

Volunteer Information



AFRICA MISSION
SERVICES

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About Africa Mission Services

In 1999, after 8 years of service at Riverside Farm Institute in Zambia, Andrew Aho moved to Kenya and registered Africa Mission Services (AMS) as an international non-government organization (NGO). Although the mission of the NGO was to implement development projects within the Maasai community, a severe drought throughout the region immediately involved AMS in World Food Program's drought relief effort. That year, AMS was contracted to provide food aid to the 410,000 residents of the Kajiado District, the majority of them Maasai. By responsibly providing food to a drought-stricken population, AMS quickly gained a reputation amongst the Maasai as an organization intent on supporting them in practical, essential ways.

After the drought, AMS began partnering with the Maasai community, North American donors and short term volunteers to build schools, churches, and a clinic in the rural Maasai villages, as well as to implement clean water projects and provide medical services and health education. To provide the necessary infrastructure, AMS first established a mobile camp to host short-term volunteers wishing to experience the challenges and rewards of humanitarian service. As the program grew and doors opened for further expansion, AMS moved its community development projects to the Trans Mara District, just outside Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Today, AMS works extensively with local Maasai leadership to improve educational opportunities for children, offer medical services for rural villagers and provide community households with clean drinking water. Financial support for both community development and AMS's operating costs is generated by hosting short-term volunteers, who generally participate in a community development project for an average of 10 – 12 days. These volunteers minister in various ways to the local community. Building crews construct classrooms, dorms, churches and other facilities; medical personnel take medical services to the bush; others host activities at primary and secondary schools. There is a role for everyone. Most of all, everybody has the opportunity to interact with the local Maasai and learn about their culture. It is a time of giving, but it is equally a time of receiving, not only for the Maasai who benefit from the schools, classes and medical treatment, but particularly for the volunteers who get an insider perspective on traditional Maasai life and see firsthand the impact of their efforts in the community.

Volunteers are hosted at Mara West Camp, a permanent tented camp overlooking a stunning panoramic view of Masai Mara National Reserve. Here guests enjoy comfortable accommodations in canvas safari tents. Bathroom facilities include flush toilets and hot showers. The comfortable Simba Restaurant is the center of the camp, where delicious meals are served and everyone gathers after a hard day's work to socialize.

Thus the AMS family includes thousands of volunteers from around the world who have donated their time, energy and financial resources to ministering to the Maasai people of Kenya. They are the lifeblood of the organization, bringing fresh enthusiasm, vision and resources to the ministry.

Kenya Trip Helpful Information

Camp Information

Africa Mission Services volunteers are hosted at Mara West Camp, Kilgoris Road, Trans Mara. C13, Oloololo Gate, Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, Africa.

GPS coordinates:

1°15'54.5"S 34°58'11.2"E

-1.265139, 34.969778

Kenya time is GMT +3.

3G wireless internet is available at Mara West Camp. Remember, you are in Africa so it may be slow and intermittent.

You will not need to carry money with you while in camp. A tab will be opened for you to make water, juice, soda and gift shop purchases. You will pay your tab at the end of your trip. If you use a credit card to pay your tab, a 2.5% processing fee will be added on top of your balance. (Customary in all of Africa.)

Mara West Camp is powered by KPS (Kenya Power Services), and electricity is available throughout camp. Power does occasionally fail and the camp will then be powered by a generator. There is plenty power supply available to charge your phone, iPad, camera batteries, etc. You will need an outlet adapter. Be sure that you do not need an inverter prior to plugging in to any electrical outlet.

Drinking water at Mara West Camp is filtered and will be available in a large thermos container outside Simba Restaurant for you to fill your personal water bottle. You may also purchase bottled water in Simba and King Fisher restaurants.

The water inside the restrooms (sinks & showers) is treated but NOT filtered for drinking and may have a slight dirt color and smell. It will not harm you; however, DO NOT DRINK. As mentioned above, filtered and bottled water is available.

Getting There

After arriving Nairobi we will travel by land to Mara West Camp in the Trans Mara District. Plan on having everything you need for the 5-8 hour drive, (road conditions determine length of time to travel), as your luggage will not be available to you until arriving camp.

Visa Information

You may need a Visa to enter Kenya. Check the internet for current information to determine if the country where you are a resident requires a visa to enter Kenya.

eVisa Information - Kenya Visa for US citizens is \$50. plus small processing fee

Visit the electronic visa page at www.ecitizen.go.ke Select Register as a Visitor
(As part of this process, you may receive a confirmation email that you need to click on to verify and confirm your registration.)

