Packing Guidelines

Kenya: Urbanization, Health, and Human Rights
Fall 2015

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Luggage
Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

Most students find that a large internal frame backpack and a smaller daypack or duffel bag are the most convenient choices of luggage. However, you should also have a smaller bag to use for carrying your books and personal items. You will find that you can store your larger piece of luggage at your homestay during the semester.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document). Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (http://www.tsa.gov) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

Clothing Guidelines
In order to be culturally appropriate and to assist with cultural immersion, SIT Kenya requires students to dress according to local norms. In most cases, this still leaves plenty of room for individual choices. This is not a policy that will enable you to “pass” as a local, but rather to ensure that you do not offend or embarrass people with whom you work or stay. While Kenyans are in many cases aware that American standards of dress are different from Kenyan standards, it is not an excuse for setting aside Kenyan standards in favor of American ones. Kenyans find certain American dressing conventions appealing, others odd, and still others profoundly offensive or insulting. And you will not escape these judgments merely because you are American. In extreme cases, failure to abide by established program rules of dress will result in disciplinary action. Your academic director will explain local conventions in greater detail once you are in Kenya, but for now you will need some guidelines as
you pack for the trip. Please read the following paragraphs carefully and bear in mind that the guidelines were developed by SIT students.

Part of the program takes place in Nairobi, a cosmopolitan city of three million people, some of them expatriates from Asia, Europe, North America, and other African countries. Nairobi is just over a mile above sea level. Because of its pleasant, dry climate, it hosts many international agencies, NGOs and international corporate headquarters. For this environment, your clothing should be layered. Bring clothing that is casual and comfortable, but also bring clothes that you could wear to a wedding or a job interview. Both men and women should bring a light weight jacket or blazer which they can wear for special occasions.

Bear in mind that often people in Nairobi dress with more sophistication than is common in American cities. What you wear is very important, both for the sake of feeling comfortable and for the sake of cultural appropriateness. Short shorts and very tight trousers for women are not acceptable. However, depending on the situation, you may wear jeans, slacks, or even long “dress” shorts. Neatness and fashion are always important, and host families and other Kenyans affiliated with the program frequently complain that students tend to under-dress. Every semester, there are students who do not take dressing seriously, or who have not read this document carefully, and who end up regretting that the clothes they brought are not stylish enough for Nairobi; think “business casual” (but not ‘coat and tie’), trendy, coordinated, and put-together.

While style is not so important in the village, modesty and cleanliness are even more so.

The rest of the program takes place in conservative rural areas. While style is not so important in the village, modesty and cleanliness are even more so. You will be expected to avoid clothing with holes, clothing with immodest pictures or writing, shorts or clothing that is revealing and very informal (such as tank tops, crop tops, halter tops, sleeveless shirts, or bikinis). Tops should cover shoulders and waists, skirts should cover the knees, clothing should not be too tight or see-through, and plunging necklines are not acceptable. Women in most areas of East Africa dress with modesty, wearing skirts well below the knee with slips (though ankle-length skirts are not a good idea either, since they tend to get dirty and frayed very quickly), blouses or t-shirts with sleeves and relatively high necklines, and sandals, sneakers, or flats. Women quite simply do not wear pants or shorts in rural or Muslim areas of the country (mostly near the coast). You will be able to buy traditional wrap-around skirts called kanga to wear on the coast and in the villages.

