

An Interview with Jaz from The Worldwide Tribe

What inspired you to set up The Worldwide Tribe and how has it developed over the past few years?

I set up the Worldwide Tribe as a travel blog when I was working in India. I shared the stories of the amazing people I was meeting there and the crazy experiences I was having travelling through Asia. It was only when I wrote about my first visit to the refugee camp in Calais known as 'The Jungle', last July, that anybody other than my friends and family started to listen. I wrote a post that night in bed, and woke up in the morning to it having been shared over 65,000 times!

What happened next was very organic. We were inundated by thousands and thousands of people wanting to donate both physical stuff (tents, sleeping bags, clothes, food) and money. We raised over £250,000 on JustGiving (their biggest Crowdfunding campaign ever), and filled warehouses full of donations. It quickly grew to beyond what we could manage and our team soon grew to accommodate!

The Worldwide Tribe was originally inspired by the realisation that underneath culture, religion, race and language we all have the same basic needs, we all have passions and dreams and hobbies, we are all human.

How many of you are there in The Worldwide Tribe team and what different roles do you have?

The Worldwide Tribe team is basically just my family. It began with me and my two younger brothers (Fin and Nils), my boyfriend Dan and my best friend Jess. We still remain the core team but many people have helped and supported us along the way! Fin is a filmmaker so produces our content and is filming a documentary about the camp, Nils is running projects like installing Wifi into the camp, Dan lives in Lesvos coordinating a volunteer programme and working on boat rescue, and Jess oversees all communication across our social media channels!

How do the people you meet respond when you ask them about their hopes or ambitions for the future?

This is a great question as I always ask people in the camp about their hopes and dreams and their answers are consistent. People want normality. They want security. They want routine! They want stability, a job, a house, to provide for their families, just the very basics, just to know where their next meal is coming from. They don't want their main daily focus to be on survival. Many

people in Calais hope to find this in England as they already speak English or may have family here, although many are also in the process of seeking asylum in France which can take up to two years, during which they cannot work and are forced to live in the Jungle.

What do you think is the most inspiring story you have heard about or encountered on your travels?

Wow, this is a difficult one. The person who inspires me every single day is my little foster brother. He's a refugee from Eritrea who left his country aged 13, with two friends, to avoid compulsory military service. He travelled across the Sahara, didn't eat for 15 days, crossed the Mediterranean Sea in a rubber Dinghy and walked across Europe. He lived in the Jungle until he successfully hid under a train and made it to the UK. He is the most beautiful, loving, affection, clever, sweet person you have ever met.

Another story that has stuck with me, is that of a 23-year-old from Dafur, Sudan. He has since become a very good friend, and the person whose shelter I sleep in when I stay in the camp. He told me that five years ago, the Gangaweed (government Militia) had come to his village on horseback when he was 18, burnt it to the ground and brutally shot many people, including his dad, just for being black. He was arrested, accused of opposing the government, and put in prison for two years. As soon as he got out, he went back to where the village once was, desperate to find his two little brothers, little sister and mother. He was told his sister was alive and in a nearby town so he went looking for her. She wasn't there. He searched towns and cities until he was again arrested, as travelling through the country is not permitted. Unable to face any more time in prison, he spent all the money he had to be smuggled to Libya. Here he started his journey, on foot and alone to England, "where everybody is always smiling and no one has problems," he told me. "Is it this cold in England?", he asked in the middle of a sunny day in August. His expectations, and the reality of his life if he ever does make it to England, make my heart hurt. He told me he doesn't feel the hunger (the refugees get one free meal a day they have to queue for hours for), or the cold (I can't even begin to imagine winter in this camp), he just feels the pain of his lost family. Each time he spoke the word family, his voice broke and he put his head in his hands. Crying, he told me that every time he closes his eyes, he sees his mother, telling him he is a good boy, and that he is doing the right thing. "Why then, am I living like an animal?" he asked me. Every night he walks a few miles to the tunnel in an attempt to make it to England, although he told me he was taking a couple of days break from trying to allow his leg to heal. He proceeded to show me a huge bruise on his calf from where he had been hit by a police baton. Many many people from Sudan tell the same story. Persecuted for being black, many have seen their entire family killed in front of their eyes. Coming home to England, his story, and that of many others, stay with me and keep me motivated in the work I'm doing!

Why do you think social media has evolved into a popular platform for storytelling?

I think the wonderful thing about social media is that it is so accessible to everyone. It's also very personal, current and just easy to digest, unlike some news platforms. You can connect with people on an intimate level and I think people like that.

What does the term refugee mean to you?

The term refugee has come to describe a beautiful international group of inspirational people for me. People who have experienced true atrocities yet still, their strong spirit and support for one another prevail above all. The experience with the refugees I have met has been nothing but positive, filled with hospitality, openness, kindness and love and I am very grateful for that!