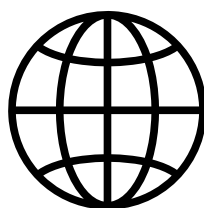
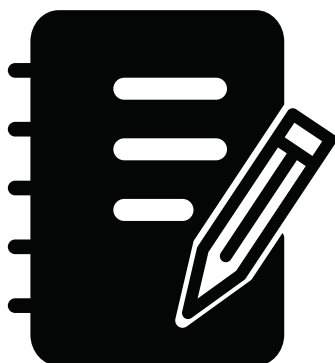


International Volunteer's Handbook



Volunteering with A Rocha Kenya

- Notes for International Volunteers -

Thank you for volunteering to help us at A Rocha Kenya! We'd like your time with us to be as rewarding as possible. Please read through the whole document in detail as we need you to know all of this information before arriving!! These notes will also help you plan your preparation. Do let us know of anything else we can clarify for you.

1. A Rocha Kenya - who are we and what do we do?

A Rocha Kenya is a Christian Conservation organisation that is part of a wider family of A Rocha projects around the world. This includes the umbrella body, A Rocha International. A Rocha began in 1983 in Portugal (hence the Portuguese name meaning 'The Rock') when a small group of Christian birders realised that the role of the church in caring for the environment had been completely neglected and something should be done about it! They established a field study centre in Portugal as a place to carry out practical conservation programmes and where people from all walks of life could gather to discover what it means to care for God's world.

To date (2019) there are 21 countries which have A Rocha projects and they cover a vast spectrum of cultures and ecological systems. The key commitments of each project can be described by the '5 Cs' of A Rocha, namely:

- Christian
- Conservation
- Community
- Cooperation
- Cross-cultural

To find out more about how these pan out in the life of the projects, visit the A Rocha website <http://www.arocha.org>

The History of A Rocha Kenya

Colin Jackson, the Director of A Rocha Kenya, caught the vision to start the Kenyan arm during his three year stint with the Portuguese project during the late 80s early 90s. A bird enthusiast since childhood and born and brought up in Kenya, he decided that his home country with its richness of habitats and wildlife, coupled with the many threats facing them, had a real need for such a project. Additionally, with some 70-80% professing Christians, Kenya had the potential to be an excellent location for A Rocha. After a year in a Bible College and another four as a research scientist at the National Museums of Kenya, Colin established A Rocha Kenya on the coast 100km north of Mombasa in an area called Watamu. He chose this location as it was in the neighbourhood of some key 'Important Bird Areas' (IBAs) across a range of habitat types, overlapping with an increasing human population relying on these natural resources for survival.



Our Programmes

To date A Rocha Kenya has grown from four staff members to twenty seven and operates three conservation programmes and a field study centre known as 'Mwamba' (or 'The Rock'). The programmes are:

- 1) Research and Monitoring, focussed mainly on bird, forest and marine research
- 2) Environmental Education for schools, churches and community groups surrounding the key habitats
- 3) Community Conservation (namely the Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Eco-Tourism Scheme - ASSETS – see <http://www.assets-kenya.org> for more details)



Our sites

The two main habitats we work on are Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Mida Creek, though we also have projects at Sabaki River Mouth, Dakatcha woodlands and Gede Ruins Forest. ---

Our Coastal Centre, Mwamba



The Mwamba centre, set just back from the white beaches and coral gardens of the Watamu Marine Protected Area, serves as the hub for our work and houses our offices and volunteer/guest accommodation. Most of the plot has been left wild in its original coastal forest habitat which is home to a host of birds and animals including a few specials and over 131 butterfly species recorded so far!

Nearby Attractions

We have a number of sites of interest in the near vicinity of our centre which will be worth a visit during your stay here. These include...

- Gede Ruins
- Mida Creek and Boardwalk
- Kipepeo Butterfly Farm
- Malindi and Watamu Marine Parks
- Arabuko-Sokoke Forest
- Bioken Snake Farm
- Local Ocean Turtle Conservation Centre



Other destinations a bit further out are Lamu Island and Tsavo National Park which can be done as weekend trips.



Nairobi Office

We also have a Nairobi office located on a plot of land called Karara in the rural suburbs of Karen, where the National Director works. The plot is a base for people to come and enjoy our nature trail through indigenous forest and learn from our demonstration farm plots which have employed the 'Farming God's Way' method. We also have an extensive indigenous tree nursery at the site and reforestation and removal of exotic vegetation are done regularly.

