

Language

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English and Swahili (called Kiswahili in the language itself) are the official languages of Kenya and are taught in schools throughout the country. There are also many major indigenous languages (including Kikuyu, Luo, Kikamba, Maasai and Samburu) and a plethora of minor tribal languages. Hindi and Urdu are still spoken by residents of Indian subcontinent origin.

Most urban Kenyans and even tribal people who deal with tourists speak English, so you shouldn't experience too many problems making yourself understood. Italian is almost the second language on the coast, and Kenyans working in the tourist industry may also speak German. Most tourists to the coast also visit the national parks, so safari operators almost always speak some Italian and German.

Swahili is widely spoken in Kenya, but the language becomes more basic the further you get away from the coast, with a lot more English words creeping in. You'll also find that there are more books and newspapers available in English than there are in Swahili. Nonetheless, a working knowledge of Swahili, especially outside urban areas, is very useful. It will enrich your travel experience and open doors, often enabling you to

communicate with people who don't speak English, particularly speakers of different tribal languages.

Another language you may come across in Kenya is Sheng, which is spoken almost exclusively by the young people. Essentially a patois, it's a mixture of Swahili and English, with a fair sprinkling of Hindi, Gujarati, Kikuyu and other tribal languages. Unless you can speak reasonable Swahili, you probably won't realise Sheng is being spoken – listen out for the distinctive greeting between friends – *Sassa!*. The response can be *Besht*, *Mambo* or *Fit* (pronounced almost like 'feet').

SWAHILI

The Yale website at www.yale.edu/swahili/ is an excellent general online reference to the language and contains a useful audio pronunciation guide. Get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Swahili Phrasebook* for a handy, pocket-sized language guide chock full of useful Swahili.

PRONUNCIATION

Perhaps the easiest part of learning Swahili is the pronunciation. Every letter is pronounced, unless it's part of the consonant combinations discussed in the 'Consonants' section below. If a letter is written twice, it is pronounced twice – *mzee* (respected elder) has three syllables: m-ze-e. Note that the 'm' is a separate syllable, and that the double 'e' indicates a lengthened vowel sound. Word stress is almost always falls on the second-last syllable.

Vowels

Correct pronunciation of vowels is the key to making yourself understood in Swahili. If the following guidelines don't work for you, listen closely to how Swahili speakers pronounce their words and spend some time practising.

Remember that if two vowels appear next to each other, each must be pronounced in turn. For example, *kawaida* (usual) is pronounced ka-wa-ee-da.

a	as in 'calm'
e	as the 'ey' in 'they'
i	as the 'ee' in 'keep'
o	as in 'go'
u	as the 'oo' in 'moon'

Consonants

Most consonants in Swahili have equivalents in English. The sounds **th** and **dh** occur only in words borrowed from Arabic. The **ng** combination is tricky at first but gets easier with practice.

r	Swahili speakers make only a slight distinction between r and l ; use a light 'd' for r and you'll be pretty close.
dh	as 'th' in 'this'
th	as in 'thing'
ny	as in 'canyon'
ng	as in 'singer'
gh	like the 'ch' in Scottish <i>loch</i>
g	as in 'get'
ch	as in 'church'

ACCOMMODATION

Where's a ...?	... iko wapi?
camping ground	uwanja wa kambi
guesthouse	gesti
hotel	hoteli
youth hostel	hosteli ya vijana

Can you recommend cheap lodging?

Unaweza kunipendekeza malazi rahisi?

What's the address?

Anwani ni nini?

Do you have Kuna chumba kwa ...?

a ... room?	
single	mtu mmoja
double	watu wawili, kitanda kimoja
twin	watu wawili, vitanda viwili

How much is it per day/person?

Ni bei gani kwa siku/mtu?

Can I see the room?

Naomba nione chumba?

Where's the bathroom?

Choo iko wapi?

Where are the toilets?

Vyoo viko wapi?

I'll take it.

Nataka.

I'm leaving now.

Naondoka sasa.

EMERGENCIES

Help!	Saidia!
There's been an accident!	Ajali imetokea!
Call the police!	Waite polisi!
Call a doctor!	Mwite daktari!
I'm lost.	Nimejipotea.
Leave me alone!	Niaceh!

