



MZUNGU IN KAMPALA with Bryan McInnis

The easiest way to beat Kampala traffic

After the better part of a year in Kampala, I finally discovered the secret to defeating rush hour traffic. The solution is surprisingly simple.

Acquire a pair of flashing red and blue lights and attach them to your grille.

Rainy season had arrived, and I still had not figured out how to filter the SafeBoda app for "driver with roof." So a few days ago, I made a fateful decision. I drove myself into the city. Anyone who has spent more than a week here knows you do not simply drive into Kampala city centre during rush hour without a plan. The odds of sitting in traffic until your leg muscles begin to lose memory are too high. Fortunately, I am not a dummy.

Before beginning my commute, I drove down the road to a shop I will call God Makes a Way Auto Mechanic. I presented the required secret handshake and quiet-

ly mouthed the password. "Unofficial MP."

The mechanic paused and glanced toward the road.

"Is that Prado yours?"

"Yes, sir," I replied calmly.

"Good. It would be better if you had a G-Wagon. But a Prado is fine."

He disappeared into the back and returned moments later carrying my salvation: a pair of clip-on blue and red lights.

With daylight breaking across the horizon and traffic building on Ggaba Road, I clipped them onto the front grille and switched them on. Their brilliance cut through the morning haze and silently communicated a very important message to every taxi driver, boda rider, pedestrian and commuter on the road.

This man's plans are far more important than yours. What happened next was nothing short of miraculous. Traffic parted.

Cars pulled aside. Bodas scattered. As I approached the Mukwano roundabout, traffic police sprang into action, shouting at drivers who had failed to recognise the historic significance of my morning commute.

At one point, I glanced in the rear-view mirror and noticed a long line of vehicles gliding effortlessly through the wake of my flashing lights. I felt generous that morning and allowed them to follow.

Leadership requires sacrifice.

Of course, I should be clear that I am not recommending this. Kampala already has enough unofficial importance moving through its roads. There are moments here when traffic feels less like transportation and more like a national referendum on status. The largest vehicle wins. The most confident driver wins. The person most willing to behave as if the entire nation is awaiting their arrival often wins.

And yet, the temptation is understandable. Traffic in Kampala tests a person's soul. It reveals things about your character you may have preferred to keep hidden. You begin the journey as a patient, thoughtful human being. Forty-five minutes later, you are bargaining with God for a gap between a taxi and a cement truck.

Perhaps that is why flashing lights are so powerful. They offer the fantasy that one can rise above the jam, that the ordinary limits placed on everyone else need not apply to you. It is less a traffic solution than a spiritual diagnosis.

For years I feared Kampala rush hour. It turns out all I needed to conquer it was two clip-on lights and a completely unjustified sense of national importance.

Clearly, I still have much to learn.

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