Bird ringing takes place every Thursday

2. VOLUNTEERING AT MWAMBA

As mentioned, the central base for all that we do in A Rocha Kenya is Mwamba, our Conservation Centre. This is where you will be based for the duration of your stay with us. Please see our website for photos to familiarise yourself with the centre.



- **Supervision & care**

Mwamba is a caring community. Milly, who works in hospitality at Mwamba, will make sure you are welcomed and feel at home. Volunteers who are programme-based (e.g. with Environmental Education or Research) will be guided by their programme leaders. A brief induction to Mwamba will be included at the beginning of your stay.

- **Coastal Culture**

The local community are the Giriama people, one of the seven groups of the Mijikenda tribe. These days they have a mixed culture of traditional and Western. Many have taken on the Christian faith, others Islam and some remain with their traditional religion. As Malindi and Watamu are increasingly popular tourist destinations, many different tribes from across the country have come flocking to the area as well, so it is not unusual to see Masai in full cultural dress striding along the road.

- **Culture shock!**

Those volunteers who are unfamiliar with Kenya/Africa will find that things run very differently here to a Western setting. We will give a basic synopsis on a few cultural pointers, but one aspect many volunteers find immensely challenging on arrival, is the pace at which things operate. We are in a rural setting with few support services, at this point limited funding, and in an area (the coast) where there is a very laid-back approach to timing that the heat has worked into the culture. Also, we are involved in many activities with limited staff so we often have our hands full!

Volunteers generally come in at high speed and expect to achieve far more than is possible in the limited time available.

Also, items such as computers are shared so unless you have your own laptop, you may sometimes have to wait for them to become available. Additionally, the coast is prone to regular power cuts, so sometimes plans are thwarted. Be warned, you will probably find the pace and services very frustrating at first before you adjust! Please prepare yourself for this – your patience will be appreciated!

A few tips: find out about different cultural practices from our staff members once you've arrived.

We've listed some examples on the following page...

Kenyan cultural practices

Greetings: These are very important in Kenya! It is the norm here to greet each person in a group individually, rather than a general greeting. Some time can also be taken asking after people's health etc, and telling them they are very welcome if they have just arrived, before discussing anything else. Kenyan people that are not used to international cultures will feel offended if not greeted properly. People will be delighted if you learn some Swahili greetings and a few other basic words. Ask someone at the centre to help you with this.

- **Right hand:** It is considered impolite to hand anyone anything especially food, with the left hand. This applies to receiving anything as well.

- **'Would you like some food/drink?':** In American and European culture it is considered polite if a guest arrives at a home to first ask them whether they would like something to eat or drink before serving it. They will not feel offended if the guest says he is not hungry or thirsty. In coastal Kenyan culture people may be offended if they are asked whether they want to eat or drink something or not. It is expected that the host will serve something without asking. If they do not want it, they will politely say so as they see you preparing to bring it. This scenario can be common at our centre as many local people arrive and seat themselves waiting for a meeting with a staff member. The best thing to do (after greeting them, that is!) is simply to bring them glasses of water and leave the jug with them so that they can add what they need.

- **Dress code:** Western ladies may not wear as many clothes as may seem proper to coastal Kenyans! Also it is considered quite shocking to see someone walking around in a swimming costume other than down at the beach. (See further details under Section 3)

- **Alcohol and Christianity:** In Kenya many Christians consider drinking alcohol a big sin, and they do not do it at all. Western Christians generally have a different view. They consider getting drunk as bad, but having a glass of wine or a beer is no problem for them at all and is often part of their culture. One of our staff members was very shocked to see a volunteer pastor from the UK cracking open a beer with great relish! So if you are a Christian it might be worth discussing this issue with the Kenyan people you are with, and in certain settings, if you feel it may bring offense, rather have a soda instead.

- **Being informed:** Compared to most coastal Kenyans, Western people liked to be as informed as possible and like to know what is going on at any given time. For the level of information you may need, be prepared to ask many questions as it may not be as forthcoming as you are used to.

- **Being direct:** Kenyan culture is very polite. People will be very hesitant to say something that in their opinion may disappoint or offend you. If you ask a direct question about someone's opinion on something they may not give their real opinion to prevent causing offence. So, if everyone agrees with something, it may not necessarily mean they do and it might be wise to enquire further at a later stage.

