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Adventure

Bus to Moyale,  
Kenya-Ethiopia  
border



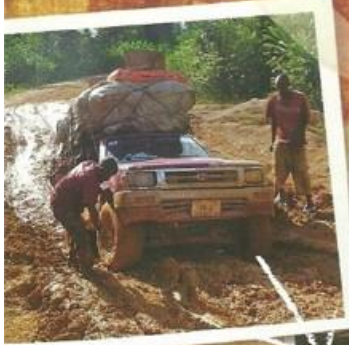
Minibus transport,  
Saint-Louis, Senegal



Sabrattha Roman city,  
Libya



Dalla-Dalla  
minibus at  
Stonetown,  
Zanzibar



Bush taxi from  
Buchanan to  
Greenville,  
Liberia



Accommodation  
block, Ngongo,  
Rep of Congo

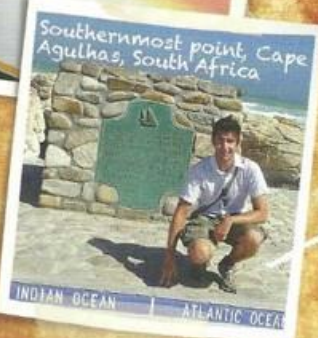
Dhow to Kilwa  
Kisiwani island,  
Tanzania



Travelling by flat bed  
truck carrying maize,  
Pebane, Mozambique



Intercape bus  
from Cape Town  
to Caledon,  
South Africa



Southernmost point, Cape  
Agulhas, South Africa





# Busman's holiday

Ian Packham set off to 'circumnavigate' Africa with just one rule: he had to travel as close to the coast as he could, using only public transport. He completed the trip in 13 months, notching up 25,000 miles and 31 countries. He spoke to **Mary Askew**

## WHY PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

Initially it was because I don't enjoy driving. In the end it actually turned out to be a good thing as I had to interact with the communities I travelled through.

## WHAT REACTION DID YOU GET FROM THE LOCALS?

Most people in Africa never travel for pleasure, so what I was doing was a real surprise to them. People were staggeringly generous. It really took me aback. If I asked somebody where the bus stop was, they wouldn't just tell me – they would take me there, share food with me, and wait with me for the bus to turn up, which could be hours. There was a generosity that you rarely see in Britain.

## DID YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICA CHANGE?

Absolutely. I was really quite worried and nervous to start with. Everyone you speak to who hasn't spent time in Africa sees it as a really dangerous place. People were telling me that I was going to die out there. When I got to Africa I had an amazing reception everywhere I went. It was completely the opposite to what you see in the mainstream media here.

## WHAT WAS YOUR BEST MOMENT?

Reaching the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. When I set out I didn't know if the trip was even possible, so getting halfway round felt great. Early on in the trip, in Mauritania, the bush taxi passed a herd of camels. There is something very special about seeing animals in their natural habitat and that was a fabulous moment.

## DID YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GIVING UP?

Yes, briefly, when I wasn't able to get into the Democratic Republic of Congo. The officials there wanted money under the table, which I wouldn't give them. It caused a domino effect as I collected my visas on route. Not getting into the DRC meant I couldn't collect my visa to Angola, and from Angola get into Namibia. I had to go on a huge detour to get back on track. It was very demoralising.

## WHICH COUNTRIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT AGAIN?

I really enjoyed my time in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria and would love to go back, despite travel being very difficult there. The infrastructure is poor, but there is such a vibrant culture and people are fantastically friendly.

## WERE YOU EVER LONELY?

I am naturally quite shy and for the first two months I felt really homesick. Then I became more confident and had more conversations with locals. From that moment on I was never lonely. In fact, there were times when I desperately wanted a break from people, to be on my own, but being on your own is quite hard in Africa.

## TELL US ABOUT ONE MEMORABLE CONVERSATION

I had a really interesting chat with a fisherman in Senegal. He told me that fish caught off the coast there were not for local consumption but were sent to North Korea. He had had real problems earning a living since the contract fishermen came in. It was sad, but fascinating.



We thoroughly recommend Ian's book about his adventure, *Encircle Africa: Around Africa by Public Transport*, available now from [travellafricashop.com](http://travellafricashop.com). For more information, visit [encircleafrica.org](http://encircleafrica.org)

**I had an amazing reception everywhere I went. It was completely the opposite to what you see in the mainstream media here**

## WHAT DID YOU READ?

When I set off about 2kg of my bag consisted of books. I am a big Graham Greene fan and read *The Heart of the Matter* in Sierra Leone, where it is set. It is an amazingly evocative book and matched the country perfectly, right down to describing the changing colour of the laterite roads.

## WHAT WAS YOUR MOST ESSENTIAL BIT OF KIT?

I found having a can of sardines with me incredibly important. When I didn't know how long it was going to take me to get to my destination, it was good to know I had sardines in my bag. I could eat them cold, and they were a very normal thing to eat in Africa so nobody looked at me strangely for having them.

## WHAT DID YOU WISH YOU'D LEFT AT HOME?

A tent. Even the smallest village had somewhere to stay or someone offering to rent a spare room. It was great to be part of people's ordinary lives with kids running about, and perhaps watching satellite TV – just like in a British home. I didn't use the tent once.

## IS IT GOOD TO BACK IN THE UK?

I miss not being surrounded by the verve and love of life that they have in Africa, but there were things about England that I dearly missed – things you don't notice when you experience them on a day-to-day basis. For example, after a while you start to miss a nice English queue.

## IS THERE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'D PASS ON TO WOULD-BE ADVENTURERS?

I learnt so much about myself and about Africa. It was such a revealing experience from both those points of view. It's led me to the conclusion that anyone can do anything they want to, you just have to want it enough. 🌿