

Introduction

On the invitation of my friend Collins Ugochukwu, my brother Martin and I spent one month – from December to January – in Nigeria. During this time we visited Port Harcourt, Abuja (Capital city), Calabar, Owerri and Enugu. During Christmas and New year's eve we were staying in Mbaise (Collins' hometown) – a big community of several villages.

There are three major tribes in Nigeria. The Ibos in the East, the Yorubas in the West and the Hausas in the North. There are also many minority tribes like the Efiks and Ibibios in the Calabar area, the Ikweres, in Port Harcourt, the Tivs etc. In 1991 Abuja became the capital of Nigeria. This town was founded because the former capital Lagos did not represent the whole country. Abuja is completely planned and is called the "Centre of Unity". Except Abuja, Port Harcourt and Calabar all the other towns we visited are situated in Ibo land.



Collins, our guide, knows his ways around and a lot of people too, so we got lots of experiences you may not get as a normal foreigner. By the way, I wouldn't forget to mention that he showed us only secured places.

Nigeria is not a country for tourists. Actually, a lot of Nigerians even don't know what sense it makes to visit a foreign country just to see the country. Some also don't know about the economical implications tourism can have. They would only go abroad for business or anything related. That was why many people we met regarded us as investors and started discussing business with us.

People

The Ibos are very happy people. When driving through the countryside as a white man the children would start calling you "Onyocha or Oyibo!" (white man) waving their hands and running towards your car. If you are a man with long hair (like my brother) you'll be a complete attraction. They like to laugh a lot. They have learnt to be happy with what they have got – the amount of sun does its bit.

If an Ibo wants to visit his or her friends or family relatives, he or she would just go to them without the need to make an appointment. It may happen that nobody is at home but in that case you can visit someone else in the neighbourhood. Because of that practice you can sometimes have a full house, and that doesn't matter at all. A Nigerian can't imagine not to know his neighbours at all. Everyone lives in a big community which is looking for a common ground on which to base. When an Ibo meets another Ibo from his hometown they are brothers even if they are not from the same parents. When an Ibo meets another Ibo not



from his hometown and out of Iboland, they are brothers too. When an Ibo meets another Nigerian or a Black in a foreign country he treats him like a brother also.

The Ibos are lovers of their traditions. They celebrate Christmas without a Christmas tree and Santa Claus. You may see some Christmas trees in shops but they are only for the rich. For the common man it is a useless stuff. During Christmas period most people go to their villages and celebrate it with their relatives and friends. It is the time to meet family and friends, time for wedding ceremonies (traditional & white), time for fund raising events, time for different ceremonies in the villages. For example in Mbaise Christmas lasts from 25th of December till 2nd January. Every day a different village of the community is hosting. A lot of people from neighbour villages come to the host village to meet their friends, to watch masquerades, to eat, drink and laugh a lot.

The Christian missionaries did a good job in Ibo land – you can see a lot of churches and most Ibos are Catholics. Unfortunately, I had the feeling that the importance of religion suppresses the humanistic enlightenment. Having no religion is unimaginable for many Ibos even for well-educated ones. That is why they may look at you in amazement or with a contemptuous smile when declaring you don't believe in God.

Because of the high integration into ones family, it is totally uncommon to bury their dead in a central grave yard. You have to bury your deceased next to your house. Otherwise people may think you expelled a family member.

Remarkable is also the importance of hierarchy in society. The hierarchy is determined by age and by affluence. The first born has more privileges than the next born in a family. The rich has privileges than the poor. A white man is supposed to be rich (per definition) and as a big man you may get served first in any occasion.

Women

Women are not equal to men, yet (typical African tradition). In all professions they are allowed to start a career but it is still expected that they take care of the household. You can imagine what that means in a traditional family size of seven children. At ceremonies female guests get served first, and then followed by the men. Anyway, for further economical development of Nigeria it will have to give them equal rights to get benefit of the full female potential.



Most importantly, men are exclusively proud of their women's beauty, and there is no doubt that they are beautiful. Most women are slim and well-trained. Carrying of heavy things like buckets of water give them a good posture. The big hats, they like to wear, are the abstraction of the African way to carry things on their heads.

