

30th January 2012

Dear Friends

As there is much more to tell you about our trip to Tanzania, I continue from our arrival in Dar Es Salaam. Having snatched four hours sleep, we left our hotel at 5.00 am. Although the bus station was within walking distance from the hotel, Godfrey, our new found friend kindly came to pick us from the hotel and bring us to the bus. Fortunately he did, as he ably helped to navigate us through the chaos of a very busy intercity bus station and onto the right bus. I am not sure if we would have ever made it on our own! It certainly was a very interesting scene to observe once we secured our seats which Godfrey had also kindly booked for us. One of the most amazing things for us was the fact that all buses had a starting time of 6.00 hrs so that we sat in a huge bus blockade for almost an hour with ever bus vying to get out before everyone else! The logic of staggered departure times to ease such congestion just doesn't exist.

The journey out of Dar Es Salaam was striking by the number of fuel stations, and traffic on the road heading north consisted solely of buses and fuel tankers. While this was quite a novel phenomenon it is hardly surprising considering the pivotal role of Dar Es Salaam as a major port serving much of landlocked central Africa, and the lack of private transport in this impoverished country. As we had stupidly left our map at home (bought solely to follow our tracks across this new land!), we had no idea where we were or how much further we had to go (apart from knowing it was a long way). But it was a very pleasant adventure, constantly seeing new landscapes and again being amazed at the extent of cultivation and good quality housing. After dark, and after about 13 hours already, the trip did get a little tedious but we were kept very alert by the experience of somewhat dangerous driving at high speeds. We learned later that the driver was trying to beat a curfew, whereby if he had not got within a certain distance of Mwanza at a particular time, we would have spent the night sleeping on the bus! At about 12.30am we finally arrived at Mwanza, Nyakato and warmly welcomed by our sisters.



Christmas Eve was spent exploring a little of Mwanza and its beautiful lake, while our hosts did the final shopping for our celebrations. We attended the Vigil Mass and welcomed the significance of the birth of Jesus into our world. Christmas Day saw us engaging in the festive activities, with Elizabeth assisting with table decorations as I became immersed in icing cakes that our sisters had baked for their neighbours and friends.



Dinner was a festive occasion befitting the day, with much food of different cultural varieties. We had the added fun of introducing some of our sisters to the novelty of Christmas crackers for the first time.



After a little siesta, some of us went distributing the Christmas cakes before climbing to one of the highest points in Mwanza to view sunset over the lake. Mwanza is indeed a town of many hills and there are wonderful views from a number of different places.



Our special day ended in a traditional way with prayer and the exchange of gifts, around a Christmas tree.



But our trip did not end here, so there is still more to tell.

Until next time, Pat