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

It's considered rude to speak to someone without first greeting them, so even if you only want directions, greet the person first. *Jambo* and *salama* can be used as the Swahili equivalents of 'excuse me'. *Shikamoo* is also a respectful greeting used for elders: the reply is *marahaba*.

Hello.	Jambo or Salama.
Welcome.	Karibu.
Goodbye.	Kwa heri.
(Until) tomorrow.	Kesho.
Goodnight.	Lala salama.
See you later.	Tutaonana.
Yes.	Ndiyo.
No.	Hapana.
Please. (if asking a big favour)	Tafadhali.

Thanks (very much). *Asante (sana).*

You're welcome. *Karibu.*

Excuse me. *Samahani.*

Sorry. *Pole.*

How are you? *Habari?*

I'm fine, thanks. *Nzuri.*

What's your name? *Unaitwa nani?*

My name is ... *Jina langu ni ...*

Where are you from? *Unatoka wapi?*

I'm from ... *Mimi ninatoka ...*

Where do you live? *Unakaa wapi?*

I live in ... *Ninakaa ...*

May I take a picture? *Naomba kupiga picha.*

Just a minute. *Subiri kidogo.*

DIRECTIONS

Where's ...? ... iko wapi?

It's straight ahead. *Iko moja kwa moja.*

near *karibu na*

next to *jirani ya*

opposite *ng'ambo ya*

Turn ... *Geuza ...*

at the corner *kwenye kona*

at the traffic lights *kwenye taa za barabarani*

left	kushoto
right	kulia

HEALTH

I'm sick. *Mimi ni mgonjwa.*

It hurts here. *Inauma hapa.*

I'm allergic to ... *Nina mzio wa ...*

antibiotics	viuavijasumu
aspirin	aspirini
bees	nyuki
nuts	kokwa
peanuts	karanga

antiseptic *dawa ya kusafisha jeraha*

condoms *kondom*

contraceptives *kingamimba*

insect repellent *dawa la kufukuza wadudu*

iodine *iodini*

painkillers *viondoa maumivu*

thermometer *pimajoto*

water purification tablets *vidonge vya kusafisha maji*

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak (English)?

Unasema (Kiingereza)?

Does anyone speak (English)?

Kuna mtu yeyote kusema (Kiingereza)?

What does (asante) mean?

Neno (asante) lina maana gani?

Yes, I understand.

Ndiyo, naelewa.

No, I don't understand.

Hapana, sielewi.

Could you please write ... down?

Tafadhali ... andika?

Can you show me (on the map)?

Unaweza kunionyesha (katika ramani)?

NUMBERS

0	sifuri
1	moja
2	mbili
3	tatu
4	nne
5	tano
6	sita
7	saba
8	nane
9	tisa
10	kumi
11	kumi na moja
12	kumi na mbili

13	kumi na tatu
14	kumi na nne
15	kumi na tano
16	kumi na sita
17	kumi na saba
18	kumi na nane
19	kumi na tisa
20	ishirini
21	ishirini na moja
22	ishirini na mbili
30	thelathini
40	arobaini
50	hamsini
60	sitini
70	sabini
80	themanini
90	tisini
100	mia moja
1000	elfu

ON SAFARI

Look there. *Tazama pale.*

What is there? *Iko nini pale?*

What animal is that? *Huyo ni mnyama gani?*

electric fence *usiguse sengeri*

Watch out! *Angalia!/Chunga!*

Danger (on signs) *Hatari*

African buffalo	mbogo
antelope	popu/kulungu
baboon	nyani
bird	ndege
bushbaby	komba
cheetah	duma
crocodile	mamba
elephant	ndovu/tembo
gazelle	swala/swara/paa
giraffe	twiga
hippopotamus	kiboko
impala	swala pala
jackal	mbweha
leopard	chui
lion	simba
mongoose	nguchiro
rhinoceros	kifaru
snake	nyoka
spotted hyena	fisi
water buffalo	nyati
zebra	punda milia

QUESTION WORDS

Who?	Nani?
What?	Nini?
When?	Lini?

