

There was a mysterious and eerie hum emanating from the engine room of the ferry we had just boarded. The gloomy clouds looming overhead stretched all the way past the island and added to the tense atmosphere everyone was breathing in and out. We pulled away from the shore and one by one people were drawn to the back of the boat where the view of the precious Mother City was growing and fading into the distance. The engines roared into full power and a stream of white water left a temporary trail from the mainland. I imagined the thoughts of the prisoners, shackled up and bundled together watching the trail back home fade away as they sailed closer to the island that would hold them prison. Robben Island

I could still see the mainland as the we approached the shores of Robben Island. The sound from the engine room turned into a slow idle rumble which sounded like the beat of a drum. Like prisoners, we got into single file and we're escorted off the boat. Stepping onto the pier for the first time made everything I had read and watched about this place a surreal reality.

The tour of the prisons lasted about 30 minutes. An ex-political prisoner accused of terrorism and sabotage showed us the way and provided thought provoking and interesting dialogue throughout the tour. He led us through a series on holding cells and interrogation chambers before we finally arrived where we had all been waiting to be - the prison cell that Nelson Mandela was held in for almost 27 years. A simple cell with four walls, a cell door, a window for the guards to see through and a sink. I expected an uncomfortable feeling but standing on the outside of the cell brought home what he had done. We as a nation were finally free and no cell could ever contain us again.

From there, we boarded a bus and toured the rest of the island stopping at different monuments and churches along the way. A new tour guide provided commentary and information on specifics of the island. It is interesting to note that the island was initially a leper colonies used to keep the disease, which was considered incurable at the time, away from the mainland. It was later turned into a prison to keep the disease of racism and apartheid on the mainland. Today the island serves as a reminder of South Africa's dark past and is a national heritage site.

Once back on the mainland, the vibrant colour of South Africa's rainbow nation were more clear than before.

Mufudzi Nhamoines