You will be asked to UPLOAD A DIGITAL PASSPORT PHOTO (Maximum size 500 px by 500 px)

Once logged in, select Department of Immigration Services

Select Submit Application

Select Kenyan Visa

Select the type of visa: **Single Entry (visitor)** and read the instructions carefully

Passport Place of Issue: **USA or country of your passport**

Reason for Travel: **Holiday Tourism (DO NOT SELECT MISSION WORK)**

Complete the application form – please note that incomplete applications will be rejected and you will lose your processing fees

You will need a scan of the main page of your passport (with your name, date of birth and other information)

You will need to re-upload your passport photo

Pay using your Visa card, MasterCard or other debit card

You may receive the visa immediately, or it could take up to 7 days. If not received immediately, you will receive a email advising that your visa is approved, log back into your ecitizen account and download your visa.

Print a copy of your visa to present to the immigration officer at your point of entry into Kenya. Be safe and make two copies. Place one inside your passport and one inside your carry on in case one gets misplaced or lost.

Kenya Climate

A common mistake is to assume that Kenya is hot and humid. It is not. The elevation of your travels is between three and seven thousand feet and most often the temperatures range between 75 to 85 degrees during the day and between 50 to 65 degrees during the evenings and night. You will want a variety of clothes to switch back and forth between, a few cool items as a first layer with some warmer things on top. You will find that you dress warmly first thing in the morning and take off layers as the day progresses, only to put them back on towards evening. A warm coat or sweatshirt is good to have along. Rainy season is typically anytime between October – December and March – June. Along with lots of rain and mud, the temperature can feel especially chilly during a good downpour. It should be noted that Mother Nature has not been following the rainy season schedule very accurately and rain should be factored in as a possibility during any mission trip.

Changing Money in Kenya

Kenya currency is known as Shillings (KSH) and in 2016 varied in value between 95 and 101 shillings to the US\$1.00.

Bureaus of Exchange and banks will only buy bills printed **after 2004**, and they must be in fairly **good condition**. **\$100** and **\$50** notes get the best rate of exchange. \$20s and \$10s get lower rate. Traveler's checks get **very low rates**.

***IMPORTANT:** If you wish to be financially independent, **while you are waiting for your luggage to arrive, exchange money at the Exchange Bureau by the luggage carousel.** You will then have Kenya Shillings with you on your trip down to camp.*

NOTE: in Europe, you can change money at any "Bureau de Exchange" places on the streets, but the best rate is usually through an ATM. Remember that in Europe, ATMs only take cards that have a PIN of four (4) digits or less. So if your current ATM card has a longer PIN, you might want to have it changed before you fly.

Advice on Tipping in Kenya

For many travelers, tipping in a foreign country is confusing and awkward. To help take some of the guesswork out of it, the following insights are offered.

Tipping, while always optional, is an effective method of showing appreciation to people who serve you well. Many of the local people you meet while traveling throughout Kenya come from some degree of impoverished circumstances and are most likely contributing to the support of a large, extended family. Most workers are paid about \$100/month. Your tip is a nice way of sharing your personal good fortune while reinforcing good work ethics and generating goodwill. AMS encourages those who can to show their personal appreciation as they travel from place to place throughout Kenya.

Since there are many employees at Mara West Camp that you may not have the opportunity to meet, (cooks, cleaners, laundry personnel, etc.), the Mara West employees have decided to share tips with all their fellow employees. A tip box is located within Kingfisher and Simba Restaurants.

You will most likely have hired drivers with you throughout travels in Kenya. They will pick us up from the airport, take us to our Nairobi accommodations, Mara West Camp, mission work site(s) and into the Masai Mara National Park Reserve. A tip at the end of your travels to the drivers is greatly appreciated.

A Guide to Good Manners In Camp and Amongst the Masai

Interaction with the local Masai community by AMS volunteers leaves a lasting impression as to who AMS volunteers are! This impression will affect the mission volunteers who follow. If the impression is positive it helps to pave the way for more positive experiences to follow. If the impression is negative or if complications follow some unfortunate situation, it affects future relationships between AMS, the community and any future volunteers. For the most part, common sense and simple courtesy are the keys to good relationships, but some pointers are in order.

