

General Information on Life in Kenya (IAESTE – JKUAT)

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Language

English and Kiswahili are the two languages widely spoken in Kenya. Official business is normally transacted in English. Most people in the private business also understand and communicate well in English. However, Kiswahili is also widely spoken and also extensively used in commerce and social places. One will not escape using a few words such as ‘**Asante sana** (Thank you)’, ‘**habari yako** hallo)’, ‘**kwaheri** (see you)’.

Kenya is a multi-ethnic society and therefore there are many other languages and dialects spoken. Thus, generally every Kenya speaks at least three languages with the third being the ethnic mother tongue. Even with this diversity of languages, the practice is that people switch to the language that is best understood by most people in a group.

1 Transport

Transport is mainly by bus, *matatus*, and taxis, *boda boda*, and train.

- i. **Taxis:** Taxis are individual hired transport. Normally, they wait at specific places for customers. They are available to be flagged down at the road. You should agree on the charges at the beginning of a trip. Very few base their charges on time and distances.
- ii. **Matatus:** ‘**Matatus**’ are the most common form of transport. The word ‘Matatu’ refers to a minibus with a capacity of up to 25 passengers or a van, a microbus, with a seating capacity of 14 passengers. The latter are also referred to as ‘Nisan’. (Note that this reference

has nothing to do with the make of the vehicle.) A licensed microbus will normally have a horizontal yellow band around its body. (NOTE: The law requires that one seats and wears a safety belt when travelling in a *matatu* or a *bus*.)

The '*matatus*' do not run on a time schedule. In a trip they make many stops and might wait long at some places. However, they are very many on any given route and therefore they generally provide reasonably efficient transport. The route number is always well displayed. There are several termini in the city and one needs to know where to get a *matatu* that takes you to the destination you want.

- iii. **Buses:** There are two bus transport companies operating in Nairobi area. These are the Kenya Bus Service (KBS), whose buses are blue in colour, and the Citi Hoppa whose minibuses have green and yellow colours. There is also the Metro Shuttle, which is a KBS fleet of Minibuses. These provide more efficient transport than the *matatus*. They do not make as many stops or wait long at bus stops. For KBS, Citi Hoppa and Metro Shuttle the two major points in the city where one can get the buses are Kenya Commercial Bank (also referred to as Kencom) and Ambassador Hotel. Both termini are located in the city centre.
- iv. **Train:** There is limited travel by train within Nairobi. However, passenger service by train is available between Nairobi and Mombasa.
- v. **Boda boda:** This is transport by bicycle. Actually this is bicycle taxi service, where you sit behind a cyclist. This is available for short distances, for instance at the University.
- vi. **Tuk Tuk:** There are now three-wheeled motor-cycle vehicles (scooters) especially in small towns such as Thika. They operate like taxis but they charge lower rates.

2 Banking and Currency

- (i) Opening Hours: Banks open on working days between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 pm. They also open on the every Saturday of the month between 9:00 and 11:00 am.
- (ii) The currency is the Kenya Shillings (Kshs). There are paper denominations of Kshs 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000. There are coins of Kshs 1, 5, 10, and 20. There are new but rare coins of Kshs 40. Coins of value less than one shilling are of 50cents (cts), and 10cts. However, these are now almost out of circulation. (1 Kshs = 100 cts.).
- (iii) Trade within the country is only in Kenya shillings. There are many currency exchange bureaus in town. The exchange bureaus at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport operate for 24 hours. Exchange rates offered by the different bureaus vary considerably. Information on the exchange rates is published daily in the newspapers Daily Nation and The East African Standard. You also can check the current exchange rates at <http://www.centralbank.go.ke/index.asp>

3 Medical Information

- (i) **Hospitals:** There are many hospitals in and around Nairobi of which a number are private. There are also a many private medical consultant clinics. JKUAT University has a hospital and a team of doctors.
- (ii) **Water:** Tap water is safe for drinking. But most people generally drink only boiled water. It is also the practice for most restaurants to provide hot water for drinking. Bottled water may also be purchased at super markets.
- (iii) **Malaria:** Malaria is transmitted through mosquito bites. For this reason, mosquito nets are normally provided in most accommodation facilities. It is advisable to always use a mosquito net while asleep. Also avoid short trousers or sleeveless shirts in the evenings. Mosquito repellent creams are also recommended. Visitors may want to consult with a doctor about malaria prophylaxis.

