

# BAREFOOT into AFRICA

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The chance to travel up Lake Tanganyika onboard the MV Liemba, visit the chimpanzees at Gombe and to travel across the heart of Tanzania by train was too much to resist.

Our guide for the three week trip was Ken 'Barefoot' Smith of [Barefoot Safaris](#) and he certainly lived up to his name, never once wearing shoes whether in the city or the bush.



The first few days were spent travelling up through Zambia from Lusaka to Mpulungu. Stopping on route at Kasanka National Park and Livingstones' memorial. Travelling through the Bemba villages it felt like time had stood still and we were certain little had changed from Livingstones' time.

Arriving in Mpulungu, we quickly settled into the Grasshopper Hotel, a very typical old run down colonial house with a charm of its own. Following an excellent meal cooked by Mr Barefoot and a few drinks we slept well and were up early for breakfast and the transfer to the docks and MV Liemba. Here our vehicles left us for

five days slowly making their way around via the roads to meet us in Dodoma.

Facilities aboard the ferry were surprisingly good, particularly as Mr Barefoot arranged for us to use the Officers toilet and shower, very hot and steamy with no lock on the door however a lot less potent than the other facilities! Meals were excellent and hearty especially the freshly baked bread for breakfast.

The days aboard the Liemba were exciting and full of colour. Nineteen times throughout the journey we stopped some way out from the shore, blasted the horn and dropped anchor, while the fisherman and merchants desperately paddled out to

us, selling everything bar the kitchen sink, delivering post, collecting or dropping off passengers including a bride and groom! Markets were soon in full swing in the passageways biscuits, fruit, meat, rice and much more briskly traded as the stallholders came and went during the journey. The activity did not slow day or night, we eventually however retired to our cabins spending Two fitful nights disturbed by the blasts on the horn and the brisk trade at the stalls outside our cabins.

Arriving in Kigoma in good time we disembarked and were sad to say goodbye to the Liemba however the visit to Gombe was now very much at the forefront of our

minds. Following a restful day and night at the Tanganyika Beach Hotel formally the Railway Inn, we set off via boat at dawn for Gombe. Two hours later we arrived, split into two groups and were allocated guides. We set off at a brisk pace, soon over come by the humidity and pace, a rest stop was called for, chance to catch our breath and then we were off again. This pattern continued for a couple of hours the pace quickening when the chimps were heard, however unable to keep up we struggled to catch even a glimpse of



them. Then our guide, suddenly stopped fingers to his lips he indicated for us to very slowly and quietly inch forward and there sat in a tree just a few feet away was Goblin. A magical hour and a half was then spent following the chimpanzees, first Goblin then a whole family group, youngsters playing, adults grooming each other and a couple of adolescents squabbling. We were sad to leave however felt it only fair to let them have the forest to themselves once again.

Following an exhausting walk back along the beach, we greedily drank the cold

drinks waiting for us and tucked into lunch. Exhausted but happy we climbed back into the boat and slept for most of the two hour journey back. A quiet evening and early night followed.

The following evening we arrived at Kigoma station and boarded the train for the 24-hour journey across the heart of Tanzania to Dodoma. Every time the train stopped we hung out of the windows, the children begged for empty water bottles or sold us honey, hard-boiled eggs, pineapples and bananas. At some stations whole markets were set up whether we arrived in daylight or after dark, delicious smells wafted into the carriages from the cooking pots enticing us out on to the tracks.

During the night we were all awoken by an explosion and almighty jolt as the train shudder and stopped, many hours later we eventually pulled away again. Apparently the engine had exploded and a new one had to be brought from elsewhere!

Exhausted we arrived at Dodoma at around 2am eight hours later than planned. The train journey was however an experience none of us would have liked to miss.

From Dodoma we made our way to big game country and the Ruaha National Park, an exceptionally beautiful place where elephant and buffalo abound. We spent two whole

days out in the park, taking a siesta during the midday sun under a shady tree, posting lookouts to ensure our safety and each evening was spent enjoying sundowners on the riverbank, a perfect end to a perfect trip.