- **'Thank you'/'Asante':** Western people say, 'Thank you' and show appreciation for something in words far more frequently than people do in Kenya. Do not be offended if you hand somebody something and they do not express verbal appreciation as you would expect.

Volunteer tasks

The work of A Rocha Kenya is diverse and volunteers of all ages come with very different skills and experience. For this reason, we cannot give you an exact programme before you arrive. If you expressed a specific area of interest on your application form you may be allocated a programme leader. However, we also have general tasks which are carried out by all volunteers. These include:

- Guest House – general assistance including taking a lead at mealtimes with serving and washing, sometimes helping with cooking or cleaning, talking with guests etc.
- Hospitality – As we operate a guesthouse and have a spectrum of visitors and researchers from all walks of life, welcoming visitors, settling them in and making sure they are looked after during their stay is a core part of volunteering with A Rocha Kenya.
- Beach clean ups in front of Mwamba.
- Simple maintenance tasks as allocated by the centre manager.
- Assisting with bird ringing and fieldwork.
- Computer work – data inputting, admin.
- Maintaining the Mwamba and Nature trails.
- Helping with food shopping.



Bird counts at Mida Creek

Taking initiative

Come prepared to lend a hand doing many things. As we run a wide range of activities with few staff, you may find that on some days you will not be as busy as you would like. Please do not be discouraged! We ask that at these times you could lend a hand in another activity, such as helping clean rooms for guests, helping out in the kitchen, garden or with maintenance. We appreciate any type of assistance you can provide as it all works to keep our organisation running smoothly.

Weekly schedules

In general, volunteers are expected to contribute the equivalent of a normal working week (8am to 5pm). Depending on the tasks you are involved in, this may vary – please be prepared to be flexible, especially on weekends when there is often work to do around the centre and fieldwork. Your first few days will be an opportunity for settling in and getting to know the centre.

Holidays & Visitors

In the past volunteers who've stayed for several months have had visits from friends and family who've been welcomed as guests at Mwamba. Should having visitors require you to take a break or be away from the centre for a while please coordinate this well in advance with the person supervising your work and Monicah, who is in charge of volunteers. It's helpful to organise trips away at times that will be least inconvenient for the work you are involved with. You are free to visit Mombasa, Lamu or other sites of interest over the weekends, but again, coordinate these with your supervisor or organise them for the end of your stay.

Accommodation & meals

Centre accommodation is in simple rooms. Some have en suite facilities, though these rooms are not always available to volunteers; the wider needs of the centre will determine room allocations. All rooms have mains electricity (220v, UK-style 3-pin). Mosquito nets, sheets and towels are provided.

Accommodation is full board, with a serve-yourself breakfast which for volunteers should be finished before 8am. Lunch is served at 1pm and dinner at 7pm. Mainly African dishes are provided so come prepared to enjoy tasty local cuisine. If you would like to keep a few supplies for yourself such as peanut butter, Marmite, honey, cereals or snacks, you are free to do so. Please put your name on personal items so that others don't eat them!

We ask volunteers not to cook separate meals/food items for themselves. Should you want to do some baking, we can make provision for this, but bear in mind we are on a tight budget, so please check with Monica first!

Washing up is shared by all residents.

The tranquillity of the centre is constantly admired. There is no TV and late evening disturbance should be minimized, for the benefit of other guests and residents. Please note that darkness falls around 6.30pm all year round, and that public transport is not available in the area after 8pm (see Travel below).

All visitors are requested not to smoke inside any of the buildings.

Security

Security and personal safety are matters of common-sense awareness, rather than worrying concerns. Please keep the door of your room locked when you are not in it and avoid leaving valuables near the windows, or down at the beach. There is a safe for personal treasures. The centre is in a peaceful area, and has night time security.

Beach operators (commonly referred to as 'Beach Boys') may approach you when you are on the beach. We recommend that you politely and firmly ask them to leave you alone! Also rather don't tell them where you stay and we request that you do not invite them to the centre.

Finance & payments

Volunteers are charged a minimal rate to cover accommodation & meals. This rate will be confirmed with you directly. Fees are due on arrival, to cover (a) the full period of your stay, if less than 3 months, or (b) the first 3 months of a longer stay, after which fees are payable monthly, in advance. If, during your stay, any time is spent away from the centre, this will remain chargeable, unless your room is vacated to allow other use.

