

A date with destiny

LAKE SHORE LODGE, LAKE TANGANYIKA, TANZANIA

Words and pictures by Tom and Dag Girod.



Another dusty day in Africa came to an end, and we spent the night at Kalambo waterfalls in northern Zambia before following a rough dirt road to the remote little border post at Kasesya the next morning. Perhaps road conditions would change after the border post? Indeed they did – they got worse.

We've been overlanding through Africa for almost 11 months now. We began last year in September in Germany, taking the overland route from Egypt through eastern Africa, reaching Cape Town in May this year, 225 days and 25 606 km later. Now we're on our way back home, planning to travel again through eastern Africa, but now via more remote areas like northern Zambia, western Tanzania, Ruanda and Uganda.

We've travelled many roads: good, bad, broad, narrow, new and horrible tar roads as well as many gravel and

dirt tracks. But now, slowly, our will to suffer on bad roads is dwindling and we're beginning to feel tired from all the experiences and impressions we've had during the last year.

So now we find ourselves with our seven-day transit visa for Tanzania, at the intersection of two bad dirt roads in Sumbawanga. We have to make a decision. Turn left, towards adventure and 800 kilometres of more bad roads along Lake Tanganyika, or turn right, towards boredom and the start of the tar road in Mbeya...

As we'd already spent six weeks in Tanzania (when we drove south), we decide to take the 'fast track' via Mbeya the next day. In Sumbawanga we find a good place to camp for the night at Forest Way Country Club.

Normally one feels better after making a difficult decision. But we are somehow in a not-so-good mood, cleaning our rolling home and putting

everything back where it belongs. Suddenly there's someone standing next to our vehicle with a big smile. He says, "I'm Chris, wow, what a wonderful truck you have!" His enthusiasm wakes us up. We engage in a nice conversation and tell him about some of our recent overland adventures. We also tell him that we'd originally planned to head north from Sumbawanga to the Lake Shore Lodge, which we'd picked up a leaflet about some months ago when we were still heading south.

"It belongs to my wife and I," says Chris. His wife Louise joins us and we all laugh at the coincidence. We continue chatting about travelling in Africa for a little while and when Chris and Louise wave us goodbye and wish us a nice onward journey, we have new and reliable information about the northbound road through western Tanzania.

Later in the evening, while drinking a few bottles of Kilimanjaro beer, we



start to think. Why are we travelling through Africa? Aren't we still searching for adventures and new experiences? The 1 000 km road up north should be "bad, but not so bad", and hadn't we planned to also visit Ruanda and Uganda on our way back home? We make a new decision, this means a new adventure in western Tanzania and to the Lake Tanganyika!

The next morning we head north with recharged batteries, and of course we want to visit Chris and Louise and their Lake Shore Lodge. The entire road from Mbeya to Mpanda is currently under construction, which means we're driving on deviation tracks most of the time, but all in all it's a dirt track similar to many others we've driven before. The last 80 kilometres towards the lodge after the turn-off from the main road are actually much better, although they don't compare to Namibia's gravel wonders.

"Come as a guest and leave as a friend" says the sign that greets us at the lodge's entrance. Okay, this is quite a bold statement, we say to ourselves. Soon we're greeted by the very friendly personnel (Chris and Louise were still busy buying supplies and provisions in Sumbawanga at that point) and we quickly find a suitable space for our vehicle under the big mango trees on one of the four private campsites. But before we set up our camp, we enjoy a cold drink at the bar, it has a fabulous view over the blue waters of Lake Tanganyika.

Later on, we find ourselves relaxing at the beach, enjoying the lazy life and somehow not being in the mood to prepare dinner in our onboard kitchen.

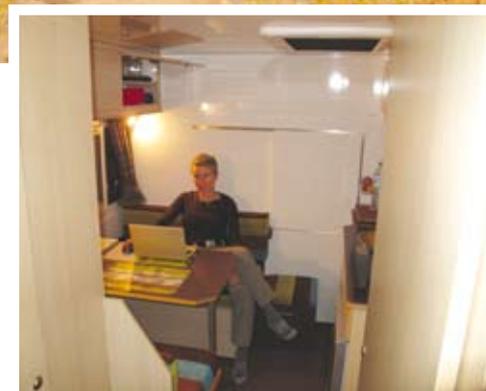


Above Our shaded campsite at Lake Shore Lodge. **Top right** Dag catches up on correspondence. **Bottom right** That's one tidy bathroom!

