

## Cell Phone

The porch where I am sitting is newly screened and the open style living, palm trees, and beach just six or seven hundred meters to our east is all Floridian (or as I imagine it might be). We are told that these days of mild nights and morning are a three months aberration in what is otherwise a secession of continuous and relentless heat. We are forewarned.

Of the many initial impressions, the most determined and profound is of the economy here &ndash; how far the Tanzanians have to make a dollar go. The Mazungu economy, the one that caters to the foreigners &ndash; the economy we are living in &ndash; is close enough to ours to be recognizable: \$2,000 a month for a smallish 3 bedroom 2 bath house on the fashionable MsasANI (penultimate syllable stressed, as in all Swahili words) &ndash; which accurately describes our house. Water is delivered, trash collected (the Tanzanians are a particularly neat group &ndash; multiple showers per day &ndash; no one leaves a job without showering for the trip home &ndash; streets continuously swept to litter-free dusty condition in a government CCC-type program), highspeed (relative term there) internet (\$500 to start and \$55 per month). You can get a big beer anywhere for about a buck &ndash; on the beach or in a shack in town (its the beer, stupid). Dinner &ndash; and here the peninsula really shines, there are lots of charming eateries &ndash; will run you \$5 to \$10, so it&rsquo;s cheap, but not so cheap you don&rsquo;t recognize it.

Then there is the real Tanzania. The first hint comes from the Peace Corps volunteers who claim they need a few more bucks than their current \$100 a month per diem. &lsquo;But they get free housing,&rsquo; we&rsquo;re reminded. Which brings up the story of Richard.

Richard is the gardener here. Well, he was the Jack of all Trades, gardener, guard, owner&rsquo;s live-in spy, but when we took the place we said &lsquo;no live-ins, spies or otherwise&rsquo; (I&rsquo;ve gotten smarter since the last time &ndash; no one starts work here until 10:00 so I don&rsquo;t have to creep about looking for a quite place to work). Unfortunately, that pronouncement put Richard and his wife &ndash; both Malawian (here for the robust economy&hellip;now that tells you something) out of a place to live.

We offered Richard a single-title job (gardener only &ndash; no starting work before 10:00) at the same rate he had been making (\$70 a month for 6 days a week of work), but said we would add to cover his lodging and transportation costs. He came back to tell me &ndash; and I was shocked at this &ndash; that he would need \$120 as a deposit for his room. I checked around and found out that the number was correct. It is customary to pay the first year in full. Yep, rent, \$10 bucks a month. That is where this real economy starts.

Ana, our cherubic 24 year old house keeper &ndash; not a word of English but a sense of Clean to beat the band - makes two bucks a day, the average wage around here, but we also pay her the standard thirty cents she needs to buy her lunch from the lady on the corner who cooks out of a big common pot for the community laborers. Ana gets neither a housing nor transportation allowance, but then she can walk the couple miles it takes to get to work.

And despite all this, the Tanzanians are a wonderfully cheerful, peaceful lot. They are welcoming and graceful, humorous and polite. I hear there is a lot of crime here &ndash; understandably (and, really, where isn't there &ndash; besides maybe Switzerland, but look what it costs to live there!) The crime is not yet violent against Mazungus&hellip;though I hear they can be somewhat more vicious amongst themselves.

Last points: Cell Phones and DVDs &ndash; the points at which the two economies meet. The cell phone is the ubiquitous signifier of status here. Above a certain station (4th grade for Mazugus &ndash; I kid you not - and professional employment status for locals) the cell phone is de rigor. We, being good and important Mazugus, have 3 cells and a land line (one cell being Nancy's pass around duty phone which we happen to have right now) and our kids have not yet weighed in (though that is coming soon). The thing is, cell calls cost half a buck a minute! George, the senior guy working at our house, cook and chief whatever (charming delightful guy &ndash; perfect English, great with dogs and kids), who makes a whopping \$100 a month, asked if he could recharge his cell at work (no electricity chez lui)&hellip;and he needed to spend that \$100 to get the phone (a full month's salary for the professional man) so that he can spend that buck (three days rent) to make a two minute call! And you really don't leave home without it.

And finally DVDs &ndash; another deal entirely. Most clearly supporting the Mazungu life style requirements, these high quality DVDs are sold wherever we congregate (pizza parlors, beach bars, shopping centers). They run about \$4-\$7 apiece. I just got The Manchurian Candidate last week (\$4)&hellip;and not the old one either &ndash; Denzel Washington or whomever&hellip;good flic, if you haven't seen it. You might want to catch it &ndash; I believe it is still showing at a theater near you. Or you can wait a couple months for the DVD to be released.

And the bootleg DVD market is hot &ndash; it is dog eat dog out there. I just bought a 5 set (Farenheight 9/11, around the world in 80 days, Last Samuri&hellip;a real contemporary anthology) for \$7. Can't wait to watch it&hellip;and watch it..and watch it&hellip;but how to explain it to the kids? That's been the dilemma &ndash; yes it is pirated, yes it is illegal, yes I did buy it, yes I did see your teacher standing there. After great deliberation (and before we bought the first one) we &ndash; at least Luke and I &ndash; decided that if we could promise that we would try not to do anything worse than this, we could watch bootleg DVDs and still live with ourselves. And so, with such small steps, does the life of crime begin. More soon from the Birthplace of Man (still don't know if that's correct, but I think it is kind of catchy&hellip;)