Kenya

Country Facts
Population: 39,002,772
Languages: Swahili, English
Predominant Religions: Christian (Protestant, Roman Catholic), indigenous, Islam minority
Time Zone: Three hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 254, country code; 11, Mombasa city code; 2, Nairobi city code

Introduction:
Everyone should visit Kenya at least once — not just for the spectacular wildlife, but also for its beautiful lakes and beaches and for the sweeping vistas of the Great Rift Valley. Kenya has more than 50 national parks and game reserves, some devoted to marine life or natural beauty as well as wildlife. Kenya’s people are friendly, the tourist trade is well-organized, and there’s a lot to see and do, making Kenya a rewarding place to visit. That isn’t to say that Kenya is a trouble-free destination. If you spend some time in its cities, you are increasingly likely to encounter petty crime.

Compassion in Kenya:
Compassion International’s work in Kenya began in 1980. As of 2010 more than 71,200 children participate in more than 285 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 1,450 mothers and caretakers and their infants and toddlers through 37 centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 235 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Kenyan children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- English and Kiswahili (also called Swahili) are Kenya’s official languages although English is widely used in business, education and government sectors. Kiswahili is promoted to encourage national unity.
- Kenyans are warm and friendly. The family is society’s most important group, followed by the tribe. Failing to maintain close ties with the extended family is considered rebellious behavior.
- Shaking hands is the customary greeting in Kenya and there are many different types of shakes for different relationships. For example, a long, extended clasp is typical for well-known acquaintances and brief, standard handshakes are for someone you have just met. Some Kenyans, when shaking hands with a person of elder status, grasp their right wrist with their left hand. While it may be rare to find people hugging, women tend to be freer about this. In urban areas, it is also common to find men who are good friends hugging.
- Public displays of affection (including holding hands) are not acceptable in most areas, although they are increasingly common in Nairobi.
• Eye contact is important and people are more willing to trust a person who will look them in the eye. However, some traditional women will not look men in the eye.
• Kenyans tend to be conservative and formal in business situations. Titles, such as doctor and professor, should always be used when applicable. Expect to know someone for a while before using his or her first name. Initial greetings are always marked by sometimes lengthy questions about your family, country, etc.
• Politics is an acceptable area of conversation once you are well acquainted with your hosts.
• Conversations about sex and local rituals are usually considered taboo.
• Strict and traditional gender roles are the norm in most rural settings in Kenya and, although women in senior management positions are rare among all ethnic groups, black Kenyan women in urban centers have begun to be recognized in politics, academia, business and government. Kenya’s chief nursing officer is a woman and has represented Kenya at international organizations including the United Nations. There are numerous organizations for women in business, such as the Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWRT) and the Business and Professional Women’s Club.
• Value systems in Kenya are quite different than in the U.S. or Europe. Topics such as hobbies, pets, boyfriends, girlfriends, pregnancy, etc., are quite strange to people in the rural communities.
• When making a visit to your child’s home, it is culturally advisable to bring a small basket or gift bag with foodstuffs or toiletries. Our Kenya field office will typically include this detail in a visit confirmation.

Dos and Don’ts:
• Do pronounce the name of the country KEHN-yah [the pronunciation KEEN-yah, which is the old British colonial pronunciation, may offend residents].
• Don’t photograph the people or their homes and livestock without asking permission, and don’t be offended if you’re asked to pay for the privilege — it’s customary in some areas, particularly with the Masai who expect payment.
• Don’t change money on the black market. The illegal money changers are often quick-change artists, and the police will arrest you if they even suspect you’re changing money illicitly (to be safe, don’t even hand money to a friend in public). Also, it’s illegal to export Kenyan currency, which, in any case, is difficult to exchange upon departure. Only change small amounts of money at a time.
• Do learn and use a few words of Swahili. Kenyans will welcome you with jambo [hello], soon followed with hakuna matata [no problem]. They will be most pleased if you reply in their own language. Asante sana means “thank you very much”; habari gani is “how are you?”; and kwaheri is “goodbye.”

