

Reprints of my articles in The Dar Guide

The Kigamboni Ferry

To most of the residents of Dar es Salaam, the Kigamboni Ferry is a convenient route to escape the crowds of the city and spend a pleasant day on a tranquil southern beach, but to the 600,000 residents of Kigamboni the ferry is a lifeline. Not only does it act as the community's daladala, commuting 30,000 passengers to work and home each day, but it also ferries in all their necessary goods. Truck loads of staples, the full assortment of duka supplies, even drinking water comes across that way. The unattractive alternative to the ten minute crossing is a slow thirty kilometer drive (take Kilwa road south of the city and turn left at Kongowe).

To some extent, the ferry created the very problem that it solves. Just ten years ago the Kigamboni peninsula had far fewer residents, and the ferry only carried half the number of people it carries today. But with the arrival of the '20 car plus 800 passenger' Kigamboni in 1990, the ferry's over overall capacity more than doubled from the Alina's '15 car and 400 passenger' load. The Kigamboni also shortened the average wait time, which is now about ten minutes, depending on direction of travel and the time of day. (The Ministry of Works operates the ferry and sets prices at 100 Tsh per passenger and 1000 Tsh for cars, regardless of the time of day).

For those looking to cross from Dar with minimal delay, weekday mornings between 6:00 and 10:00 are the optimal time, because both boats are in service and the crowd is going the other way. Between 10:00 and 15:00 hours there is generally a single ferry operating. The good news is that both boats are fully staffed around the clock so that they can respond to service needs whenever they arise.

While the ferry is technically closed from 1:00 to 4:00 each morning, the Kigamboni residents know that it is just a radio call away. It is not unusual for the boats to be called into service to assist with emergency transport to one of the city's hospitals. In fact a few years back, when Kigamboni's TIPER refinery was still in operation, the ferry provided emergency service in the opposite direction, ferrying the fire and rescue vehicles over to a blaze. They shared the credit for keeping that blaze at bay.

Weekends are by far the busiest time, with both boats in operation for over twelve consecutive hours beginning around 9:00 am. That length of continuous operation can create problems, the most common of which is clogging caused by all the garbage in the harbor. Most of the clogging can be handled by the skipper but several times a day it requires something more. That's where the fulltime dive team comes into play. The divers are a virtual SWAT team in the water, hacking away at fishnets and plastic sacks, and they are often able to restore performance without

significant delay.

And what will become of this venerable institution when the much ballyhooed 'new bridge' is finally built? Current thinking is that the bridge will cross further south down Magogoni creek, below where the tankers come to berth. A bridge there would further open the peninsula to development; and the upshot of that? Demand for ferry service on the northern point is almost certainly here to stay.

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