Where? *Wapi?*
Which? *Gani?*
Why? *Kwa nini?*
How? *Namna?*

SHOPPING & SERVICES

department store *duka lenye vitu vingi*
general store *duka lenye vitu mbalimbali*

I'd like to buy ... *Nataka kununua ...*
I'm just looking. *Naangalia tu.*
How much is it? *Ni bei gani?*
Can I look at it? *Naomba nione.*
I don't like it. *Sipendi.*
That's too expensive. *Ni ghali mno.*
Please lower the price. *Punguza bei, tafadhali.*
I'll take it. *Nataka.*

Do you accept ...?
credit cards *Mnakubali ...?*
travellers cheques *kadi ya benki*
hundi ya msafiri

more *zaidi*
less *chache zaidi*

Where's (a/the) ...? *... iko wapi?*
bank *benki*
market *soko*
tourist office *maarifa kwa watalii*
... embassy *ubalozi ...*
hospital *hospitali*
post office *posta*
public phone *simu ya mtaani*
public toilet *choo cha hadhara*
telecom centre *telekom*

TIME & DATES

What time is it? *Ni saa ngapi?*
It's (ten) o'clock. *Ni saa (nne).*
morning *asubuhi*
afternoon *mchana*
evening *jioni*
today *leo*
tomorrow *kesho*
yesterday *jana*

Monday *Jumatatu*
Tuesday *Jumanne*
Wednesday *Jumatano*
Thursday *Alhamisi*
Friday *Ijumaa*
Saturday *Jumamosi*
Sunday *Jumapili*

January *mwezi wa kwanza*
February *mwezi wa pili*
March *mwezi wa tatu*
April *mwezi wa nne*
May *mwezi wa tano*
June *mwezi wa sita*
July *mwezi wa saba*
August *mwezi wa nane*
September *mwezi wa tisa*
October *mwezi wa kumi*
November *mwezi wa kumi na moja*
December *mwezi wa kumi na mbili*

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

What time is the ... leaving?

... inaondoka saa ngapi?

Which ... goes to (...)?

... ipi huenda (...)?

bus *basi*
minibus *matatu*
plane *ndege*
train *treni*

When's the ... (bus)?

(Basi) ... itaondoka lini?

first *ya kwanza*
last *ya mwisho*
next *ijayo*

A ... ticket to (...).

Tiketi moja ya ... kwenda (...).

1st-class *daraja la kwanza*
2nd-class *daraja la pili*
one-way *kwenda tu*
return *kwenda na kurudi*

cancelled *imefutwa*
delayed *imeche leweshwa*
platform *stendi*
ticket window *dirisha la tiketi*
timetable *ratiba*

Private Transport

I'd like to hire a/an ... *Nataka kukodi ...*
bicycle *baisikeli*
car *gar i*
4WD *forbaifor*
motorbike *pikipiki*

Are you willing to hire out your car/motorbike?

Unaweza kunikodisha gari/pikipiki yako?

(How long) Can I park here?

Naweza kugesha hapa (kwa muda gani)?

Is this the road to (Embu)?
Hii ni barabara kwenda (Embu)?

Where's a petrol station?

Kituo cha mafuta kiko wapi?

Please fill it up.

Jaza tangi/tanki.

I'd like ... litres.

Nataka lita ...

diesel *dizeli*
leaded/unleaded *risasi/isiyo na risasi*
I need a mechanic. *Nahitaji fundi.*
I've had an accident. *Nimepata ajali.*
I have a flat tyre. *Nina pancha.*
I've run out of petrol. *Mafuta yamekwisha.*

The car/motorbike has broken down (at Chalinze).

Gari/pikipiki ime haribika (Chalinze).

The car/motorbike won't start.

Gari/pikipiki haiwaki.

Could I pay for a ride in your truck?

Naweza kulipa kwa lifti katika lori lako?

Could I contribute to the petrol cost?

Naweza kuchangia sehemu ya bei ya mafuta?

Thanks for the ride.

Asante kwa lifti.

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

I need a/an ... *Nahitaji ...*

Is there a/an ...? *Kuna ...?*

baby seat *kiti cha kitoto*
child-minding service *anayeweza kumlea mtoto*
disposable nappies/diapers *nepi*
(English-speaking) babysitter *yaya (anayesema Kiingereza)*
highchair *kiti juu cha mtoto*
potty *choo cha mtoto*
stroller *kigari cha mtoto*



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Swahili Phrasebook

Glossary

The following are some common words that you are likely to come across when in Kenya. For a more complete glossary of food terms, see p94.

