

Nachingwea – almost upon us!

IF you've read any of our previous *Newsletter* articles, you'll know that my wife, Liz, and I are travelling through Tanzania, visiting places where my in-laws were posted during the 1950s, when the country was still known as Tanganyika. They were married at St Andrew's, Nachingwea in 1952 by Rev Ronald Cox.

Planning your own travel offers the freedom to tailor your itinerary—provided you have the time, interest, and patience. But it also demands effort and comes with

the risk that, if things go wrong, there's no one else to blame. In Tanzania, the challenges are real: the extensive bus network is notoriously unsafe, the minimal rail services rely on ageing, unreliable Chinese-built trains, and most internal flights route through Dar es Salaam, making direct provincial connections rare.

That said, we're embracing a bit of everything: internal flights, a rental car with driver, one 10-hour bus ride, Bajajis (Tuk Tuks), Uber, an overnight train—and, of course, our wits. Hey Ho!

Part of our route involves taking the once-weekly overnight Mukuba Express from Dar es Salaam to Mbeya, run by Tazara Railway. Despite the website listing contacts for reservations, emails went unanswered, and calls weren't picked up. After weeks of researching and trying a dozen phone numbers, we finally had success via a WhatsApp message (the Kiswahili has been omitted):



Robert: “Hello, please let me know if I can make a reservation for the Mukuba Express on this number? Thanks, Robert.”

Tazara: “Yes.”

Robert: “Great, our details are as follows...” We sent our names, the travel date, departure and arrival stations, the name of the train, “Mukuba Express”, class of sleeper compartment and asked what the cost would be.

Tazara: “Please send details of your train travel.”

Robert: “What other details would you like?”

Tazara: “Your names.”

Robert: Inclined to keep things simple, I resent our names.

Tazara: “It is reserved.”

Robert: “Thank you. Please let me know the cost and do we pick up the tickets at Dar es Salaam station ticket office?”

Tazara: “TZS 210,000 . Pick up tickets from Tazara office, not from ticket office.”

Robert: “Where is the Tazara office and is there a reservation number?”

Tazara: “Tazara office is in ticket office. No reservation number. Just say your names and pay in cash. Sometimes train doesn’t run.”

Robert: “When will we know if the train isn’t running?”

Tazara: “On day or day after. If it doesn’t run you can take train next week.”

Clearly, train scheduling was not a priority for the railway company. But had the reservation been made? We’ll only know when we find the Tazara office.



Another WhatsApp encounter with a hotel, ‘The Dicoo Inn’ in Mbeya went as follows:

Robert: “Hello, we would like to make a reservation. Is there anyone who can speak English?” (message repeated in Kiswahili).

Dicoo Inn: “You can make reservation with me.”

Robert: “Thank you. We would like to reserve a double room for two nights. The first night is for 30-31 August, then we travel to Matema, where

we will spend a night and then return for another night at the Dicoo Inn 2-3 September.

Dicoo Inn: "We do not have hotel in Matema. "

Robert: "We just want to book the Dicoo Inn in Mbeya, we will book the Matema hotel separately.

Dicoo Inn: "You want to reserve three nights?"

Robert: No, just two nights at the Dicoo Inn.

Dicoo Inn: "Then why you mention Matema where we don't have hotel. "

Robert: "I should not have mentioned Matema. Please can we book the nights of 30-31 August and 2-3 September at the Dicoo Inn."

Dicoo Inn: "You don't want to book room when you go to Matema?"

Robert: "No. We will book Matema ourselves. Just two nights at the Dicoo Inn please."

Dicoo Inn: "Okay."

And that was the last communication with the Dicoo Inn.

We've had similar exchanges with several other reservations, so to say our trip is planned is to take too many liberties.

The exception to this is the focal point of our stay in Nachingwea. Kevin (St Andrew's Nachingwea LINK Chairperson) has been an enthusiastic contact brought about through the Stapleford LINK. Everything from our arrival in Masasi to a drop-off at Lindi five days later, has been organised by Kevin. We have visits to the Bishop of Masasi - Right Rev James Almasi, the women's DARE group, two schools, the Stapleford Library, local dignitaries, the LINK Committee and their families, an extended three-hour church service, which we're going to struggle with, and a couple of our requests to visit sights that Liz's parents would have known.

We'll be taking gifts—some generously provided by the Stapleford LINK, others personal—which means an extra suitcase and the inevitable negotiation with Tanzania's ever-diligent customs officers upon arrival in Dar es Salaam. Seasoned travellers have offered one key piece of advice: bring cash.

We're spending the last week of our month in Tanzania at a lovely resort in Zanzibar. An unashamed reward for the endeavours of two elderly teens thinking they can still hack it on the road. **Robert & Liz Claiborne-Dixon**