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### *Swahili Phrases You Need to Know for Your East African Safari*

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When you're on safari in East Africa, knowing a few of the most common Swahili phrases can go a long way with not just communication, but opening doors to even greater adventures. Speaking with locals and guides in their native tongue is a great way to instantly build a connection and demonstrate both respect and interest in their culture.

Let's look at the history of the language and learn some key Swahili phrases which you'll be able to use on your East African adventure.

#### **A Brief History of Swahili**



Swahili, or Kiswahili, is one of the most widely spoken languages across Africa, especially on the East of the continent. Across Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda parts of Mozambique and more, Kiswahili has more than 200 million speakers spanning different cultures, nations and tribes.

Rooted in Bantu, Swahili language is also influenced by Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, German and English owing to centuries of trade and colonisation. For example, 'Safari' (which translates to 'journey') comes from Arabic ('safir'), whilst other terms reflect the region's storied history across the Indian Ocean.

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## Swahili Greetings & Courtesies



First impressions count – Swahili speakers are courteous, so greetings are some of the most important phrases you can learn before your trip to East Africa.

- **Hello > Jambo / Hujambo:** ‘Jambo’ is the most commonly used greeting, similar to ‘hello, how’s it going?’ in English. *Interestingly, the literal translation of “hujambo” is “Do you have any worries?” The reply “sijambo” indicates that you “do not have worries.”*
- **How are you? > Habari gani?:** ‘Habari’ translates to ‘news’ – so, what’s the news?
- **I’m fine > Nzuri / Salama:** ‘Nzuri’ means ‘good’ and ‘salama’ means ‘peaceful’ or ‘all’s well’.
- **Thank you > Asante:** You can also use ‘asante sana’, which means ‘thank you very much’.
- **You’re welcome > Karibu:** You can also use ‘karibu’ to say ‘welcome’ upon someone’s arrival.
- **Goodbye > Kwa heri:** If you’re saying goodbye to more than one person, you can say ‘kwa herini’.
- **Sorry / Excuse me > Pole / Samahani:** Pronounced ‘poh-lay’, ‘pole’ can be used to apologise or express sympathy for someone.
- **Please > Tafadhali:** Be sure to use this liberally.

- **No worries > Hakuna matata:** One you'll likely be familiar with, 'hakuna matata' means 'no worries' or 'no problems'.
- **Respect > Heshima:** Respect is valued deeply in East African cultures, so this is an important one to remember.

A little tip, you might be greeted with 'mambo' in casual settings (which essentially means 'what's up?'), you can respond with 'poa', which means 'good' or 'cool'.

### Some Basic Swahili Questions

- **Where is... > ...iko wapi?:** The object/destination comes first in Swahili, so 'where is the toilet?' would be 'choo iko wapi?' (or 'choo kiko wapi' if you want to be more specific – as 'kiko wapi' typically refers to inanimate objects).
- **How much? > Ni bei gani?:** You could also say 'Shilingi ngapi', which means 'how many shillings?'.
- **What is this? > Hii ni nini?:** This one can be extremely useful at local markets, or when trying [new foods](#).
- **Do you speak English? > Unazungunmza Kiingereza?:** Most local guides will speak English, but many locals may not.
- **I don't understand > Sielewi**
- **Help! > Saidia:** A very useful Swahili word to know in case of emergency. 'Saidia' means 'help' and 'nisaidie' means 'help me'.

### Accommodation & Amenities





While you're likely to have your [accommodation](#) all set up before your arrival, it can be helpful to know some key Swahili phrases to make sure everything goes smoothly on your trip.

- **Room > Chumba:** A useful one to know when navigating your accommodation.
- **Bed > Kitanda:** You can also say 'kitanda kimoja' to say 'one bed', if you're staying in your own room.
- **Water > Maji:** A must-know for any adventure, especially when you're out in the [parks or game reserves](#). 'Maji ya kunywa' is the phrase for 'drinking water'.
- **Toilet > Choo:** Easy to remember, and one you'll likely be glad you learned!
- **Shower > Bafu:** Try 'ninaweza kuoga' to say 'can I take a shower?'.
- **Food > Chakula:** After a long day you'll be glad to enjoy some local 'chakula kitamu' – 'delicious food'!

### Wildlife & Safari Phrases



Here's where you can really start to have some fun with your newfound Swahili knowledge. Talk to your guide to learn more or impress other travellers when you're out on safari.

- **Animal > Mnyama:** One animal is 'mnyama', multiple animals are 'wanyama'.
- **Lion > Simba:** Here's one you've definitely heard before! Simba means 'strength' – the perfect embodiment of this celebrated animal.
- **Elephant > Tembo:** Elephants, or 'tembo' are some of the most revered animals in East Africa.
- **Leopard > Chui:** Pronounced 'choo-ee'.
- **Rhino > Kifaru:** If you're lucky enough to spot a rhino, impress the other guests by pointing out a 'kifaru'!
- **Buffalo > Nyati:** Buffalo, or 'nyati' make great subjects for some [holiday photography](#).

- **Giraffe > Twiga**
- **Hyena > Fisi**
- **Bird > Ndege:** Depending on the context, 'ndege' can mean either bird or aeroplane.
- **Snake > Nyoka:** 'nyoka', the Swahili word for 'snake', is the subject of many Swahili proverbs. A common one is 'fimbo ya mbali haiui nyoka', or 'a baton out of reach cannot kill a snake' – highlighting the need to always be prepared.
- **Track / Footprint > Alama / Nyayo:** If you're out tracking with a guide, be sure to point out 'alama' or 'nyayo' whilst in pursuit.

### Enhance Your Experience By Learning A Little Swahili

Learning some key Swahili phrases isn't just about making your safari smoother, it's about making it more human. Build strong connections and portray respect by engaging with the local culture and the people who live in East Africa.

Beyond the mesmerising [wildlife](#) and captivating landscapes you'll see on your trip, you'll remember the people you met and the conversations you had. With a little time and practice, you can make those conversations even more meaningful and memorable.

Last but not least – don't worry! Speak with confidence as East Africans are famously forgiving when it comes to pronunciation, it's the effort that really counts.

If you're interested in finding out more about a once-in-a-lifetime trip to East Africa, [get in touch](#) with us today to find out more.

