

Gemstone Safari and the Lapidary Training Centre, Dar es Salaam

With a little internet research I discovered the Lapidary Training Centre, located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This centre is run by Ms. Noreen Masaki, a certified lapidary instructor who offers hands-on courses in all aspects of gemstone cutting, geared to the hobbyist as well as the more serious-minded student.

Lapidary class & a perfect holiday

Faceting 101

The art of lapidary was not completely new to me as I had cabbed many a stone as a teenager but learning to facet was like starting all over again. As it turned out that I was the only student in my class, so I had one on one training for the three days course. Ms. Masaki is a very competent teacher and she demonstrated each step of the cutting process in detail and started me hands on with my first stone on day one.



A good selection of Tanzanian rough was presented to choose from for my first project. I chose the citrine crystal in the upper left hand corner of the photo as it was free of inclusions and of a substantial size. Ms. Masaki showed me how to mark the stone for trimming away unwanted colour zoning.



We then chose a basic round facet design for this first project. After preforming the stone on the grinding wheel I learned how to apply it to the dop stick with hot wax. The faceting process then started. The lapidary school employs top of the line digital faceting machines, of Ultra-Tec brand. First the pavilion was cut, and then polished to exacting angles and finish. Then the stone removed and re-dopped to facet the crown and polish the crown. Through careful tutoring I managed to complete my first faceted stone, a fine 9.50 carat citrine on the first day.



I took the stone out the next morning to marvel at its beauty in the natural sunlight. The critical angles that Ms. Masaki taught me about were working their magic.

The stone sparked like a beauty!

Over the course of the next two days I finished a 0.90 carat rhodolite garnet and 0.70 carat aquamarine. Both stones presented different learning experiences to those that I encountered in cutting the citrine.



The Gemstone Safari Begins

On our fourth day we were joined by the organizer of the Gem Safari, Mr. Hubert Heldner, and the rest of the gem safari guests for an orientation class, held in conjunction with Ms. Masaki. We spent the morning learning about the geology and gemstone deposits of Tanzania before departing from Dar es Salaam on our bus journey. Chatting with Hubert on our way to our first stop in Morogoro, Carol and I were impressed with his knowledge of the country. I was most interested in his tips on how to interact with the local people.



by Harold Lindsay

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