



Swahili for Your Tanzania Adventure

Simple, useful Swahili for everyday moments during your trip.

KARIBU TANZANIA

From your first greeting to your next adventure.

15 chapters · A practical guide to keep with you



YOUR TRAVEL COMPANION

A little Swahili goes a long way

You do not need to speak Swahili to travel around Tanzania. English is widely used in tourism, and your guide, hotel staff and activity providers will usually speak English.

But learning a little Swahili makes travelling in Tanzania a lot more fun.

A simple **Asante** can bring a smile. A friendly **Habari?** can start a conversation. And being able to say that you are tired, hungry or desperately looking for a toilet can be surprisingly useful.

This is not a complete Swahili course. There are no long grammar lessons and no expectation that you will speak perfect Swahili by the end.

Instead, we focus on the words and phrases you are actually likely to use while travelling in Tanzania.



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CHAPTER 01

Karibu Tanzania

Karibu!

Welcome!

Swahili, or **Kiswahili**, is spoken throughout Tanzania and is an important part of everyday life.

You will hear it in cities, villages, markets, national parks, restaurants, on ferries and pretty much everywhere in between.

A few words to start with:

Karibu

Welcome

Asante

Thank you

Asante sana

Thank you very much

Samahani

Excuse me / Sorry

Ndiyo

Yes

Hapana

No

Sawa

Okay / Alright

Hamna shida

No problem

What you will hear

In Tanzania, people often shorten words or pronounce them differently from the careful Swahili you might find in a textbook.

That is completely normal.

You do not have to copy everything perfectly. The goal is simply to understand a little more and make yourself understood.



CHAPTER 02

You Already Speak Some Swahili

You probably know more Swahili than you think.

Safari

Safari means journey or trip.

So when you say you are “going on safari”, you are actually using a Swahili word already.

Hakuna matata

Yes, this really is Swahili.

Hakuna matata means “there are no problems” or “no worries”.

You will certainly hear it in Tanzania, especially around tourists.

In normal everyday conversation, however, you will also hear:

Hamna shida.

No problem.



CHAPTER 02 · CONTINUED

You Already Speak Some Swahili

Pole pole

Pole pole means slowly.

You will hear this a lot, particularly while hiking.

Twende pole pole.

Let's go slowly.

Jambo

Jambo! is probably the most famous Swahili greeting among tourists.

Tanzanians will understand you perfectly, but between Tanzanians you are much more likely to hear greetings such as **Habari?**, **Mambo?** or

Hujambo?

So yes, you can say **Jambo**.

But let's teach you a little more.

CHAPTER 03

Start Here: The Essentials

If you only learn a handful of Swahili words before your trip, start with these.

Habari?	How are you? / How are things?
Nzuri.	Good.
Asante.	Thank you.
Asante sana.	Thank you very much.
Tafadhali.	Please.
Samahani.	Excuse me / Sorry.
Ndiyo.	Yes.
Hapana.	No.
Sawa.	Okay.
Hamna shida.	No problem.
Sijui.	I don't know.
Naelewa.	I understand.
Sielewi.	I don't understand.
Subiri kidogo.	Wait a moment.

You will also often hear:

CHAPTER 03 • CONTINUED

Start Here: The Essentials

Ngoja kidogo.

Wait a moment.

Both are commonly used.

Twende.

Let's go.

Njoo.

Come.

Sasa hivi.

Right now.

Leo.

Today.

Kesho.

Tomorrow.

Jana.

Yesterday.

A very useful word: kidogo**Kidogo** means “a little”.

You can use it in all sorts of situations.

Kidogo tu.

Just a little.

Subiri kidogo.

Wait a little.

Ninaongea Kiswahili kidogo.

I speak a little Swahili.

And that last sentence is an excellent one to remember.

CHAPTER 04

Meeting & Talking to People

Greetings are important in Tanzania.

Do not be surprised if someone greets you before asking what you want. Starting immediately with a request can feel abrupt.

Basic greetings

Habari?	How are you? / How are things?
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Nzuri.	Good.
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You can also make the greeting more specific:

Habari za asubuhi?	How is your morning?
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Habari za mchana?	How is your afternoon?
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Habari za jioni?	How is your evening?
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A common informal greeting is:

Mambo?	What's up? / How are things?
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A common response:

Poa!	Cool / Fine!
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CHAPTER 04 · CONTINUED

Meeting & Talking to People

Introducing yourself

Jina lako nani?	What is your name?
Jina langu ni Anna.	My name is Anna.
Unatoka wapi?	Where are you from?
Ninatoka Ubelgiji.	I come from Belgium.
Ninafurahi kukutana na wewe.	Nice to meet you.

