

Tips For Travellers To Kenya – Courtesy of Karibuni Lodge

What to Pack – Main pack and Daypack; things you will need every day - (D)

Underwear – lightweight underpants preferably cotton (and not thongs) to avoid discomfort and infection and for ease of washing and drying quickly.

Socks – lightweight, preferably cotton – if it gets cold then wear two pairs rather than take thick woolly ones that will hardly get used!

Sarong, kangas or kikois– two in colours that match the rest of your clothes – great as fast drying towels, beach mat, cover ups in sun or for visiting religious buildings, skirts, aprons to protect other clothing from dust, nightwear, sheets or pillowcases in questionable guesthouses – you can pick up cheap traditional kangas and kikois on your travels in any local market. Carry one in your daypack (D) Kangas are light colourful cotton wraps and kikois are heavier weave.

For girls, a baggy skirt or sarong can be useful on expeditions especially those which necessitate toilet stops along the roadside – this might be all the privacy you get in sparse desert regions! Carry a few sheets of toilet paper tucked into a bra for toilet stops in places where you do not want to have to rummage in a backpack.

Lightweight pyjamas or tee-shirt or sarong. You might have to share a bathroom or bedroom.

Two pairs of lightweight eg cargo type trousers in sensible colours such as khaki or brown. If trekking or climbing Mt Kenya, pack a pair of warm tights to wear underneath or wrap a sarong on top – better than packing thick, heavy trousers! This applies to men too – no one will see the tights!

One pair of shorts. Many places find shorts unacceptable so look at how the locals dress before venturing off the beach with them! Zip-off cargo pants are useful.

Swimming costume – this can double as underwear.

Three or four tee-shirts in colours that won't show dirt or dust easily – forget white! Make sure at least one has cap sleeves and high neck to prevent sunburn, and to avoid giving offence in some of the more conservative areas.

Long sleeved shirt (or two) to wear on cooler days or as a protection against strong sun or mosquitoes (mossies) at night. Ensure it is the sort that can survive without ironing!

Warm fleece – even 'hot' countries like Kenya can be chilly at night.

Lightweight waterproof or poncho to protect your fleece from getting soaked!

One pair good quality (eg Teva) walking sandals.

One pair good quality hiking or climbing boots depending on what your plans are – waterproof if possible. If you are not a hiker, comfortable sneakers are fine.

A lightweight pair of flip-flops or foot thongs – available easily (and cheaply) on your travels.

Unless you are staying in expensive lodges, you will not need smart jackets, ties etc and as most Kenyan towns do not have decent pavements, it is wise to leave the high heels at home ladies! Most places are casual dress and normally conservative (with a small c).

Hair ties for long hair and a cotton scarf – ideal for bad hair days, visiting churches, sitting in open topped wind blown vehicles or protecting scalp and back of neck from strong sun. Men can use one to

protect their necks – or for wiping a sweaty brow! Cotton won't slip like silk does. Unless you are staying on the main tourist circuit, don't expect to find electricity for a hairdryer!

Sun hat – washable and squashable. Baseball and straw hats are readily available all over Kenya.

Travel mosquito net with spare hooks, tape and strings to secure – also available in Kenya – only if needed if you are travelling on a tight budget. Medium range places usually have nets.

Mosquito repellent – apply as soon as the dusk arrives – don't wait until you see a mossaie! (D).

Sunscreen – high factor eg 30 or 50 not 8 or 4 – and a lip balm with sunscreen (D).

Health care

First aid kit - antihistamine tablets for allergies or insect bites, painkillers for headaches etc, anti-congestant tablets if you have to fly and are suffering from a cold, anti-diarrhoea tablets for when you simply must travel – otherwise do not take these but seek medical advice, antiseptic cream for bites and scratches, anti-malarial if you are taking, tiger balm or similar can give relief during colds or headaches, a few throat lozenges for sore throats, plasters in varying sizes, small bandage and safety pins, disposable surgical gloves if you can't wash hands, thermometer, (scissors and tweezers). If you are travelling in very remote regions for a long period, you may want to consider syringes, spare needles, suture needle, scalpel, another pair of gloves, together with malaria medication, broadband antibiotic. In most regions, these are totally unnecessary and supermarkets and pharmacies are well stocked for most basic items.

