

Residency in Botopasi, Suriname:

I'm very happy to share my experience of the 3 months residency in Suriname from the beginning of June till the beginning of September 2013.

Botopasi is a small village in the interior of Suriname, at the edge of the Amazonian rainforest; Botopasi is one of the African diaspora villages in the expansive habitation of the Saramaccan population. To get to Botopasi, we had to travel by car for a few hours then by boat. There are no cars in Botopasi, maybe 3 or 4 motor bicycle in the whole village.

The scenery is very beautiful, wild, adventurous and rough. The forest is mostly untouched by human hand.

Isidoor Wens is the organizer of the residency. He was born and raised in Botopasi, and he's been living in the Netherlands for many years now, so it makes him the perfect person to help and guide foreigners throughout the residency program. Understanding both Saramaccan and European culture. He goes out of his way to help you realize whatever it is that you want to do. Being from the village, he basically knows everybody and really puts you in contact with the locals, tells you all about the village history, customs and so on. His family lives there and is also very involved in making sure your stay is unforgettable. By the end of my stay, I felt like a member of the family.

ARTCEB was for me a life changing experience. Being Belgian from the French speaking side, I wanted to go to a place where I could improve my Dutch (Dutch is everyone's second language), push my self, my photography work and live one big great adventure. So Botopasi was just the perfect match for me. Indeed it's a place that shook me right down to my core. Botopasi definitely met my residency expectations.

It was a very challenging experience in every way possible: physically, culturally, philosophically... You're just confronted to such a different way of life. Everything is just simply and utterly different: the food, the weather, the people, the houses, the relationship toward time, being cut out of the outside world, the life conditions are simply harder (a few hours of electricity in the evening per day, internet is hard to come by, artistic furniture is only available in Paramaribo,...), the rough environment, the bugs, mosquitos,...

The locals are exceptionally friendly and curious. They're not afraid to question you and whatever it is your trying to do, which pushes you to question yourself even more.

I believe a residency is a great way to make you grown as a person and as an artist. The first 2 weeks, I really thought I wasn't able to stay for 3 months there, I thought: "there's nothing here, just jungle". Slowly as time went by and one starts to understand how things work, one starts to see how special and unique this place is. Botopasi tested my patience, my will to pursue a specific idea, forces me to work in a totally different way (the light is very strong, being a photographer it totally challenged my work)...

The conditions are generally difficult but somehow anything and everything is possible in Botopasi. The obstacles that one will face, force you to develop a new ingenuity to be able to produce your artistic work and it leads you to new conclusions.

Before the residency, I had read about it: the previous experiences and such, but I don't think I really had an idea of how challenging it would. The cultural shock is very big, it's very hot, and the bugs are very present. One should be aware that this experience is maybe not suitable for everyone. In my opinion, you really have to be an adventurer, an experienced traveller and have a fighting spirit to enjoy this experience to the max. That said, I would do it again in a heartbeat.

If you want to experience a new world, learn about your self, challenge your practice and learn: this is exactly what you're looking for.

Check link: <http://www.artots.nl/ARTCEB/>