. It left behind some spectacular sights – the famous pyramids of Giza and its surroundings, for example, Abu Sir, Memphis, and Dahshur.







The best means of transportation in the desert is camels or horses. While the Sahara is actually a sandy ocean, camels are rightly called ships of the desert.

Today, the Sahara is mainly rocks and sand with scattered oases, but it was not always like this. In the past, there were rivers flowing across the Sahara, antelopes, buffalo, and other animals lived there, and people bred cattle there. After the last glaciation, however, the area gradually became warmer and drier. People concentrated their herds in places with some remaining water. This led to the creation of erosion centers from which the desert began to spread. This process continues today in the south of the Sahara, in the zone called the Sahel.



The Sphinx was called the Father of Terror by the Arabs. It has the shape of a lion with a human face and it is possible that it is an artifact of an extinct civilization which preceded the Egyptian civilization. It is also possible that it was built during the reign of Khafre (2558–2532 BC). Right behind the Sphinx, there is the Pyramid of Khafre, the most famous Pyramid of Cheops, and the smaller Pyramid of Menkaure.

The Pyramid of Cheops is composed of 2.5 million limestone blocks, each weighing an average of 2.3 tons. It was built with incredible precision, but how it was achieved remains a mystery.

Perhaps the most famous complex of the monuments of Egyptian civilization is Luxor. Revenue from tourism accounts for 85% of the municipal budget, but the infrastructure on the periphery of the city is by no means developed to a corresponding level.







The walls and pillars in the Luxor Temple as well as in nearby Karnak are richly decorated with scenes from the life of the oldest known human civilization.

Luxor Temple is probably the most impressive of all the monuments of the pharaohs. It was built by Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC). During his reign, the power and prosperity of the Egyptian civilization culminated.



The famous Valley of the Kings lies on the west bank of the Nile. Almost all of the pharaohs were buried here. The walls of the rock tombs are decorated with scenes from the afterlife. Virtually all of the tombs, originally filled with gold and other treasures, were plundered. The only intact and therefore the most famous today is the tomb of Tutankhamen. The treasures found here are exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. He was a relatively insignificant pharaoh who died very young and ruled for only 9 years (1336–1327 BC). It is hard to imagine what treasures the tombs of the more significant pharaohs probably contained.



The Temple of Queen Hatshepsut was built on several rock terraces, the surrounding hills are limestone. Hatshepsut was the only queen of ancient Egypt. It is strange that this is probably the most popular stop on bus tours, because the interior of the temple has no magnificent decoration.

Directly in front of the temple you can see a nice sign indicating a significant tree. It has just one flaw – the tree dried out long ago and so the sign seems somewhat out of place.



