

Time Travel, Kisumu railway station

Goal

Discover how Mathematics Education can be used in the Historic Environment

Learn local history of Kisumu and the connection to today's society

Connect university, museum and schools

Facts

The Kisumu area was inhabited by the Jo-Kisumi clan before the arrival of the British.

Kisumu town was founded in 1901 as the end terminal of the Uganda Railway. In December that year the railway line reached Lake Victoria and in February 1902 it opened for goods and passenger trains. The port adopted the name Port Florence, soon to be changed to its local name Kisumu.

The Uganda railway was a huge logistical achievement and became strategically and economically vital for both Uganda and Kenya. Construction was carried out principally by laborers from India. The British could transport people and soldiers to ensure their domination of the region. The Uganda Railway also developed shipping services on Lake Victoria, passenger and trade steamers. Kenya and Uganda Railways and Harbours was founded in 1929, succeeded by the East African Railways and Harbours Corporation in 1948.

By the 1930s and 40s, Kisumu had become a leading East African centre for administration, transport and commerce and in the 1950s a new town centre was designed. After independence in 1963 Kisumu developed even more as a centre for trade and communication. The 1960s and 1970s were times of growth and prosperity. A new railway station opened in 1972, the same year as the municipal boundaries were widely extended. The incorporation of new residential areas faced challenges in terms of social service.

In the 60s the harbour was improved, faster ferry boats were introduced as well as a new train ferry service across Lake Victoria. A lot of cargo was transported on the lake, cotton and coffee were reloaded on the trains and exported.

The airport in Kisumu was built already in 1931 and served for many years as a hub for international flights.

Kisumu has always been a segregated town, since it was first outlined in 1903, with clear demarcation of African, Indian and European areas. Europeans lived in the elevated Milimai area and formed the upper tiers of administration; Indians filled up lower administration and were the majority of the traders and merchants; Africans had more manual jobs dwelt in simple railway workers accommodation (landhies) or in homesteads.

The progress of the town stagnated in 1977, as a result of the dissolution of the East African Community. The railway and harbour company were divided into national railways.

The 1980s and 1990s had some environmental crisis and the outbreak of water hyacinth in Lake Victoria, causing problems in the lake region.

In 2012 the passenger trains operating between Nairobi and Kisumu stopped.

Kisumu is today a fast growing town facing challenges and opportunities in services, housing, business and transport.

Scenario, Preparing for the opening of the new railway station in 1972

The new train station is almost finished after years of planning and more than a year to build.

The old station is too small and can't facilitate the growing amount of goods and passengers.

Kisumu is a thriving town, a town of communication. Business and trade are prosperous, there are always people coming and going. The harbour has been improved, there are new and faster ferry services across Lake Victoria. The airport is growing with both domestic and international flights to several cities on the continent. The railway has always been the centre in Kisumu and it's going better than ever. Passengers and goods are increasing. The railway and harbour company is famous for its professionalism and also for the design and construction of equipment for trains, stations and ships.

Kisumu town has this year incorporated new residential areas and the administrators are making plans to improve the service and living conditions, both in the new and old areas. Of course there are many challenges in a fast growing town like Kisumu.

The day is finally here when the first train from Nairobi will arrive at the new train station. All the work has been focused on finishing the carpentry and painting on the new building and there has not been time enough to prepare for opening ceremonies.

Therefore East African Railways and Harbours Corporation have called for extra workers today, young and old, to finalize the last operations. The platform and the rail have to be cleaned and there is always goods to reload. There has to be a celebration sign, nice decorations on the posts and the new timetable is not totally finished. And of course there has be some singing and dancing when the first train arrive, and that train is expected already this afternoon...

Roles

Station master, ticket master, inspector, foreman, officers, vendors, clerks, labourers...

The students are young persons who have been called in to prepare for the opening of the new train station (Indians, Africans)

Key Questions

Communication

- What is the best way of communication/ transportation – cars, trains, ships, airplanes?
For me, for the community, for the environment?
Can trains and ships be a mean of developing the region, the country, East Africa?
- How do we improve communication between different groups of people in Kisumu and how to improve living conditions in this fast growing town?

Activities

- Make a celebration sign for the opening of the new railway station: text, illustrations etc
Make (paper) garlands to decorate the station
- Finalize the train timetable
- Make boxes and containers for the vendors
- Clean the platform and the rail
- Prepare singing and dancing for the opening

Possible activities:

- Reload cargo (cotton/coffee..)
- Make a bench or other equipment for the platform (design, construct)?
- Prepare tea and sandwiches?

Disruptive activities: Buy tickets (1st, 2nd, 3rd class)

Buy candy or biscuits from vendors

Singing and dancing

Time Plan

07.30 Preparation of the site

09.00 Students arrive, welcome, background, scenario
characters, rules

09.45 Initiation, Time Travel starts,
Activities and discussions in groups
Disruptive activities

10.40 Coming together, put up the signs, show the time-table, sing and dance

11.00 End of the Time Travel (first train is coming)
Tea, reflection

11.30 The students leave for school
Clean up the site

1 February /1 September 2014

Ebbe Westergren, Kalmar County Museum, Sweden

Lena Westergren, Berit Roos Johansson, Linnaeus University, Sweden

Phoebe Awiiti, Kisumu museum