

Korean Students Learn About Nature Thru Africa Savanna

By Hong Sun-hee
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TRANSVAAL, South Africa — All their senses have become awakened to bushveld, to every sound, smell and sight. Their hearts, pounded and breaths were withheld while the dusty winds dried up their lips and night's cold air made their skin shiver under the blankets.

Finally, the Korean youths spotted a big lion roaring meters away from the open jeep. They had been riding for hours for this exciting once-in-a-lifetime moment.

Through this experience on the savanna they realized that men are intruders and wildlives, keepers in the nature.

It was the highlight of their sponsored trip to the Lapalala Wilderness School, sure enough to leave a lasting imprint on young people about the need to care for the environment — for in the end it ultimately has to do with human survival.

The Cathay Pacific Korea provided round-the-trip air tickets and Samsung Electronics footed the bill during their weeklong stay in South Africa.

During July 16-20, the Koreans mingled with 20 South Africans, five Hong Kong and four Taiwanese students.

Programs varied every day from hiking, water study, "solitaire and time capture," to discussions and safari trips.

Through a first day's full-day trail on the prairie where herds of animal dung spread, participants learned about the organic role plants and animals play in nature as well as acquiring precious information on how to take advantage of organisms without violating the natural environment.

what Hanneke van der Merwe, field instructor, defines as "a supermarket of living things."

Not to hear but to "listen to" and not to see but to "look at" are what the students must keep in mind during the course at Lapalala, said Merwe.

Shin Su-jong, freshman of Seoul National University department of international politics, said, "The green fruit of a tree produced white juice in my mouth and then it turned into gum. That's the wonder of nature!"

They walked and paused to trace "sophi" (meaning "footprint" in Afrikaans language) of animals and to

hear typical African robins singing and saw with their own eyes that plant leaves are thick in dry habitat.

They became able to identify impala from kudu, black rhino from white rhino (the word deviated from "wide" and understand the symbiosis between zebra and wildebeest).

The 44-year-old teacher who prefers to be called by her first name Hanneke is completely different from a textbook lecturer, a kind too many in Korea.

As implied in one participant's question, "Are you telling us or asking us?" she always set forth questions, let students think and help them draw answers themselves.

With dried excretion she broke down with hands, students traced what the animal ate, how it digested the food, what the animal was and why the animal left remnants open in the nature and so on. "You can learn so much from dung," Hanneke says.

In a water study session the next day, they went down to the brooks, dipped out flowing water and stagnant water, collected organisms from the water, which are identified with the help of an information sheet and completed a record sheet. An environmental problem was sketched and the groups determined what the effects thereof were on the ecosystem that they had just studied.

The ensuing session was devoted to a long discussion on ways in which they were not using various natural resources wisely in their home and school environments.

The youths slept one night in the bush under the program dubbed "Solitaire and Time Capsule." They were brought to a beautiful location in nature and placed away from each other. No communication was allowed to take place. It was intended to give each for them to be given an opportunity to be alone with nature.

However, the winter night with mercuries around 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) in the Southern Hemisphere was too cold for participants to devote themselves to meditation. Students who got there from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea at the height of summer in their home countries were not used to the cold.

Kim Yong-gyun of the Seoul Institute of Art said, "I was trapped inside a refrigerator in dreams while I slept on the ground in the thin sleeping bag which was made for camping in summertime."

Park Hee-jin of Ewha Womans University said she wanted to die when she got up from sleep at 2 a.m.

The outdoor education is increasing in popularity not only because of motivation from youngsters to study biology and botany, but also because of the underlying advantages that outdoor education offers leadership, discipline, a sense of responsibility and adventure.



Participants listen to Hanneke van der Merwe, far left, field director of the Lapalala Wilderness School, prior to their departure on an all-day hike in the bush to observe wildlife. The teacher told them not to "see" but to "look at" and not to "hear" but to "listen to."



South African youths re-enact a traditional nuptial ceremony during the "Night of International Culture." The Lapalala Wilderness School helps white and black youths from South Africa better understand their black countryman as well as promoting friendship between Africans and Asians.

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Another Korean student confessed in a meeting to review the trip back in Seoul, that she stopped pressing the

"close" button in her apartment elevator because that simple action would ultimately result in an environmental hazard.

The school is situated in the Lapalala

Wilderness area, a 24,400 hectare privately-owned sanctuary of nature, at Waterberg Mountains in the northwestern Transvaal, 310 kilometers from Johannesburg.



Shin Yong-sok from Korea caresses Mothlo, a hippo protected by the Wilderness Trust of Southern Africa while other students look on. The hippo was found ailing in the bush in April, last year.

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