



Jumping into new experiences with Systech International

When I was offered the opportunity by Systech to complete a transfer on the Medupi and Kusile power plants in Johannesburg, I was both excited and nervous. Having heard of the lawlessness of the country and after watching a Louis Theroux documentary on the city itself, I had no doubt that it would be a unique experience and I was not disappointed. Whilst the poverty gap remains a divisive force in South Africa, a country which still feels the lasting effects of the Apartheid, I was overwhelmed by the energy of the city of Johannesburg and the people who live in it. Johannesburg is an economic powerhouse, with its province, Gauteng, making up 34% of South Africa's GDP. However, the cultural aspects of the city are just as powerful and just as important.

I was assigned to work with the legal team in preparing for issues it was handling between one of the main package contractors and the employer, Eskom. The plant itself consists of six boilers, each powered by an 800MW turbine and when fully

functional will be the biggest dry-cooled coal-fired power station in the world. It is being constructed due to the growing demand for electricity in SA.

I experienced several power outages during my short stint in Johannesburg, and Eskom struggles so much to produce enough power at times that it has to resort to rotational load shedding, whereby certain districts are not given any power for a period of time so that there isn't an entire blackout of the whole system. Whilst this didn't affect me since my guesthouse had a backup generator, it creates tremendous difficulties for the poverty stricken South Africans, who suffer during the cold winters.

The projects have also been at the heart of important political issues throughout its course. Several of the matters that our team were working on were as a result of strikes and industrial unrest, which caused serious delay to the progress of the works. One of my main tasks was to research case law and media coverage concerning certain

Max Woodward-Smith - Legal Experience in South Africa



Kusile & Medupi Power Stations

periods of unrest and the political motivations of the trade unions behind them. As soon as I started, I was thrust into reading and gaining background and contractual knowledge of the claim which the team was focused on at the time and received teaching from highly skilled professionals in the legal department of Systech. The diverse and challenging nature of the work made the four weeks fly by and the deadline-oriented method of the job further made the job exciting, especially when receiving decisions from the DAB.

The social side of working in Johannesburg was also very enjoyable. Whilst it is important to stay safe in the city and to use taxis instead of walking, there was a great selection of bars and restaurant around Sandton, which was the area where most of the consultants were staying, including Mandela Square and several other good nightlife spots. I arrived in South Africa just in time for the World Cup and so there was a lot of team social events that revolved around the football, which was a great opportunity to meet everyone outside of the work environment. The internship also offered a great opportunity to explore the area outside of Johannesburg which was incredibly beautiful and was great for getting a break from city life. A work colleague and I decided to go to

Soweto, a vast area of townships to the South West of Johannesburg, to face our fears and do a bungee jump off of the famous Soweto Towers. After a fairly silent taxi ride there and an even more silent ascent up the towers we both managed it and got a great view of Soweto at the summit of the 100m bungee whilst we were at it. For those who are not as keen to take their life in their own hands to such a degree, there are still other great ways of seeing the culturally important Soweto and also the renowned Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. I even had the opportunity to go down to Durban to watch the Sharks play the Jaguars and enjoy the beaches and walks in Natal.

Overall, to be able to work in such a vibrant and culturally important city as Johannesburg was a great opportunity and I would jump at the chance to do it again. The work was rewarding and important in the political context of South Africa, and the social aspect made the experience one to remember.

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