

Lagos blog

If the truth be told, I was told not to go to Lagos by none other than a Nigerian colleague. Unless of course I was ensured an armed escort and had handlers all the time. I thought it a bit dramatic however similar themes emanated from other colleagues. Then the Nigerian elections happened and we were told that the trip may be delayed because of election violence and instability. They say between 2 extremes lies the truth and this is likely the case in this instance. Perhaps the first sign of the truth emerging was the Nigerian elections that not only occurred event free but replaced the sitting President and Government democratically and peacefully. So it was that we left on our West African adventure. Getting through the airport is somewhat taxing and me forgetting my Yellow Fever card at home didn't help matters. Well maybe not armed escort, but having help at the airport does help, especially when ones Yellow Fever card is safely at home in Cape Town. Just forget what you know about typical airport arrival activity –this is very different. Multiple stops, checks, forms, emigration at many desks...then your luggage. For the first time (and likely the last time) I had wrapped my luggage in plastic at check-in as advised by the check-in agent. "Sir, its Lagos I suggest you wrap your luggage", I was told. Wrapping your luggage is a magnet to customs folk in Lagos as I was to learn, clearly making you look like a member of the Medellin drug cartel. Out of a throng of people in arrivals, my perfectly plastic wrapped suitcase was pulled aside. Unceremoniously the plastic was removed and my bag searched to find nothing, thankfully. Exiting the airport one is struck by AK47 wielding soldiers, a reminder of Boko Haram and its nefarious intents. Let's just say Lagos is another world. The airport is an experience, outside waiting for your ride is equally another experience. More people thronging there than at a typical football or rugby match in South Africa. Our ride to the hotel was uneventful despite dire predictions of traffic jams that last so long, you can get to celebrate another birthday whilst waiting.

Slipping into the hotel through the stifling tropical heat was a welcome respite. Nigerians are very friendly people and make you feel at home. Chris Kassianides believes it's due to their genetically higher levels of the endogenous cannabinoid neurotransmitter, Anandamide. Even so, despite many problems in their country they are friendly and ebullient. I'm thinking that we can do with some anandamide some days.

Our 3 day meeting started off with a Post-Graduate half day teaching session focusing on Liver disease in Africa completed by a twilight symposium on hepatitis

C. On Saturday the new WGO GI training centre was inaugurated completed by a superb talk by Patrick Okolo in the evening. Sunday we spent doing “Spier” type training of their fellows at various stations. Of the trip, I personally enjoyed Sunday the most. The eagerness and desire to learn expressed by the Nigerian fellows was extremely gratifying and made teaching an absolute pleasure.

We left for the airport early as we were told again about the “traffic”. We got to the airport within 25 minutes. Whilst I can quite believe the stories, I never really did experience the dire traffic so often spoken of. In any event departure from Lagos was a little gentler than arrival although equally convoluted and unnecessarily complicated. I had my core body temperature measured twice within 10 meters of 2 points in the airport. I’m proud to say, despite provocation, I remained cool, at least in centigrade.

Nigeria was an unexpected surprise in that one anticipated something and experienced something completely different. The expansion into Africa by the Gastroenterology Foundation is correct. It is demonstrating enormous benefits and building much needed bridges. I believe we have the capability, if not the responsibility, to share our expertise with our colleagues on the continent we call home.

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