About Dress

In introducing foreign culture into the midst of the Masai culture, an area of possible offence is that of dress. The Masai are familiar with the American and European form of dress as they are exposed to tourists who travel throughout their area. In general, Masai are quite accepting of the cultural differences, yet at the same time there are standards to which volunteers should be sensitive. Women especially should be aware of the need to dress modestly. Tight, revealing clothes will attract a great deal of unwanted attention from Masai men and cause resentment amongst Masai women. Keep shorts near the knee and avoid spaghetti strap, low cut tops, and leave the trendy fashions, like hip hugger jeans and exposed midriffs, home.

Camp Boundaries

Think of camp as private space, a home without walls. It is important to keep some sense of boundaries to camp, to maintain control as to who comes and goes and what goes on there. AMS does not encourage the community to visit the camp. There are certain arranged times when community Masai come into camp to sell their crafts, but for the most part only staff and hired help are permitted to be in camp. While inviting community friends to visit volunteers in camp may seem harmless, if someone's camera suddenly goes missing, the recent visitor will inevitably be on the list of suspects. It is simply easier to avoid such complications by agreeing that visiting takes place at the work site, the church or in the Masai's homes.

Photographing People

This can be a highly sensitive issue. Be very careful about taking people's pictures without first asking. It's a quick way to create hard feelings and to be regarded as an opportunist and intruder. It is possible to get pictures of tribal people, but it must be done diplomatically and considerately. Be aware that even if Maasai agree, they will most likely expect some sort of payment once the picture has been taken. Some of the best opportunities for taking photos are at the various mission and work sites, as the Maasai who are present are often participating in the activities alongside the volunteers in a spirit of goodwill and are willing to have their pictures taken without charging.

Personal Possessions

Do not travel with unnecessary valuables that you cannot afford to lose. Pay special attention to any valuables you do choose to bring, such as expensive camera equipment. Furthermore, be careful in your relationship with the community, not to let the vision shift from mission development to that of personal gain. While you might generously like to make gifts of all you've brought, please be careful. Your good intentions may affect more than you realize. We do not want the Maasai to be asking for your watches, cameras and shoes. We do not encourage significantly enriching one individual over the others as it will only create jealousy. In practice, it works best to minimize the individual gift giving during the mission trip and at some point towards the end make collective contributions to the community, school or village on behalf of the group.

Oftentimes, volunteers are tempted to throw candy to children while passing by without realizing that this practice has negative results. Maasai children are raised to be polite and humble and elders are frustrated to see their children now begging and demanding "sweeties" from visitors. Once again, a wiser, more culturally sensitive approach would be to pass out goodies in an organized setting, such as at the school, the clinic, or while doing village visitation where it can be given personally and children can show good manners.

Personal Decorum Between Opposite Sexes

Kenyans are friendly, polite people who are for the most part broad minded about cultural differences. This is especially true of those who are educated, work in tourism or live in urban areas. In rural areas, however, sometimes cultural differences lead to major misunderstandings. To avoid such misunderstandings it is best to keep behavior conservative between opposite sexes. What may be meant as a friendly hug by an American woman may be perceived by a Maasai man as an aggressive sexual advance. Although it is difficult to avoid every possible misunderstanding, it is wise to realize that cultural differences do exist and to adopt a conservative approach to relationships with the opposite sex as the best way to avoid sending messages you never intended to send.

Wildlife Conservation

The Trans Mara region of Masai Mara is a high profile area that has attracted significant attention from individuals and groups who are very committed to conservationism. If some of these conservationists had their way, there would be strict controls implemented that would deny all but the wealthy access to the park. Their point is to preserve the area by limiting the amount of traffic and influence it is exposed to. Fortunately, they have not been given the freedom to control the park this way. Nevertheless, the issues of conservationism are utmost in the minds of those who manage the park and with some international figures who study wildlife in the Mara. All of us need to realize that their concerns are entirely valid and be supportive of them in a proactive way. We need to do our best to protect the environment, to be respectful of the wildlife and to show our commitment to matters of conservationism and ecology.

Thus we ask that mission groups always keep the camp clean of trash, never litter at any time in any place for any reason, deal respectfully with the terrain and plant life, never chase or be aggressive in any way toward the wild animals that graze in the area, and never ask locals to find for you any sort of skin or teeth, etc, that might encourage them to kill for profit. Please note that it is highly illegal to take any indigenous product out of the park or to leave Kenya with animal horns, teeth, skins, etc, even if found lying around on the ground.

Also, please bear in mind at all times that the AMS camp borders the park and that it is completely plausible for dangerous animals to be in the bordering areas of the camp. Do not wander off by yourself or take early morning or late night strolls into the brush that borders the camp. Also, do not walk down the escarpment into the park below, as you will be most likely be spotted by the Rangers, arrested, and charged a \$80 park entry fee.