Being polite

Asante sana.	Thank you very much.
Karibu.	You're welcome.
Samahani.	Excuse me / Sorry.
Pole.	Sorry.

You will hear **pole** constantly in Tanzania.

Someone trips?

Pole!

Someone is sick?

Pole!

Someone has had a long, exhausting day?

Pole!

It expresses sympathy rather than an admission that something was your fault.



CHAPTER 05

On Safari

Now for the important stuff.

Animals

Simba	Lion
Tembo	Elephant
Twiga	Giraffe
Nyati	Buffalo
Kiboko	Hippo
Mamba	Crocodile
Chui	Leopard
Pundamilia	Zebra
Ngedere	Monkey
Ndege	Bird

CHAPTER 05 • CONTINUED

On Safari

Useful safari phrases

Kuna simba?	Are there lions?
Simba yuko wapi?	Where is the lion?
Angalia!	Look!
Hapo!	There!
Hapa.	Here.
Karibu.	Near.
Mbali.	Far.
Simama hapa, tafadhali.	Stop here, please.
Subiri kidogo.	Wait a moment.
Naweza kupiga picha?	Can I take a photo?
Twende pole pole.	Let's go slowly.
Twende.	Let's go.

A little safari challenge

Next time your guide spots something, try asking:

Ni mnyama gani?	What animal is it?
Or:	

Ndege gani?	Which bird?
You may not understand the entire answer, but that is part of the fun.	



CHAPTER 06

On the Road

A lot of travelling in Tanzania happens on the road.

These words can come in handy:

Gari	Car
Basi	Bus
Bajaji	Three-wheeled taxi / tuk-tuk
Pikipiki	Motorbike
Barabara	Road
Kushoto	Left
Kulia	Right
Moja kwa moja	Straight ahead
Hapa	Here
Pale	Over there
Karibu	Near
Mbali	Far



CHAPTER 06 · CONTINUED

On the Road

Useful phrases

Twende.	Let's go.
Simama hapa, tafadhali.	Stop here, please.
Ni mbali?	Is it far?
Ni karibu?	Is it near?
Tunaenda wapi?	Where are we going?
Tutafika saa ngapi?	What time will we arrive?
Subiri kidogo.	Wait a moment.
And one particularly useful Tanzanian concept:	
Sasa hivi.	Right now.



CHAPTER 07

Hiking & Walking

Heading into the Usambara Mountains, Uluguru Mountains or Udzungwa? These are worth remembering.

Mlima	Mountain
Mto	River
Msitu	Forest
Njia	Path / Way
Maji	Water
Jua	Sun
Mvua	Rain
Moto	Hot
Baridi	Cold

CHAPTER 07 · CONTINUED

Hiking & Walking

On the trail

Twende.	Let's go.
Twende pole pole.	Let's go slowly.
Subiri kidogo.	Wait a moment.
Nimechoka.	I'm tired.
Nataka kupumzika.	I want to rest.
Nina kiu.	I'm thirsty.
Nina njaa.	I'm hungry.
Nahitaji maji.	I need water.
Ni mbali?	Is it far?
Bado mbali?	Is it still far?
Dakika ngapi?	How many minutes?

Do not be surprised if the answer to that last question turns out to be rather optimistic.

CHAPTER 08

When You're Tired, Hungry or Just Need a Toilet

This may be the most useful chapter in the entire course.

Your basic needs

Nimechoka.	I'm tired.
Nina njaa.	I'm hungry.
Nina kiu.	I'm thirsty.
Nahitaji maji.	I need water.
Nataka kupumzika.	I want to rest.
Nataka kulala.	I want to sleep.

The important one

Choo kiko wapi?	Where is the toilet?
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Remember:

Choo = toilet.

If you only remember one emergency travel word, this is a strong candidate.

CHAPTER 08 • CONTINUED

When You're Tired, Hungry or Just Need a Toilet

When you are not feeling well

Sijisikii vizuri.	I don't feel well.
Ninaumwa.	I'm sick / I'm in pain.
Tumbo linauma.	My stomach hurts.
Kichwa kinauma.	My head hurts.
Ninaharisha.	I have diarrhoea.
Nina kidonda.	I have a wound.
Nahitaji daktari.	I need a doctor.
Nahitaji hospitali.	I need a hospital.



CHAPTER 09

Food & Drinks

Eating local food is one of the easiest ways to use a little Swahili.

