

Episode 70: The Mountain Kingdom

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, the ninth and last country that they visited on their trip in Southern Africa.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about the ninth and last country that we visited on this trip in southern Africa, and that is Lesotho. It's a mountain kingdom, it's a very small country, and probably because it's a very small country, it wasn't really on our radar¹ to begin with.

Wendy: No, when we initially planned the trip, we didn't plan on going to Lesotho at all. Really just because we knew absolutely nothing about it. But, uhh, once we started reading the guidebook, we thought that it did actually look pretty interesting, it looked like it was very different from South Africa, which surrounds it, and so we figured that it would be worth checking out². And in the end, we liked it so much that we went back for a second visit.

Nick: Yeah, we visited for four days, and then we went out into ... back into South Africa, and we met up with our friend Ted and his friend Alina, and we did some hiking with them in the Drakensberg mountains in South Africa, and then we had a few days to spare³, so we decided to come back into Lesotho. Uhh, we came back through a different border and we went to a different area of the country, and so it was nice to see that part as well.

Wendy: Yeah, and it was a great way to end our trip, I think. It was the last few days from our trip, apart from going to Johannesburg to catch our flight out. Umm, and we were a bit tired by that point. We'd been travelling for more than three months already, and we just wanted to rest and relax and Lesotho is a wonderful place to do that, particularly the villages, like the places where we spent most of our time there, uhh, they're very peaceful, quiet, relaxing places, and we really enjoyed this time that we spent there.

¹ on our radar: something we were thinking about or planning

² checking out: seeing what it's like

³ to spare: remaining, extra, left to go

Nick: Yeah, Lesotho is a really interesting country. Umm, as I think we've said in a previous, as we've been travelling, we've been going to countries that have been gradually getting more and more developed. Earlier in the trip we were in places like Mozambique and Malawi, which are quite, umm ... they're not very developed at all. They're quite low on the [UN human development index](#). Then we went to Zambia and Zimbabwe which are a little bit higher, and then we went to Botswana and Namibia and South Africa, which are higher still, they're kind of on the next rung⁴ up the ladder. And so this was the pattern that we'd been following. And then to go from South Africa to Lesotho, which is much poorer, umm, was a little bit of a shock, but it was certainly different, like you said.

Wendy: Yeah. Uhh, so the level of development was definitely much lower than it is in South Africa. But it wasn't ... it was also different from the other less developed countries that we've been to on this trip too, as well. It wasn't like Malawi, it wasn't like Mozambique. It's really not like any country that I've seen in Africa before. And we've seen quite a few now, we've seen about half of the countries in Africa. Is it twenty-four or twenty-five?

Nick: I think it's twenty-five now, yeah.

Wendy: Yeah. Umm, and I've never seen anything like Lesotho. If anything, it reminds me more of Nepal or, you know, other kind of mountainous areas in different parts of the world, because you don't see many mountains in Africa for the most part. But Lesotho really is entirely, umm, surrounded by mountains.

Nick: Yeah, it's ... it is very interesting. It is kind of like Africa on the one hand. Certainly the level of development brought us back to what we think of as Africa, but like you said, it's different and unique on the other hand, and so that made it a really great place to stay. Umm, it's a very rural country. Uhh, there's one urban centre, really, and that's it, which is the capital Maseru. It has about four hundred thousand people, and there's about two million people in the whole country. So it's a small country, completely surrounded by South Africa, and there's just this one urban centre. There are a couple of kind of other one-street towns, or one-horse towns⁵ as you might call them, uhh, and the rest is just villages and rural areas. And I mean Africa's rural in general, but in Lesotho that was taken to a new level I thought.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm, yeah. Uhh, definitely the places where we stayed were very small villages and towns, and we got to see a lot of the country as well because, uhh, on our way in the second time, we came through a different border post in a different part of the country, and we took what turned out to be quite a long journey. Uhh, in total it took us about ten hours to travel across the north of the country. And so we got to see a lot of it. And yeah, a lot ... it was mostly very small villages and open countryside.

⁴ rung: step on a ladder

⁵ one-horse towns: small towns

Nick: Yeah, and a lot of that time was in the very far northeast, and we came ... because we came in over a pass in the Drakensberg mountains, we were in this mountainous area. And even for Lesotho, quite a poorly developed area. So we came in on a paved road from the ... on the South African side, and then that became a dirt road on the Lesotho side. And it took us about four hours to travel hardly any distance at all, about sixty kilometres I think, on this dirt road. And there was actually one moment which I thought provided an interesting snapshot⁶, which was that we were right next to the border and the border was a river running parallel to the road, and we were on this dirt road. And you could see a paved road on the other side of the river, and that's the South African side, but we were on the Lesotho side. Umm, so it is a poor country, but that certainly doesn't mean that it's a country to be looked down upon, and the people are very proud, I think, of their life and their rural life, and that's great to see.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, and also quite happy, I would say, as well. You know, even though they don't have all of the material possessions that we might think are necessary for a happy life, you know, they live very simply and they have a very strong sense of community, so they're always helping each other out. We had a really nice conversation with one of our hiking guides, 'cause we did a few hikes while we were there, and he was telling us quite a lot about his culture. He was obviously very proud of being a Basotho, a person from Lesotho. And he said, 'No one ever goes hungry here, because if someone in the village doesn't have enough food, then all of the other villagers are going to take care of them and make sure that they do have something to eat.' So there's a very strong sense of community and they really support each other, and I think that leads to a real, genuine happiness.