Medical Information

You do not have to have any shots. Encourage having your tetanus up to date. It is up to you to decide how vaccinated you want to be. Should you decide to contact a travel medical clinic, they will most likely suggest you get a whole list of shots.

Malaria

Malaria is a serious disease that can be fatal if not treated properly. The illness ranges from a vague sense of poor health to that of a nasty, relentless flu. Symptoms almost always include fever, chills and body ache, and often a good measure of stomach and bowel distress. Obviously, an ounce of prevention is worth several pounds of cure.

Malaria is spread by the anopheles mosquito, which comes out in the cool of the evening. It is not common to find malaria in the area of the Trans Mara where the Mara West camp is situated, and to date we have not had any problems with mission groups contracting it. But it is a possibility that should be taken seriously.

Take precautions to avoid getting bit by mosquitoes. Recommendations are as follows:

- Wear light-colored clothing
- Wear long trousers, long-sleeved shirts and socks in the evenings
- Use mosquito repellents that contain the compound DEET on exposed areas
- Avoid perfumes or aftershaves

In addition, you may want to talk with a doctor several weeks before your trip and make arrangements to begin a malaria prophylactic a month before you travel. You will take this prophylactic during your time in Africa and a couple of weeks after you return to the States. Also ask your doctor for a malaria treatment that you can take if you in fact do become sick with malaria while on the prophylactic.

Yellow Fever

Yellow Fever is the only vaccine that is legally required for entry into Kenya. The requirement is not enforced if you are flying into Kenya from a country where the disease is not endemic (such as USA). Although it is stated that yellow fever is endemic in Kenya, we are not personally aware of anyone who has ever had it and do not feel it is necessary to get the vaccine.

For more information about health issues in Kenya, AMS recommends checking out the Travel: Kenya Health Information site at www.travel.yahoo.com.

What To Bring

Packing:

Most airlines allow you to check two 50lbs bags, otherwise, you will most likely have to pay money when checking in your luggage. Check with your airline carrier prior to packing to be sure of their guidelines.

You might want to have a few toiletries with you on the plane. Visit <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm> for what is allowed in your carry-on.

Mara West will provide you with a bed, blankets, linens, and towels. They will also provide all toilet paper and hand soap.

Suggested list of your personal belongings:
(for additional suggestions: <http://www.travellerspoint.com/packing-list.cfm>)

Individuals

- Personal toiletries
- Feminine Hygiene Products
- Flashlight with batteries
- Bug spray with DEET
- Jacket, including rain coat/wind breaker, warm jacket/sweatshirt,
- Clothes for work
- Church clothes should you wish to visit a local church (for men just a clean pair of jeans or Dockers, for women a plain skirt or dress)
- Good pair of protective shoes: work boots, hiking boots, or sturdy sneakers
- Easy shoes: sandal type shoes for easy on and off
- Hat, plus bandanas for people who want to protect ears and neck
- Work Gloves
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen, lip balm with sunscreen
- Water bottle
- Hand wipes / instant hand sanitizer

- Personal addictions (Chocolate, licorice, etc. are not always available in the Mara West Giftshop. If volunteers aren't ready to go without these items, we recommend they bring their own rather than find themselves deep in the bush experiencing a meltdown.)
- Personal medications/First Aid Kit

Travel Documents

- Passport (Keep photocopy in separate location)
- Visa (Keep photocopy in separate location)
- Money (see note in the Money Section)

Recommended

- Binoculars
- Camera, film or compact cards, batteries, charger, travel adapter.

WHAT NOT TO BRING

Hair dryer, curling iron, electric shaver, electric toothbrush, clothes iron, etc.

Travel Tips

Here are some tips for traveling internationally:

- Buy a money pouch and keep your documents safe. Make copies of your documents. Take a set with you and leave a set with a family member/friend at home.
- Travel smart – don't leave things unattended, and/or scream tourist.
- Travel with a pen handy. Keep it with you; don't store it overhead while flying. You'll need it to fill out forms in the planes.
- Keep passport with you; don't store overhead unless you have memorized your number and dates.
- Pack carefully and avoid carry-ons as much as possible. Patience will also go a long way!
- Pack an extra change of clothes, toothbrush and essentials in your carry-on as sometimes luggage does not come through immediately. Keep liquids to a minimum as security will be tight.

