



Field Studies on Improving a Gynaecological Tool in South Africa

Before arrival

My project partner and I got in touch with a professor at the University of Cape Town GSB, Mikael Samuelsson. He introduced us to a project that continued the work of one of his previous MBA students. This project fit well with our master thesis, where we are developing a gynecological tool for women in South Africa. We applied for funding through KTH Field Studies to help cover some of the travel costs and make our field studies possible. It felt important for us to go to South Africa and try to improve women's healthcare there by designing a product suited to local needs. Since I had never been to South Africa before, I didn't have many expectations, but I was curious to learn more about their culture. We didn't need to take any language courses because most people in South Africa speak English. We also didn't need any extra vaccinations since we had already taken the necessary ones. For our eight-week stay, we didn't need a visa as it was within the visa-free limit. Before traveling, we made sure to discuss where we would stay, as we had heard that some areas could be unsafe. We talked about this with our two local contacts to find a safe and practical place to live.

Upon arrival

We arrived a few days before starting our project to get settled. Shortly after our arrival, we had a meeting with both of our local contacts to introduce ourselves and discuss the project. As a thank-you for their support and for welcoming us, we brought small gifts from Sweden. During this first meeting, we also talked about how we would work moving forward. I would say we officially started the project about half a week after arriving. The MBA student who had worked on the previous research was close to us in age, and we spent a lot of time with her both during and outside of the project. We became good friends over the course of our stay.

Financials

In general, I would say that South Africa is cheaper than Sweden, mainly because of the exchange rate, which makes things more affordable for us. Eating out is quite inexpensive, and it's easy to do so because it's convenient. To save money, we tried to find a good balance between eating out and cooking at home. We often had breakfast in our apartment and bought food containers so we could bring lunch with us when we were at the university.

Accommodation

We stayed in two different apartments, both to experience living in different areas and to spread the risk in case one of the accommodations didn't meet expectations. When we found places to stay, we made sure to double-check with our contact person to ensure that the area and the accommodation in general were safe and acceptable. Accommodation was generally one of the more expensive costs, mainly because we arrived when there were still many tourists and because South Africa faces a housing shortage. However, we managed to find good places that were a bit simpler than what we were used to at home, but nothing uncomfortable. We ended up staying in a smaller place and sharing a bedroom, but of course, this depends on personal preferences and budget. There are various options in terms of standards, so it's useful to consider what suits one's needs and what can be afforded.

Project

As mentioned, the field studies are part of our master's thesis. After spending eight weeks in South Africa, we have continued working on the project back in Sweden. Our main focus during the field studies was conducting interviews. We visited hospitals and clinics, scheduled meetings, and spoke

with healthcare professionals to gather insights for our project. On days when we didn't have interviews or visits planned, we worked on literature studies to deepen our understanding of the field. We received support from the MBA student, both through her local contacts and during the interviews.

Country

I absolutely loved South Africa and felt very comfortable there. People were extremely friendly and always happy to chat. However, safety can be a concern, but we never experienced any issues. As long as you use common sense (avoid walking alone at night, flashing your phone, or talking to strangers on the street etc.) there are no major problems. We were a bit more cautious than we would be at home in Sweden. I didn't experience any major culture shock. When we arrived in early January, there were still some tourists around, and many people were still on holiday. We quickly realized that the most effective way to schedule interviews was to visit clinics in person rather than calling or emailing.

Leisure and social activities

We tried to make the most of our free time and explored a lot. We spent time at the beach, watched the sunset while eating pizza, and even tried paragliding. We did a lot of hiking, both up Table Mountain and Lion's Head (the sunset from Lion's Head was absolutely magical). We also took weekend trips and explored different parts of South Africa. One weekend, we stayed at the MBA student's beach house. Another time, we rented a car and went on a road trip along the coast where I even did a bungee jump! Along the way, we hiked in Tsitsikamma National Park and went on a safari. We also visited several wineries for wine tastings and went to a rugby match to experience the local sports culture. There was always something to do, and we rarely had a quiet moment in Cape Town. For exercise, we got a gym membership near our apartment, but many people also ran along the beach promenade, where there was an outdoor gym that I used occasionally. It was easy to meet people and make new friends. For example we met some students at the rugby match and hung out with them afterward. I also chatted with people at the beach and in bars. As long as you're open-minded, it's not hard to connect with people, South Africans are very social and approachable.

Sustainability

When traveling to South Africa, our original flight was canceled, and the airline wanted to reroute us with two stopovers in Europe. We didn't feel that this was the most efficient option, both in terms of time and sustainability, so we requested a rebooking with only one stop. From the start, we had prioritized choosing a flight with only one connection to minimize unnecessary travel emissions. Once in South Africa, using public transport was challenging and, most importantly, unsafe. Our contact person strongly advised against it and recommended using Uber for longer distances and especially at night. However, whenever possible, we chose to walk instead. When traveling with others, we carpooled and often added an extra stop to our Uber rides to reduce the number of trips. Our project is closely linked to UN Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. The aim is to create a more comfortable and accessible experience for women undergoing Pap smears. By improving the procedure, we hope to encourage more women to get tested, leading to earlier detection of cervical cancer and, ultimately, better health outcomes.

Other recommendations and observations

In South Africa, there is something called load shedding, which refers to planned power outages. You can use an app called ESP to check when power cuts are scheduled for different areas. It's a good idea to bring a power bank and a battery-powered lamp in case of outages during your stay. Additionally, if you plan to hike up to Lion's Head to watch the sunset, it's helpful to have a lamp with you, as you'll need it for the way down once it gets dark.