

Wli Water Falls - Volta Region of Ghana

At four o'clock in the am I showered and threw on white khakis and the golden Markus Garvey Tee Shirt I bought from the Black Star Line Cooperative Credit Union (BSLCCU). As I stepped out into Ghana's fresh and warm morning air, I went from one house to another in the little village of Ye Fa Ogyamu, confirming and re-assuring the arrival of our transportation. My friends in the neighborhood and I were waiting for our six am TroTro (Van) that I thought we had "chartered", exclusively. It was to take us on the four hour trek up to Ghana's tallest mountain, mount Afadzato, to Wli Water Falls. We were to spend the night because of the length of the trip. The TroTro would return and pick us the next day. So I had gone online, found and booked up the Wli Water Heights Hotel. The ad had said that you could see the falls in the distance from the hotel's veranda. I thought it sounded like a good pick.

The six o'clock TroTro became the seven o'clock TroTro. For whatever reason, in Ghana, you must adjust everything by at least one hour. We were told, after calling them to inquire, that the TroTro originally scheduled had mechanical problems so another one would have to be sent out to us.

The Driver and his Mate (the door man) arrived with a TroTro that looked like it wouldn't make it out the gate, less known up a mountain. Since I could see that I was the only fearful one, I sat back, prayed and tried to get comfortable. As it was, the seven of us, including a 92 year young man, were on our way. Our crew were all smiles and bustling with energy. If you have ever commuted in a van in New York, then you know the scene with the Mate who opens and closes the side door and collects the fare. Well it's the same scenario with more discomfort.

Anyway, we were off on to the hot, dusty, and dry Harmattan seasoned roads. The dust was flying up and into our faces before we exited the gate. There went the white in my pants. Already, I was thinking, "I should have worn something different".

As we rode through the large towns like Juapong, and Ho, most of the ride was on paved roads. We didn't hit the, as I call 'em, road holes (extensive pot holes), until we got close to Hohoe (Ho-hoy-ay). The ride then became roller coaster like. Our bodies waved from side to side, as the driver navigated these never ending, unavoidable holes, spread out all across the road. I sat there thanking the creator that I'd only eaten a piece of dry "brown bread". If I had had anything else, everyone would have seen my breakfast.

When we got into the town called Ho, the driver's mate started to solicit riders to join us. I was under the impression that we had completely chartered the TroTro. I was later told that it would have cost us more to have it completely to ourselves. So as we rode into the desolate mountain area, there were a few people who needed rides on the way up. We picked up a few nice and some strange people. One brother had one of those puffy goose down coats. A lot of second hand clothes are sent to Ghana and even though it's hot there year round, they receive coats and boots too. Some people obviously dress indiscriminately. Did I mention that it was the hot and dry season. It was already about 85 degrees and it wasn't ten o'clock yet. Air conditioning was your open window, so by now, I was not only dirty but sweaty too. Looking at the goose down didn't help my already nauseous feeling.

The Mate began having problems opening and closing the side door. At one point, it took about five minutes to open. I started getting claustrophobic. I thought, "Oh, now we are also locked in this hot box."

As we rode further up and along the way, I wished for a bumpy paved road, as the road became completely dirt and it still had the huge road holes. So now we are doing the wave from side to side with dust flying all throughout the Trotro. With this new dirt flying up in my hair, I gave up and embraced my griminess by telling myself, "This is Africa and I love it".

We turned off that dirt road onto a never ending, narrower looking one. I couldn't take it anymore, but only to myself, I asked, "Where in the hell are they taking us?" All we saw was one or two people standing on the weedy roadside hitching a ride to, what looked like, the end of the world. I turned around to a couple of my friends sitting behind me and asked, "Are we going to let the leave us up here?" They laughed really hard at me. I guess they thought I was joking.

Times like these make me talk to myself. So I asked, "What did I get myself into? Girl, this is a long way from the airport." Although most of us were Africans born in America, I was the only one who wasn't presently living in Ghana and the only one feeling uptight. Even with these roads, just about everyone cat napped except me. So in trying to be cool, I kept those thoughts to myself. And I was cool until we got into the little town called Hohoe and they filled the Trotro to ultra-capacity. They practically sat on us. Because we were the only real vehicle going toward Wli Falls, our new passengers looked at our van like it was a gift from the Creator. We were definitely far out for sure!

We did see some huge motor cycles carrying three people at a time. It seemed they all had eighty-year old ladies riding in the middle and a young person riding shot gun. I couldn't keep quiet any longer, "Is this their only mode of transportation?" Everyone laughed, including the driver and his mate. I guess that meant "yes." I'd never seen motor cycles that big before! I figured Ghana is building the type of vehicles needed by them.

We passed many big motorcycles like that one along the way, with tons of dust flying directly into the faces of the drivers as they dodged road holes. I was actually shocked, amazed and sympathetic to their day to day lifestyles. I also admired their resourcefulness. A young lady dressed beautifully in Ghanaian garb was both happy and gracious we stopped for her. As she spoke, I thought of how much she resembled my daughters. Her mocha toned skin, strong jawline and perfect high cheekbones were what I'd always considered model. As she reached her stop, she paid the mate some pesewa (Ghanaian coins) and assured me Wli Falls wasn't much further and I would love it. Her kind words made me feel a lot better.

Finally we pulled into the little quaint, but cute town they call Wli Falls. Our hotel was in a flowery gated haven with beautiful, surreal looking flowers and plants decorating the perimeter. A lovely garden rested perfectly in the center of the perimeter. The staff of young men and women, literally came running out to greet us! Talk about excellent customer service! One young female from the staff ran up and hugged our Ghanaian friend, turns out they had gone to school together. She was expecting us. I felt much better now that there was some form of familiarity.