abanyamorigo – medicine man
askari – security guard, watchman

banda – thatched-roof hut with wooden or earthen walls or simple wood-and-stone accommodation
bao – traditional African board game
beach boys – self-appointed guides, touts, hustlers and dealers on the coast
boda-boda – bicycle taxi
boma – village
bui-bui – black cover-all garment worn by Islamic women outside the home

chai – tea, but also a bribe
chai masala – sweet tea with spices
chakula – food
chang'a – dangerous homemade alcoholic brew containing methyl alcohol
choo – toilet; pronounced 'cho'
Cites – UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

dhow – traditional Arabic sailing vessel
dudu – a small insect or bug; a creepy-crawly
duka – small shop or kiosk selling household basics

fundu – repair man or woman who fixes clothing or cars, or is in the building trades; also an expert

gof – volcanic crater

hakuna matata – no problem; watch out – this often means there is a problem!
harambee – the concept of community self-help; voluntary fundraising; a cornerstone of Kenyatta's ideology
hatari – danger
hoteli – basic local eatery

idli – south Indian rice dumpling
ito – wooden 'eyes' to allow a dhow to see obstacles in the water

jinga! – crazy!; also used as an adjective
jua kali – literally 'fierce sun'; usually an outdoor vehicle-repair shop or market

kali – fierce or ferocious; eg *hatari mbwa kali* – 'danger fierce dog'

kanga – printed cotton wraparound incorporating a Swahili proverb; worn by many women both inside and outside the home

KANU – Kenya African National Union
KC – Kenya Cowboy, a young white male Kenyan
kikoi – striped cotton sarong traditionally worn by men
kiondo – woven basket
kitu kidogo – 'a little something'; a bribe
kofia – cap worn by Muslim men
KWS – Kenya Wildlife Service

Laibon – chief or spiritual leader of the Maasai; known as Olonana earlier, and Lenana today
lugga – dry river bed, mainly in northern Kenya

makonde – woodcarving style, originally from southern Tanzania
makuti – thatch made with palm leaves used for roofing buildings, mainly on the coast
malaya – prostitute
mandazi – semisweet, flat donut
manyatta – Maasai or Samburu livestock camp often surrounded by a circle of thorn bushes
mataha – mashed beans, potatoes, maize and green vegetables
matatu – once-feared public minibuses used throughout the country, now 'tamed' by new safety regulations
matoke – mashed plantains (green bananas)
mboga – vegetables
miraa – bundles of leafy twigs and shoots that are chewed as a stimulant and appetite suppressant
mkate mayai – fried, wheat pancake filled with minced meat and raw egg; literally 'bread eggs'
moran – Maasai or Samburu warrior (plural morani)
murrum – dirt or part-gravel road
mursik – milk drink fermented with cow's urine and ashes
mwananchi – worker of any kind but usually agricultural (plural *wananchi*, which is also used to refer to 'the people')
mwizi – a thief
mzee – an old man or respected elder
mzee kipara – bald man; literally means 'mosquito airport'
mzungu – white person (plural *wazungu*)

Narc – National Rainbow Coalition
Ng'oroko – Turkana bandits
Nissan – see *matatu*

nyama choma – barbecued meat, often goat
Nyayo – a cornerstone of Moi's political ideology, literally meaning 'footsteps'; to follow in the footsteps of Jomo Kenyatta

panga – machete, carried by most people in the countryside and often by thieves in the cities
parking boys – unemployed youths or young men who will assist in parking a vehicle and guard it while the owner is absent
pesa – money
Peugeot – shared taxi
pombe – Kenyan beer, usually made with millet and sugar

rafiki – friend; as in 'my friend, you want safari?'
rondavel – circular hut, usually a thatched building with a conical roof

safari – 'journey' in Swahili
sambusa – deep-fried pastry triangles stuffed with spiced mince meat; similar to Indian samosa

shamba – small farm or plot of land
shifita – bandit
shilingi – money
shuka – Maasai blanket
sigana – traditional African performance form containing narration, song, music, dance, chant, ritual, mask, movement, banter and poetry
sis – white Kenyan slang for 'yuck'
siwa – ornately carved ivory wind instrument, unique to the coastal region and often used as a fanfare at weddings

Tusker – Kenyan beer

ugali – maize meal set hard and served in brick-shaped pieces
uhuru – freedom or independence

wa benzi – someone driving a Mercedes-Benz car bought with, it's implied, the proceeds of corruption
wananchi – workers or 'the people' (singular *mwananchi*)
wazungu – white people (singular *mzungu*)

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