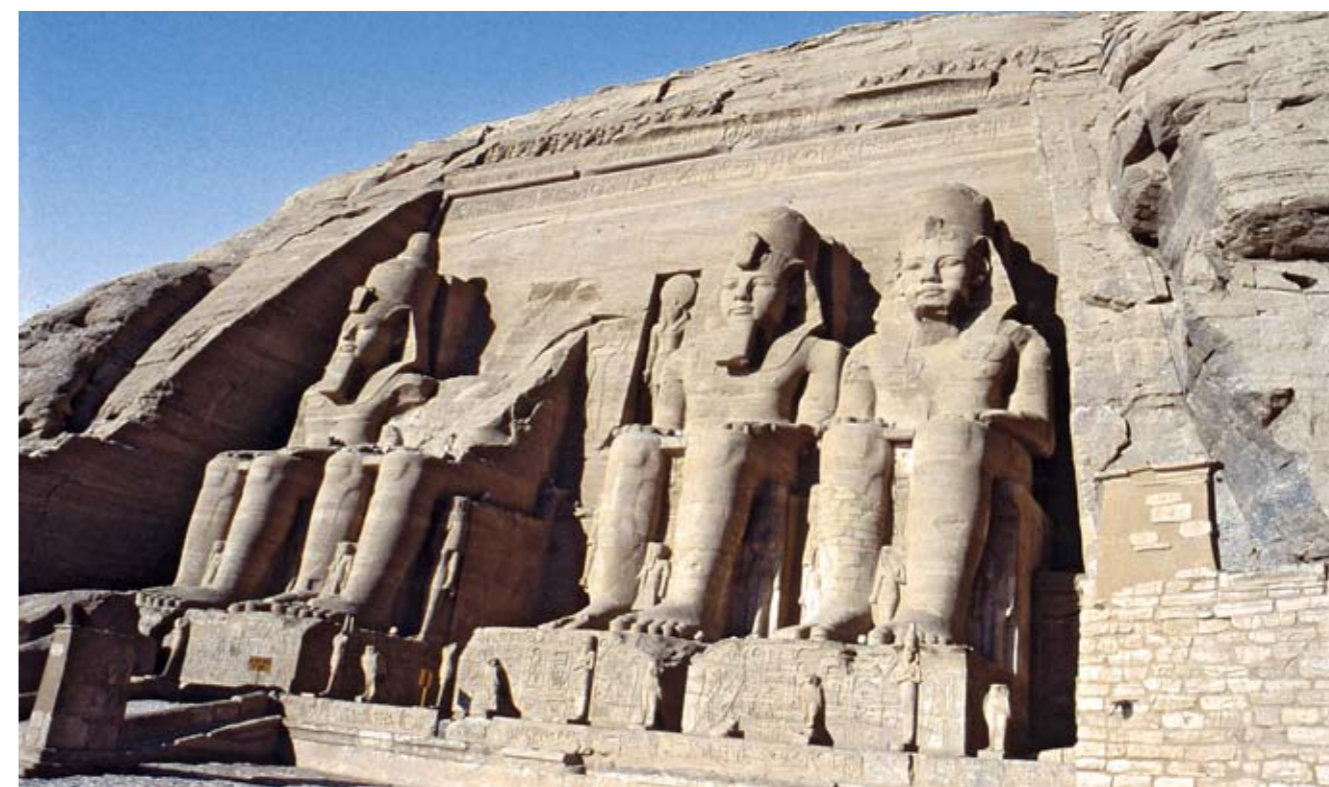




From the hills between the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut and the Valley of the Kings you can observe irrigated fields, which are fed with life-giving water from the Nile. All around is desert, stretching from east to west across the African continent. Egypt has only 2.5% of cultivable land and the population continues to grow. As in other Arab countries, most young people have no prospect of a decent life with a good job. Their frustration and anger, manifesting itself mainly in men, is growing. No father will marry his daughter to a man without a job and prospects.



Abu Simbel is a magnificent temple built by the mighty pharaoh Ramses II. It is located in the south of Egypt near the border with Sudan and it was saved from flooding with the help of UNESCO. In the 1950s, the Egyptians supported by the Soviets built a new dam on the Nile upstream of Aswan which caused a rise in the river level of 62 meters (203 ft). They wanted to sacrifice the monument, saying that it meant "drowning the past in order to save the future". Fortunately, the Swedish engineers managed to relocate the temple above the flood level, under an artificial hill with a huge concrete dome protecting the temple from the piled rocks and soil.