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
The biggest threat to travelers is the street crime in Nairobi and in some beach-resort areas along the Indian Ocean. Carjackings are increasing. Don’t, under any circumstances, walk alone
in the larger cities at night — that’s an open invitation to be robbed. Avoid several areas altogether in Nairobi: River Road, Uhuru Park and Haile Selassie Avenue. Be even more alert beyond Moi Avenue east of the city, which, though more vibrant, is generally less predictable.

Some thieves specialize in jostling and robbing tourists on overcrowded public transport, so take a taxi instead and lock the passenger doors once inside. Don’t wear nice jewelry or watches, and avoid displaying a cash-filled wallet. Note that pickpockets often use a simple handshake as a distraction for a colleague to steal your billfold. And if you’re heading to the beach, carry as little money as possible. Do not accept food or drink items from strangers, including children. There have been incidents where these have been drugged to aid robbery. Stay alert in most urban spaces. Because of crackdowns in the larger cities, criminals have begun to relocate to smaller towns, resulting in crime waves in those places as well.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations — wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

**Health:**
Sanitary conditions are not up to the standards of developed countries. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe (especially in a hotel or if it’s included on a package tour), but peel fresh fruit and vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, and avoid local dairy products. Street food, especially if it is fried in repeatedly used oil, can cause upset stomachs. Don’t drink the tap water, and ask if the ice at your hotel is made from purified water. Stick with bottled drinks, and when buying bottled water, check that the seal is intact, as there have been cases of used bottles being refilled from taps. Tap water is usually safe for brushing your teeth; however, it’s very high in magnesium content. For the same reason, you might want to limit the amount of coffee and tea you consume.

Adequate hospital and outpatient treatment is available in Nairobi and Mombasa. The bigger, more reliable HMOs such as AAR Health Services now offer tourism coverage and health insurance for visitors over brief periods. Malaria is a concern, so consult your doctor about taking a malaria prophylaxis, and bring insect repellent with Deet as an active ingredient. Ask your physician about precautions or vaccinations for yellow fever, typhoid and hepatitis. Bring all prescription medicine needed for your trip. The sun can be very strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat.
We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Vaccinations for yellow fever, typhoid, and hepatitis may be recommended, as well as anti-malarial medication.

Money:
Kenya’s currency is the Kenyan shilling. Exchange rates have been reasonably steady against the U.S. dollar, U.K. pound and euro in recent years. When changing cash, small bills attract a lower exchange rate than larger ones. Do look closely at what you’re given when you change money. Many counterfeit U.S. banknotes, printed on plain paper, are circulating in Kenya. Because of this, Kenyan banks and wildlife authorities do not accept pre-1995 U.S. banknotes. The most common fake U.S. denominations are $5, $10 and $20.

Banks and hotels exchange currency and traveler’s checks. Always ask what commission and charges will be deducted, because they vary from place to place. There are ATMs in the cities, but security is a concern. Visa and American Express are widely accepted, but MasterCard is limited. Credit card fraud does happen, so keep all copies of your receipts and be sure that the currency you’re paying in is clearly marked (unscrupulous vendors may put a dollar sign in front of the shilling amount after you’ve left).

Weather:
Kenya is basically a year-round destination — the only months to watch out for are April and May [which can be quite wet, though sometimes the rains come late]. There’s also a season of short rains that can occur anytime from late October through December, but it doesn’t hinder travel.

Although Kenya spans the equator, most of it is situated at 4,000 feet/1,200 meters or higher, which tends to mitigate the heat. In higher elevations, expect temperatures to be about 10 degrees F / 5 degrees C cooler than in low-lying parts of the country.

Dress:
Temperatures during the day vary from mild to hot and humid. Light cotton clothes are ideal but bring a light jacket or sweater in case of sudden drops in temperature or rain showers. Nights can be chilly, so a slightly heavier jacket or sweater is also advisable. Long sleeves and pants help to fend off mosquitoes; hats and sunscreens are recommended to avoid sun exposure. Women should dress modestly in public, especially in conservative rural areas and more religious spaces and cultures such as Lamu, which is mostly Islamic.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.