

Newsletter: Farakunku Lodges March 2015

So here we are, almost at the end of another guest season...our 7<sup>th</sup> ...and our busiest yet, despite the worries over Ebola and a minor so-called attempted 'coup' here. We have been so lucky with our visitor numbers consistently high throughout the 5 months since early November. Thank you to everyone who came ...we have really enjoyed the return of so many repeat guests as well as meeting lots of new visitors.



*Christmas Eve meal*



*...and entertainment*

We celebrated Christmas with some lovely guests...lots of feasting, dancing and music. Since then guests have come to enjoy all the usual things on offer here, especially appreciating the calm of our private bird and tree sanctuary, meeting the local community when out walking, the prolific bird life and of course our lovely unspoilt beach.

Our neighbouring tailor has made several lovely shirts and tops for guests who have bought some bright African fabrics in the market and had a garment run up within a day or so.



*Tailor & family*



We have had some strange weather this season...hot and sunny mostly during the days, some cloudy days and some freak (totally out of season) *rain* this week and some much colder- than- usual nights...even duvets needed sometimes! Perhaps the solar eclipse and Spring equinox had something to do with it? Sadly we were too far south to experience the eclipse.

Just recently our new land in Gunjur, planted up with orange trees and vegetables for the restaurant, has had an attack from a wild pig digging under the barbed wire and who ate all my cabbages! This week we went to pick the leeks that were ready, only to find they've all been eaten by a mystery animal! Whatever it is, also seems to like the bark of the orange trees... a big problem unless our man there can catch it! Just some of the difficulties faced here...we may not have slugs or snails eating our veggies but African pests are just as damaging!



The Farakunku Foundation children's charity goes from strength to strength. We now have over 50 children being sponsored through school thanks to the generosity of guests who have taken to heart the needs of the local children. They have also brought school materials which have been distributed to the local schools as well as to individual children. In my own small way, by baking cakes and biscuits for guests, who make a small donation, I have also raised enough to sponsor one child and am well on the way to funding another.

Even though we have been so busy here, Moses has been inspired to start a new and separate business in Bakau ...having seen the need for jobs here for so many unemployed...he has opened a Job Centre. With a small office, a computer and his many contacts he has set up somewhere for job seekers to register and has linked up with many businesses and companies who will use his centre when seeking employees. It is in the early stages yet but he is hopeful that it will grow into something successful. He is soon to have publicity on the local radio station. He has distributed letters, visited many managers and company bosses, and is now having fliers designed to leave in prominent places. The centre has already found jobs for a cleaner, a carpenter and a cook so it looks hopeful. I have only helped in the background with the paperwork and contracts. He now has a good office administrator who is very computer savvy and has a good telephone manner.

Several guests this season have enjoyed the day fishing trip on a private charter along the River Gambia, stopping for lunch at Lamin Lodge which overlooks the mangroves on the river shoreline. Moses delivers and collects them from Denton Bridge and everyone so far has arrived back with an impressive bag of fish for the grill!



*Guests on board ready for a day's fishing*



*Moses waiting for the boat to return*

We've had 3 incidents involving the police this month...all embarrassing and a bit worrying, but as usual, Mo (aka Mr Fix-it) was able to smooth things and sort out each problem. The first was when Moses had to pull over to let a speeding ambulance pass at a junction but he pulled over in the same direction as the ambulance which was overtaking and Mo went into the side. The poor patient was left inside yet the ambulance driver started arguing about damage etc rather than taking care of the patient as a priority. Mo called the police who agreed it was an accident not a crime, and that the driver should go ahead to hospital.

The second was when the new car tax disc stuck on the windscreen must have slipped out in the heat and blown away. At one of the numerous police check points, they stopped and arrested Mo. When they then discovered that his insurance was one day overdue he was in big trouble! He was able to get out of it with the help of some 'senior contacts'.

The third was entirely my own silly fault...for some unknown reason I had not done up my passenger seat belt for a short trip (and I always do) At a check point, they took Babucarr's driving licence and insurance away and asked for a huge bribe to get them back. Again, a phone call to Mo and it was sorted!

Anyway.....we have booked our stand at the Rutland Water Birdfair again...same position as before, but what has always been numbered Marquee 5 is now re-named 1. So we will be in Marquee 1 on stand 19 right by the entrance. Hope to see you there!

In the meantime, we look forward to our annual return to the UK in June and hope to see many of you while we are over there.

Our very best wishes to all our friends and guests...*Heather and Moses*



*Table setting in our restaurant for guests' Ruby Wedding celebrations March 2015*