

February 2019

Travels with Anzie - Dakar Taxi Revisited

I have attached the original Dakar Taxi journal below that I wrote during our original stay. Please read it before continuing here.

So, most of it has remained the same. The big change is in road conditions. All of the main highways have been repaved, widened and concrete medians added. This, thanks to Arab investment, according to the locals. Another change is in the fuel. When we left in late 2005, all vehicles were powered with either leaded gas or diesel. Back then, cars using leaded gas around the world were given a new lease on life. They were exported to West Africa. Since then the rules have changed. Now it's either unleaded gas or diesel.

Interesting enough, Western Europe is in the process of banning diesel. Normally when we rent a car in France, we specify diesel because we save 15% on fuel. Plus the diesel there is different from the "putt-putt" diesels we're used to in the U.S. It burns cleaner and the engine is more powerful than our putt-putts. This year when we arranged a rental in France for March-May, we were advised that diesel is the same price as regular gas, and the diesel car is more expensive to rent than the regular gas car.

But, I digress.

The taxis look the same as before: yellow and black Nissan Sentras and other Japanese generic makes. Many are composed of more Bondo and brushed-on layers of paint than metal. I'm becoming more picky about my taxis: I inspect them for cleanliness, which, to me, is a sign of professionalism. I ask if the driver speaks French. Many of them speak only Wolof, the local language. We've experienced confusion with our driving directions due to miscommunication. Then, you have to bargain with the drivers. After three weeks here, we have a pretty good idea of the normal fares for different destinations.

When we lived here before, we had a car. I would drive to and from work and, yes, I had a few close calls. But I swear that the drivers have become much more aggressive. We looked into renting a car for the duration of our stay. Aside from the cost (\$60/day for an eight-year-old Peugeot) I decided that I could no longer compete in terms of aggressivity(is that a word?). Anzie and I both have suffered from bouts of constipation here. My new theory: it's at least partially the result of the several times during each taxi ride that we clench our sphincter muscles in fear of an oncoming collision.

Senegal Politics: Abdoulaye Wade is the president we remember. He spoke at a Suffolk University - Dakar convocation when I taught there as an adjunct professor. He spoke flawless English. He was in office from 2000 to 2012. During his tenure the country's infrastructure was greatly improved. The highway system is so much better. The new international airport was opened in the past year. A new railway line connecting downtown Dakar to the new airport – a 45 minute drive from Dakar – is scheduled to open within the next few months. Power outages were a big problem when we lived here. Now we have them only occasionally, and they usually last less than an hour. Senegal now can produce 800 megawatts of power. There's talk of a

wind turbine farm in the near future, as well as a grid to connect to hydropower being produced south of Senegal in Guinea Conakry.

Oil has been discovered offshore near the northern border with Mauritania. This worries me because, in Africa, oil seems to breed corruption, which breeds political unrest. Heretofore, the only natural resources in Senegal were beaches and fish – nothing worth fighting over. Let us hope that this new-found resource is managed efficiently and lawfully.

It is said that Wade also produced many billionaires with all this construction work. His son, Kalim, also made billions. Kalim's nickname is "Mr. 15%". That's what he allegedly skimmed off the top of any project funding. Since 2013 he has been ensconced in the "Iron Bar Motel", and was recently sentenced to 6 ½ years in prison for corruption.

Nonetheless, in the 2012 presidential election, President Wade, who claims to age 92, put up his son as candidate. We recently viewed a documentary on the election, and the preceding campaign. Several demonstrations became violent: rocks thrown at police; police responding with tear gas and rubber bullets. The opposing candidate, Macky Sall, won by a 2-to-1 margin. The 2019 presidential election is scheduled for February 24. Sall is favored to win, although we are advised not to spectate at any of the predicted rallies.

By the way, we have a new neighbor ... a sheep. He has taken up residence on a porch two floors down. He "B-a-a-h"s all day long. So far he hasn't made noise at night, or not that we can hear anyway.

Trash – a Major Problem: One major improvement the President could make would be to clean up the trash. Trash and garbage are all-pervasive. The first step would be to put out trash cans. The second would be to pick them up. There is weekly garbage pick-up right now. Hopefully the garbagemen will accept added reimbursement for the added duties. Piles of rubbish and construction debris are strewn everywhere. Perhaps a volunteer program could help here. Obviously this is not a project that will be accepted by all overnight. It will take some time and effort to change the mindset of the Senegalese to become anti-litter. It took years to change the mindset in the U.S. back in the '50's. A pilot project would be a great start. I would recommend our present neighborhood. The Yoff beach should be a tourist attraction; however the overwhelming presence of trash is a real detriment. During my morning beach walks I pick up glass shards, but there's plenty more trash deposited by the ocean. Personally I wouldn't mind becoming a beachcomber ... sun, sand, water – what's not to like?

A la Prochaine,

Chuck Kennedy

June 13, 2003

Dakar Taxi

I have in mind a new video game that should really sell. We'll call it "Dakar Taxi". The challenges that confront the player won't be out of somebody's fantasy. They'll be the real ones that I've seen here in Dakar -- like:

- The black and yellow taxis that decide to turn a narrow two-lane road into a three-lane. They either come right at you and expect you to pull off the road, or else they pull out to pass you and veer into you when the oncoming lane doesn't give way.
- One rule here is supposed to be " Priority to the Right". Any car coming off a road to your right is supposed to have right of way. It just doesn't work that way in reality. In the real world of Dakar, the rule seems to be " Priority to the Biggest Car" or else "Priority to the Driver with the Biggest Balls".
- The "Car Rapides", those jitney buses with seats for 25 plus ten guys hanging off the back end. They pull out from the side of the road without so much as a glance behind them.
- Horse-drawn carts. These carts consist of 4 X 6 ft. platforms mounted on rubber tires. You take your life in your hands when you try to pass one.
- The "vendeurs" - the peddlers who create a traffic hazard at every stoplight as they try to sell you everything from toothpicks to watches to a tail light for a 1986 Peugeot (I'm not kidding!)
- Potholes on the paved roads that could house a family of five.
- Boulders and crevasses on the unpaved roads, of which there are many.
- Sand. The other day I got stuck in the middle of an unpaved road. Luckily I was able to rock my way out of the soft sand.
- Live animals: goats, cows, donkeys. Don't trust that donkey who's placidly munching grass alongside the road. As soon as you come up even with him, he'll bolt right out in front of you.
- Dead animals. We came across two dead camels in Mauritania.
- Speed bumps ranging in size from " What was that?" to " Holey Moley, I think we left our rear axle back there!" A speed bump is known here as "gendarme couchant", which translates: " sleeping policeman".
- Praying Muslims. Friday is the " Sabbath Day", if you will. Muslim men attend services at the mosque. If the mosque is full, the faithful will spill out onto the street. On our way home from Anne's office last Friday afternoon we came upon a huge traffic jam. Enough cars ahead of us began to turn around and head the other way so that we could see what the problem was. The street was filled with dozens of men kneeling on their prayer rugs. We were forced to either wait for the prayers to end or else back down the street and head in another direction. We chose the latter.

My problem is developing a scoring system. I could use some help here.