

# Learning a little Swahili Goes a long way with the Kenyans

If you're planning a visit to Kenya, you might find it useful to know a few phrases of Swahili. Swahili is the most widely spoken language in sub-Saharan Africa where it developed with the arrival of Arab and Persian traders on the East African coast between 500 - 1000 AD. Swahili is a word the Arabs used to describe "the coast" and only later did it come to apply to East African coastal culture specifically. In Swahili, the correct word to describe the language is *Kiswahili* and the people who speak Kiswahili as their mother tongue may call themselves *Waswahilis*. Although Arabic and indigenous African languages are the main inspiration for Swahili, the language includes words derived from English, German, and Portuguese.

## Learning to Speak Swahili

Swahili is a relatively simple language to learn, mostly because words are pronounced as they are written. If you wish to expand your Swahili beyond the simple phrases listed below, there are several excellent online resources.

### Greetings

Hello: *jambo / hujambo / Uko salama*

How are you?: *habari gani*

Fine: *nzuri*

Goodbye: *kwa heri / kwa herini* (more than one person)

See you later: *tutaonana*

Nice to meet you: *nimefurahi kukutana nawe*

Goodnight: *lala salama*

### Civilities

Yes: *ndiyo*

No: *hapana*

Thank you: *asante*

Thank you very much: *asante sana*

Please: *tafadhali*

OK: *sawa*

Excuse me: *samahani*

You're welcome: *karibu*

Can you help me?: *tafadhali, naomba usaidizi*

What is your name?: *jina lako nani?*

My name is: *jina langu ni*

Where are you from?: *unatoka wapi?*

I'm from: *natokea*

May I take a picture?: *naomba kupiga picha*  
Do you speak English?: *unaongea kiingereza?*  
Do you speak Swahili?: *unaongea Kiswahili?*  
Just a little bit: *kidogo tu*  
How do you say... in Swahili?: *unasemaje... kwa kiswahili*  
I don't understand: *sielewi*  
Friend: *rafiki*

### **Getting Around**

Where is the...?: *iko wapi...?*  
Airport: *uwanja wa ndege*  
Bus station: *stesheni ya basi*  
Bus stop: *bas stendi*  
Taxi stand: *stendi ya teksi*  
Train Station: *stesheni ya treni*  
Bank: *benki*  
Market: *soko*  
Police station: *kituo cha polisi*  
Post office: *posta*  
Tourist Office: *ofisi ya watali*  
Toilet / bathroom: *choo*  
What time is the... leaving?: *...inaodonka saa ngapi?*  
Bus: *basi*  
Minibus: *matatu*  
Plane: *ndege*  
Train: *treni / gari la moshi*  
Is there a bus going to...?: *kuna basi ya...?*  
I'd like to buy a ticket: *nataka kununua tikiti*  
Is it near: *ni karibu?*  
Is it far: *ni mbali?*  
There: *huko*  
Over there: *pale*  
Ticket: *tikiti*  
Where are you going?: *Unaenda wapi?*  
How much is the fare?: *nauli ni pesa ngapi?*  
Hotel: *hoteli*  
Room: *chumba*  
Reservation: *kuhifadhi nafasi*  
Are there any vacancies for tonight?: *kuna nafasi zozote za usiku wa leo?*  
No vacancies: *hakuna nafasi*  
How much is it per night?: *ni bei gani kwa usiku?*

## **Days and Numbers**

Today: *leo*

Tomorrow: *kesho*

Yesterday: *jana*

Now: *sasa*

Later: *baadaye*

Every day: *kila siku*

Monday: *Jumatatu*

Tuesday: *Jumanne*

Wednesday: *Jumatano*

Thursday: *Alhamisi*

Friday: *Ijumaa*

Saturday: *Jumamosi*

Sunday: *Jumapili*

1: *moja*

2: *mbili*

3: *tatu*

4: *nne*

5: *tano*

6: *sita*

7: *saba*

8: *nane*

9: *tisa*

10: *kumi*

11: *kumi na moja (i.e. ten and one)*

12: *kumi na mbili*

20: *ishirini*

21: *ishirni na moja*

30: *thelathini*

40: *arobaini*

50: *hamsini*

60: *sitini*

70: *sabini*

80: *themanini*

90: *tisini*

100: *mia*

200: *mia mbili*

1000: *elfu*

## **Food and Drinks**

I'd like: *ningependa*

Food: *chakula*

Hot / cold: *ya moto / baridi*

Water: *maji*

Hot water: *maji ya moto*

Drinking water: *maji ya kunywa*

Soda: *soda*

Beer: *bia*

Milk: *maziwa*

Meat: *nyama*

Chicken: *nyama ya kuku*

Fish: *samaki*

Beef: *nyama ya ng'ombe*

Fruit: *matunda*

Vegetables: *mboga*

## **Health**

Where can I find a...?: *naweza kupata... wapi?*

Doctor: *daktari*

Hospital: *hospitali*

Medical center: *kituo cha matibabu*

I'm sick: *mimi ni mgonjwa*

I need a doctor: *nataka kuona daktari*

It hurts here: *naumwa hapa*

Fever: *homa*

Mosquito net: *chandalua*

Headache: *umwa kichwa*

Diarrhoea: *harisha / endesha*

Vomiting: *kutapika*

Medicine: *dawa*

## **Animals**

Animal: *wanyama*

Buffalo: *nyati / mbogo*

Cheetah: *duma*

Cow: *n'gombe*

Elephant: *tembo / ndovu*

Giraffe: *twiga*

Goat: *mbuzi*

Hippo: *kiboko*

Hyena: *fisi*  
Leopard: *chui*  
Lion: *simba*  
Rhino: *kifaru*  
Warthog: *ngiri*  
Wildebeest: *nyumbu*  
Zebra: *punda milia*