Our rooms were all ground level, right off the veranda. We had a fantastic view of the gorgeous flowered garden. I was really feeling this now and the misery of our four-hour journey began to disappear. When the driver asked what time should he come back in the morning, someone said nine, I yelled out eleven. Everyone laughed. I was comfortable now.

I felt renewed with energy, I was ready to go and explore the beauty of my mother's land. But, we were all famished as my breakfast consisting only of one piece of brown bread, which was a distant memory and I don't think anyone else had eaten at all. So their cute little indoor/outdoor restaurant was just what the doctor ordered. They checked us into our rooms as we ordered lunch. Of course we dined outside. Whoever said we could see the waterfalls from our hotel was telling a much welcomed truth; we could literally see the falls on the side of the mountain. It was very attractive and simply beautiful. I was really smiling hard now and thinking, "let's go for it, no time to change", especially since it was already twelve thirty.

The Ghanaian food was delicious. Now, I was full and ready to go! We gathered our cameras and binoculars, put our sneakers on and headed up the road to the entrance of Wli Water Falls Park. The scene was buzzing with vendors selling beautiful arts and crafts; it was nice seeing so much talent gathered together in one area, especially when that area was in the motherland. After paying our entrance fees we were introduced to our tour guide who demanded we each buy at least one- 2 liter bottle of water. He said that anyone taking the 1 or 2 hour hike up the mountain "Would sweat like a pregnant fish and become dehydrated." How can a fish sweat in water? I thought to myself. We bought a beautiful African printed nap sack to carry some of our water in.

We walked for about 45 minutes to an hour crossing a little treacherous, wobbly, makeshift, log bridge. My mind said, "Yes, let's do it!" My body was shaking all over. As usual the rest of the group seemed pretty calm, so like the road holes and flying dust, I sucked it up. I had come too far, very little could stop me from seeing the Wli Falls up close and personal. We passed over a few well-constructed bridges made out of wooden planks as well; these were sturdy and comfortable for me to cross over. We were given the options of hiking to the top of the falls with our tour guide or going straight to the bottom of the falls. A brother and I decided we were going to the top; the rest of the group went to the bottom of the falls. Our tour guide gestured towards a selection of nature-made-walking sticks placed right at the base of the steps. He told us a walking stick was a must have as we each picked out one comfortable for our heights.

It was truly a hike. The extreme inclines had no rest landings at all. I was, "Sweating like a pregnant fish," within an half of hour of walking up this steep, narrow, path made of stones, rocks and tree roots. Now I knew what it took for a pregnant fish to sweat? I felt like someone had poured a bucket of water over my head. After another 15 minutes or so, just as I couldn't take it anymore, we reached a well-needed resting point with an amazing view of the waterfall straight in front of us. As we took pictures, the tour guide mentioned there was another water fall above this one that was even more beautiful. He said it was only another two hours up, "Yeah right," I thought, as I headed back down with them following. This waterfall was good enough for me, I wondered if anyone had ever seen the one on top.

The walking stick really came in handy as we walked down the steep inclines. I didn't realize we climbed that far. About an hour later, we met up with the rest of the group at the bottom of the falls. The view was spectacular!

Looking up, the first thing I saw was this huge opening in the mountain top with water falling like it was pouring from the sky. Below it was this great beautiful multi-colored rainbow, arched across the base of the falls. It was absolutely mesmerizing! I knew then, why people traveled so far back into what I



thought was "No man's land."

After being mesmerized by the waterfall, I noticed a white man bathing himself under the water cascading from the mountain top and a white woman- his wife, I'm guessing- sitting on the bench. Damn, I thought, the road never gets too dusty and steep for them does it? Even though I was in my mother's land, in the comfort of my own people, previously I'd felt I had traveled too far out of my league, my comfort zone. Now, here these people were enjoying the beauty of the falls as though they were the creators of it. This really made me think about how biased we/I can be against our own while other embrace and take what they want.

Flying about 150 feet above our heads, was about a thousand fruit bats. Some of the wide winged creatures flew in a circular motion, like directionless birds. Many others flew like a swarms of bees, the rest merely clung to the side of the mountain near the falling water. I was so excited. I didn't know what to do first. Should I roll up my use to be white pants, walk through the river, straight to the water fall and let the water run down my body to wash off, since I really did smell like a pregnant fish or should I take out my camera and get some good shots? I decided to take some pictures first, as though the scene was going to change. "Close your mouth." One of the brothers from our group warned me as I looked up to take pictures. I laughed and followed orders, thinking of the load that could drop.



I secretly envied one brother as he stripped down to his underwear as if we weren't all standing there and headed for the falls. "Why can't women strip like that without getting everybody all riled up?" I thought as I stood there hot, sweaty and stinky.

Leaving Wli Water Falls was great sorrow. If it wasn't for the fact we were looking forward to passing the vendors with their fine fabricated clothing, beautiful crafty wood carvings and other trinkets on the way out; it would have been a tearful exit, for me anyway. Although I'm good at masking my emotions, at that point, I didn't care if they knew I wanted to cry.

We planned to go out that night at one of the little clubs we'd seen while passing through the town, but when we got back none of our tired bodies mentioned it again. We ate a nice dinner while peeking at the moon, stars and the falls in the distance. It was a real "sky show."

The next morning as we waited for the TroTro, a couple of us went back to buy more souvenirs. Ironically I was hoping they wouldn't arrive as scheduled, but they were there waiting when we returned from souvenir shopping. Everyone taunted me for being late since I had really enforced the time of return.

My friends were planning for their return trip on the ride home, but I would soon be returning to the United States. I couldn't believe I was sitting there wishing I could take that long and crazy ride with them again. I'm coming back!