For men, casual dress can include jeans, sneakers, and t-shirts, as long as they are clean and free of holes. More formal occasions (of which there will be several) call for neat, pressed, dark colored slacks, pressed, button-up shirts (long or short sleeve), and leather dress shoes (penny loafers or lace-ups) or dress sandals. Flamboyantly colorful, Hawaiian-style shirts or guayaberas can be worn semi-formally in Kenya, so long as they are clean and pressed, and have a collar and buttons. A variety of colorful slip-over shirts are available here. Kenyans consider shorts to be appropriate for schoolboys and playing sports, but not for casual wear by adult males. Traditional wrap-aroundes called kikoi are often worn on the coast instead of long pants. Shirts with sleeves, whether short or long, are required. Ties and jackets are not required but it is a good idea to have one of each.
Much of the country is known for its hot, tropical climate, though areas at higher elevations (such as Nairobi) can be surprisingly cold at night (50 degrees is not unheard of). You will certainly need a sweater and/or a light jacket, and waterproof rainwear is essential. The clothes that you bring should all be washable and breathable, preferably drip-dry cotton and cotton-blends. Polyesters and other fabrics that do not breathe can be very uncomfortable. You will be hand washing and line drying your clothes.

Buying new, expensive clothing is not recommended. Whatever you don’t pack, you can probably get in Kenya – except shoes. Second hand clothing (mitumba) is available very cheaply all over Kenya. You can usually find whatever you want within two months of the end of any season in the northern countries. Designer clothing is shockingly cheap in the mitumba market.

**Equipment**

Mosquito nets are available in Kenya and cost about $10 USD. But should you decide to bring one, it should be of the self-supporting variety. One recommendation is a Skeeter Defeater, though some students prefer a net that wraps around you so you do not have to tuck in the edges. Both are available through Travel Medicine, Inc. at [www.travmed.com](http://www.travmed.com). You only need to bring a sleeping bag if you plan to camp on your own after the program. If you plan to climb the mountains or travel through cold countries, you will need a heavier bag. These are usually available in Nairobi either retail or secondhand but there is no guarantee that you will get the bag you want, at the time you need it.

The program provides bottled water during all excursions and clean bottled water can be purchased nearly everywhere in Kenya. However, if you wish to avoid the use of plastic water bottles for environmental reasons, you may bring a portable water filter, which can be used during homestays and excursions. The brands past students recommend are the ‘system pack’ which you can find at: [http://www.steripen.com](http://www.steripen.com) and the MSR Miniworks EX water filter which can be found at [www.msrgear.com](http://www.msrgear.com). If you purchase the SteriPEN, be certain to bring spare batteries for it because you might not be able to find replacement batteries in Kenya. You should also bring a small travel towel for the first week. If later on you need a big towel, you can buy it in any supermarket or mitumba markets.

**Computers and Other Electronics**

It is strongly recommended that you bring a laptop computer. SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss that may occur. Personal property and baggage insurance is included in the program fee for all study abroad program participants through SIT Study Abroad. Read the details on SIT’s personal property and baggage insurance, in the full Description of Coverage on this site: [http://studyabroad.sit.edu/documents/studyabroad/health-insur-policy-info.pdf](http://studyabroad.sit.edu/documents/studyabroad/health-insur-policy-info.pdf).

Previous students have found it very helpful to bring their laptop or netbook, but must exercise caution in keeping it safe. Do not entrust your backpack to any stranger as this has often resulted in theft. Do not pull out your netbook in public or during travel in general because this attracts pick pockets and thieves.

If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. You will be responsible for arranging storage for your laptop in a secure place while on excursions. Past students have also brought MP3s, iPods, galaxies, and DVD players. These are often used during excursion travel. We recommend that if you do bring these electronic devices, ensure their safety as we are not in position to guarantee their safety. It is also recommended that students bring digital recorders for their language classes, ISP research, and other audio related communications. It is also highly recommended that students come prepared to buy mobile phones because those brought from the US may not work in Kenya. Phones cost around $50 USD.
Be sure to bring a large capacity flash drive for back-up and storage of data and photographs. For those who need it, word-processing and printing can be done at Internet cafés. Cyber cafés and other email facilities are plentiful in Nairobi and other major cities, however, once outside these towns, Internet access is extremely limited.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage, and electrical adapters: http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/. Kenya’s voltage is 240 and has the electrical outlet that uses the Type G plug adapter.

Don’t forget your adapter and your voltage converter!

