Uganda – Day 2 – Shoebill Stork

It was a very late night once we landed in Entebbe, met the rest of the group, and got to our first destination…Papyrus Guest House. Since our cell phones didn't reset (not sure why) we ended up staying on Amsterdam time and almost missed breakfast. Fortunately, our friends came looking for us while there was still time to eat. Of course, we packed plenty of "bars" just in case we needed extra supplemental food / energy.

Rain greeted us this first day, so our venture into the swamp was delayed until the afternoon. Once the rain stopped (around 10am) we ventured out to soak in some local culture in the form of open markets. If the forecast was for rain all day, I'm not sure what we would have done since the markets are closed whenever it rains. As it was, however, we were able to peruse a few different areas and admire some beautiful creations of art. (No, we didn't bring anything home to sell in the gallery – we are still committed to carrying only North American products).

We returned by to Papyrus Guest House to freshen up and get a hot meal for lunch. This is where I had my best meal of the trip. I opted for the steak and, although I'm not sure exactly what animal it came from, it was excellent. As with most meals, we had a choice of potatoes, rice, curried veggies, etc.

The plan was to catch the afternoon ferry out to the swamp to begin the hunt. Unfortunately, when we got to the dock there were already so many cars, trucks and people in front of us that we had to go to plan B (or was this plan C since we didn't get out in the morning?) We boarded 2 small wooden boats (center picture) – well, we thought they were small until we got out to the swamp and were transferred into 5 smaller boats (right picture)! We didn't all move quickly enough, so one of our friends ended up in another boat.


Market





We saw an abundance of birds and beautiful flowers and foliage while we searched for the elusive Shoebill. After we spotted it, it immediately flew off. I'm not even sure whether everyone saw it – we did, but we weren't able to get any good pictures at this point.



The crew manning the boats was determined that we were ALL going to see it and get some decent pictures, so they continued deeper into the swamp. We finally reached a point where the grass was so thick that the guys had to start using poles to push the boats through the water and decided to consolidate us into 3 boats. Ours stayed in the middle with only the three of us. Then they got out of the boats and started pushing, pulling, poling the boats. They were working very hard and we got to a point that most of us were telling them it wasn't worth it. I think we were all thinking about what could be in the swamp…crocodiles, snakes, who knows what else – but they were not concerned and just kept trudging along. Finally, we saw where she was hiding and we all got a chance to see her through our binoculars, camera lenses, iPhones and iPads. When we saw enough, one of the guys walked around the one side to scare it off, as I perched on the edge of the boat determined to video its take-off.

It was a long way back out of the swamp, but with a satisfaction and gratitude for the hard work of these Ugandan men that none of us will soon forget.