



In a country whose average citizen does not own a car, public transportation rules the road. From motorbike taxis to the minibus “daladalas” to the more upscale coasters, much of the traffic you see is made up of these rides for hire. For traveling longer distances, there are giant buses available which make daily trips back and forth between, say, Moshi and Tanga, or Arusha and Dar.

The conditions in Tanzanian public transport are generally cramped, hot, and dusty. The drivers tend to be more concerned with making the trip quickly than with such frivolities as traffic laws and safety.

While these vehicles lack comfort, they do seem to try to compensate in one area. Almost all sport bright, flashy paintjobs which distinguish one bus line from another and may serve to attract riders. Often they have large murals painted across the back. The Nickels family’s favorite of these may be seen adorning the rear of buses of the N’gorika line. Featured is a standard depiction of Mount Kilimanjaro, but with the unusual addition of a reclining tiger in the foreground. It may take a moment to realize why this is odd. Tigers do not live in Africa. We have plenty of lions, leopards, and cheetahs, but no species of tiger is native to this continent.

When a tiger bus is in front of us for some distance, we start to speculate about the inception of the murals. Whose idea were

they? Was the artist just mistaken about native fauna? Is the bus owner an immigrant from Asia? It’s a mystery. At any rate, for us the tiger-Kili image has come to symbolize a fish out of water, and we can totally relate to that.

We’re going on five years in Tanzania. It feels increasingly like home to us, but in so many ways we are strangers in a strange land. As we turn up the fans and reach for light-weight clothes to wear while we listen to “seasonal” favorites like “White Christmas” and “Sleigh Ride” we recognize the dissonance between the beautiful country that hosts us and the country of our births. Both places are home, but the gap between them serves to remind us of another country that by God’s grace we will one day call home.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ this December, we send our love and gratitude to you, our friends and family. Your support and encouragement enable us to do the work set before us with vulnerable children. They are worth it!

May you experience the “wonders of His love” this Christmas season and in the New Year.

With joy,

*Phil, Sara, Lydia & Audrey*

Phil, Sara, Lydia, and Audrey Nickels

*“If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” – Hebrews 11:15-16*