Women take a lot of care about their outward appearance. They like to wear colourful clothes with big jewellery which is a wonderful contrast to their dark skin. I recognized that they don't like to shake hands as much as the Nigerian men do. Maybe it is because they know what men may have touched before... Anyway, if you want to shake a woman's hand she will shake your hand.

Men

Ibo men love keeping short hair or having bald head, because it is very fashionable to them. An Ibo man with long hair is suspected to be gay. But there it is no sign of male homosexuality, when holding another man's hand for a long time. Even if it looks like a gay couple it is just a sign of friendship in Nigeria.



When friends meet each other they exchange several handshakes which end up with finger snapping. It needs some practise to snap your finger by using a finger which is not your own. But when greeting someone of higher state than your own is, you should show him respect by using your two hands while shaking his hand – without finger snapping.

An Ibo man would be pleased to arrange a marriage for a white and one of his sisters.

Children

There are a lot of children in Nigeria. The population has been growing immensely during last decades. Of course parents want to offer their children a good education but good education is expensive. That is why the modern family size of 2-3 maybe 4 children is becoming more popular among some families.



Animals

In Nigeria, Elephants, Giraffes, Monkeys, Lions and so on can be seen in the Zoos or perhaps in the national parks only. Animals which you can see in natural environment are lizards - everywhere. Some lizards may measure up to 30cm by size. Except these, there are also a lot of chicken and goats moving around houses and in the streets.

Don't wonder about cockroaches which are as big as a door key. Also the spiders are bigger than the ones in Europe. Fortunately, the Nigerian monster spider is not dangerous. But be aware of snakes which can be found in the bush, though we did not see any during our visit.

In Nigeria you can see a lot of birds from Europe which stay there as long as it is cold in Europe. The types of seasons we have in Europe don't exist in Nigeria. It is a tropical country and the tropics have just two seasons – rainy and dry season. In the northern hemisphere, where Nigeria is situated, dry season is during winter time in Europe while rainy season is during summer time in Europe. When we got to Port Harcourt on the 2nd of December we experienced one rain shower but later it was getting more and more dusty from day to day.

Food

One traditional meal of the Ibos consists of a pasty ball (garri or pounded yam) and soup. But the Nigerian soup does not resemble European soup. What they call soup is more meat and vegetables than water, but a lot of pepper (pepperoni). Soup can be green or orange or of any other colour depending on its ingredients. It can contain beef, fish or snails. For eating, with your fingers you take a piece of the pasty ball of garri or pounded yam and make a smaller ball to dip into the soup. So far it doesn't sound difficult, but it is, take it from me. You need some practise to perform well. And you should not hesitate to lick your fingers while eating. Otherwise your fingers will be extremely sticky. After some trials I gave up eating with fingers and returned to using a fork.

Another meal is the traditional pepper soup. As the name already implies it includes a lot of pepper. It is made of goat meat, or cow tail and their intestines. The spicy water tastes well but I did not try the meaty parts.

When guests come to your house, they get offered kola nut which shows a sign of welcome and love to them. You should not refuse the kola nut. Before sharing the kola nut the host says a short prayer in Igbo. The kola nut just understands Igbo language only. Thereafter it goes around and everyone takes a piece, eat it or keep it in his pocket. Kola nut has a very bitter taste. The Ibos are saying that kola nut has a special meaning in every part of Nigeria. The Yorubas grow it, the Hausas eat it and the Ibos celebrate it.

Very tasty and fresh are fruits like pineapple, bananas, plantains or pawpaw. The pawpaw tree may be the fastest growing fruit tree in the world. After putting seeds into the ground you will enjoy the first harvest of fruits after less than 12 months. The pawpaw fruit is as big as a honey melon but with red pulp. Pawpaw has no characteristic taste like pineapple; it is just sweet and juicy.

My favourite meal in Nigeria was yam with sauce (stew). Yam is a big tuber which grows in the ground. It is prepared like potato and has a similar taste.



