



## Basic Swahili for Travelers

This is a brief introduction to Swahili with basic instruction about pronunciation and important words and phrases. Anywhere you travel in East Africa, the ability to communicate in Swahili will greatly enhance your experience. Even if you do not plan on studying the language in-depth, we strongly suggest learning and using basic greetings and phrases. The locals will greatly appreciate your efforts and will be all the more welcoming to you during your stay. If you would like to complete a beginning course in Swahili there are a number of self-study books and tapes. *Teach Yourself Swahili*, by Joan Russell (Teach Yourself, 2003) is one of the best.

### Pronunciation

a	as in father	m	as in mill
b	as in bat	n	as in neat
ch	as in chop	ng'	as in <i>song</i>
d	as in dad	ny	like the Spanish ñ, or the first 'n' in <i>onion</i> o
dh	as in <i>this</i>		as in <i>old</i>
e	halfway between get and <i>gaï</i>	p	as in pin
f	as in family	r	as in rabbit
g	as in game	s	as in small
gh	halfway between 'k' in <i>keep</i> and 'g' in <i>get</i> h	sh	as in shallow
	as in <i>home</i>	t	as in <i>time</i>
i	as in <i>see</i>	th	as in <i>thick</i>
j	as in <i>jump</i>	u	as in <i>roof</i> v
k	as in <i>kennel</i>		as in <i>vote</i>
kh	like 'ch' in J.S. <i>Bach</i>	w	as in <i>women</i>
l	as in <i>long</i>	y	as in <i>yolk</i>
		z	as in <i>zero</i>

Stress nearly always falls on the next to last syllable, and accents mark which syllables to stress: dáda (2 syllables), mlángo (3 syllables), nimechóka (4 syllables), tunafuráhi (5 syllables).

## Greetings

## Translation and *transliteration*

May I come in?	Hodi (hoh-dee)
Welcome/Come in	Karibu (kah-ree-boo)
Hello	Jambo ( <i>jah</i> -mboh)
Goodbye	Kwaheri (kwah- <i>heh</i> -ree)
How are you?	Habari yako? (hah-bah-ree <i>yah</i> -koh)
Very well	Mzuri sana
...and you?	Na wewe je?
Okay	Sawa
What's up? (informal)	Mambo?
What's up with you? Cool	Vipi, Poa

## Introductions

## Translation and *transliteration*

My name is...	Jina langu ni... (jee-nah <i>lah</i> -ngoo)
What is your name?	Jina lako ni nani? (jee-nah <i>lah</i> -koh <i>nah</i> -nee)
What do you call yourself?	Unaitwa nani?
I call myself...	Ninaitwa...
Pleased to meet you.	Nimefurahi kukutana
I am from America.	Ninatoka nchi ya Amerika.
Where are you from?	Unatoka wapi? ( <i>wah</i> -pee)
I am a student.	Mimi ni mwanafunzi.
I am doing work for ...	Ninafanya kazi kwa...

## Etiquette

## Translation and *transliteration*

Thank you	Asante (ah- <i>sah</i> -nteh)
You are welcome	Karibu (kah-ree-boo)
Please	Tafadhali (tah-fah- <i>thah</i> -lee)
My sympathy (Sorry)	Pole (poh-leh) or Samahani
Excuse me	Nisamehe (nee-sa- <i>meh</i> -heh), Samahani

**Relationships/Titles****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>Me</b>	Mimi
<b>You</b>	Wewe
<b>Us</b>	Sisi
<b>Him/Her</b>	Yeye
<b>Them</b>	Wao
<b>Friend/Pal</b>	Rafiki (rah-fee-kee)
<b>Family</b>	Jamii (jah-mee)
<b>Daughter</b> (in Luo)	Nyar
<b>Daughter</b>	Binti
<b>Son</b>	Mwana (mwah-nah)
<b>Relative/Brother</b>	Ndugu ( <i>ndoo</i> -goo)
<b>Brother</b>	Kaka
<b>Sister</b>	Dada (dah-dah)
<b>Father</b>	Baba ( <i>bah</i> -bah)
<b>Mother</b>	Mama
<b>Doctor</b>	Daktari (dahk-tah-ree)
<b>Teacher</b>	Mwalimu
<b>Sir</b>	Bwana (bwah-nah)
<b>Man, Men</b>	Mwanaume, Wanaume (wah-nah-oo- meh)
<b>Woman, Women</b>	Mwanamke, Wanawake (wah-nah- <i>wah</i> -keh)
<b>A young person</b>	Kijana (kee- <i>jah</i> -nah)
<b>Girl, young women</b>	Msichana (msee-chah-nah)
<b>Old man (term of respect)</b>	Mzee

**Drinks****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>I am thirsty</b>	Ninasikia kiu
<b>I would like...</b>	Ninaomba...
<b>I want...</b>	Nataka...
<b>Drinks/Beverages</b>	Kinywaji
<b>Coffee</b>	Kahawa (kah-hah-wah)
<b>Tea</b>	Chai
<b>Water</b>	Maji ( <i>mah</i> -jee)
<b>Milk</b>	Maziwa
<b>Beer</b>	Bia

