

# TANZANIA: Warm on the Inside, Cold at Exit

Two years ago, I used my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and the fact that my first book was turning ten to travel from Nairobi to Johannesburg. My partner and son indulged me by agreeing to be part of the road trip. That trip resulted in a book that's part memoir of me as a traveling writer and part memoir of me as an African, a parent, a partner and a friend entitled *Hardly Working* which came out this year. This year, taking advantage of my son's two months holidays and the fact that the book is out, my family and I convinced fellow writer Niq Mhlongo to get on the road with us through some of the same places. Our trip kicked off on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July and Namanga border post was easy as always. But from past experience, I knew this was nothing to get too excited about. Two years earlier despite a smooth crossing at Namanga, we had got some drama on exiting. While attempting to leave Tanzania into Malawi via the Chitipa border post, an immigration official asked us for \$100 per passport for an infraction we had committed. Back then, I jokingly suggested that we were being punished because of the Kenyan among us. I suggested that his bad Kiswahili so offended the immigration official that they mentioned the ridiculous amount of money. This time, it was clear that the Kenyan passport holder was disadvantaged.

But before that, we had some memorable times in the country.

Our first stop was in Arusha. Our interaction with Arushans did not start off well. The cab driver who picked us up from our shuttle stop tried to hustle us with a high cab fare. Fortunately, when I had gone to the reception of our hotel to check in, I had checked what the average price would be. We finally paid him half of what he asked us and twice what we should have paid. We all agreed that we would not forget Donald, but for the wrong reasons. The 13-year-old in our party stated that by trying to rip us off, he exhibited the sort of greed one could expect from the current American President. But fortunately, it got better from there. We checked in to the low-budget Golden Rose Hotel and though the hotel lacked the beauty of a rose, it made up for it with the golden service of the staff. Equally important, it was clean. Having left our home in Nairobi at 6.30 in the morning and just snacked on the road, we were also very hungry. So off we went across

the street for some *nyama choma*. In Arusha, as in Nairobi, Mhlongo commented that the ugali portions were rather small. The *mbuzi choma* was top drawer though. Sadly, we had got the last bit of it and when we finished what we had, we all realized that we were still hungry. So we asked for beef instead. I suspect the person who supplies this restaurant with beef really loves his cattle. They only slaughter them when they are very old and so the meat was so tough that the youngster with braces could not partake in it and just consumed vegetables and salad. While the youngster had a juice, the adults ordered sampled the beers: a Safari, a Kilimanjaro and a Serengeti. We all agreed that the Serengeti was the best one. It would become the drink of choice for the length of time we were in Tanzania.

We left Arusha for Dar es Salaam in the morning of the next day. Kilimanjaro Express left promptly and although Google informed us that the trip would take nine hours, we ended up being on the road for almost 12 hours. Part of the delay stemmed from an engine problem the bus had just as we left Moshi. But we considered this a working holiday so we were in no rush.

Dar es Salaam is as different from Arusha as Eldoret is from Nairobi. Beyond the big city vibe that one gets in Dar, the city somehow feels more Tanzanian. One can't help but feel, when in Arusha, that one is still in Kenya somehow. In Arusha, we could get away with speaking English most of the time. In Dar, we had to up our Kiswahili game. Coming from a Kenya that was full of politics, I could not help but notice that there seemed less political talk in Dar. In fact, I only recall a single political conversation in the ten days we spent in Tanzania: with our Ugandan hostess married to a Kenyan who was asking about Kenyan politics.

After a memorable week in Dar, we had a two day stop in Morogoro. Having made a pre-booking that would suit our almost empty pockets, we checked in to Motel 88 on a street unimaginatively named Nane Nane in Morogoro. I had some money on my Tigo simcard but it was late enough for us to have nowhere to withdraw the cash. The woman who checked us in however, allowed us to check in without payment, trusting that we would settle the bill before we checked out. As a half South African, half Zimbabwean staying in Kenya, I honestly am not used to this level of trust from strangers. It was a pleasant welcome though. As we had not eaten since lunch, she even allowed us to order dinner. The best fish I have ever tasted is at Manor 54 in Nairobi. The fish at Motel 88 came a close second in deliciousness. That time when food is so good that even after you are full you

can't imagine leaving anything apart from bones? That was exactly what happened to all four of us as we ate the fish at Motel 88. The next day, we made a pilgrimage visit to Solomon Mahlangu College of Science and Education.

