

I arrived about a week ago and have thus far received four comments on the weight I gained while in the states. One man pointed out using hand gestures and puffing of his cheeks that I have grown wide. A woman who is well-versed in the social graces of American women saw this and explained in Malagasy that it is not polite to point out that an American woman has gained weight. The next man to comment said I have grown stronger, which is a nice euphemism I suppose. My Malagasy counterpart (she doesn't like me referring to her as my "student") told me I look bigger and it means I am happy and healthy. In Maroantsetra I am sure that people will comment more on my appearance.

I am waiting in Tana for the permit to be approved. Claire arrived and we are happily staying in the Hilton in Tana. It is so very nice compared to other places here; they have a pool, a little weight room, free snacks from 6-8 pm...but the taxi drivers out front will not bargain because they see us come out of the Hilton. La Maison du Pyla is still very nice and I recommend it over the Hilton. At least the taxi drivers there are willing to bargain.

The Games of the Indian Ocean are coming here in August. The mascot is a border-line scary ravalala tree with a large, too-happy smile. There are billboards all over with the ravalala doing gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, biking, etc. I doubt the games will make it to Maroantsetra, so I will miss them. I desperately want a ravalala mascot t-shirt.

Air France misplaced one of my bags. It had all of my Tana clothing and field clothes, rechargeable batteries, my sleeping bag, and hundreds of clothes for the people who live near my field site. I had fits at two Air France offices. I even pulled up my pant legs to show the woman that I had no more socks and I was walking around in tennis shoes without socks. She didn't really seem too sympathetic especially since there are plenty of people around town without shoes. She was probably thinking I should be happy that I at least have shoes. I can apparently get money from AF to reimburse me for my temporary loss. If anyone sees my bag sitting around at the Minneapolis, Detroit, Paris, or Tana airports, please take it and send it to me here. It has my name written all over it. It is overweight and I don't understand how that monstrosity could have been misplaced. I have officially shifted my anger and disappointment from Air Mad to Air France. Note to Air France: Now you also need to fly me on business class to get back my love and support. And don't feed me poisson, either.