Useful words

Maji	Water
Chai	Tea
Kahawa	Coffee
Chakula	Food
Wali	Rice
Ugali	Ugali
Maharage	Beans
Samaki	Fish
Kuku	Chicken
Nyama	Meat
Mboga	Vegetables
Matunda	Fruit

CHAPTER 09 · CONTINUED

Food & Drinks

Ordering

A very useful construction is:

Naomba... I would like... / May I have...

For example:

Naomba maji. May I have water?

Naomba kahawa. May I have coffee?

Naomba chai. May I have tea?

Naomba chakula. May I have some food?

Other useful phrases

Nina njaa. I'm hungry.

Nina kiu. I'm thirsty.

Ni tamu. It's delicious.

Tamu sana! Very delicious!

Bila nyama. Without meat.

Bila pilipili. Without chilli.

Pilipili kidogo. A little chilli.

Maji baridi. Cold water.

Maji ya moto. Hot water.

Bia baridi. Cold beer.

Chakula kiko tayari? Is the food ready?

Asante, chakula ni kitamu. Thank you, the food is delicious.

CHAPTER 10

At Your Lodge

You certainly do not need Swahili at most safari lodges and hotels, but these phrases are easy and useful.

Chumba	Room
Kitanda	Bed
Ufunguo	Key
Maji	Water
Taulo	Towel
Umeme	Electricity

Useful phrases

Chumba changu kiko wapi?	Where is my room?
Naomba maji.	May I have some water?
Naomba taulo.	May I have a towel?
Hamna maji.	There is no water.
Hamna umeme.	There is no electricity.
Chakula ni saa ngapi?	What time is the meal?
Tunaondoka saa ngapi?	What time are we leaving?
Asante sana.	Thank you very much.

CHAPTER 11

Beach & Island Life

Heading to Zanzibar, Mafia or Pemba?

Time to swap safari Swahili for beach Swahili.

Bahari	Sea / Ocean
Pwani	Coast / Beach area
Mchanga	Sand
Jua	Sun
Samaki	Fish
Kuogelea	To swim
Ndala	Flip-flops

Useful phrases

Bahari iko wapi?	Where is the sea?
Naweza kuogelea hapa?	Can I swim here?
Ni mbali?	Is it far?
Tunarudi saa ngapi?	What time are we coming back?
Maji ni baridi?	Is the water cold?
And when you are finished doing absolutely nothing on a tropical beach:	
Twende kunywa kitu.	Let's go drink something.

CHAPTER 12

Markets, Shopping & Money

This is where your Swahili can become particularly useful.

The most important question

Bei gani?

What price?

Or:

Ni shilingi ngapi?

How many shillings?

In everyday speech, listen carefully and you may hear **shilingi ngapi** run together so quickly that it sounds more like:

Shingapi?

That is the version your ears should be ready for.

Numbers

Moja	1
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Mbili	2
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Tatu	3
-------------	---

Nne	4
------------	---

Tano	5
-------------	---

Sita	6
-------------	---

Saba	7
-------------	---

Nane	8
-------------	---

Tisa	9
-------------	---

Kumi	10
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Ishirini	20
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CHAPTER 12 · CONTINUED

Markets, Shopping & Money

Thelathini	30
Hamsini	50
Mia moja	100
Elfu moja	1,000
Elfu kumi	10,000

Shopping phrases

Nataka hii.	I want this one.
Sitaki.	I don't want it.
Ninaangalia tu.	I'm just looking.
Bei gani?	What price?
Shingapi?	How much?
Gharama sana.	Very expensive.
Punguza kidogo.	Reduce it a little.
Sawa.	Okay.
Asante.	Thank you.

A useful cultural note

Bargaining is normal in some markets and souvenir shops, but not everywhere.

You would not normally bargain over a fixed supermarket price, restaurant bill or hotel rate.

Keep it friendly. Bargaining is a conversation, not a battle.

CHAPTER 13

When You Need Help

Hopefully you will never need most of these, but they are worth knowing.

Msaada!	Help!
Nahitaji msaada.	I need help.
Nimepotea.	I'm lost.
Sijui niko wapi.	I don't know where I am.
Nahitaji daktari.	I need a doctor.
Nahitaji hospitali.	I need a hospital.
Ninaumwa.	I'm sick / I'm in pain.
Sijisikii vizuri.	I don't feel well.
Tumbo linauma.	My stomach hurts.
Kichwa kinauma.	My head hurts.
Ninaharisha.	I have diarrhoea.
Nina kidonda.	I have a wound.
Subiri kidogo.	Wait a moment.
Tafadhali nisaide.	Please help me.
Piga simu.	Call / Make a phone call.
Polisi	Police
Hospitali	Hospital
Daktari	Doctor

CHAPTER 14

Just Enough Swahili to Make Your Own Sentences

You do not need to study Swahili grammar to enjoy using the language.