4 Telephone Services

I. Telephone Companies

- a. Telkom Kenya Limited – Offers fixed line services
- b. Safaricom Kenya Limited. It offers mobile phone services. Its numbers start with 072.
- c. Celtel. It offers mobile phone services. Its numbers start with 073.

SIM cards for the two mobile phone companies are available at fairly low prices. SIM cards now are sold for less than Kshs 100. Ask the sellers to explain to you the tariff structures that are available. Mobile phones are targeted by pickpockets. Keep your phone in a safe place always.

II. Pay phones

- d. ‘*Simu ya Jamii*’ – these are privately run public phone services. They are very popular and reliable.
- e. Public booths are available especially in the towns.
- f. Telkom Calling Card – One can buy a Telkom Calling Card, which one can then use at any telephone connected to a digital exchange and with a touch-tone capability. International calls can be made with Telkom calling cards for Kshs. 20 per minute.

III. International Calls:

- a. Note that the zero before the Kenya telephone numbers is omitted when one is calling from outside Kenya.
- b. To make international calls you first dial 000.

5 Internet

There are many cyber cafes in the major shopping areas in Nairobi. They charge per minute and the charges are reasonable. The connectivity is reasonably good in the well-established cafes. In addition, post offices both in town and rural areas have internet access.

You can access Internet at the JKUAT department to which you are attached. The connectivity at the University is excellent. You may also access the Internet through the JKUAT University Library or at the Cyber Café in the student centre.

6 Power Supply

The grid provides power at 240 V ac of frequency 50 Hz. It is good to have a flashlight in the house for use in the event of a prolonged power outage.

7 Emergency

- I. Police: call 999.
- II. Ambulance: Call 999
- III. IAESTE Secretary– Cell: 0733-868242 or 0723-667602; Office- 067-52029. Ask for Gathenya.
- IV. IAESTE JKUAT Students – Cell 0722-662886 ask for Caroline Nyaga.

Note that most of ambulance vehicles are attached to hospitals. If you are based at or near JKUAT, you should contact the JKUAT hospital in the event of a medical emergency.

Note that in the event of an emergency, friends or people in the neighbourhood are likely to be the most responsive. So do not ignore them.

8 Eating Out

At JKUAT

There are three different eating places within the University. These are established to serve the student community, and the staff working at the University. Thus, meals will only be available at specific times in a day. There are also some canteens and hotels in the neighbourhood of the University which serve popular local dishes at reasonable prices. (*Nyama Choma* (roast meat) and *Ugali* (Corn meal) is a popular dish.)

In Nairobi

Nairobi is an international town and is made up of people from different cultures. This cultural diversity is also reflected in the types of restaurants available and the menus they provide.

9 Public Holidays

The following are the public holidays

January 1st

May 1st

June 1st

October 10th and 20th

December 12th and 24th, 25th, and 26th

10 Common Swahili Words

karibu – welcome

asante sana – thank you very much

kwaheri – bye bye

habari – how are you? (greeting); *reply* mzuri- good , or OK, fine

jambo – how are you? (greeting) *reply- si jambo* – OK

pole – sorry, said in empathy

pole pole – slowly

ngonja – wait

kidogo – a little

twende – let's go

jua – sun

kali – tough,

jua kali – phrase for informal business sector

chakula- food

nyama choma- roast meat

ugali-baked corn meal (a corn meal cake)

11 Social Programme

12 Places to Visit

13 Clothing

14 Entertainment