The College, named after a Mkhonto we Sizwe cadre who was executed by the apartheid government in 1979, was built on land that was donated to the African National Congress by Julius Nyerere. Despite not giving advance warning, the Principal of the College, Professor Malisa gave us a guided tour and a history of the ANC in the area and at the school. I was curious to know whether the land had been uninhabited prior to the donation. It turns out the land had been a sisal farm owned by a private company. While I appreciated the revolutionary gesture of President Nyerere, I wondered whether there were locals who may have been unhappy about this imposition of South Africans which essentially may have taken away some jobs. Moreso in light of the area neighbouring the college dubbed Dark City, where we were told our South African fathers and brothers left children that they never returned to reclaim. Prof Malisa is, I suspect, a born diplomat despite his current career as an educator and his qualifications as a veterinarian scientist. He rather spoke positively about the role South Africans played, mentioning the furniture factory the returning exiles left behind which employed many locals and had won international awards. "So where is the factory located? How far from here?" We all wanted to know about this award-winning factory. The answer, when we got it, made us feel sad. Apparently, the factory was stripped of its assets by subsequent management and eventually had to shut its doors. We were yet again seeing the danger that greed brings. This one, with even more harmful consequences than that of Donald of Arusha.

The night before our departure, the hotel manager, Richard, bought us a round of drinks for being 'good guests.' The generosity was touching. When we finally left Morogoro after two days, we all agreed that it felt like we were leaving a gentler, kinder home. We were now on our way to Mbeya.

On a previous trip, Mbeya was a town we rushed to and rushed out of. This time around, we got to appreciate it in a more leisurely manner. We took time to walk around and realized that Mbeya was bigger than I had previously thought. I had expected Naro Moru, only to find that I was in Kisumu but without the lake. In the restaurant we decided to have lunch at before taking transport to the Tunduma/Nakonde border, vendors walked in and out selling everything from grapes to sweaters. I didn't see anyone buy anything but I noted that the staff in

the restaurant did not seem to stop the vendors coming in to trade. We were enjoying ourselves so much that by the time we got to the border, it was too late to cross. We could however buy our tickets to Lusaka for the next morning and get our tickets to Lusaka, thanks to advice from our clued in cab driver, Ali. We bought the tickets and went to the border for our stamps. This is where we became convinced, that some passports are more forgivable than others.

We started off by showing our Yellow Fever cards and filling out some forms. The three South African holders did not have problems. We noticed though, that the Kenyan was having a heated discussion with the Health official. I had been certain we would have problems. The men and the boy in the team had asked for seven days at Namanga. This was now our tenth day. They had overstayed by three days. They had overstayed because they had not bothered to calculate the days we would need in Tanzania and when offered a week at Namanga, had all said 'yes, sure.' I, on the other hand, had asked for two months as I generally do when I know I can. We however, had not imagined the trouble would start from the Health official. Just when it came time for our passports to be stamped. We left the Kenyan there, figuring we would get back and see how we could help later. We went to Immigration and handed our passports.

He flipped through mine. I had not broken any rules. He stamped my passport and smiled.

Then he flipped through my son's passport.

And Mhlongo's passport.

'You overstayed?'

'Yes sir,' Mhlongo answered. 'The child was unwell so we needed him to recuperate.'

The child had, in fact, stayed in water swimming in Dar and had caught a cold. He blew his nose without prompting. I wasn't sure the immigration official would think this a convincing enough reason for their overstaying. There would be a fine for sure. It would have been better if he had used my carefully crafted story of our unwell grandmother in Morogoro. The immigration official smiled and said, "Afrika Kusini. Don't do that again." And stamped the passports.

Meanwhile, our Kenyan comrade was still held up at Health.

Later, he told us how it went. At Health after the official flipped through the passport he said, 'Something is missing in this vaccination card. You have no vaccination for cholera.'

He stated rightly that he had never heard of such a vaccination.

The official told him ignorance of the new law was no excuse. Then told him he would only let him go if he paid \$100. The official held on to the card, gave him back his passport and told him to think about it while going to get his immigration stamp. At immigration, the blue Kenyan passport resulted in another request for \$100 for overstaying. We did not have \$200 but even if we did, it was not money we would part with. So we pleaded on his behalf to both officials. They reluctantly but sternly allowed him to go. 'We are doing it because of your friends.' My Kenyan partner had complained about the new regulation to apply for the East African passport before his pages have run out. After his second experience at Tanzanian exit points, I suspect he can't wait to have the new regional passport.