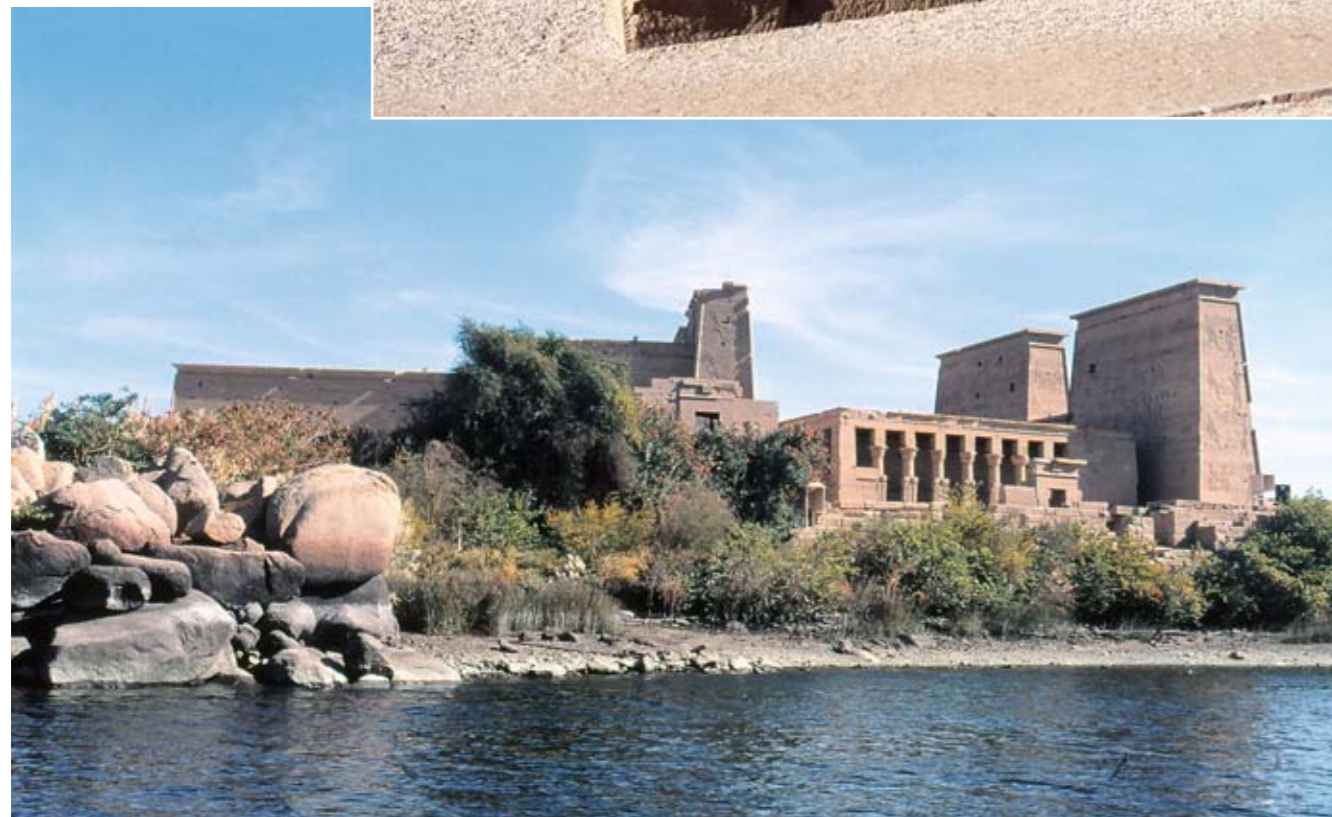






Lake Nasser (or the Aswan Dam) is the largest artificially created lake in the world. It stretches from the dam to the interior of Sudan 480 kilometers (300 mi) in length and in some places up to 35 kilometers (22 mi) wide. From an environmental point of view, it is a controversial construction. On one hand, it produces electricity and prevents flooding along the Nile, on the other hand, it stopped the delivery of nutrients to the cultivated areas during the floods. The nutrients must be replaced with fertilizers the production of which is expensive and energy-intensive.

On Agilkia Island (also called Philae) is a beautiful romantic temple complex dedicated to the goddess Isis. It can be reached only by boat. However, you must bargain relentlessly, otherwise the local sort of businessmen would swindle you out of your money. Nevertheless, a visit is definitely worth it.



In Aswan, as well as in other Egyptian cities, there are communities of Christians. People were just celebrating New Year 2010 but it was ruined by a group of mad fanatics in Cairo who at the end of a Mass, when people were coming out of the church, shot ten people dead.



In Aswan itself you can see the Unfinished Obelisk. It is carved from a 42-meter-long (137 ft) granite monolith. If it had been completed, it would have weighed 1,168 tons, which would have made it the largest stone monument carved from rock by the ancient Egyptians. During the finishing work, however, a flaw was discovered in the bedrock which prevented the completion of the obelisk and the disappointed craftsmen left the site. It is still not clear what would have been the purpose of the obelisk had it been completed.







Hurghada is best known for its tourism industry. On one hand, the city has some nice buildings, such as the local mosque, on the other hand, the streets a bit further from the chain of coastal hotels are quite dirty.



Considering that the locals live by tourism, they do not bother too much with the maintenance of the infrastructure. Walking onto this pier can be a thrilling experience with an uncertain outcome. I spent one day in Hurghada and it was more than enough for me. I can imagine a much better form of recreation.

The sea itself is beautiful and if you go snorkeling, you can observe abundant underwater life. Nevertheless, the sea is almost unreachable unless you live in a hotel at the beach. Here, you have a strip of water about 80–100 meters (260–330 ft) wide, through which you must swim out to sea.



The new generation of young people in Suez. It is hard to say what kind of life is waiting for them: a period of peace, or of wars and civil unrest; a life in poverty and unemployment, or in relative abundance?



This is a typical picture – the sea is beautiful, but garbage is everywhere. In the past, it was mostly organic and therefore degradable waste. Today, garbage is mostly composed of plastics which are virtually non-degradable.

The Suez Canal is a 163-kilometer-long (101 mi) stretch of water that separated Africa from Asia. More than 20,000 ships a year pass through it and the fees for passage constitute a significant part of the budget of Egypt. Pharaoh Necho II made the first attempt to build it as early as 610–595 BC. After more than 100,000 workers had died, the construction was stopped. The canal was built between 1859–1849 and opened for navigation by the French and British. In 1956 the Suez Canal was nationalized by President Nasser. The French and British, in collaboration with the Israelis, responded with a military invasion which caused the Suez Crisis. They retreated after sharp protests from the international community. However, for security reasons the passage of cruise ships is still not permitted.