**Food****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>I am hungry</b>	Ninasikia njaa
<b>Food</b>	Chakula (chah-koo-lah)
<b>Bread</b>	Mkate ( <i>mkah</i> -teh)
<b>Meat</b>	Nyama ( <i>nyah</i> -mah)
<b>Fish</b>	Samaki (sah-mah-kee)
<b>Vegetables</b>	Mboga ( <i>mboh</i> -gah)
<b>Fruit</b>	Matunda (mah-too-ndah)
<b>Chicken</b>	Kuku
<b>Corn</b>	Mahindi

**Locations****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>Market</b>	Soko ( <i>soh</i> -koh)
<b>Mosque</b>	Msikiti
<b>Church</b>	Kanisa (kah-nee-sah)
<b>Shop</b>	Duka
<b>School</b>	Shule ( <i>shoo</i> -leh)
<b>Hospital</b>	Hospitali (hoh-spee-tah-lee)
<b>Home</b>	Nyumba - Nyumbani
<b>Bathroom/Toilet</b>	Choo (choo)
<b>Shower</b>	Kioga ( <i>kee-oh</i> -gah)
<b>Kitchen</b>	Jiko (jee-koh)
<b>Garden</b>	Shamba ( <i>shah</i> -mbah)

**Cost****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>How much?</b>	Pesa ngapi (peh-sahn gah-pee)
<b>How many?</b>	Ngapi ( <i>ngah</i> -pee)
<b>Money</b>	Pesa ( <i>peh</i> -sah)
<b>Price</b>	Bei ( <i>beh</i> -ee)
<b>Expensive</b>	Ghali ( <i>ghah</i> -lee)
<b>Cheap</b>	Rahisi (rah- <i>hee</i> -see)

**Time of Day****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>Morning</b>	Asubuhi (ah-soo-boo-hee)
<b>Afternoon</b>	Mchana ( <i>mchah</i> -nah)
<b>Evening</b>	Jioni (jee-oh-nee)
<b>Night</b>	Usiku (oo-see-koo)

**Numbers****Translation and *transliteration***

	Sufiri	<b>11</b>	Kumi na moja	<b>30</b>	Thelathini	<b>1000</b>	elfu
<b>1</b>	Moja	<b>12</b>	Kumi na mbili	<b>40</b>	Arobaini		
<b>2</b>	Mbili	<b>13</b>	Kumi na tatu	<b>50</b>	Hamsini		
<b>3</b>	Tatu	<b>14</b>	Kumi na nne	<b>60</b>	Sitini		
<b>4</b>	Nne	<b>15</b>	Kumi na tano	<b>70</b>	Sabini		
<b>5</b>	Tano	<b>16</b>	Kumi na sita	<b>80</b>	Themanini		
<b>6</b>	Sita	<b>17</b>	Kumi na saba	<b>90</b>	Tisini		
<b>7</b>	Saba	<b>18</b>	Kumi na nane	<b>100</b>	Mia		
<b>8</b>	Nane	<b>19</b>	Kumi na tisa	<b>102</b>	Mia na mbili		
<b>9</b>	Tisa	<b>20</b>	Ishirini	<b>200</b>	Mia mbili		
<b>10</b>	Kumi	<b>23</b>	Ishirini na tatu	<b>250</b>	Mia mbili na hamsini		

**Useful Words/Phrases****Translation and *transliteration***

<b>Yes</b>	Ndiyo
<b>No</b>	Hapana
<b>Maybe</b>	Labda
<b>Now</b>	Sasa
<b>Later</b>	Baadaye
<b>Long life</b>	Maisha marefu
<b>No worries/problems</b>	Hakuna matata
<b>I am satisfied (by this meal)</b>	Nimeshiba.
<b>I want...</b>	Nataka... ( <i>nah-tah-kah</i> )
<b>I want to go...</b>	Nataka kwenda...(nah- <i>tah-kah</i> kweh-ndah)
<b>I want to buy...</b>	Nataka kununua...
<b>I am tired.</b>	Nimechoka.

I am lost.	Nimepotea
I don't know.	Sijui.
I don't understand.	Sifahamu.
How do you say...in Swahili?	Unasemaje... kwa Kiswahili?
Can you repeat that please?	Sema tena tafadhali.
Repeat that slowly	Sema tena pole pole
Who?	Nani?
What?	Nini?
Why?	Kwa nini?
Where?	Wapi?
When?	Lini?

### Swahili Proverb/Phrases

### Translation and *transliteration*

Together for one goal.	Pamoja kwa lengo moja.
A proverb that has a similar meaning to: "a journey of thousand miles starts with one step."	Haba na haba hujaza.
Slowly is the best course	Pole pole ndiyo mwendo
Hurry has no blessing	Haraka haraka haina baraka
He who praises rain has been rained on	Asifuye mvuwa imemnyeshea
To live long is to see much	Kuishi kwingi ni kuona mengi
To get lost is to learn the way	Kupoteya njia ndiyo kujua njia

### Miscellaneous

### Translation and *transliteration*

Peace	Amani (ah-mah-nee)
Love	Upendo (oo-peh-ndoh)
Work	Kazi (kah-zee)
Enough	Inatosha/basi
Beautiful	Mrembo (mreh-mboh)
Slowly	Pole pole (poh-leh)
Strength	Nguvo
Bad	Mbaya (mbah-yah)
Long life	Maisha marefu
Cool	Poa

<b>Beautiful</b>	Nzuri/Mzuri
<b>Sick</b>	Gonjwa (goh-njawah)
<b>Good</b>	Nzuri
<b>Piece of cloth worn by a woman</b>	Kanga