

# The Bad Part About Being White...

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The bad part about being **white** in Africa is... well, I'll be honest, there are a few drawbacks. Believe me, this country is beautiful, the people make you feel like family, and I want to bear hug every chocolate-colored child I see, but there have definitely been some challenging parts of having fair skin on this continent. Here's a little peek in to the little daily battles we face as white people in a predominantly brown-skinned country.

**I am turning brown.** Over the last 3 months I've been in Africa, I've slowly been turning browner myself. Yes, the African sun is giving me a nice golden tan, but also, I'm just dirty. And it's not just because I only shower every 3 days. The roads we walk single day are dusty, red-brown dirt, and it begins to seep into your pores. I have to scrub my feet every night just to get them clean enough to slip into my sleeping bag.

- **We can't step outside of the house without getting yelled at.** Most of the time it's just a friendly "Mzungu (white person)! How are you?" or "Jambo (Hello)!" But sometimes, it's creepy men, and they don't speak a lick of English, and I'm a little nervous to know what they're actually yelling out at us between the cackling laughter.
- **Africans will try to hold our hands.** It is no unusual thing to see two men walking down the street hand-in-hand, or "inter-digitating" as we call it in World Race culture. In Africa, if you are friends with someone, you hold hands, period. New friends or old, they will try to hold your hand. And it will be uncomfortable. But you will smile and bear it so as not to offend your new friend.
- **Everyone touches us.** Africans seem to have zero sense of personal space, and they sure as heck don't mind invading yours. You'll literally have people sitting on top of you in the over-stuffed public buses. The bus workers all want the mzungus to take *their* bus; the shop owners all want you to buy *their* jewelry. So they take your arm and try to guide you in their direction. I've learned the art of the polite, but firm, pull-away.
- **Everyone thinks we are rich.** Africans see white skin, and they assume we have money coming out our ears to hand out to anyone who asks. At least a couple times a day, I'll encounter a sweet little old lady with an upturned palm in my face. We have to explain over and over that we are poor missionaries, and in fact there are poor people in America too.
- **Mzungu price vs. African price.** When bargaining for a soccer jersey at the market or talking down the price of a taxi, Africans will attempt to jack up the price thinking we have

plenty of money. They think we don't know that's not the price they usually charge to fellow Africans. But the jokes on you! We're not just any Americans, we're World Racers. We've been around the block, and we're not going to fall for your shenanigans.

- **EVERYONE stares at us.** And no, it's not just a polite little stare, then they catch themselves and look away. They'll blatantly gawk at us, mouth open and all. They'll do a double, triple, even quadruple-take as we pass on the street. Any sense of anonymity we might have enjoyed in the States has been completely shattered.
- **I've been compared to an Albino.** In Tanzania, we have encountered a number of Africans who are Albino. While hanging out with a group of kids, they dragged over one of their friends who happened to be Albino, then pointed to both of our skins to compare. Well, I know I'm fair-skinned, but leave the sweet child alone!
- **We accidentally offend people.** We might forget to wash our hands before a meal or take off our shoes before we enter a house. Or worse, cause the neighbors to complain to the pastor because we wore shorts outside the house... whoops.
- **The pastor will invite church members to come touch our hair and skin.** Yes, this happened. Church members literally came and petted our heads and felt our skin in the middle of a service.
- **I sometimes feel like I'm in the final rounds of Who Wants to be A Millionaire?** Africans will stop us to ask me questions about who made the bomb at Hiroshima, why the Vietnam War started, what crops America exports the most, and the different divisions and leaders in our government. I wrack my brain, fishing for long-lost facts from my American History classes, but, let's just say, I won't be making a trip to the bank anytime soon.
- **We scare African children.** Ok, so not all of these sweet babies adore us. Some of them are frightened to death of these ghostly figures haunting their neighborhoods. Every now and then, a child will burst into tears, shrieking and running the other direction if we attempt to approach. Well, you win some, you lose some.

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At this point, 10 months into our journey, we have learned to shrug these events off and just say, "**Hey, T.I.A.**" That's Race code for "This is Africa." You just roll with it and file it under "Let's

Laugh About This Later Tonight.” But don’t worry, I’m not changing my skin color anytime soon, and there’s a few reasons why I’m more than happy to be a Mzungu (which far outweigh the bad parts):

- **I get to hug African children everyday.** They flock around us, and I will usually find one who allows me to scoop them up, toss them in the air, and tickle their belly. This alone brings me more joy than I can say.
- **No matter how many days it’s been since I last took a shower, someone always tells me I’m beautiful.** Yes, people may yell many things at us when we step outside, but who doesn’t like to hear that you’re beautiful??
- **When people stop me and want to know why I’m here, I have a prime opportunity to share Christ.** I’ve gotten to where I’m not even a little nervous to share that I’m a missionary, and we’re here to share the love of Christ. I’m proud. I’m proud of the call God placed on my life and that He gave me the guts to answer that call. I am not ashamed to let people know that we’re here for Jesus. I’m here in Africa for Jesus, I’m here on this earth for Jesus. It’s a pretty awesome feeling.