

Welcoming to Ghana

Volume 1

22/23 Winter Travel Team

December 28th - 31st



The team exploring historical sites in Accra, Ghana.

Issue 1 Updates

- Flying into Accra
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Issue 1 Writers

- Soren Wagstrom
 - Becca Cheney
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Welcome to Accra

Soren Wagstrom
12-28-2022

Hey all! This is Soren Wagstrom, and I am currently on the Winter 2022 EWB-ISU travel team in Ghana. I am starting off this series of newsletters by writing about our first two days of travel. For some background information, there are eight students on this trip, as well as Dr. Maier, our faculty advisor. Our members are distributed throughout the clinic, rainwater catchment, and shea nut project teams. While here, each of us has a series of action items that we hope to achieve, and we will be providing updates on these items, in addition to discussing our various experiences in a culture that is new to all of us.

This is day one of our trip. Five of us flew from Des Moines to Chicago at 6:30 am, and the rest of the team met the Des Moines travelers in Chicago for our flight to Washington DC. The Des Moines to Chicago flight was challenging, as we ran into some last-minute issues with the requirements to check in for an international flight. Once we all got to Chicago, we all had a brief layover before boarding our flight to DC, during which there was not enough time to do much.

Our flight to DC lasted around 2 hours and was the first flight that offered in-flight movies, so I chose to watch Elf. The movie did not start from the beginning, and I was not able to finish it in time, but it seemed like a fun movie. Once this flight finished, we had a 6-hour layover before our flight to Accra, Ghana. We spent this time chatting, walking around the airport, and making bracelets. Our flight departed the United States at 7 pm local time and arrived in Ghana at 4 am local time (10 am Ghana time). This flight had a wider selection of on-demand movies and shows, so I chose to watch House of the Dragon, which ended up making me tired. Eventually, we were served our in-flight dinner, which made some of us sick.



This map of Ghana shows Accra in the South where the team is flying into. Uilo is just North of Wa in the upper-west region. They will be flying from Accra to Wa in-country to avoid a 20-hour drive.



The image above shows the team at an Accra airport.

Soren Wagstrom

12-29-2022

This is the second day of our trip, and we are all very tired. Nonetheless, our day was packed. Once we got off the plane in Accra, we spent hours going through customs lines and baggage claim, where we found that one of our duffel bags had gotten torn during the flight and needed to be repaired. Upon leaving the airport, we met up with our hired driver, who brought us to a bank to exchange US Dollars for Ghanaian Cedis. The exchange rate is roughly 1:10, and comparable items tend to be much cheaper in Ghana than in the US. Once we exchanged our currency, we drove to a local grocery store, where we all bought bottled water and some other items, before heading to our guest house where we stayed the night. Once we got settled in our temporary home, we left again and drove to Black Star Square, an important historical monument that was constructed to celebrate Ghanaian independence from the British. Our next stop was one of the local markets, which was by far the most exciting part of the day.

These markets are made up of lots of independent vendors, each of whom is very interested in getting business from nearby people. While in this space, there are constantly people calling you to come to check out your store, with varying degrees of persistence. It is a very interesting experience, and there are many cool items for sale, but we did not purchase much today. We will be returning again toward the end of the trip. After we left the market, we got food at a fried chicken restaurant, similar to Popeyes or KFC. As I mentioned earlier, things are often much cheaper in Ghana than in the US, as my 2-piece fried chicken with a large side of fries cost 43 cedis (~\$4.30). Many of us were still feeling sick due to the in-flight dinner from the night before, so we took it easy on our stomachs and ate slowly. After we finished dinner, we returned to the guest house and spend the rest of the night playing UNO. Tomorrow, we fly to Wa and make the van trip to Ullo.

The image to the right shows Sarah and Soren with Agape in Ullo. Agape has always helped travelers with projects and learning about the land in Ullo.



Becca Cheney

12-30-2022

Today was our first morning waking up in Ghana. I woke up at 5:45 am, packed my bags, and we all left our guest house at 7:15 am to drive to the Accra airport for our flight to Wa. We all got through security at the airport with no issues this time and then waited for our flight at 9:50 am. While waiting, some of us walked around to look for food. There were a few places around, but we settled on a spot with coffee and meat pies, which were tasty. Once it was time to board, we ended up leaving the building entirely and walking a distance outside to our plane, which was an old propeller plane. Some of us found this a little concerning, but we made it to Wa safely. After collecting our bags, we went outside and immediately noted how drier the northwestern region of Ghana is than the southern region.

