

General Information

Kenya Mission Trips

Have you ever thought about going on a mission trip to another country, but you just don't know how it all works? We have put together some general information that those of us that have traveled on earlier mission trips found helpful. Please know we are praying for you as you consider joining a Kenya Mission Trip. We can assure you that if you were to speak to each one of the participants of the other trips, all would tell you that they were glad they went on the spiritual journey. You surely will not look at things the same upon your return home.

Vaccinations

Talk to your physician about what he/she thinks is best for you. While Kenya does not require any vaccinations to enter, some are suggested. Several of the countries around Kenya do require Yellow Fever. We are only 35 miles from the Uganda border while in Maseno and they are a country that requires it. Thus, if we would need to make an emergency exit, we would need the vaccination to enter one of those countries. Many get the Hepatitis A & B vaccine series, Typhoid Fever shot and update their Tetanus. If you've received any of these vaccinations, consult with your doctor regarding boosters. Some insurance companies pay for the shots, others do not. For those who did have to pay for them, they found that those that were offered from the County Health Department were cheaper than in the physician's office. Ask ahead of time about the cost if you are concerned your insurance won't pay for them.

We highly recommend you take Malaria meds. These are started just before you leave and for a few days after you return depending on the drug. We are surrounded by Malaria even though we do use nets at night and wear bug spray. It doesn't matter which of the anti-Malaria meds you take. All seem to have a few side effects; insomnia, bad dreams, upset stomach, etc. Talk to your doctor about which of these side effects most concern you and they can help you avoid that type. Some physicians have sent a prescription for a Z-Pak; it is a good antibiotic to use for various illnesses. It is a good idea to bring extra medications as we do not have reliable medical help or medicines available close to us. Your doctor can be assured that our medical people will help you decide if you need to start the medication. Anyone with a severe allergy needs to bring Epi-pens with them. Don't take a chance if you have severe allergies to something.

Keeping Yourself Healthy

First and most important is PRAY! That includes before, during and after. Whether it is emotional, spiritual or your physical being, prayer will help! We carry hand sanitizer with us to use throughout the day. Many of us take probiotics prior to going, while there, and after we come home. Some of the malaria meds do a number on one's GI tract and probiotics seem to help. Since some have started doing that, they have had much less problems with their stomach.

However, we do encourage travelers to bring Imodium or something similar with you on the trip. It is recommended to carry it with everyday just in case. Many people don't ever experience any troubles with their GI tract, but if yours is one of the sensitive stomachs, go ahead and bring some just to be safe. Some bring Pepto Bismol chewable tablets and feel those work better. We also recommend you pack electrolyte dry powder packets in case you have stomach issues and need to replenish your electrolytes. We do only consume sealed store-bought water. Keep yourself hydrated while in Kenya; that will also help your immune system stay strong. You are responsible to bring any over the counter meds/ointments you may need to take (Tylenol, Benadryl, hydrocortisone ointment for rashes, feminine products, etc...) Be aware, there are no drug stores in the area.

Climate

We are located on the equator, so the weather is very nice and summer like. It may get up in the high 80's during the day and may dip into the 60's at night. We may see occasional rain showers, but they are usually short-lived and do not alter our plans. For the February travelers it tends to be even hotter.

Clothes

Women should wear long (mid-calf or below knee) length skirts with shirts (no tank tops) for some of the days we are there. Three skirt outfits are recommended as we put on various events with the children and/or guardians. It is culturally more acceptable than pants in settings like those. It is fine to wear pants or capris for some of our home visits and work projects. Avoid tank tops with thin straps unless it is under a loose fitting short sleeved shirt as the women in our area generally cover their upper arms. Men may wear jeans, pants or shorts. Everyone should have a sweatshirt/windbreaker for cool nights or rain showers and also for the flights. Bring a wide brim hat to protect your head/neck; we are right on the equator which is the most dangerous UV rays.

We may need to share bathroom facilities. Men and women will both want to wear night wear that is conservative. Pajama pants and t-shirts are acceptable. Good soled shoes are a must. Tennis shoes work great and are comfortable for the walking we do. Please do not wear open toe shoes with bare feet for our daily walking as the area has a parasite that lives in the soil and you do not want to get that. You may wear Keen-type sandals if you wear the short tennis type socks underneath to protect your skin. We recommend packing a second pair of shoes in case your shoes get dirty or wet and need time to dry. You will want to bring a pair of flip-flops for showers.