Contact & communication

You are likely to find this limited, compared with home.
Please be prepared for this. Our details here at Mwamba are:

A Rocha Kenya Conservation Centre
PO Box 383
Watamu 80202
Kenya



Physical address: Plot 28, A Rocha Kenya (Mwamba), Dongokundu, 3kms south of Turtle Bay Beach Club.

Email contacts: mwamba@arocha.org
Telephone: +254 7 93 058 924

Email

We have internet access at the centre, although speeds can vary.

Alternatively, there are email outlets in Watamu (Ksh 3 per min) and Malindi (Ksh 1 per min). Ocean Sports Hotel, along the beach from us, the Pili Pan Restaurant, and Amici Mie Gelateria all have wireless internet available for the price of a soda. If you have a laptop, do consider bringing it, as it may also be useful for other volunteer tasks such as helping with data entries etc.

Phone

Outgoing calls can be made from the centre office if circumstances demand. These are chargeable, and international rates are costly. However, there is a code which can be used to make it cheaper. Incoming calls are possible. WhatsApp calls work fairly well and are generally the best option. Many official services (eg. Kenyan Immigration Office, and also many tuktuk and motorbike drivers) are also available on WhatsApp. Zoom/Teams calls also work fairly well, though Wi-Fi speed may fluctuate.

Cell/Mobile phone

Getting a Kenyan SIM card is useful, especially if planning to stay for a longer time. If bringing a cell/mobile phone to Kenya please note that cell phones from Europe are generally compatible with those in Kenya, although they may need to be unlocked, but those from North America are not compatible with the Kenyan network. A cheap cell phone can be bought for around Ksh 3,000. Safaricom is the main Kenyan mobile network provider – a SIM card on its own costs only about 200 Ksh, and can be bought from an official Safaricom store (don't get ripped off at the airport or by an unofficial dealer!). There is a Safaricom store in Watamu, and they will help you install your SIM card and make sure that all is running smoothly. Make sure you bring your passport ID with you to the shop, as this is required to purchase a SIM card. Having a Safaricom SIM card will also allow you to pay using mPesa (see below). Note that Mwamba does have fairly good cell network coverage by the Safaricom service provider (and service is generally quite good along the coast). Other companies are not covered at all well at the centre so bear this in mind when buying your sim card on arrival.

Money

Having cash is very useful in Kenya as many small shops, as well as Tuk Tuk and Motorbike drivers, will not accept card payments. There are two ATM machines in Watamu where cash can be withdrawn. Note that some ATM machines only allow you to withdraw 1000ksh notes. These however can be changed into smaller value ones at the tourist office next to the Blue Marmalade supermarket in Watamu if you wish to do so. It is also useful to have a credit/debit card with you, as there are some shops and services, including some marine and wildlife park ticket offices, which only accept card or mPesa payments (see below).

mPesa (mobile money)

Most Kenyans use mPesa, which is a way to store and transfer money from one person/business to another. Money is uploaded onto your Safaricom SIM card when visiting a Safaricom store and you can send money to other individuals or pay bills for restaurants/shops using your phone. Money is sent via mobile signal, so you do not have to use mobile data when transferring money. Network coverage at the coast is relatively good so you should not have problems with payments going through. If staying in Kenya for longer, getting a Safaricom SIM card and uploading money onto mPesa (which automatically comes with your Safaricom SIM card) is advisable, because almost all shops and individuals (eg. Tuktuk drivers) accept mPesa payments. Provided the amount you wish to transfer does not exceed how much you have uploaded on your SIM card, you can send any amount you wish, which is particularly useful when paying motorbike or Tuk Tuk drivers, who sometimes do not have the right amount of change. mPesa is also a powerful tool when negotiating prices, as you are more flexible in the amounts you can pay. In addition, because many ATM machines only allow you to withdraw 1000ksh notes, getting smaller banknotes can be difficult, which is another reason why mPesa is so useful. The tourist office next to the Blue Marmalade supermarket can exchange larger notes for smaller ones, and can also upload money onto your mPesa (this service is free of charge).

Post

Mwamba has a PO BOX which is held at Watamu Post Office (see above). This is checked regularly. However, letters from Europe and America could take a long time to arrive (with one letter that was posted from the Netherlands taking 2 years!). Big packages can be slower and you may have to pay for them.