*The Crusaders' castle in the Gulf of Aqaba near the border with Israel is a witness to the medieval conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land.*

*The Sinai Peninsula is situated between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. It is already in Asia but still part of Egypt. It resulted from the movement of the Arabian and African lithospheric plates which have been diverging for 40 million years. The coast of the peninsula has become a paradise for divers. Inland is a desert with beautiful mountains.*

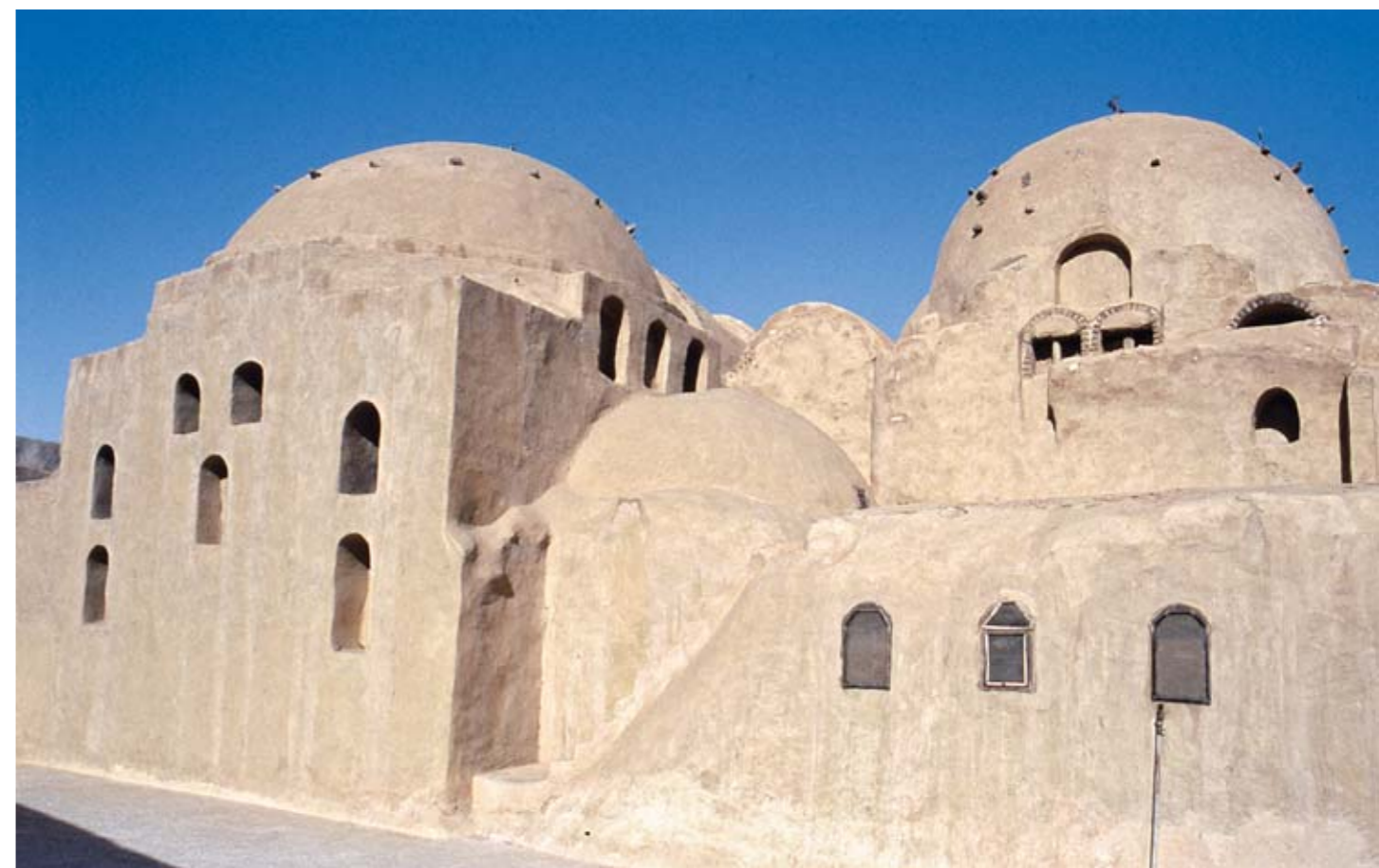


*Moses' Mountain (Mt. Sinai). Jews, Christians and Muslims believe that Moses received the Ten Commandments from God here. The mountain is 2,285 meters (7,497 ft) high, but it can be reached easily. It is recommended to climb to the top in the night chill and wait for the morning sunrise.*

*St. Catherine's Monastery lies below the mountain. According to legend, this is the place where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The monastery was founded around 330 AD. It bears the name of St. Catherine, martyr, who died for her faith in Alexandria.*



*A group of historic Coptic monasteries can be found in the area of Wadi El Natrun about 100 kilometers (60 mi) northwest of Cairo. In the 4th century, thousands of Christians went into the desert to escape from Roman persecution. People lived in caves or built monasteries. At one time, there were about sixty of them, but only four remain. Legend says that one of them, Deir es-Suryani, was visited by Jesus with his family when they fled to Egypt. Since then there has been a spring of drinking water there while everywhere else water is spoiled with sodium.*







*Monastic and religious life in general is now undergoing a revival among Coptic Christians.*