Gifts
As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy; you do not need a gift for each member. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community in which you live. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your homestay family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family from home to share.

You can also buy gifts in-country as needed. Sometimes these are more appreciated by the recipients because they are familiar.

What You Can and Cannot Obtain in Country
Items readily available in Kenya include: soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tampons, pads, moisturizers, deodorant, most prescription medications and some familiar over-the-counter medications. However, particular brands of certain toiletries may not be available. One example is deodorant; most brands available in the US are not available here.

Alumni Mentor
If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni mentor: http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/eop_contact_alum.cfm.

Don’t Miss the Packing List on the Next Page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director. The clothing you bring may be adapted to your own style, within cultural norms of acceptable dress.

Remember to place all valuable items and prescriptions in your carry-on luggage while traveling and all sharp items in your checked luggage.
Suggested Packing List

Clothing

**General**
- 10 day supply of dark socks and underwear
- At least 1 sweater, sweatshirt, or fleece (avoid white)
- Raincoat with hood or poncho
- 1 pair of flip flops
- Sneakers or lightweight, durable footwear for daily use
- Nicer shoes for more formal occasions (penny loafers or flats will do)
- Modest, one-piece bathing suit
- Canvas or other shoes to wear for swimming in the sea (or buy in country)
- Gym shorts (one pair)
- Clothing and sandals that can be worn for dressy occasions
- Pajamas or modest clothing you can sleep in while sharing a room with someone
- One pair of waterproof boots for rainy season

**Women**
- At least 3 knee-length or longer skirts or dresses (pockets will be extremely useful – avoid white)
- 1 pair of knee-length “dress” shorts (optional – avoid white)
- At least 1 pair of lightweight slacks (not jeans)
- At least 2 pair of jeans or cargo pants
- At least 1 half-slip (a cultural necessity)
- At least 4 ordinary T-shirts (avoid white)
- At least 1 collared T-Shirt or short-sleeved blouse (avoid white)
- Sports bras (the roads are bumpy and you will need support)
- At least one outfit for more dressy occasions like weddings or job interviews
- An outfit for going out in the city

**Men**
- At least 1 collared, long-sleeved shirt for more formal occasions
- At least 2 pairs of jeans or cargo pants
- At least 3 pairs of slacks (dark colors are preferable to khakis)
- At least 3 ordinary T-shirts (avoid white)
- At least 2 collared, button-up short sleeve shirts (avoid white)

**Travel Documents**
- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card where applicable (see the Safety, Security, and Health document for more information)
- Two photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- Copy of resume or CV for research permit
- Two passport size photos for Kenya visa
- Relevant articles or notes for ISP research (at your discretion)

**Health/Toiletries**
- 15 week supply of all prescription medication plus any you need for after-program travel
- Decongestant, cold and flu medication
- Face wipes or exfoliate
- Saline solution for contacts (available here but expensive)
- Sun block of SPF 30 or higher (available but expensive) make sure to bring enough
- Sunburn lotion (available but expensive) - Aloe Vera is highly recommended by previous students
- USB drive and blank CD’s
- Medicine for yeast infections, if necessary, and acidophilus
- Anti-diarrheal medication
- Thermometer
- Mosquito repellant
- Anti-itch medication (bug bites are part of life in the tropics)
- Dental floss (available but expensive)
- First aid kit
- Sunglasses
- Sun hat or bandanas (the latter are useful for trading at local markets – you may want to bring a few)
- Towel

**Other Important Items**
- Smaller bag or day pack for short excursions
- Combination locks for luggage
- Pocket knife with bottle opener
- Water bottle/canteen (some students choose to bring a bottle with a filtering system)
- Travel alarm clock
- Ziploc bags for items that may leak in your luggage, such as shampoo
☐ Flashlight (absolutely essential), preferably headlamp-style
☐ Extra camera batteries (two sets of rechargeable batteries and a charger that can take 240 volts will come in handy)
☐ Sleeping bag if planning to camp on your own after the program

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