Report back

Towards the end of their stay, volunteers are asked to write a report of their time with A Rocha Kenya.

Churches

English language services take place in Malindi (St Andrews) and Gede (St James) Anglican Churches. Services at other churches are in Swahili and there is a wide range of denominations represented. If you are interested in attending church you are welcome to join our staff members at their various churches or find one where you feel happy attending. There is also a time of worship at Mwamba on Sunday afternoons.

Centre fellowship meetings

We have a weekly Bible Study and prayer meeting with the team on Mondays and a time of worship on Sunday afternoons. Volunteers are welcome to join in if they would like to.

Medical Care

There are very good hospitals in Mombasa and Nairobi for emergencies. We also have a good Family Doctor close by for advice and minor ailments. Snakebites are very rare – we have yet to have a volunteer bitten by a snake. But in the remote chance of this happening, we are down the road from the Bioken Snake Farm which has the top expertise in East Africa for dealing with snake bites so you will be in good hands!

Climate

Be prepared for high temperatures and humidity.

Note: Mwamba does NOT have air-conditioning, though we do have fans in all rooms. The hot and humid non-rainy seasons are from January to late April and September to October, although November and December can be very hot too in some years! The rainy seasons cool things down. The 'long rains' come around late April to July/August and the 'short rains' from October to December. However, over the last 10 years weather patterns have become quite unpredictable probably due to global climate change.

Values and Ethics at Mwamba

Being a Christian organisation is central to A Rocha's work and we ask all volunteers to recognise this. Mwamba is known in the area as a Christian centre and it is important that our values are reflected in the local community, both in business and in social activities. As part of our team, volunteers are our ambassadors and for this reason, we ask you to uphold our values for the duration of your time with us. The main areas are as follows:

- Operating as a community – This is part of A Rocha's style. For this reason, volunteers must live at the centre and join the shared mealtimes when guests and team members eat together. Also be aware that the staff members are operating jobs with heavy workloads! Try and minimise unnecessary interruptions and social chatting with them during work hours, especially given the relaxed atmosphere at the centre!
- Dating – We ask that you do not begin dating (i.e. start a relationship) with anyone during your time here. We have found that short-term dating has caused immense problems for us as an organisation in the past. If you find you like someone, please be friends with them and interact with them in a group. Once your time with A Rocha Kenya is over you are free to pursue a relationship with whomever you choose. If you are already dating someone from home and they would like to come and visit, they are most welcome. However, we ask that you do not share a room with them.
- Nightlife - We request that volunteers do not go to the nightclubs here as they are pick-up points for prostitution and drugs are around. There are quite a number of good eat out places and hotels that are fine so there shouldn't be a shortage of destinations for you to head to after hours. Please remember you are an ambassador for the organisation when you are out socialising! This is a small town! Everyone associates you with A Rocha Kenya whether you know them or not.
- Dress – Given the cultural norms it is important not to offend sensibilities by, for example wearing inappropriate clothing away from the beach and particularly when going away from the centre or when hosting community members at Mwamba. Ask for advice from Milly or Carol as to what is OK to wear. Also please do not sunbathe at the centre or walk around the centre in your swimming costume. Thanks.
- Hardwood carvings – Part of the work we do is to join with the local communities to protect Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and surrounds. There is still a roaring illegal trade in indigenous hardwood trees and they are sold as furniture, building material and carvings. One species in particular (*Brachylaena huillensis*; 'mhuhu'), has been all but wiped out from the forest. African Blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*; 'muhingo') has been so hammered in Kenya, that carvers now go down to Tanzania to finish off their supplies as well. Please do not buy hardwood carvings here in Kenya (or anyone else!!).
- Use things sparingly – As a conservation organisation we attempt to use energy, water paper etc. conservatively. Please switch off lights, taps and fans when not in use. Use both sides of paper for printing or print on the back of used paper. Please avoid printing drafts unnecessarily. Use shower and dish water sparingly.

Before your visit - Preparing at home

Passport

Check that your passport will remain valid for the dates of your visit, and for at least three months after your return. If not, please take action! Getting a Kenyan Visa requires a passport that is valid for at least another 6 months.

