



Collections • Tanzania

Personal Journey: In Tanzania, a sudden stab of murky suspicion



A stroll toward the Masai Market in Arusha, Tanzania, a shopping area for handicrafts, paintings, and jewelry made by artisans. A young local guided two travelers through the area, but an abrupt hint of danger set their intuition quivering. (DUSTIN GRINNELL)



By Dustin Grinnell, For The Inquirer

POSTED: August 18, 2014

Luxury African Safaris

desnasafaris.com

Using award winning lodges & camps in Southern Africa and East Africa

Heart Attack Signs?

simplehearttest.com

Know the 4 Bodily Signs. Take The Simple Heart Test Now

"I Finally Cured My RLS"

seratame.com/EndRestless...

How I Stopped Restless Leg Syndrome Fast Relief 100% Guaranteed to Work

Why Can't I Find a Date?

gk2gk.com

Maybe because you're looking in the wrong places. Try Geek 2 Geek

InfectiousDisease Advisor

infectiousdiseaseadvisor.com

Trusted Source on Communicable Diseases & Drug Resistance

Knowing when to trust your intuition can be difficult, especially in a foreign land.

It wasn't our guide who made me suspicious; it was the bystander, a short woman with a vibrant dress and bananas in her hand.

Our guide had been confident during our "tour" of Arusha, Tanzania, not the least bit shady. "This way," he said. "Right through here," as he pointed to a shoddy door on the side of a nondescript building.

The woman, however, was shifty, her eyes twitching, her too-still body poised, begging, "Don't go you fools, it's a trap."

"Wait," I said, motionless. My friend stopped and turned, followed by the guide, who looked confused.

The half-day adventure through the busy town in northern Tanzania, which served as a jumping-off point for safaris and treks up Mount Kilimanjaro, had been fun and stimulating, but most important, and often surprisingly, safe. And the guide, a scrawny twentysomething from a neighboring town, had been accommodating and seemed genuine, despite his obvious desire for us to buy one of his paintings at the tour's conclusion.

But as the woman beside him shuffled her feet anxiously, I began to reconfigure my impression of the young man. The sudden hint of danger had cast the local artisan in a different, less-than-hospitable light. In return for a few swirls of paint, a quid pro quo I was certain he performed regularly, perhaps he had wanted more than a few of our American dollars.

The woman hadn't nodded at me, she hadn't slipped me a note, and she hadn't screamed, "Run!" But I had reacted nonetheless. She had given something away, exposed our guide somehow. "No," I said, despite the fact no one had addressed my hesitancy.

"But this is last part of the tour," the guide responded eagerly, placing his palm on my friend's backpack. Suddenly I began a game of connect-the-dots. Like breadcrumbs, I followed the details of the last few hours back to the moment when our guide discovered us at our hostel's front door, wading through a crowd of peddlers and beggars, offering us refuge in a cozy alleyway where he stashed his artwork for purchase. "I can show you around Arusha," he had prodded. We told him no a handful of times, but ultimately, adventurously, agreed.

His services required such persistence, I thought, but not taking no for an answer should have been our first tip-off. The second had been his speech; it was choppy and too quick, like a coffee-house barista who'd done too much of his own stuff. And the

We Recommend

Times Square is not a square

January 6, 2013

Find More Stories About

[Tanzania](#)

guide had loved my friend's Gore-Tex boots, joking with a grin that he could leave them with him before we returned to Boston. His quip had seemed benign then, but now, my eyes glued to the nervous woman, the remark seemed like a canned observation likely bestowed upon countless wide-eyed tourists who came before us, and before them.

"Take us back to our hostel, please," I said, now convinced that the "last leg" of our tour was a trap and that hiding inside the building was a gang of wicked thieves, their stolen duffel bags stuffed with the wallets and watches and purses and jewelry of traveling victims.

The guide's face dropped, his head shifting backward. Saying nothing, he pivoted and dodged the building on our way back to the center of town. Was he disappointed that his plan, which had worked without a hitch countless times before, had been foiled? Or was he insulted by my silent accusation, my subtextual jab that he was a faker, a predator even?

Would we have come upon danger or wonder, thieves with machetes, or an oasis, brimming with sensory treasures? I'll never know. Intuition is funny like that. It deals in subtleties, rascally details subject to perception, environment, and false cues from objects and especially humans, like an onlooker who had put my nerves in overdrive. But had I misread the situation? The woman could have just heard a terrible bit of news, after all. She could have been searching desperately for a missing child. Maybe, humiliatingly, she had found our presence unnerving.

As we walked back to our hostel, I felt a slight embarrassment, wondering if perhaps I had overreacted, if maybe I had been victim to my heightened senses, my own prejudices and fears, provoked by a low-down building in a foreign country at the edge of an otherworldly town. But I also felt grateful that I had followed my instincts, thankful that I had let the woman on the periphery inform my senses. Right or wrong, appropriate or obnoxious, clever or foolish, I had listened to the tiny details only my intuition had noticed and knew that was the best I, or anybody for that matter, could do.

Dustin Grinnell is a science writer for a biomedical research institute in Cambridge, Mass.