

Pen pictures of school and life in Mwanza

Rosie

In Mwanza, even just walking to school can sometimes be an adventure in itself. If it's rained in the night, you jump streams where a path used to be; if it's hot you kick dust high up in to the shafts of morning sun; children on their way to state schools walk with you and hold your hand; you can buy freshly picked pineapples on the side of the road for a few pennies; and if you're really (un)lucky someone might try to sell you a tortoise.

Life is very different here from in the UK and I've had to get used to the way things are. At times, situations test my patience and drive me crazy, and at other times I am astounded by the gentleness and random acts of kindness of the people of Tanzania. I was working in a little primary school in England before I came to teach Reception at Isamilo. Although the two schools differ greatly in various ways, and initially I struggled with the language difficulties, kids are kids wherever you are - and my day still brightens when they bound in every morning. Now when one of them brings me a flower they've picked on the way to school, it's a frangipani instead of a dandelion!

There is a thriving social scene in Mwanza which you may like to participate in as fully or as seldom as you wish. You may find yourself eating steak and drinking wine at a restaurant overlooking the lake one day, and dancing to a live band in the Congolese club with hundreds of sweaty revellers the next. Mwanza has become my home. I love it, and you are *karibu sana* (very welcome) to come and see for yourself the delights it holds. You might end up becoming part of the motley crew!

Morgane

"Mwanza?! Why do you always choose to live in those weird places? First Rwanda and now Mwanza!? Haven't you seen the film?"

This was the reaction of a lot of my friends and family when I announced I was moving to Mwanza. And no, I have not seen the film.

Since then, some of them have come to visit and realised that maybe life here was not portrayed very objectively in 'Darwin's Nightmare' and that it was quite pleasant to be 2 hours away from the Serengeti and a short flight away from Zanzibar...

Don't get me wrong; this is not a dream place. But it works for me.

So what do you need to live happily? Good friends? There are plenty of those around here, colleagues, neighbours, other expats as well as Tanzanians of course. A great job? The school is changing, and improving, very rapidly and the students are respectful and hardworking. Social life? I mentioned the lovely people here but there are also some nice places to go to, not an amazing variety but enough! Nice weather? All year round...

Basically, Mwanza is a very easy city to live in, not huge but big enough and did I mention the weather?

Sheila

Recently, while at the coast, I bought a new top. The sales lady recommended hand washing. I told her I lived in Mwanza and we both laughed – no choice really!

Lifestyle here is different. A while ago my husband and I made a list of pros and cons of living in Mwanza and the cons considerably outweighed the pros. But we are still here!

Sometimes I feel that growing up in the 50s and 60s was good grounding for the way I'm living now. At my age I should be playing granny in the UK but here I am exploring East Africa.

When my sister sends me a short e-mail in reply to my 'How I was dragged up Mount Meru' (it was Kilimanjaro last year! – with my son who was visiting) because she's wearing three jumpers and her gloves in the house, I enjoy telling her sometimes it's so cold I have to wear long sleeves (21 degrees). She is tired of hearing I've been to the Serengeti ten times (well once was with her when she visited).

So if you tire of always having power or even water every day, if tarmac roads or pavement gets monotonous, if driving is not an adventure, if you like fresh food (with limited choices), then maybe this is the place for you.

Oh – and there is something about teaching here which challenges your creativity and inventiveness and the kids are fantastic.

Jonathan Robbins, Cathryn Fox and Leo

Mwanza can be the most relaxing and the most frustrating place at the same time. We enjoy the friendliness of the local people, the easy pace of life and the, usually, fabulous weather. Mwanza is a little dilapidated but they are making efforts to improve roads and buildings. There are a few good places to eat, 3 or 4 of western standards and there is a great selection of Indian food. Shopping is interesting; you do have to search for things, which can be entertaining if you are not in a hurry, and quality is often questionable. Prices can be high for imported goods and travelling has become more expensive, with higher hotel rates and air fares, but there are still plenty of opportunities for adventure, especially being so close to the Serengeti.

School has limited but acceptable resources. It is difficult to source quality goods within Tanzania, although there are occasional deliveries from the UK, and teachers tend to have to be a little more inventive. Classes tend to be better behaved than in the UK but still provide some challenges and Saturday School is a great opportunity to get involved in helping more disadvantaged children.

If you come expecting to wait a while for your food to arrive at restaurants, power cuts and brownish tap water then you will usually be pleasantly surprised. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world and at times this is very evident. However, we feel very privileged to live here and, with all things considered, feel our overall standard of life is as high as, if not higher than, when living in the UK. Hence the reason for extending our contracts for a fifth year.