Surprisingly malt beer (called Malta or Maltina) is a very famous drink in Nigeria. It is quite expensive but it is produced by different brands and is very healthy. Also very famous is „Guinness Extra Stout“ which is – like kola nut – extremely bitter. Much more tasty are the local lager beers like „Star“ and „Gulder“ or „Harp“ by Guinness, which are offered in a 0.6l-bottle. Their taste is not worse than a good German beer. If you want to impress someone you can open your bottle without using an opener. You can use your water bottle, for instance, which should be by your side every time so that you can't get thirsty. The best is to drink only bottled water. And stay away from mayonnaise!

Money

The Nigerian currency is called Naira and means a lot to Ibos. It seems that for some people the Naira is even more important than God. They don't use electronic payment and always pay cash. Nigeria is a cash nation. That is why money permanently comes to the fore. The state doesn't collect many taxes and offers no assistance to its citizens at all. To care about your future lies in the hands of every individual. Whenever the individual needs help the family and friends will support – that is their traditional way, the government does not care.



At celebrations a lot of time is spent for donation. Unlike the Germans who donate secretly the Ibos donate in public. The highest donor would be called out so that he can be sure to get the gratitude and respect of the people.

During occasions like wedding ceremonies or other anniversaries it is tradition that the celebrants must dance. While they are dancing male guests come close and spray money on them. This tradition is one reason why even new banknotes become dirty very soon.

Buildings

Maybe in no other part of the world you will find as many uncompleted buildings as in Nigeria. I don't exaggerate when saying that almost one house in ten is uncompleted and does not seem to get completed in the near future. In some rooms you may be find some banana trees growing in them.

The traditional house is built of mud. It is cool inside even at high temperatures outside. Nowadays most buildings are brick houses or of concrete. Only in the villages you can find some traditional mud houses but there are not many of them any longer.

A European may be shocked by the mass of scruffy huts around the roads. I am not sure whether they are just used as sun protection for traders or used as flat for poor people. Anyway, after some days you will get used to that sight.



Rich people have a wall around their houses. These walls have spikes or barbed wire on the top – like barracks. For entering such a compound you go through a big gate. Anyone who can afford has a gate guard who opens the gate. These walls and spikes are for protection against thieves and strangers.

When entering a flat you stand in the living room directly. There you find a big couch, arm chairs and a TV-station. Next to this room are the dining room and the kitchen. This kind of apartment reminds me of the common US-American television apartments.

Traffic

Nigerian traffic is chaotic. The bigger and the faster cars try to overtake one another. There are a lot of motor bikes. If the motor bikes would be cars there would be traffic jams all the time. There are rarely traffic signs. Even if you see a traffic sign somewhere most people don't know its meaning. They do not obey traffic laws.

We saw a lot of cars used in Germany before they were imported into Nigeria. Some have broken front windows, faulty lights or seat belts – no problem as long as the horn is working. Without horn driving is very dangerous in Nigeria. You need the horn to call people's attention. "Horn before Overtaking" is written on some trucks.



If you can choose you should take a car with air conditioning. AC is not only comfortable for high temperatures but also because of smog and dust. Not every road has asphalt or the asphalt cover is broken. That is why cars cause a lot of dust around the roads during dry season. That is annoying and can cause a running nose. If you don't have the opportunity to use AC you should not become thirsty – drink a lot. When being thirsty the possibility of getting running nose is even higher.

When travelling into the cities, policemen can stop you at will. They may use a "natural" blockade or make their own by putting trees on the road to force you to slow down. They don't really do something important. They just look at you and some policemen delay you till he gets some money (20 Naira) from you. Because of their arbitrariness policemen have a very bad image in Nigeria. They carry heavy guns and that is why they get the necessary respect anyway.

For me as a middle European man it is impossible to drive in Nigeria. Not only because of the chaotic way of driving, but also because the policemen will take special care about you. Even if you don't drive they may charge you an extra fee (50 times the official fee) when the driver committed a little driving offence.

Language

The linking and official language in Nigeria is English. But the native language of the Ibos is called Igbo. Anyway, Igbo itself has so many different dialects. Some Ibos from different towns don't understand each other and instead they speak English or a mixture of both.