Visa

A visa will be required for entry into Kenya. The easiest option is the Kenyan eVisa. To obtain your eVisa, you are required to fill out an online form and also involves uploading photos of yourself and a photocopy of your passport. The easiest option is the Single Entry Visa, which will allow you to stay in Kenya for up to 3 months. You can access the eVisa website via <https://evisa.go.ke/evisa.html> to fill out your online application form- be careful not to use other websites, as many are unofficial or overpriced and may steal your money! The Kenyan visa costs about \$50 or Ksh 4,000. Alternatively, a visa can be sorted through the Kenyan High Commission or Embassy in your country. Check their website for details.

Although most applications are processed within 48 hours, it's still a good idea to get your visa sorted as early as you can. Note that the eVisa is more of a pass to enter Kenya (so you have until the eVisa expiry date to enter the country). At your arrival in Kenya, you will receive a stamp in your passport, and you have up to 3 months to stay in Kenya from the date of that stamp.

It's worth noting that if you are staying for longer than three months then you are able to extend your eVisa for a further 3 months. This process however is a bit more complicated as you need to first fill out an online form and then visit an immigration office for your physical endorsement. Although this is technically possible in smaller offices such as Malindi, most applicants get referred back to either Mombasa or Nairobi. For more information on visa extensions, please visit <https://evisakenya.net/kenya-visa-extension/#:~:text=Travelers%20have%20to%20visit%20the,during%20their%20stay%20in%20Kenya>.

Inoculations & anti-malarial drugs

Consult a doctor or travel clinic in good time before your visit, for advice over inoculations, anti-malarials, and any other health issues. You can expect to need inoculations against Typhoid, Hepatitis A and B, Meningitis and possibly Rabies, though find out what your country recommends. A Yellow Fever inoculation (with a certificate for travel) is a must for many countries.

Mwamba is situated in a malaria area, though for visitors of good health this need not be a major concern provided sensible measures are taken. We ask that you take anti-malarial drugs as a precaution. You will generally need to start taking them before arrival in Watamu and possibly, depending on the type prescribed, to be continued for a while after departure. Anti-malarials are available in Watamu which may be of help to those staying for longer periods. Please consult your doctor for the most appropriate one for you.

In your home country, shop around for best prices as these can vary considerably, and consider supermarket pharmacies. Some pointers that may be helpful: The cheapest option that many of our volunteers and guests have used successfully is Doxycycline. One side effect though is that it may make your sun slightly more sensitive to sunburn so you'll need to add suntan lotion more often than usual. Malarone is another common one used and is very effective with minimal side effects, however one drawback for some is that it can be prohibitively expensive.

Note: Please avoid using Larium (Meflequin) if at all possible, as some people experience serious side-effects from it (not always immediately) which are unpleasant for everyone to deal with! The most common generally include paranoia, depression and vivid dreams. If you cannot avoid taking Larium, you should not be on it for more than 3 months. Please let us know if you are on Larium on arrival.

Insurance

Make sure you have it! Shop around in the internet but make sure you have good medical coverage and your insurance is not so cheap it misses things out.

Travel plans / flights

We request that volunteers organise their own travel arrangements in getting to and from Mwamba. We recommend that you fly into Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi and then take a flight to Malindi and then a taxi (20mins) from there to our A Rocha Kenya Centre, Mwamba. Alternatively, you can fly directly from your home city into Mombasa Airport and then take a taxi (2.5hours) to Mwamba.

Nairobi-Malindi

From Nairobi Airport, Fly 540.com, Kenya Airways (KQ), or 748 Air Services are the best connecting airlines to bring you to Malindi which is the closest airport to us and is about 20mins away. Other services to Malindi, including Air Kenya and Skyward Express are available from Nairobi's Wilson Airport, across town, though they fly only on certain days of the week.

Note: some flights from Kenyatta Airport to Malindi, although this is rarely the case, depart from the terminal 2 building (check on your flight ticket beforehand). This is located away from the international terminal and there is a shuttle bus that can bring you to terminal 2. Alternatively, it is accessible by foot (it is about 750m to walk). Ask somebody for directions when still inside the airport building. Because it takes some time to reach terminal 2, it is advisable to plan in some extra time when booking your connecting flight to Malindi, in case of delays on the first flight.

