

Sharing space in Lagos

Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria, is the second most populous city in Africa (overtaken by Cairo). The city started on an island, then spread across five islands and onto the adjoining mainland. To visualise the scale and density, consider this: the cluster of islands is smaller than Cape Town in area, yet is home to 15 million people.

It is a busy, bustling, boisterous and densely populated city, with evident inequality between the haves and the have nots, and its transport system is characteristic of this: cavalcades (for those who have a lot), cars (for those who have), and buses and taxis (for those who have not) dominate the roads, and the density means that traffic jams, or 'go slows', are a common feature.

Bridge into Lagos Island: The commercial centre of Lagos is on Lagos Island. This is the third Mainland Bridge, commissioned by a former military leader. We were lucky enough to be traveling on it the day after Christmas, which left the road relatively empty; usually it takes hours to traverse. Most people traveling onto Lagos Island use private vehicles, although buses and taxis are second and third choice.



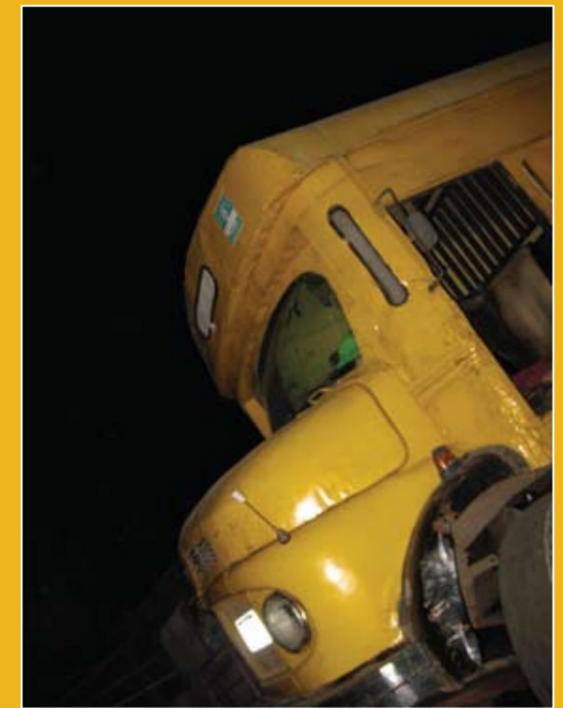
TEXT & PICS: EMMA AROGUNDADE & KOLADE AROGUNDADE



Religion is part of the fabric of life in Nigeria, with Christianity the most visible religion in Lagos. Some churches have fleets of buses and taxis that bring the faithful to Sunday services, yet many vehicles not used by churches are also painted with religious messages.



Lagos city taxis are painted yellow with black stripes. This taxi's white and green means that it is an interstate or long-distance taxi – similar to the long haul minibus taxis in South Africa.



Molues are synonymous with Lagos, and celebrated in photography, poetry and art about the city. 'Molue' is a pidgin word that means 'mole it in' or pack it to the brim. They are privately owned and cheaper than minibus taxis, and the most used mass transit vehicles. Government leases particular routes to the owners, and these routes are calculated on the basis of the population statistics for various areas. Assigned routes are painted on the outside of the vehicle, and heavily policed.



The cheapest, fastest and most dangerous way of getting around, 'okadas' get you through traffic jams quickly. They are officially frowned upon, however, and have been banned from most parts of Lagos, now operating primarily in suburban areas. They're also known as 'let's go', 'naga' and 'achaba', but the more common 'okada' is named after a local airline. Government tried to introduce rickshaws as a safer alternative, but has failed to stamp out okadas' popularity.



RIGHT: A busy intersection in Lagos: While not all roadsides resemble this one, you'll see a sign in the background noting a 'hi-tech road development' – continual upgrades and road development are a common feature.



Roadside trading in Lagos is commonplace. Due to the high traffic volume, traffic jams and long, slow journeys are regular features of life. These 'go slows' or 'hold ups' present perfect opportunities for traders of all kinds, from food and clothing to furniture and livestock!



Another indication of the extent of religious involvement in everyday life in Nigeria, this sign in the Anglican Archbishop Viney's compound exhorts church members to consider road safety.



Waiting for the bus: people from the outskirts of Lagos rely on public transport to get to the islands and back again. Queues can become a real crush of people, although this one is relatively small.



One of the other roads linking the mainland to the island, in the middle of a fairly common traffic jam. Trips on the same route in Lagos can take anywhere from 20 minutes to three hours, depending on the time of day.



LEFT: Nigeria has a fairly widespread railway network, which covers local and national routes. This compound in the Yaba district of Lagos is currently not being used — because no-one is sure to which government department it belongs...

BELOW: The Federal Mass Assisted Transport body loans vehicles to private individuals as part of a hire-purchase scheme with no interest; these buses run countrywide. The scrapes on the side of the bus are the result of pushing through traffic jams.