Of course they will be pleased to notice that you try to speak their native language. It is like that in every country. Igbo words are pronounced like Latin words, but it has a very special melody which can't be shown by letters.

Igbo	English	Deutsch
Ke du ahagi?	What is your name?	Wie ist dein Name?
Ibu onye?	Who are you?	Wer bist du?
Aham bu Chima.	My name is Chima.	Mein Name ist Chima.
Ke du Ebe isiri bia?	Where do you come from?	Woher kommst du?
Kedu ka imere?	How are you?	Wie geht's dir?
Adim nma.	I am fine.	Es geht mir gut.
Ego ole ika iwere?	How much do you want?	Wie viel willst du haben?
Anam ana echi.	I am going tomorrow.	Ich gehe morgen.
Anam ana taa.	I am going today.	Ich gehe heute.
Ahurum gi na anya.	I love you.	Ich liebe dich.
Onyeocha!	White man!	Heller Mensch!
Onyeoji	Black man	Dunkler Mensch
Oyibo	white human	Weißer Mensch
Nnoo	Welcome	Willkommen
Biko	Please	Bitte
Ndo	Sorry	Entschuldigung
Bia!	Come!	Komm!
Gaba!	Go!	Geh!
Nwoke	man	Mann
Nwanyi	woman	Frau
Nwa nwoke	boy	Junge
Nwa nwanyi	girl	Mädchen
Ofia	bush	Busch (Gelände)
Ulo	house	Haus
Ulo Uka	church	Kirche
Ulo akwukwo	school	Schule
Ulo ego	bank	Bankgebäude
Ego	money	Geld

Closing words

Every human being is confronted with a mass of prejudices during his/her lifetime. A prejudice is generated every time you adopt somebody's opinion without having your own experiences concerning that matter.

It is the human nature to seek affirmation of existing opinions. Experiences that go along with your opinion always become more evident than experiences that don't. This is how it is with prejudices too. If somebody tells you that Jon drinks a lot of coffee you will remember that opinion when seeing Jon drinking a cup of coffee. That will support your prejudice. In this example it may sound of minor importance, but prejudices become very critical when referring to a group of people. Human beings are individuals. An individual is unique even when being able to categorize somebody by special characteristics which he has in common with other people. An opinion about a group of people can never reflect the individuals – especially when it is a prejudice.

The ability to categorize experiences is a part of human nature. In the end that is something which makes us different from animals. Anyway, nobody is aware of stereotypes. But stereotyped thinking is very critical when it is taken from somebody else.

Of course, I know that the stories I am telling about Nigeria and Iboland respectively, will produce new prejudices. That is why it is important to me to enlighten this fact. My account here is not complete or objective, but it is based on my own experiences in Nigeria. Certainly I am not telling the whole story. Some experiences are just for my own or I think they are not important. That is why it is my personal view. Anyway, at this point I want to state some important facts:

Imagine your new neighbours are foreigners. It is a nice family but they shout all day. They are incredibly loud! Now you may think that people in the country where they come from are as loud as they are. But who is telling you that? It is a conclusion which is just based on the fact that they have a different nationality and that they are loud. Is it logical? It is not. Maybe their former neighbours in their home country did not like them, too because of their noise. Maybe that is why they moved. Who knows? It is so easy to explain their noise with their nationality, but it is rubbish. It is just a simple stereotype, a prejudice about the rest of the people in that country. Everyone runs the risk of stereotyped thinking. White people have a stereotype about black people and black people have a stereotype about white people. But there are loud or impolite or dirty or criminal people in every country.

Especially in foreign countries the social environment there is different from your social environment in your home country. When you are on working experience you have a lot of contacts with working people and not with students any longer. When you are a tourist you will be in tourist areas from which you may stay away in your hometown. In a theatre you will find different people from the people in a discotheque. All these facts will cause different experiences and opinions – different to what you already got. And if somebody reports his experiences it is just a part of what he knows and his knowledge is just a very little and biased part of the real world.

Try to look at people without prejudices and you may notice that they are not as different as you have expected...