

US VERSUS THE IMMIGRATION OFFICER (1-0)

Time was nigh to go tither to the metropolis Addis Abeba and motion the immigration office to extend our visa. Us romantic fools thought it fun to take the public bus service from Hawassa, safer than the minibus and definitely cheap beyond imagining. For less than three euros it will carry you six hours straight with a lengthy stop halfway. The rear axle of our particular bus was bend, and the only available three places were just above this pendulum, giving more substance to horse powered transport.



Once there, we signalled a not so pristine Lada and were dropped off at an imposing granite stairway, getting our sweat on with a hearty climb, step after step bringing us closer to the men in power holding court in even numbered rooms. In a sort of baraque detached from the building proper, we were first outfitted with the necessary forms through which public servants tend to communicate with the outside world, lending strength to their nefarious verbal communication skills. We were too late for achieving actual results that day – cancellotomy of sorts with less blood but more ink – and were asked by deaf mute civil servants to fill out some forms, copy our present visa and passport so we could return the next morning armed with the cookies that makes the typical bureaucrat heel and waggle his tail.

Come morning we were allowed to participate in a game of queuing and hopping between rooms creating an algorithm of annoyance (76 → 80 → 76 → 78 → 90). The gods had mercy on Pien, since she requested an extension under the obscure limit of forty days, specifically another thirty-five days. It was deemed unnecessary for her to be processed by the top dowg and was allotted an extension without any

further hassle. Jaap and myself however, requested a more lengthier stay, and were thus suspicious subjects who were unknowingly send packing to room eighty for a proper rogering.

A desk ridden alpha male of the paper shuffling kind presided over the proceedings in this room. When we encountered this man earlier that day, he spoke unto us with peculiar design and preached he was a detective who sought the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Lo and behold, after the usual wait wherein we observed successful and failed negotiations of other legal aliens – quite entertaining, I must add – we were allowed to approach his fake mahogany altar and make a throw at success ourselves.

As he scanned our papers and asked us offhandedly what the *real* purpose of our visit to Ethiopia was, the heavens closed up and droplets of despair started their descent – we entered with tourist visas, technically not the only purpose of this journey, for, as you well know, we do voluntary aid for weeks on end. Naughty us! After a lukewarm exchange between us and this pen licking officer, where he, amongst other silly questions, inquired after our profession and how much money we declared at the airport upon entry, he ended the discussion with ‘thirty days are quite enough, good riddance’. What?! By law, we are allowed to extend our tourist visa twice with thirty days. Yet, his declaration of annoyance seemed more like a coy trick to entice us into confessing crimes we did or did not commit.

Although his suspicion was ... minutely reasonable - a state, I suspect, comes naturally with the job – this outcome was bloody unacceptable. We refused to stand up and leave, and I became vexed of sorts, for, however fun ‘the game’ is on itself, this breed of people, proper disciples of Bart Simpson, always seem to use their power only to annoy.

After I asked him in semi angered poise, en plein public, if he would also pay for changing my tickets and would be O so kind to help me reschedule the arrival and departure of my friends, he gave in, crossed out his previously penned directives and changed the thirty days into our requested forty-two. Only down side to this petit adventure was that we could not pick up our passports later that day.