

Madoka's Uganda

Hi, everyone! My name's Madoka, and I'm a university student. I major in education, and through my classes, I became interested in child psychology and child welfare. Last summer, I stayed in the Philippines for 3 weeks. During that time, I met a lot of street children. It was an overwhelming experience, and because of this, I wanted to learn more about educational situations in developing countries. So, I decided to take a year away from university after I finished my sixth semester, and I came to Uganda last month to do a year-long internship. Life here is very different to how it was in Japan. Let me introduce it to you.

Since arriving, I have been living in the dormitory of the organization where I do my internship. Every day, I get up at around 7:00am. I have a few pieces of bread and milk for breakfast – this is provided by my organization. After breakfast, I do my laundry by hand. There aren't any washing machines in my dormitory – in fact, washing machines aren't very common in Uganda, because they are so expensive. Even the cheapest washing machine costs around 1.5 million Uganda Shillings, which is the currency in Uganda. 1.5 million shillings is about two months' worth of average wages.

Anyway, after doing my laundry, at 8:00am, I go to the office by taxi. The taxis are not like those in Japan. Ugandan taxis are more like busses, and they are often crowded by too many people. There are seats for 15 people, but there are usually 20 or more riding the taxis. I think this is illegal, but the police standing on the streets don't care about it. However, the taxi does its job, and it gets me to the office by 8:30am.

When I arrive, I begin preparing for my classes. I'm doing a teaching internship here, and I teach two classes per day. I teach mathematics to primary school orphans, that is, children who have lost their parents, from 8:45 to 9:30 and from 12:00 to 1:00pm. After classes, I take an hour-long lunch break. There is a school lunch, but I usually cook for myself or buy my food. I don't really like the local foods, because the seasoning and flavors are too strong for me.

After lunch, I begin working on my remaining tasks. There is a lot of work to teaching outside of class hours. I mark – I mean, grade – my students' completed worksheets, create new worksheets for the next day's classes, and prepare for my new project. All of this takes a lot of time, so I usually stay in the office until 5:00pm.

After work, I spend my time getting to know more about Uganda. I often visit my students' houses to learn more about their lives and their families. I talk with my students about their dreams. Many children want to become politicians or lawyers, professionals like that. I feel that many Ugandan students are interested in politics more than Japanese children of the same age. I enjoy walking with my students to their houses, because it's a great time to talk and get to know them better. When we arrive, I greet their guardians in the Luganda language, the most widely spoken language in Uganda. Afterwards, I tutor the students in mathematics or play with them and the neighborhood children. Sometimes they teach me new things in Luganda.

Afterwards, I walk back to the dormitory. I try to get back by 7:00pm, because it gets dark around 7:30. On the way, I like to look at different kinds of signs – road signs and shop signs, that sort of thing. Many of them are written in three languages – English, Luganda, and Swahili, which are the three most common languages in Uganda. In Japan, we often see multilingual signs with languages like Korean and Chinese, but those are usually for tourists. In Uganda, these languages are for the locals.

Once I get back to the dormitory, I take a shower and wait for dinner. Dinner is at 8:00pm, also provided by the organization. We often have spaghetti, rice, sweet potatoes, and beef. There are also pineapples and watermelons that are much cheaper and sweeter than those in Japan. After dinner, I spend time studying languages – of course, English, Luganda, and Swahili. Around 9:30pm is when I call my boyfriend – it is around 2:30pm in his local time. Unfortunately, we can't spend much time talking, but that's OK – I say good night to him at around 10:00pm, and then, I go to bed.

So, this is my daily life in Uganda. Life like this will continue until next February.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. About how old is Madoka?

Answer: 21~22 years old.

Hints/Clues: She says she has taken a year off after her sixth semester (third year) to do an internship abroad. This means that she would traditionally have been a fourth-year university student, which in Japan is usually around 21 to 22 years of age.

2. What is the average monthly wage in Uganda in Japanese Yen?

Answer: Around 30,000 yen.

Hints/Clues: Madoka mentions that a cheap washing machine costs around 1.5 million Uganda Shillings, and that this is twice the average monthly wage. So, halving that gets 750,000 USh, or around 30,000 yen. (Students should be prompted to use online currency converters).

3. In what language does Madoka teach mathematics?

Answer: Probably English.

Hints/Clues: She mentions that the children often teach her Luganda, and that she is learning Swahili too. So, she probably isn't strong enough in these languages to teach in them. Also, if students do some brief research, they will find that the language of schooling in Uganda is English.

4. Madoka is from Japan, but does her boyfriend live in Japan?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: She calls him at 9:30pm, which is 2:30pm his local time. As Japan is eight hours ahead of Uganda, the time zones do not match, and therefore he can't be living in Japan.

5. Why do many people in Uganda speak English?

Answer: Colonialism.

Hints/Clues: This will require brief research (or critical thinking) on the part of the students, so there are no direct clues. However, it can also form a basis for discussing multilingualism in Sub-Saharan Africa, and why many of the countries do not have a unified national language.

6. Madoka observes that 'more children in Uganda are interested in politics or law' than in Japan? Why do you think this is/she feels that way?

Answer: Answers will vary.

Hints/Clues: Answers will vary, and points should be given for well-reasoned responses. Possibly answers might include that Madoka's schoolmates were simply less interested in these professions, which has given her a bias. Another potential is that the standard of living is generally high in Japan, which does not pressure students into wanting to make societal change through such professions.