Nick: I also think there's a genuine warmth that they display towards foreigners, or towards people like us. Umm, and so we had a lot of nice little interactions with people and it doesn't have to be much, but you can be walking down the street and someone can just say, 'Hello,' to you, they can say, 'Welcome, you're welcome in this country,' and that makes you feel great about it. Umm, the kids are really amazing, there was one kid in particular who we saw a few times, and he was ... I guess he lived right near one of the guesthouses we were staying at in one of the villages. And he would give me high fives as we walked past, and he would give you hugs.

Wendy: Yeah, he was a tiny little boy, I'd say probably about four years old and I don't think he spoke a single word of English but we could definitely communicate, uhh, regardless of the language barrier just with his ... the huge grin on his face, he was obviously so thrilled to see us. And yeah, he would just wrap his arms around my waist and give me this ... the sweetest hugs. So that's something that I will definitely remember for a long time about Lesotho.

⁶ snapshot: brief summary or profile

Nick: Yeah, it's definitely part of the charm of Lesotho. As we said it is very rural and we've stayed in a few villages. Uhh, the people are very tied to the land⁷ and to the animals that they raise, and so there's a lot of farming, a lot of, uhh, agricultural, umm, industry that goes on with crops and things like that. And also there are a lot of animals. We saw more farm animals than we've seen in any other country by far, I think. We see shepherds with their sheep and their cows. Umm, even on some of the main roads, or even in Maseru you can see sheep, and so that's really quite interesting to see. People ride horses and donkeys around, uhh, so it's a way of getting around, it's a method of transportation in the rural areas and in the villages. And so it just ... it was very charming for people like us who are from the city to see this life. It was really interesting I thought.

Wendy: Yeah. Uhh, raising animals is differently a huge part of their culture. And that's become a part of the charm for - a part of the appeal and attraction - for a lot of tourists who go there as well. Uhh, pony treks or horse treks is a big, you know, popular activity that a lot of tourists come there to do. We didn't do that, we just did hiking, umm, I prefer to just use my own two feet rather than a horse's, but, umm, yeah, you definitely see animals everywhere. They are an inextricable⁸ part of the landscape and of the lifestyle and culture of the people there too.

Nick: And I remember, actually, this morning, I saw - which I hadn't seen before - in Maseru as we were passing back through. There was a roundabout - did you see this from the minibus? - there was a roundabout with a decoration on it, and there were two statues.

Wendy: Mmm.

Nick: And there were depicting rural life. So one was a man wheeling a wheelbarrow and the other was a farmer with a farming tool working the land.

Wendy: OK.

Nick: And so even in the biggest urban area of the country they're celebrating their own, kind of, rural roots and their farm roots. And so I thought that was nice that they celebrate it, that they're proud of it, they don't shy away from it⁹.

Wendy: Yeah that's interesting. No, I didn't see that out of the window today. So thanks for pointing that out.

Nick: Anyway, and so we crossed back into South Africa today, and now we're in Johannesburg, so we're definitely not in Lesotho anymore.

Wendy: No!

⁷ tied to the land (phrase): dependent on the land

⁸ inextricable: incapable of being separated

⁹ shy away from it: avoid it, pretend it doesn't exist

Nick: The idyllic¹⁰ villages are gone and we're back in the big bad city again.

Wendy: Yep, and, uhh, hopefully we'll survive it for a few days before we really finish this trip and go home.

¹⁰ idyllic: charming, simple

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nick and Wendy visit Lesotho twice?
2. According to a story Wendy told, why don't people go hungry in Lesotho?
3. What did the statues on the roundabout that Nick saw show, according to him?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. She got another promotion last week. So she's moved another _____ up the ladder within the company.
2. He grew up in the country, moving between various _____. His parents were divorced and his mother took work wherever she could get it, but it was a boring childhood for him in these tiny places.
3. Indigenous people are often _____ because it has a cultural significance to them that goes beyond farming.
4. Her parents were immigrants and she was made fun of at school but now she has embraced it and won't _____.
5. Their dream is to buy a beach house on an _____ island and live the rest of their lives looking out at the ocean away from noise, pollution and big cities.
6. We spent last night _____ a couple of new bars that have opened up recently. They were both really great!
7. For our Europe trip, France and Italy are definitely _____. Beyond that, we're not sure where else we're going to visit.
8. The hills are an _____ part of Lisbon. Without the hills, it wouldn't be the same city.
9. This photo of your grandmother in front of her house when she was a child is a great little _____ for what life must have been like back then.
10. After buying their new house, they still had some money _____, so they decided to go on a holiday.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to Lesotho? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever lived in a rural area? Would you prefer to live in a rural area or in a city? Why?
3. Wendy described the sense of community as being very important in Lesotho. Do you think that's also true in your own country or region? Explain your answer.

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Because after the first time, they returned to South Africa to meet up with friends for a hiking trip, and then had some time left so they decided to go back to Lesotho.
2. Because their neighbours will help them out and give them food if they need it.
3. That Lesotho is proud of its rural life and celebrates it.

Exercises

1. rung
2. one-horse towns
3. tied to the land
4. shy away from it
5. idyllic
6. checking out
7. on our radar
8. inextricable
9. snapshot
10. to spare