Avoid bringing valuable or 'showy' jewelry. You may wear simple earrings. Please do NOT buy a new wardrobe. Shop garage sales or consignment shops for clothes and shoes. You may choose to leave clothes behind when we leave. As you will find out, the people are very poor, so we are more than happy to share. You may wish to search for some "Wisconsin", "Minnesota" or "Michigan", etc...shirts/sweatshirts at garage sales or from your hometowns/churches. It is like leaving a "little piece of our home" behind when we leave. Many of us have even left one of our pairs of shoes.

Please note we do not wear clothing on any of the flights that identify our group or identify us as Americans. We have been encouraged for security reasons to not draw attention to ourselves in light of terrorist activities. Nancy's son is a former USA Special Forces Green Beret and he greatly encourages us to follow this policy of avoiding such attire. We know God goes with us, but we just want to be as safe as possible. We do wear our His Arms t-shirts to the His Arms parties in Maseno. We surely do walk with our Christian friends in Kenya and support them in their faith. Let Nancy know if you need a blue His Arms shirt. If you wish to have two, as we do wear on consecutive days, the first one is free and the second one is \$8.50.

Accommodations

The team stays at a Maseno "Motel" that is safe and gated, with guards at night, clean for Kenya standards, and adequate. You may find it slightly less than Motel 6 type motels you are used to here in the USA, but the basics are covered. Running water, although might be cold or too hot! Showers should be short as water is a luxury in our area.

You can wash your hands in the sinks. **DO NOT RINSE YOUR TOOTHBRUSH WITH THE FAUCET WATER.** Some travelers take the Wisp type disposable toothbrushes. So rather than wasting our precious bottled water for cleaning the toothbrush, you can use one in the morning, place it back in the plastic bag, use it again at night, and then toss it. If you do not want to use disposable toothbrushes, make sure you bring an extra toothbrush as everyone makes the mistake at least once of putting it under the faucet. We will have a western type toilet-it may or may not have a toilet seat. We usually have toilet paper but not in abundance. We also have a bath towel, but you need to bring a washcloth, hand towel, and bar soap for your own use.

The rooms can be locked but we still do not leave valuables out since other workers have access to the key. We do not carry our passports when out and about but do try to find a more discreet place to keep them in our rooms. We had not had a problem with anything being stolen from our rooms. We just try not to tempt people. We usually have single twin type beds with malaria nets over each bed. Again, do not set your expectations high for accommodations and you will not be disappointed. The most important part is that it is gated and guarded at night.

Monkeys are all around the grounds. Do not feed them; they can carry disease and be too tempted to touch your hand. You can take pictures of them. Chickens also roam around the grounds and may enter your room if you leave the door open to get some air; just gently chase them out of your room.

Meals

We will eat breakfast prior to going out each day. We will not have another meal until we return prior to dusk. Kenyans often only eat one meal a day. We are not used to that and need some protein for lunch to maintain our energy. Look for high protein bars avoiding chocolate varieties as they do tend to melt in your pocket as we go through the day. Feel free to munch on your bars when necessary, even while walking, etc...as we do not stop and sit down for lunch.

We will carry bottled water each day. Water will be purchased with mission trip donations. If you are offered liquids while doing home visits, it is ok to drink tea as it has been boiled, but do not drink regular water. Most of our Kenyan friends understand that. We are often offered soda to drink. While many of us do not usually drink much at home, in Kenya, it is one of the safer drinks to consume. We need liquids daily, so soda pop can be a safe alternative. Again, the average Kenyan rarely has soda to drink. It is way too expensive, costing two days wages per bottle. So if we are offered soda, know it is a huge sacrifice and gift on someone's part; even if served warm as refrigeration is rare in our area of Kenya.

Dinner will be served each evening. We will eat our meals in a dining room that we may share with others. It varies with each team. We try to be kind, polite and friendly to all and appreciate the beauty of the area and the kind people that are doing their very best to take safe care of us. They will tell us times for meals. The food for our group will be set out family style. We try not to be rude and be sure to show up for meals when they tell us to come. The coffee (instant) and tea they prepare is safe. Toasters are non-existent. Again, remember we are not at the Hilton. Make sure you say Asante Sana (thank you!) often. Remember we are representing Jesus 24/7 even in conditions that we may feel are less than great.

