



White lions, turtles and a great leap forward!

Following his A-levels, Valentin Dilg decided to make good use of his time before starting university and opted to embark on a language study trip. This journey took him to the vibrant landscapes and rich cultures of South Africa, which he followed up by doing some volunteer work there. Not only did he immerse himself in the country and its people, but was also able to acquire a wealth of unforgettable impressions.

Valentin was initially drawn to the allure of Australia or New Zealand, but when he saw the options on offer at Carl Duisberg Centren, it was clear that South Africa would be his destination. Moreover, the prospect of being able to participate in volunteer programs at a cat sanctuary and an ocean conservation centre ignited his sense of adventure.

Valentin planned his journey in close collaboration with the team at Carl Duisberg Centren, and started his trip with a four-week stay at the Good Hope Studies language school in Cape Town. Here, amidst the lively streets and diverse communities, he not only honed his English language skills but was able to get first-hand experience of life in South Africa. Prior to the holiday, Valentin had opted to reside with a host family for a more immersive experience, but there had

also been the option to live directly on the school campus.

The second stop on his journey was the cat sanctuary, which is situated about two hours away from Cape Town. Nestled in the heart of the countryside in the middle of nowhere, the sanctuary for big cats – which is also home to the aforementioned white lions – was a stark contrast to the bustling metropolis and therefore has its own guest house for the volunteers.

„Of course, we had to get up early at the camp, then we set about completing our daily chores, such as cleaning the enclosures, preparing for feeding, repairing fences and, as a highlight, taking a walk with one of our „own“ animals, separated by a fence of course,“ says the young man, summarising his experiences on site.



The last stop on Valentin's South African journey brought him to the O.R.C.A. Marine Foundation in Plettenberg Bay, on one of the most fascinating coasts in the world. As a volunteer, Valentin's job was to accompany tour groups to spot whales, dolphins and turtles and to participate in beach clean-up initiatives around the area. Here, too, the accommodation was very close to the location, with all the volunteers living together in one house.

For Valentin's mother, Manuela, the journey symbolized more than just an adventure; it represented a pivotal moment of independence for her son.

„It was really worth every cent,“ she says, summarising her impressions. „To be able to go on a trip like that, especially when it is your first time travelling alone on another continent, is a huge step towards independence.“ With the support of the seasoned Carl Duisberg Centren team, taking care of all the essentials during planning and implementation, they provided her with the reassurance of knowing that her son was in capable hands, which made the decision to embark on such an adventure an easy one.

„And who knows, maybe I'll take a trip like this myself one day. After all, volunteering is possible at any stage of life,“ adds the 60-year-old with a laugh. „However, there is one of Valentin's highlights I would probably miss out and that is the jump from Bloukrans Bungy, which is one of the world's highest commercial bridge bungy jumping sites at 216 metres.” ■


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