



Rwanda Sample Itinerary

Photos and narrative from February 2014 Rwanda trip

“I felt like I went to a family reunion and met our long lost brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and grandchildren in Rwanda. I loved sharing life with them, laughing with them, dancing with them, crying with them, cheering them on. One boy stopped me, looked me in the eye and said in plain English, “This has been the best day of my life.””

-Rwanda trip participant

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” *-Jeremiah 29:11*



Day 1: Arrive in Kigali and drive three hours to Butare



We made it to Rwanda! We arrived at the Kigali airport and were picked up by the ZOE staff. We then had a three hour drive to Butare, where ZOE Rwanda is located. We checked in at the Mater Bonii Consilii Hotel and had the rest of the day to unpack, relax, and just get to know one another. The trip leader led us in our first devotional that evening to prepare our hearts and minds for the days to come.

Day 2: Visit group project and meet several graduates



On Day two, our first stop was a banana plantation group project. We arrived as the group was digging drainage ditches to drain water from the previous night's heavy rains. The plantation is farmed by two working groups who are entering their third year in the program. We were able to meet Jean, the president of the group, who shared his story. Jean and his three siblings used to live in isolation, begging for food and unable to attend school. Now they are respected by the community, eat regularly, and Jean's siblings are in school. From ZOE he received a goat, a small grant, school fees, and inputs for farming. He has been able to buy more goats, and sells bananas, chickens, rabbits, and tomatoes.

After visiting several other graduates, we met Solange at her home. Her first project was selling bananas since she needed quick income for food, but her real ambition was to become a tailor. From her income, she was able to buy her own sewing machine, get vocational training, and start her own business. She now owns land and her own house. She also has three goats, a pig, and a substantial grain harvest. We were so inspired by the stories we heard today.



Day 3: Maize harvest, visit with 2nd year group, and participate in anti-AIDS club



Our day began at the group's maize plantation. The pastor of the Hope Companion church shared that the church had been praying for them and the church's children were raising funds. We then worked alongside the group to help pick corn and cut down the corn stalks.

Afterward, we drove to visit several children, including Elina, 18. When her parents died, Elina and her two siblings inherited a piece of land. ZOE gave Elina inputs for her land and training so that she now has enough to eat with some left over to sell. She said she is no longer an orphan because she has people who care about her.

We proceeded to the group meeting where we were greeted with singing and dancing. The children quickly pulled us all into the dance, and afterward, the meeting opened in prayer. The children then followed the tradition of sharing part of their first harvest with their parents by giving it to their Hope Companions. The Hope Companions presented the children with a beautiful poster with pictures of their church, congregation, and surrounding area. They also left five photo albums to show the children who was supporting them. It was a wonderful relationship building moment for the children.



Day 4: Sunday service, explore the town, and relaxation



We worshipped at the Zion Temple. Although the service was over three hours in length, the time went quickly with joyous singing and two sermons. We returned to the hotel for lunch and had the afternoon free. Most of the group walked into town to shop and visit the large Cathedral. It was a day of worship, exercise, relaxation, and reflection.

Day 5: Visit ZOE children at market and group meeting



At the market, we heard short introductions from the ZOE children selling produce. We had the opportunity to interact one-on-one with the children and buy their produce, if desired. One story we heard was about Jean Baptiste, who supports his two young siblings. He grows and sells maize so that he can buy food and afford to send them to school. He now has hope for his family and dreams for a bigger future.

We then traveled to the sector offices for a group meeting of approximately 100 children. Luis, the vice president, led the meeting and shared Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 1:7 and asked us to share those verses with our churches. He then talked about the trainings they have received. The group had 14 homeless households that ZOE helped find shelter. They now eat two meals a day and those who dropped out of school have now returned to their classes with the income they have earned. The children proudly held up their bank books to show they all now have bank accounts. At the end of the meeting, the children performed a drama to tell the story of their life before ZOE. The Sector Secretary then spoke to the group thanking ZOE for its work in the community. He said that for these children to have businesses at such a young age will make them great leaders as they grow older.

Day six was a day of exploring the culture of Rwanda. We checked out of the hotel and went to the National Museum in Butare. There we toured the exhibits of the history of Rwanda, and learned about its economy, dress, housing, and customs. The visit concluded with a performance of traditional Rwandan dances. After lunch at the Ibis Hotel, we made the drive back to Kigali for our final night in Rwanda. We settled in and looked forward to meeting the first year working groups.

Day 6: Visit the National Museum in Butare



Day 7: Meet with first year working groups

We arrived at the sector offices to find approximately 60 children working on their dream. It was the third meeting for these two groups. The drawings are both healing and helpful to get the children to think about the future after spending their life just worrying about getting through the day.



A young man shared his dream with the group:

What he doesn't like: violence, child abuse

What makes him sad: Parents were shot in the genocide (he was 2 mos. old)

What he likes: food, church, TV, Fanta, radio music

Dream for the future: to own a cow, chickens, a home, and to be a driver

Several other dreams were shared before the Hope Companions had the opportunity to speak. One church representative told the group it was a special day for their church, that they were proud of them, and knew they would be successful. Another Hope Companion then addressed his group and explained that his wife could not be there because she was caring for their three young boys. He shared, "My wife and I love you."

It was a difficult day hearing the testimonies of children who are just starting the program, are suffering, and have not yet experienced the transformation that we saw in the other groups who were further into the program. We know the children will succeed, but it was still difficult to observe their circumstances and not be able to change them immediately. We ended the day saddened, but with hearts full of hope.

Day 8: Kigali Genocide Memorial and Departure



After several hours at the Genocide Memorial, we caught our flight home from the "Land of a Thousand Hills" and the beautiful countryside. We will never forget the strength, determination, and motivation of these orphans in the face of great trauma, fear, and uncertainty. We will never be the same after witnessing God's transforming love and power in new ways.