Our van to Ullo was an old, yellow vehicle that was rusty everywhere and the back door did not properly close. There was very little room in the back of the van for our luggage, so much of it had to be strapped to the top of the vehicle. Fortunately, nothing fell off while we were driving.

During the drive, we encountered three police blockades with varying degrees of reluctance to let us pass. Apparently, we are supposed to have some kind of escort with us to help with these situations, but we did not this time. After a while, we did meet up with a member of the police department in Wa, who gave us an escort the rest of the way. The roads started off fairly well-paved but turned into gravel. We ended up taking a back road to get to Ullo, which was narrower and bumpier.

Upon arrival in Ullo, we drove straight to Ina and Brandon's house, who are hosting us for this trip. Their house is significantly larger and more recently built than most of what you will see in Ullo, so it definitely stands out. Most of us are staying in the apartment building that they built behind their house, which is currently still under construction.



The image (right) shows Sarah and Tiaunna being carried around in Ullo.

After we all got moved in, we took a tour of the nearby community, including the senior high school. Our dinner for that night was yam chips (similar to french fries, but made of yams) and fried chicken, which was tasty. After dinner, we drove to the Chief's house for an official community welcome, complete with speeches and dancing. After I returned to the house, I spent much of the remaining evening doing preparation work for my action items during this trip.

Isaac Bradford

12-31-2022

Ah-mee-nah everyone! (Good afternoon to everyone should you be reading this then!). Today was our first full day in Ullo. We had a long day. Started off with a great breakfast of fried sweet dough and homemade bread, with jelly, sugar, or peanut butter (for a comfortable flavor) by Ina and her bakers. Served with tea or coffee. This a very welcome greeting from a night of the loudest and most rhythmically challenged cricket I have ever heard. Eventually, he stopped and a bird clocked in.

But to be very honest it has all been a great adventure and many eye-opening experiences. From drinking water from a bag, making sure you wave with your right hand, or hearing gasps of surprise when you stand up and are asked if you are John Cena (I am an over 6-foot tall white man). The first similarity I saw between rural Ghana and the US was that it looks very similar to Western Kansas. I spent lots of time as a kid and young adult at a church camp in the area where my aunt lives and it has red sand, hard breezes, dry brush, mosquitoes, and hot, sunny days. I feel pretty comfortable and happy with the environment. I am still tired after walking miles and being in meetings, but still enjoying it.

Today we started off by touring the Clinic area where we met Chief Hassan and discussed Clinic Sanitation briefly. Then we visited the EWB Borehole and saw the culmination of years of progress. While at the Clinic site I tried to determine where West was based on the sun thought it was one direction and it was not the direction. [Journal 1; Sun rises differently in Ghana? Must investigate further].

We also met Immaculate, a jack-of-all-trades, an amazing woman, and a great community member. She also taught us some Dagaari (the greeting above). From there we had Joloff Rice and chicken for lunch, delicious!

After lunch, we went to the Ullo 2022 Homecoming Meeting. There were government officials, the school headmaster, community leaders, our very own Prof Maier, and our Presidents Sarah and Soren! Proceedings were done in English and Dagaari. And at the end of the EWB ISU section, we all introduced ourselves. After Paul (the emcee and a school teacher at the Senior High) introduced me as his big friend, I talked to the crowd starting with the same greeting of ah-mee-nah. Everyone laughed because I spoke to them in Dagaari. [Achievement: Get people to laugh in another language]. After we all finished introducing ourselves there were some more speakers, importantly, the Headmaster of Ullo Senior High School who accredited part of the Senior High's 98% passing rate success to EWB ISU and KNUST. Specifically to Rainwater Catchment and Irrigation for the food for students and to the Borehole for clean water for the students.

We came back to the house and had a great dinner of chicken, rice, and curry beans. Afterward, we gave our gifts to Ina, Brandon, and the family. We made sure their son got the Iowa State Shirt he wanted and told us he wanted it multiple times. He is a great kid and always wants to learn and know why. Mom, I understand a little more what it was like for you. After gifts, Chief Hassan made a surprise visit to see Ina and Brandon's house. Then we celebrated New Year's Eve with games and good company. Hopefully, Ullo does not kick us out or give Ina and Brandon noise complaints. If the year ended this well, I can not wait to see what the new year brings! Bar-kaa (thank you) to my EWB family and the Ullo community for this experience!



The image (above) shows the team at a welcoming event in front of the Chief's Palace.