

What can I expect on this trip??

A Mission Jamaica Journal

Saturday



Wow! I can't believe we are finally here! After almost a whole year of planning, talking and fundraising, I am in JAMAICA! It was hard getting up so early this morning, but once our plane took off at 6 am, I was wide awake! It was so hard to believe that I was on my way!

We landed at 2 this afternoon. It is so HOT here! And humid! After we went through immigration, got our luggage and cleared customs, we got picked up by Pastor Percy and Pastor Douglas to head to our hotel. Wow! Was that ride exciting...and scary. People drive like maniacs down here...and on the wrong side of the road. I think it will take me a while to get in on the "other side" of the bus!

This hotel is AWESOME! It is so big and open...it is absolutely beautiful! The staff is so friendly and our rooms are nice! I can't wait for tomorrow!

Sunday

Today we got up, had a wonderful buffet breakfast (with omelets made-to-order) and loaded the buses to head up to Copse. I can't even describe the kids. We got out of the buses at Westhaven Children's home. I've never seen such bright smiles and heard more wonderful laughing and cheering. They were so happy to see us! It's hard to put into words the emotions I felt as they gave us a tour of Westhaven and showed us all of the projects we will be working on this week. Those kids are amazing. Then we went and took a tour of the Place of Safety and saw the projects there. What a place! The boys there were a bit shy at first, but they started talking a bit. Then a few of them got to get changed into "church clothes" and come to worship at Faith Chapel with us.



Worship was awesome! It was a lot longer service than we have at Lord of Life. It lasted over 2 hours, but the time went by so fast. There was a lot of fabulous music and everyone participated in the service by singing and shouting and clapping! What an awesome experience! If anyone ever doubted the presence of the Holy Spirit, all they have to do is spend 5 minutes worshipping at Faith Chapel! The Holy Spirit is, for sure, present there!

We spent a large part of the afternoon back with the kids. Some of us were at Westhaven and some of us were at the Place of Safety. We got the chance to just hang out with them and talk and play and sing. After that, we came back to the hotel to devotions and an excellent dinner. Then we played in the pool for a few hours. It's an early-to-bed night! I can't wait to get to work tomorrow!

Monday

I AM EXHAUSTED!! But what an amazing day!! We got up at the crack of dawn this morning, had breakfast and then Pastor Percy and Pastor Douglas picked us up to head up the mountain. I heard the song "Rough Side of the Mountain" a few times at fundraisers and MJ get-togethers, but I didn't realize the significance of that until this morning. I got to ride in Pastor Percy's bus. He gave a quick "guided tour" of our route out of Montego Bay and then turned on the music and blasted "Rough Side." Those that had been here before were singing along...the whole bus was clapping and Pastor Percy was dancing in his seat...WHILE DRIVING! It was crazy!

We started working right away. I stayed at Westhaven today. I volunteered to work in cottage 1 with the bigger girls. We went in and helped get them out of bed, showered, dressed and fed breakfast. It was so fun. They were laughing with us and we were singing while we were getting them dressed. It was a great way to start my day!

After breakfast was over, we went to work on building cottage #5. I actually helped mix and carry cement that was being poured in the construction of the north wall. I never thought I would be doing that! We use a cement mixer to do all of that, but they do it all by hand...mixing it on the ground by hand with shovels and then loading it into buckets and hauling it to the people pouring it. We took a lot of pictures...thank goodness because no one will believe I did that at home with some sort of proof!



They kept telling me before the trip to remember my sunscreen, but I forgot. Thank goodness Joe let me borrow his... We were re-applying even 45 minutes and I still got a little sunburned. This sun is crazy-hot! And I just couldn't get enough water today... I must have gone through 4 bottles. Again, thank goodness the leaders bring some up with us or we would all be in trouble.

We came back for devotions again. I'm so glad that we have that time to process things together and thank God for the day. After dinner we played in the pool and most of us are heading to bed early again. Day #2 tomorrow!

Tuesday

I really enjoyed the day at Westhaven yesterday, but today, I volunteered to spend my time at the Place of Safety. I am so glad that I did. Right after we got off the bus, about 12 of us walked up to the Place of Safety. The boys were so excited to see us and it seemed like they couldn't wait for the day's activities to begin. Some of the older boys went to do some work on the farm up the hill so we broke the remaining boys up into two groups. One group did VBS and the other group did regular school stuff.

I was so impressed with their knowledge of God. They knew the Bible verses we were quoting and they knew the stories we were telling. School was a different story. They really struggle with just basic math and reading. We switched the group after 1 ½ hours when the older boys came back from working. At 11:30, all of us went up to play soccer. It was so fun. Those boys can really play soccer! I think they really enjoyed teaching us to play!



We came back for devos and dinner. Again, it was great to decompress about the day with everyone. This is such an amazing experience! I am so glad that I decided to come! THANK YOU GOD!!!

Wednesday

It was our last work day today. I stayed at Westhaven today and got a chance to play with the kids. We colored, talked, sang and played around outside. I had such a wonderful day with them. I don't think I've smiled or laughed this much in a really long time. You know, those kids don't have a lot, but they are happier and richer than most people at home. They love God and each other and that is all that matters to them. I learned a lot from them this week.

They threw a party for us this afternoon. They used the money donated by the LoL Sunday School kids to buy a birthday cake for all of the kids that have a birthday in March. They had punch, cake and sandwiches for us to eat. It was a great party! Some of the kids even danced



for us and one of the staff members sang us a going away/thank you song. There was not a dry-eye among the group by the time she was done!

It was so hard to say good-bye to those kids today. It was like some of them knew it was our last day once the party was over. I tried really hard not to cry because that just makes it harder for the kids, too. But I couldn't help it. I hugged a dozen kids or so and the tears just came. I had to take myself to the bus...I didn't want them to see me cry. I am really going to miss them. My heart is full of their laughter, smiles and love. I know they are well taken care of, but I'm really going to miss them.

Devotions tonight were hard, too. We all talked about the kids and everything we had experienced this week. It was pretty emotional and draining. I'm looking forward to a couple of days off to process and relax.

Tomorrow I am heading to Dunn's River Falls in Ocho Rios. Some other folks are going to Negril and another group is going to the Black River to swim with the crocodiles. It'll be fun!

Thursday

O my gosh! I got to walk UP Dunn's River Falls today. After a 2 hour bus ride, we got there and walked the falls. It was so beautiful! After that, we had lunch, did a little shopping at the Ocho Rios market and then headed back to the hotel for devos and dinner.

Jamaica is such a beautiful place...but I didn't realize just how poor it was. While driving to Ocho Rios this morning, we really saw the poverty. The houses are just little one-room buildings...most without windows and metal sheeting for roofs and doors. But the people are happy here and SOOO friendly and welcoming. I LOVE JAMAICA!



Friday

I can't believe that today was my last full day in Jamaica. We got up for breakfast and then spent the morning laying on the beach and soaking up the Caribbean sun! After lunch Pastor Percy took a bunch of us into MoBay to the big market to do some final touring and souvenir shopping. We all just hung out at the hotel today and played around. The coolest part of the day was during devos...we served each other communion as a way to wrap up the week. It was cool...and very emotional.

I really don't want to leave tomorrow morning...this has been such an amazing experience. I don't even have the words to express how I feel about the friends and I have made this week. I didn't know there were so many incredible people at Lord of Life. I am so glad that I heard God's calling and came to Jamaica. God's blessings do run deep!

I am pretty exhausted...I can't wait to sleep in my own bed tomorrow. I'm excited to get my pictures back (all 8 rolls) and share all about the trip with my family and friends!