Luggage

Each traveler will carry in two large suitcases that weigh no more than 50 lbs. each. Do not buy new luggage if you do not have any to use. We have pieces you can borrow that have been donated for mission trips or you can try to find older pieces at a thrift shop. Each trip we leave some of our worst pieces that barely survived the trip. Our Kenyan friends like to use them as storage. Some pieces we bring back and will place inside another for the flights home to avoid excess luggage charges. International travel is tough on luggage so avoid bringing fancy luggage. Plus, if we look like we are millionaires, we are just a target for theft.

We will pay excess luggage fees within Kenya for our second large suitcase as Kenya only allows one checked in bag. You will not have to pay that fee for your second checked in bag. We will have sponsors help pay that fee as they are each sending small gifts to their children. We can also each carry on two bags, but they cannot weigh more than 23 lbs total. For example, you could carry a backpack and a larger purse as long as they both together don't go over 23 lbs. Let Nancy know if you need to borrow any carry-on pieces or look in a thrift store for one.

We will use every ounce of the weight that we are allowed, to carry in as many items for our Kenyan friends as we can. We bring in items such as children vitamins, Bibles, medical supplies, clothing, and gifts for our children. In the past, we have mainly used our carry-on for our personal clothes/items plus approximately 10 lbs. of one of the large checked in suitcases. The two large checked in pieces, minus your 10 pounds you get to use, is to be filled with the above-mentioned supplies that we share with others within Kenya. Luggage is typically dropped off with Nancy so she can pack all the supplies in your bags. Before you drop your luggage with Nancy, pack your 10 lbs of personal items in one of the large suitcases. Liquids over 3 oz. will need to be packed in one of the large suitcases. It is recommended to put these in a gallon size Ziploc bag in case they leak. If you will be carrying on liquids that are 3 oz. or less, they must be in a one-quart sized Ziploc bag and taken out of your carry-on to go through the x-ray machine.

Gifts

As the departure date gets closer, the trip leader will help the team decide what items to look for to take with as gifts. Again, shop garage sales/dollar stores for these items. If you do not like garage sales, tell a friend that loves them what items to look for. Sponsors traveling on the trip are allowed to bring gifts to their child and their family unit. Please check with the trip leader to see how much additional luggage weight you may use for gifts.

Money

Once we get to Kenya, we convert our US dollars to Shillings. All US bills that are taken in for exchange need to be newer than year 2009 and in \$50 or \$100 increments. You do not have to bring much extra spending money; typical amount is between \$100-\$200. We are in an "out" area and do not have a "shopping" type area in Maseno. Items to purchase include more rustic type items such as homemade jewelry & crafts that the local ladies make or soda pop for yourself as something safe to drink other than water.

Once the mission team arrives in Kenya and has spent some time with the kids and guardians, they will all have input on how to spend funds collected from donations for mission trip projects. All donations for trip projects should be sent to Peace Lutheran using the Cash Donation form.

Credit Cards

It is recommended that you bring a Visa card with a chip for use at the airports or in case of emergency. You must call your credit card company before you leave to let them know you are using it outside the USA. Let them know you will be traveling through Europe and Africa. Travelers usually have an opportunity to do a mini-safari trip at the National Park while in Nairobi. The National Park does require payment to be made with a Visa card.

Documents to Carry

It is helpful to get a passport carrier that goes around your neck. You do not want to bring everything you normally carry in your purse or wallet. Besides your Visa card, you should carry your passport, driver's license, and health booklet listing your immunizations. The passport carrier is convenient in the airport and can easily be tucked inside your jacket or shirt to keep your documents safe.

Communications

Traveling within Kenya can be a bit of a challenge for people from the USA who are used to the ability to be in constant communication with others. Check with your phone carrier to see what they offer for international plans and if your phone will work in the areas you will be traveling; even then, be aware that your phone may still not work in some areas. You do not want to come home to a giant phone bill due to roaming charges. You will also need an adapter/converter for Europe and Africa to plug your charger in to. The power outlets are different than the US and you don't want to ruin your phone. Keep in mind that we do often lose power while in Kenya. Prepare your loved ones to possibly not hear from you regularly.

The trip leader has a Kenyan phone. We will give the number to you to give to loved ones in the USA for emergencies in case your phone does not work. Most of the time service is adequate and there is WiFi at our sleeping residence that works part of the time. Occasionally even phone lines have intermittent services. We are able to replenish the phone with minutes so travelers can make short phone calls to check in with their family.