Toiletries - try and take a fortnight's supply in travel sizes and stock up as you travel or share a larger bottle with your travel buddy. All these things are available in Kenya, it just might be difficult to find particular brands outside Nairobi. Take nail polish remover pads – no danger of spillage.

Be careful when applying mossaie repellent if you wearing nail polish, as it will melt! It can also cause damage to polished leather or dyed items. Restrict make-up to minimum. In this climate, it melts and clogs pores. Perfume attracts mossaies so use a nicely scented mossaie repellent such as 'Peaceful Sleep' or citronella oil.

Toilet roll (D) – an essential essential!

Small pack of wet wipes – useful when no washing facilities present themselves.

Small bottle of anti-bacterial hand wash (D).

Small pack of detergent or travel wash. If it runs out, use soap or local shops stock tiny plastic packs of detergent.

Travel essentials

Torch with spare batteries – batteries are easy to acquire but are often short lasting cheap brands – consider solar rechargeable ones. A head torch is best for staggering round dark campsites and using the toilet! (D)

Pocket-knife – with a corkscrew and bottle opener if you are so inclined! (D).

Small roll of duct tape or insulating tape for repairs to pack or sticking up mossaie nets.

Small roll of string to tie up parcels or use as washing line.

Padlocks for your main and daypack – if you are really on a tight budget a thin chain and lock for securing dodgy hotel room doors is useful or to chain your pack at bus terminals etc. Combination locks are best as it is all too easy to lose small padlock keys.

Candle and waterproof matches or lighter if camping or going to remote regions.

Guidebook or map, hardcover notebook containing useful information, website addresses etc. If you are visiting many countries, try and restrict the guidebooks. It is easy to swap/borrow at book swaps or with fellow travellers and make notes of relevant sections. Before you leave home borrow from friends or libraries, check the Internet, and make notes/photocopy. To save bulk (and paper!) print double sided and reduce the font size to make small 'notebooks'. Do this with your personal information too, such as addresses, to avoid carrying bulky notebooks.

Make a note of essential phrases in Swahili written phonetically. Although English is widely spoken, it is nice to be able to thank someone in Swahili. (D)

Check out travel websites eg (www.lonelyplanet.com) for recent travellers' experiences or email us with questions!

Reading book or even two if you can carry them. It could be a while between book swaps.

Camera with spare film – film is easy to acquire, except slide, black and white or specialised film. Renew your lithium battery – available at big airports – as these are often not available in Kenyan photo shops. For digitals it is worth considering a spare battery and memory card, as it may be problematic finding electricity to charge your camera or find Internet café capable of downloading images. Don't forget your battery charger and a suitable travel adaptor unless you are from UK – most places in Kenya use the UK standard 3 pin-plugs.

A few photos of loved ones and your home – for your benefit and to show people as you travel round – they are always interested to see your home and family, especially if you are related to a famous footballer or celebrity! (D)

Pack of playing cards – universally loved and someone is always happy to play with you (D).

Address book – note the necessary details in a smaller notebook. You can enter addresses, birthdays, and even passport number, bank details (in code), traveller's cheques numbers etc in the address book on you can also use your email provider just in case.

Ensure you have emergency numbers for lost or stolen bankcards etc and also leave these with a relative or friend at home (D).

Emergency Information

Photocopy of passport, vaccination certificate, driving licence, traveller's cheques numbers, travel insurance, eyeglass prescription or any medical notes (blood group, medications, allergies). If you have a medical condition or allergy ensure your travelling companion is aware of it or carry details on your person. A note of your banking details – write in code – or leave with a trusted family member who is easily contactable. Keep copies in your main bag in case your daypack gets stolen. If you are travelling with a friend, swap so they carry yours and you carry theirs.

A spare pair of prescription glasses or contact lenses if you simply could not manage without them for a few days if they got damaged.

Sunglasses – make sure they are 'real' giving proper UV protection and are not just tinted glass.

Binoculars if you are a serious animal or bird spotter otherwise they just add to the weight and can be easily hired if a 'safari' is only going to form a small part of your overall trip.

