

Freetheme

Who is next to me

How do foreigners from African continent live and study in the Russian province.

About two thousand foreign students enter Tambov universities annually. Most of them are from African countries. A Russian diploma in African countries is considered to be very prestigious and gives a great advantage when applying for a job. But while trying to assimilate and establish contacts with the locals, most of them meet with a strong resistance.

I was born and grew up in a small provincial town called Tambov. It is located 500 km from Moscow. When the first foreign students began to appear in our city, I noticed this right away. It was about 20 years ago, then I was in school. At first there were very few of them, and they attracted many attentions. They were mostly from African countries. After school, I left for another city and returned only after fifteen years. The city has become unrecognizable. They manage to intertwine with colored thread into a monochrome pattern of the local population, but integrating into the population of a small provincial town isn't easy. The local population is very suspicious, and sometimes hostile to African students. Walking with one of my dark-skinned friends through the streets of the city, I constantly encounter an inadequate reaction: jokes, pokes with fingers. Friends say that they often experience open aggression, which may even turn into a fight. All their

attempts assimilate and establish contacts with the locals, not to mention to establish more serious relations, meet with the resistance and, with rare exceptions, fail. They are very much worried about this and say they imagined the Russians to be more open-minded. I haven't been living in Tambov for a long time, but this question touched me on the raw and I wanted to get to know them better, to find out how they differ from the indigenous population of an ordinary provincial Russian city and do they differ at all? Why did they choose Tambov? What do they like? How do they live? And what do they plan to do next? - It was these issues that occupied me when I decided to enter their environment and get to know them.

1. Christiane Fleure

From Abidjan, Ivory Coast

International Relations major

Overall, I like studying here. If I ignore some of the little things, like some of the habits of the locals, it's a cozy little town where everything is affordable. I'm missing African food though.

2. Israel Premier

From Brazzaville, Congo

Medicine major

I was shocked when I saw our dorms: dirt, cockroaches, there wasn't a lock on the doors. I fixed the room myself: put up wallpaper, bought a refrigerator, curtains and other little things. No one else has a room like that.

3. Rocky Mataruusse

From Libreville, Gabon

International Relations major

Sports is as important for me as education is. Rugby, boxing are my true passions. I do rugby professionally. I used to play for the national team in my home country. I'm a strong player and I need to train hard to improve my skills. It's difficult in Russia to get into the team that suits my skill level because of the color of my skin.

4. Alima Kambi

From Bakota, Gambia

Civil Engineering major

I spend all my time studying, and that means a lot to me. Sadly, I'll have to take a leave of absence next year due to financial issues, but I will do anything possible to complete my education.

5. Landry William Yao

From Yaounde, Cameroon

Medicine major

I am very proud of my cup. We got it for winning a university football competition. I can't live without sport. Also I'm an amazing cook, my friends call me "Le Cordon Bleu". (That's what the French call a virtuoso culinary, after a prestigious culinary school.)

6. Catalea l'Or Ngia

From Libreville, Gabon

Business Informatics major

I find blending in the local society difficult. I feel like a stranger. Girls in the university laugh when they see me. We're in a strange situation here; we were promised great education and clean dorms. What we got is cockroaches in the rooms and lectures in Russian. We don't fully understand the language and that's a big issue that we ended up paying a lot of money for.

7. Owolowo Akorede

From Nigeria

Management major

This painting is one of the few things I bought here in Tambov. I liked how realistic the depiction of the woman is. She is very beautiful. Many of our guys want to be friend and hang out with the local girls, but they aren't very friendly. That upsets me.

8. Abina Zoua Bertrand

From Yaounde, Cameroon

Management major

I pay for my education myself and can only count on myself - my parents passed away a few years ago, that's why I work as a loader part time. It's extremely difficult but I don't have a lot of choice, since there's not many job opportunities for people of color. I need to get a degree so I hustle.

9. Banzie Joel

Nelspruit, South Africa

Medicine major

I didn't expect having to share a room with three guys and having to sleep on bunk beds, but I've gotten used to that. There's almost no personal space, but that can be fun sometimes.

10. Sandrine

Dshang, Cameroon

Management major