After hearing what's on the menu for the three-course dinner, we decide we deserve it.

But when we enter the Lodge Restaurant in the evening, we find no-one there. Instead, we find some lanterns leading us towards the beach, where a sign next to the tastefully decorated table says "You are welcome for dinner!"

So there we sit, having a candle-lit dinner under the stars, next to the gentle waves of Lake Tanganyika. The first course is fish from the lake, which almost melts in our mouths. The main course is a delicious interpretation of South African bobotie, and for dessert they serve us our favourite: malva pudding with vanilla cream. We eat silently, overwhelmed ▶



ABOUT LAKE SHORE LODGE AND CAMPSITE

Where: 160 km north-west of Sumbawanga, on the shores of Tanganyika Lake close to Kipili.

Activities: Diving (PADI), snorkelling, kayaking, fishing, waterskiing, mountain biking, quad biking, boat cruises and excursions to Mahale and Katavi National Parks.

Accommodation: Camping (US\$12), lawn *bandas* (US\$53 pps) and luxury chalets (US\$263 pps).

Dining: Breakfast (US\$7) / lunch (US\$10) / dinner (US\$15) (all three-course):

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by all the culinary impressions and the tranquil atmosphere.

After dinner, we meet the other guests at the lakeside bonfire, where we share many interesting stories about Africa, while drinking some more beers and wines.

The next morning greets us with a blue sky and a gentle breeze from the lake. What should we do today? Diving? Snorkelling? Kayaking? Fishing? Mountain biking? Quad biking? We opt for something else: relaxing, doing nothing and listening to chilled music.

At the dinner, we say goodbye to Chris and Louise. We have to move on the next day, because of our seven-day transit visa for Tanzania. We feel really sorry, because we would've loved to go on a night fishing trip with the local fishermen from the nearby Kipili village the next night.

But Louise replies: "Your seven-day transit visa? That's no problem. We can have it extended to 14 days in the nearby village of Kirando!"

We're interested, but the next day is a Saturday, and we have our doubts. "No problem, we can arrange it for you!" In that case, we didn't have to think too hard about it – we certainly wouldn't mind staying on an extra day at the Lake Shore Lodge.

The next morning, before we even manage to get to the reception and ask how to go about the visa extension, Louise comes to our campsite to pick up our passports. Overwhelming service!

With a heavy heart we say goodbye to Chris and Louise on Sunday morning. Now we can really say that meeting them in Sumbawanga was a date with destiny, and we have indeed found real friends at Tanganyika Lake in Tanzania! ■

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THEIR TRUCK!

Tom and Dag are travelling through Africa in a MAN overland truck – it's basically a robust camping cabin bolted onto a strong 4x4 truck chassis. Originally orange and in pick-up configuration, the '94 MAN truck was initially used by a German energy company to transport the paint used for painting high-voltage masts. Since these masts are usually somewhere in the field, the company required a 4x4 truck with good off-road capabilities.

What is now the living cabin used to be a cooling unit. The cabin was built in Switzerland by Frech & Hoch in '99. From '07 to '10 it was converted bit by bit into the living room that it is now.

The vehicle has everything that's required for an overland application: good off-road capabilities (ground clearance, traction, power), an excellent range (up to 2 000 km), a built-in kitchen with dining table, a permanent bed and even a bathroom with shower and toilet. It also has a reliable water



filter system and solar panels to recharge the cabin's batteries.

Tom and Dag's overland truck is nicknamed 'White Rhino', which explains why there's a rhino depicted on the outside of the vehicle. What's really special about White Rhino is how many people it can accommodate. Most other expedition vehicles (trucks) can accommodate only two passengers (driver and co-driver), which is a bit silly for a vehicle of this size. White Rhino can accommodate up to six passengers and sleeps four comfortably.

The total investment in the expedition vehicle was in the magnitude of US\$120 000.

TECHNICAL DATA:

- MAN truck M90, Type 12.192
- Max. gross weight 12 tons, travel weight 9 tons
- 6-cylinder diesel engine, 6 900 cc, producing 200 hp and 750 Nm
- Manual 6-speed gearbox with reduction
- Rear and central diff-locks
- 400-litre diesel capacity (fuel consumption is 20 l/100 km, or 5 km/l)
- 300-litre freshwater tanks, 70-litre grey water tanks
- 2-stage water filter
- 280 Ah cabin batteries
- Two solar panels



