

## **impossible2Possible, Botswana 2012, Academic Phase 1**

### **Trading Snickers for Seswaa: My Adventure to Botswana**

By Hope McCarty, i2P Youth Ambassador

Botswana is a long way from home. More than twenty hours aboard a plane and then many more miles by train and truck. When I finally arrive in late October, there won't be any Big Macs or apple pies to satisfy my cravings. No pizzas, potato chips or pancakes to remind me of home.

I will be outside my usual late-October food comfort zone of Twix and Snickers that usually come with the candy crazy Halloween season stateside.

Instead, I can expect to tantalize my taste buds with a variety of local favorites including the national dish of Botswana, seswaa. Seswaa is a traditional meal made of beef, goat or lamb meat. The fatty meat is generally boiled until tender in any pot, with "just enough salt", and shredded or pounded. It is often served with pap (porridge made from ground maize), also known as mellepap (Visit Botswana). To contrast the saltiness of the seswaa, many people in Southern Africa prefer the scrumptious vetkoek, which literally means "fat cake", for dessert. Vetkoek is a round doughnut made from flour, sugar, salt and yeast. The dough is rolled into a ball and then deep fried. It is commonly eaten with butter, syrup, honey, or jam (Our Africa).

For me, this chance to explore an unfamiliar culture means discovering why particular customs exist and the reasons for each tradition. I am especially interested in the local cuisine. Each item on the national menu was chosen, for one reason or another, because of its ease of access. A large quantity of high quality beef is raised in Botswana, and so it is a staple in many traditional dishes. Chicken, goat, sheep, fish, caterpillar, known as phane, and various wild game are also plentiful (Durham).

In America, where people leave little time to devote to meal preparation, we like meals quick, easy, and full of variety. In one shopping center you might have the choice between Chinese, Italian, Indian, and American food. And our industrialized economy has allowed us to have that via imports in fast food restaurants and in pre-packaged meals from the frozen food aisle.

In Botswana, the agricultural sector still remains fundamental as a source of food and income for nearly 50% of the total population (source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Botswana). Because a large portion of the food consumed is grown locally in Botswana, the reliance on water for irrigation and livestock is crucial. In a semi arid landscape with little surface water, high evaporation rates, and low rainfall, drought is a frequent occurrence (FAO, Botswana). In effect, many of the locally harvested vegetables and beans are dried and salted for preservation.

Not all that I indulge in will be foreign, however. Many familiar vegetables are grown in Botswana such as spinach, carrots, cabbage, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, sweet potatoes and lettuce. One of the most popular fruits in Botswana is watermelon, which is believed to have originated in the Kalahari Desert (Martin, Sasha, Global Table Adventure).

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As I look forward to this experience, I am excited by the thought of exploring a culture so different from mine. The customs and cuisine of Botswana and Southern Africa will reveal a whole new world for me and my taste buds. I can only hope that with the combination of running 30 miles a day and eating from a new menu, my stomach will stay settled amid my nerves.

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