But understanding one small principle will suddenly allow you to recognise a lot more words.

Let's use:

Kulala

To sleep

The **ku-** is the infinitive marker.

So:

kulala = to sleep

But when someone actually does the action, the beginning changes.

Ninalala.

I am sleeping.

Unalala.

You are sleeping.

Analala.

He/she is sleeping.

You will start recognising the same pattern elsewhere.

kwenda - to go

Ninaenda.

I am going.

Unaenda?

Are you going?

Tunaenda.

We are going.

CHAPTER 14 · CONTINUED

Just Enough Swahili to Make Your Own Sentences

kunywa - to drink

Ninakunywa.

I am drinking.

Unakunywa?

Are you drinking?

A very useful shortcut: nataka

Remember this:

Nataka...

I want...

Then add an action:

Nataka kulala.

I want to sleep.

Nataka kula.

I want to eat.

Nataka kunywa.

I want to drink.

Nataka kwenda.

I want to go.

Or use **naomba** when asking for something:**Naomba maji.**

May I have some water?

Naomba kahawa.

May I have coffee?

You do not need perfect grammar.

Even a few words are enough to communicate.

And Tanzanians will generally appreciate that you are trying.



A FEW WORDS. A SMALL CONNECTION.

One last thing

Do not wait until your Swahili is perfect before you use it.

It won't be.

You will pronounce things strangely. You will forget words. Someone will answer you in rapid-fire Swahili and you will have absolutely no idea what they just said.

That is fine.

Smile, try again and use the words you know.

Even:

Habari?

Asante.

Twende.

or

Naomba kahawa.

can turn a purely practical interaction into a small connection with someone.

And that is really the point.

Karibu Tanzania.



CHAPTER 15 · 1 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

Greetings

Habari?

How are you?

Nzuri.

Good.

Mambo?

What's up?

Poa!

Fine / Cool!

Karibu.

Welcome / You're welcome.

Polite essentials

Asante.

Thank you.

Asante sana.

Thank you very much.

Tafadhali.

Please.

Samahani.

Excuse me / Sorry.

Pole.

Sorry / Sympathy.

Sawa.

Okay.

Hamna shida.

No problem.



CHAPTER 15 · 2 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

Yes, no & understanding

Ndiyo.

Yes.

Hapana.

No.

Sijui.

I don't know.

Naelewa.

I understand.

Sielewi.

I don't understand.

Ninaongea Kiswahili kidogo.

I speak a little Swahili.



CHAPTER 15 · 3 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

Getting around

Twende.

Let's go.

Subiri kidogo.

Wait a moment.

Ngoja kidogo.

Wait a moment.

Simama hapa.

Stop here.

Hapa.

Here.

Pale.

Over there.

Kushoto.

Left.

Kulia.

Right.

Ni mbali?

Is it far?

Ni karibu?

Is it near?



CHAPTER 15 · 4 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

Food & drink

Naomba maji.

May I have water?

Naomba kahawa.

May I have coffee?

Nina njaa.

I'm hungry.

Nina kiu.

I'm thirsty.

Tamu sana!

Very delicious!

Bila pilipili.

Without chilli.

When you need a break

Nimechoka.

I'm tired.

Nataka kupumzika.

I want to rest.

Nataka kulala.

I want to sleep.

Choo kiko wapi?

Where is the toilet?



CHAPTER 15 • 5 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

Shopping

Bei gani?

What price?

Shingapi?

How much?

Nataka hii.

I want this one.

Sitaki.

I don't want it.

Ninaangalia tu.

I'm just looking.

Punguza kidogo.

Reduce it a little.

Safari

Angalia!

Look!

Hapo!

There!

Simba yuko wapi?

Where is the lion?

Naweza kupiga picha?

Can I take a photo?

Twende pole pole.

Let's go slowly.



CHAPTER 15 • 6 / 6

Tanzania Swahili Cheat Sheet

When something is wrong

Nahitaji msaada.

I need help.

Sijisikii vizuri.

I don't feel well.

Nahitaji daktari.

I need a doctor.

Ninaharisha.

I have diarrhoea.

Nina kidonda.

I have a wound.