Diary, notebook and a couple of pens or pencils.

'Business card' with your name and email address to hand out to new friends or you could take small roll of pre-printed address labels (D).

Security

A money belt to carry passport, credit card, travellers' cheques. Use the belts that go around your waist as these are more secure than the neck ones as the neck strings can be easily cut or broken.

Everyone knows tourists wear a money belt so ensure it is tucked into your trousers and doubly secure, they can often be easily un-clicked so fasten them with a safety pin. If you wear a 'bumbag' ensure you pin the fastening and padlock the zip. We have seen someone open a zip on a bumbag and seen bumbags and money belts unclipped in a flash and removed in crowds! I (Theresa) carried my credit card, photocopy of the ID page of my passport and US\$100 in a small wallet pinned into the side of my bra where it wasn't detectable!

Sew a small hidden pocket inside underwear or trousers. Secure items in a waterproof bag inside your money belt to protect from rain and sweat.

Split your money into two – if one is stolen, it is unlikely the thief will search for more. If you are mugged and hand over what looks like all your valuables, the thief will probably take off.

Make up a fake pack of valuables including an out of date passport or driving licence and some cash to carry if you are planning to venture into dubious climes.

Leave flashy jewellery and watches at home! Stick with costume jewellery and a cheap watch.

Carry enough money for the day's activities and keep this separate from your money belt so you do not take this out in front of people and let them see the contents. Remember, many people here are lucky if they see the equivalent of one dollar per day in earnings. What you are carrying could be a year's wages to them and would tempt a saint!

Keeping everything dry and clean

Ensure toiletries are in well-sealed plastic bottles. Pack into a plastic toiletry bag and wrap this again in a plastic bag. Rough bus journeys and the pressure in aircraft can lead to leaks. Do not re-pack anything containing DEET as this can melt plastic!

Pack your clothes into strong plastic bags, eg underwear in one, other clothes in another. This prevents dust or rainwater penetrating them (and it will get through the pack, no matter how good the pack!) and makes it easier to find things in your bag.

Ditto papers and books. Carry a spare bag for laundry and smelly shoes! Two large bin liners can cover both you and your bag if you get caught in a downpour!

Roll clothes rather than folding them – they are less likely to get creased.

If you are travelling to areas that get chilly at night, take a sleeping bag or a shawl! Some places can be economical on bedding!

Sleeping bags for camping or mountaineering trips can be hired from the relevant tour outfit but a lightweight one can be an extra layer for these trips also. Or pick up a colourful Masai blanket! If you are not planning to camp or stay in really cheap accommodation, you should be ok with just a fleece.

Debit or credit card for emergencies, traveller's cheques. It is very difficult to get cash advances on credit cards in banks, but ATM's are quite widely available in Kenya. US\$ cash in small denominations can be useful for taxis etc if you cannot get currency on arrival.

Mobile phone and charger, however, if you can live without it, it is one less thing to worry about losing or having stolen.

Public phones and internet are readily available.

A solid water bottle with carry strap. Many places provide safe water so fill up from these sources rather than contributing to Kenya's litter problem by constantly buying bottled water.

(D) are items that you should carry in your daypack.

Less is more

If travelling with a friend, share the load by not both taking the same guidebook and first aid items, pocket-knife, binoculars etc! The same applies if travelling as a group in a vehicle – one first aid kit, map, guidebook, binoculars etc in the car will suffice!

In most towns here it is easy to stock up on essentials, however, if you plan to spend a long time in remote regions, then you may need to carry larger supplies of toiletry or sanitary items. Items such as tampons are available only in large towns (they are available in Kitale!).

Medical facilities are usually widely available and better than one might expect in respect of 'local' illnesses such as dysentery and malaria as they are more experienced in dealing with them. Although it is wise to carry suitable medical supplies, unless going into the middle of nowhere, don't be paranoid!

Many items can 'double up' on uses and save crucial space and weight eg Vaseline as a balm for cuts or a moisturiser/lip salve, sarongs as towels etc. Don't be tempted to pack more if you are taking a vehicle. At a dark campsite, in the pouring rain, it is difficult enough to rummage through minimal supplies without taking so much you can't find anything!