In the past, we have passed out a list of our contacts back in the USA for each traveler in case the phones & internet are really giving us challenges. If we can, we get a message out to one person who can notify others that the team is okay. Tell your loved ones to also 'like' our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/HisArmsKenya. We can often leave a quick message letting everyone know in the USA that the team is safe.

Your Costs

Each traveler is responsible for some of the trips' cost. You are responsible for your roundtrip airline tickets and your room and board in Kenya. Room, board and transportation while in Kenya is approximately \$30-\$35 per day. Depending on your flights, you may need to purchase some meals in the airports and the hotel in Nairobi. Travelers will also need to order a travel visa ahead of the trip to be able to enter Kenya. The cost is \$50.00. Please check with the trip leader for valid e-visa websites as many are fraudulent. One other cost to consider is if you choose to travel on a mini-safari or a larger safari. The cost will vary for a larger safari. You will be responsible for the research, booking, payment, etc. We can suggest some companies people have used before, but we accept no responsibility for these bookings.

You may mail out letters to your friends and families to see if they would wish to donate toward your air or room and board costs. Nancy has a sample letter if you are interested. We have also conducted some fundraisers to help defray our costs. If you want to help on these, you may be able to share in some of that profit toward your tickets. Any donations for your trip expenses (hotel, room and board) should go directly to you.

Mini-Safari

We can help to arrange for a mini-safari trip. It is approximately a 5-hour trip into the National Park. About \$100 will cover your entrance fee, driver cost & tip. Our past travelers have found the mini-safari very exciting without the large amount of travel needed to do a larger safari. Past teams have seen several different African animals with the exception of leopards and elephants which are both in different areas of the country. The mini-safari is normally scheduled once travelers return to Nairobi for the return trip home.

Suggested List of Items to Bring on Trip

Passport

Driver's License

Immunization booklet

Small flashlight

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Lip balm with sunscreen protection

Windbreaker or hoodie for the plane and wet weather

Hand sanitizer

Handkerchiefs for hand washing, wiping sweat, etc...

Small packet of Kleenex or baby wipes for bathroom stops while out and about-no toilet paper or running water

Hand towel and wash clothes-bring old ones and leave them behind if you wish

Bar of soap

High protein bars in for your daily consumption

Small plastic shoe box for keeping bathroom supplies in

Your sense of humor! It will get you through lots of times! If you are the type of person that always wants to follow plan A, you will learn quickly in Kenya we get down to plan M some days. You never know what lesson God may have in all the change of plans, who HE wants us to talk to.

Do not take any packing material. Use Ziplocs that can be re-used in Kenya, use rubber bands to keep things neater, etc... For example, take your bar of soap out of the wrapper and place in a Ziploc. Remove your toothpaste from the carton and place in a Ziploc. Pack all your protein bars in a large Ziploc. In the USA we use way too much packing material and the weight of the materials add up.

Evening Gatherings

One of the things we do each night after getting back to our sleeping quarters while in Kenya is allow some time to gather for "de-briefing". Many of us feel this is an important time to get together and discuss the days' activities and hear our schedule for the next day. In the past, many have found these gatherings very important in processing what we see and experience in Kenya. Many of it is very new to most of us. Some is hard to see and take. Sometimes it helps just to talk about it. Sometimes it just helps ones that have had a harder time experiencing it to know others understand. We pray together before we disperse for the night. Most feel it a very special time as a team and as a time for God to remind us of HIS presence. No one ever has to lead in a prayer unless he/she wishes.

What Will Each Team Do?

Each trip varies depending on the talents of travelers. We may conduct free medical clinics done with help of local nurses and public health nurses, make medical visits to private homes of people unable to get to clinic, make home visits to as many of our kids as we can to assess home environments, we might work with local schools or with local special needs schools.

We put on large "parties" for our 126 sponsored children and their siblings. It is a fun time with crafts and music and includes playing with kids and helping them to laugh! We do this at two locations. It is a high energy day, but totally a fun event for travelers and kids! We also may meet with the guardians to encourage them, possibly teach depending on traveler's talents, plus more. We hit the ground running with activities. We get hot, dirty and involved!

Final Thoughts

Please save this document to refer back to, but feel free to ask the team leader any additional questions.