

LIFE



It's time to
get really
cheesy

Page 16



TAXI-ING EXPERIENCE: The main taxi rank in Kampala, Uganda. Albert Retief took a public transport journey from Tokyo to Cape Town recording the sights and modes of transport that he used along the way. He was moved by people's kindness and generosity. PICTURES: ALBERT RETIEF

Camels, trains and automobiles...

Using public transport, lensman snaps world on the move, writes **Nontando Mposo**

WE HAVE more things in common with people we have never met than we have differences, says photographer Albert Retief.

The 29-year-old from Durbanville recently travelled by public transport through more than 20 countries – from Tokyo in Japan to Cape Town – capturing people and places on camera, and the similarities we share as human beings.

“Yes, we are different, but we share more commonalities; such as protests and music,” says Retief. “Also, the trip taught me to be more tolerant, that the world is not going to change for you, but you have to adapt in order to fit in with your environment.”

Inspired by American novelist and travel writer Paul Theroux, Retief embarked on the adventure in December 2013 after spending about two years teaching English in South Korea and Taiwan.

“I wanted to do something similar to what Theroux was doing, but present it in a visual way. I have done other long trips in southern Africa and in Europe, but this was my biggest adventure yet,” he says.

Retief set out with no solid plan, only a backpack packed with necessities such as a change of clothing, his passport, camera gear, and his eagerness to see the world.

“Visas were the main thing that required some organising. I had to look into the visa requirements for each country and where I could travel with my South African passport. The rest I figured out as I went along,” he says.

A bullet train in Tokyo set him off on his way and for the rest of the trip he used various modes of public transport, including buses, trains, motorbikes in Tehran and Kampala, hitchhiking, trucks

in Malawi, a camel in Egypt, while “relying on the generosity and hospitality of strangers”.

Retief says he decided to use public transport because he wanted to have real experiences with people.

“Using public transport is when you get to actually meet people because you have the time and an opportunity for conversations.

“You might not be able to have a long chat with someone on an airplane, but on a three-day train trip through Kazakhstan you can. It’s also the cheapest way to travel,” he says.

The countries and cities he visited during his almost year-long trip included Iran, Turkey – where there were mass protests at the time – Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Lesotho. Surviving on about R10 000 a month, he spent his nights in either hostels, backpacker accommodation, camping under the stars, or in the homes of kind strangers.

“I survived on mainly street food.

“The majority of the people were welcoming and generous regardless of their culture, race or faith. I came back with a better understanding of the world,” says Retief.

“There were times when I was scared, like when I was interrogated by

police in Sudan, and when I ran out of money at one point, but I didn’t let that ruin my experience. Fear is a product of your imagination and you have to determine how much it will outweigh your desire to succeed.

“I was not robbed or anything like that...”

“There are some bad people out there, but a greater number of people are friendly and generous.”

As for the highlights, he says: “I saw beauty in so many places. I walked the streets each day taking photos of people and what was going on around me.

“Some people invited me to their homes to meet their families and I even attended a wedding.

“I came back wanting to see more of the world.”

He plans on embarking on another adventure soon, and wants to publish the photographs of his most recent trip in a book.

To view more of them, visit: albertretief.blogspot.com/ or follow him on Instagram: [@albertretief](https://www.instagram.com/albertretief/).



ADVENTURER: Albert Retief PICTURE: WILLEM LAW



PILE UP: Rush hour, Tokyo, subway.



PROTECTED: Shepherd in the Simien Mountains, Ethiopia.



WELL TRAVELLED: Northern Kenya long-haul bus.