Donation Items

Think Development, Not Christmas

Often, individuals want to bring items to donate to the community and ask AMS's advice on what is needed. Sometimes a great deal of effort has gone into carrying things over to Kenya (often at the expense of extra luggage) and then once here the volunteers realize they should have / could have brought more needed items. Although it continues to be a learning experience for everyone, the following guidelines are offered.

As development establishes more schools in the Trans Mara area, the need for supplies is continuous. Although the government attempts to provide basic supplies, at best they are meager and at worst non-existent. Thus, schools always appreciate supplies, even as basic as chalk, pencils and erasers. In addition, various picture books, educational books, reading books, etc, help to expose the children to additional reading material. These schools provide education for up to 600 children. That said, there is an endless demand for soccer balls, jump ropes, and other recess items that teach the children coordination and provide wholesome entertainment.

What to avoid: Trinkets and breakables that will litter the school yard or lose their parts, becoming useless almost immediately. Junk food in general -- better to pass out soaps, toothpastes, toothbrushes, etc, than to foster a taste for candy and gum.

Clothing: Children, once again, provide a ready market for donated items. Children's clothing of any sort is greatly needed. In addition to the normal shirts, trousers and dresses, look for socks, underpants, and shoes. Babies are abundant amongst the Masai and cloth diapers, blankets and baby hats/booties are always appreciated.

Adults appreciate clothing also. Women wear dresses and skirts with blouses. Men wear long trousers and shirts. Once again, socks, underpants, and bras for women are appreciated. Stay away from large sized clothing. People are slim and larger sizes are not easy to give away.

In addition, special gifts of watches (cheap), caps (baseball style hats), pens, and scarves are always appreciated. Bibles can be purchased over here, but if you have some at home that are sitting on the shelves unused, better to bring them to give out than to bring unnecessary trinkets.

What to avoid: Large sized clothing, women's pants, adult shorts.

Safaris

Mara West camp sits on the edge of the Oloololo Escarpment, overlooking the Masai Mara. Considered by many to be the greatest game reserve in the world, Masai Mara is 1500 sq. miles of savannah abounding with wildlife. Traditionally the land of Masai people, the Reserve is the northern-most tip of the Serengeti, extending over the border of Tanzania into Kenya. The Reserve is most famous for the natural phenomenon known as The Migration. Every year up to 3 million animals graze their way around a 2,000-mile loop, crossing into the Mara from the Serengeti sometime in early August to mid September. Comprised primarily of wildebeest, the migration also includes gazelles, zebra, and impalas, as well as a host of predators who see opportunity in such numbers. For nature lovers, photographers and sightseers alike, The Migration is a fascinating event of magnitude and beauty. During the rest of the year, the Masai Mara continues to be an incredible place to view wildlife. Resident wildebeest, zebra and antelope share the reserve with elephant, giraffe, hippo, cape buffalo and a host of predators.

AMS offers volunteers full day safaris into the Masai Mara Reserve and does its best to ensure up-close and personal experiences that are unforgettable. Safaris depart camp after breakfast and, depending on the stamina of the clients and the cooperation of the weather, return when the park closes at dusk. Most people find that 2 days in Masai Mara is sufficient to see a wide variety of wildlife and get some fantastic pictures.

AMS provides a delicious picnic lunch under the shade of a beautiful tree in the heart of the Reserve. Many groups who schedule a 2-day safari opt to have one lunch back at camp and the other as a picnic.

Basic Swahili Phrases

Hello. Jambo. (jam-boh)

How are you? Habari? (ha-ba-ree)

Good. Mzuri (M-zoo-ree)

What is your name? Unaitwa nani? (oo-na-ee-twa na-nee)

My name is - Ninaitwa nani (nee-na-ee-twa na-nee)

Where are you from? Unatoka wapi? (oo-na-toh-ka wa-pee)

I am from America. Natoka Marekani. (na-toh-ka ma-ray-ka-nee)

Sure. Sawa. (sa-wa)

Yes. Ndiyo. (n-dee-yoh)

No. Hapana. (ha-pa-na)

Thank you (very much). Asante (sana). (a-san-tay sa-na)

You're welcome. Karibu (ka-ree-boo)

Sorry. Pole. (poh-lay)

Let's go. Twende (twen-day)

Come here. Kuja hapa. (koo-ja ha-pa)

Medicine. Dawa. (da-wa)

Can I take a picture? Ni sawa nikipiga picha? (nee sa-wa nee-kee- pee-ga pee-cha)

Good night. Lala salama. (la-la sa-la-ma)

Bye. Kwa heri. (kwa hay-ree)

Maasai Greetings: Sopa (so-pah) to which you reply: Epa (e-pah)