

# Kenyan villagers leave deep impression on Singaporean

When Miss Janice Chiang, 23, was first offered a chance to intern in Africa as a Ngee Ann Polytechnic student by her lecturer, she had to turn down.

She yearned to experience Africa, but she had already secured a position in a local firm.

She got another shot when she discovered last year that the same lecturer was working with companies in Africa to offer internship opportunities to students.

"I have always been interested in finding out how different cultures live and work, the more different they are from a cosmopolitan city, the better," said Miss Chiang, an accountancy and business management student at the Singapore Management University.

She soon found herself living along the coast of Kenya, an hour's drive from Mombasa, the country's second largest city.

She interned at Coastal Bamboo and Coir Development Company – a subsidiary of Build Africa Industry and a social enterprise that aims to get African villages to be self-sufficient by developing their capabilities to produce consumer goods for a wider market.

The company is currently involved in helping villages develop their capabilities in bamboo furniture production.

As the company's partner village was also exploring the possibility of eco-tourism, Miss Chiang visited neighbouring villages that had begun eco-tourism



Miss Janice Chiang (second row, second from right) with local Kenyans and other interns.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JANICE CHIANG

projects to learn about their models.

She collected data about the resources available to the partner village and crafted questions and issues to discuss with the village leaders before meeting with them.

With the information she gathered, she developed and presented an eco-tourism plan to the villagers with her co-workers, complete with suggestions and input from the villagers themselves.

"Kenyans are one of the friendliest people," she said.

"From the time I arrived at the airport to the day I left, there were strangers who willingly helped me with my luggage, directions and most importantly, food recommendations." – JAN LEE