Heavy items can take an eternity to dry and should be kept to a minimum. Wet laundry starts to stink.

Dress in layers for warmth rather than carry too many heavy items. The same applies to towels, pleasant though it may be to have a thick fluffy towel!

You are certain to add to your carrying weight as you travel as you pick up souvenirs.

Try to be well under your pack's optimum weight when you leave home. Avoid stretching the zips and capacity of your pack as the strain will damage it.

Internal flights have far more stringent weight allowances than international airlines, sometimes 10kg or less for cargo luggage!

If you are taking a vehicle and camping, please email us and we can send you some handy hints.

Taking Photos

Be careful taking photographs – always ask before taking people's pictures and before taking pictures of government buildings, airstrips, bridges, railways etc

Do not hand out money to take photos. This only encourages begging and aggression. Most people are happy for you to take photos, but in some areas, modesty, superstition or religious belief can result in a very angry crowd if you do not use common courtesy and ask first!

People normally love to see their image on your digital camera so show them the picture. If you offer to send a copy to someone, please make sure you do!

Pre-travel checklist

Before you leave home, you will need to:

- Make appointment with your doctor to ensure you are up to date on inoculations.
- Discuss malaria treatments with your doctor.
- Get your vaccination record stamped to take with you. Some inoculations need to be dealt with well in advance of your travels especially if booster shots are involved.
- Look into this at least six months ahead! Ensure you have medication specific to any illness you suffer from or a note from your doctor.
- Arrange Kenyan visa.
- Check your eyeglasses/contact lenses are ok.
- Ensure your passport remains valid for at least six months after you plan to return home.
- Obtain an international driver's licence if you plan to drive.
- Arrange health insurance.
- Make sure your debit and credit cards will not expire before you return. Sign up for Internet or telephone banking.
- Ensure your address book is up to date.
- Photocopy important documents to take on the trip and leave a set with a relative or friend.
- Get your hair cut, eyelashes dyed, bikini line waxed etc! If you have dyed hair, go natural or face the headache of trying to find hair dyes or hairdressers who can cope with Caucasian hair outside Nairobi and Mombasa!
- Serious shopping for all the items above!
- Glean information from guidebooks and Internet and make notes to take with you. Print out in small font and double sided to reduce the bulk.
- Order currency and travellers' cheques.
- Work out your budget and assume you will exceed it so have a backup!
- Consider leaving a trusted parent/sibling with power of attorney for your bank account, credit card, dealing with rented property etc in your absence. This will be really helpful if you need money sent to you or a problem crops up with your home. You can restrict this as much as you wish so you retain overall control and they have limited powers.
- Set up a hotmail account or similar, you can send yourself an email containing essential information and contact details, addresses and email your family with your itinerary. The KaribuniKitale website has an email link which will automatically forward a website link with our contact details, location etc to your friends and family.

On returning home, unpack, clean and repack most items into your backpack. This serves as an 'emergency pack' to grab in the event of a household fire or urgent unplanned trip.

Hopefully, you will never need to use it for such and it will simply ensure that for your next trip most of your essentials will be readily to hand for easy packing! You could add copies of important documents (banking, birth certificate, marriage certificate, driving licence, car log book, property title deeds etc), backup computer disks, bottle of mineral water etc. Check the expiry dates from time to time.

Most of all enjoy your travelling and your stay in Kenya and if you can think of anything else, email us and we will add it to this 'Tips for Travellers'.

Karibuni

Theresa and Ibrahim

Finally, a Bank Code example. You can safely write down the *Result*: 468468 and use a *seed* (the seed can be your birthday DDMMYY) to get back to the actual Bank Number. $Result = Bank\ Number + Seed$, $345678 + 123890$ (ignore tens) = 468468 ie $6+8=(1)4$, to reverse, $Result - Seed = Bank\ Number$, $468468 - 123890 = 345678$, in positions four and five of *Result* it is less than seed so add ten to make **14** and **16** ie $14-8=6$ and $16-9=7$. For larger numbers just repeat the seed: DDMMYYDDM.