Malindi airport to Mwamba Centre (see map) – We can organise a taxi pick up for you on request, otherwise just approach a taxi outside the airport building. You should expect to pay Ksh 3,000 from the airport to Mwamba. If intending to take a taxi, it is a good idea to withdraw cash beforehand, in order to pay the driver. ATM machines can be found in the arrivals area of Nairobi airport. Kindly send us your flight details and arrival time as soon as you have them so we know when to expect you. Tell the taxi driver you want to go to Plot 28 in Dongokundu, Watamu which is about 3km to the south of Turtle Bay Beach Club along the Temple Point Road.

Nairobi-Mombasa

There are some international flights to Mombasa, though travel from there to Mwamba is less convenient and more costly so we suggest you avoid this if possible. However, should you choose to fly to Mombasa (either from Nairobi or from your home city), there are taxis that will take you directly to Mwamba from Mombasa airport– about a 2-hour journey. Expect to pay about Ksh 7,000.

A note on Nairobi airport: If coming through Nairobi you will need to check out of International and check into the domestic terminal for your flight to Malindi. For this you have to go outside, turn right and walk about 50m or so and you will see it ahead of you. If you are unsure where to go, ask a uniformed airport employee when still within the restricted part of the International terminal.

Do not give your boarding pass or any flight details, when you are outside, to people appearing to work for the airport (check for identification).

Keep an eye on your bags for quick snatchers! If you do end up using someone to help carry your bags, a sum of USD \$1 is sufficient payment – stand your ground! Also, when changing money at the airport, calculate that you are getting the right amount.

Staying in Nairobi

For those wishing to stay overnight in Nairobi before their onward journey to the coast, we are happy to recommend suitable accommodation. One guesthouse that offers transfers to and from the airport is Mayfield Guesthouse which you will need to book in advance. You can get a taxi to town from the airport - there will be a host of taxi drivers offering lifts as you come out of the airport. A reasonable price for a ride into Nairobi is maximum Ksh 1,200.00.

The Nairobi-Mombasa Train (Madaraka express)

There is a train that runs between Nairobi and Mombasa (<https://metickets.krc.co.ke/>). The journey takes approximately 5 or 6 hours (depending if you take the slower inter-county or the express train) and takes you directly through Tsavo East National Park, so you can marvel at the beautiful landscape and wildlife from your seat. The trainline was opened in 2017 and was developed by a Chinese rail company. Security checks are very thorough (even more so than at airports!), and the train is extremely punctual, so make sure you arrive at least 1 hour (or earlier) before the scheduled departure time. Note that tickets are sold out quickly, so be sure to reserve your seat in time.

Note, however, that tickets can only be paid for using mPesa (see above) so you may have to ask someone with mPesa to get the ticket for you and send you the confirmation code (received via text message). For more info on the Madaraka Express, including departure times, please see <https://metickets.krc.co.ke/faqs.php>

Travel guides

We are listed in the Rough Guide to Kenya 2008. This or the Lonely Planet is definitely worth a read before you come, especially if you would like to travel a bit in Kenya after your time with us.

A Swahili phrase book could be useful if you'd like to have a go at learning some basic expressions, though it isn't essential as English is spoken widely.

What to bring

Currency

We recommend getting some Kenyan Shillings for the first few days when you may need to buy things. There are ATM machines at Kenyatta Airport, or alternatively there are exchange bureaus where you can exchange main currencies on arrival at Kenyatta Airport (US\$, £, Euros or SA Rand), so come with those rather than less common currencies. Make sure you know what the current exchange rate is to avoid being ripped off at the airport! There are also several ATM machines in Watamu, including one at the Blue Marmalade supermarket. The ATM takes VISA, MASTERCARD and, for some people, MAESTRO (can be more temperamental). There is a Foreign Exchange in Malindi. Note that, however, many ATM machines only allow you to withdraw 1000ksh notes!

Clothing

Cotton T-shirts and shorts are acceptable at Mwamba, though you may want to cover up against the sun, or wear long sleeves and trousers in the evening when the mosquitoes are biting! Bring a good sunhat, flip-flops or sandals, stronger shoes for visits to areas where your feet need protection from thorns etc. If you attend church on Sunday, a skirt and sleeved top for women and long trousers and shirt for men are recommended. Swimwear if you want to take advantage of Mwamba's beautiful beach; snorkelling equipment is available.

First Aid

Painkillers, plasters, strong insect repellent, sun cream (including block-out e.g. factor 30), anti-histamine, antiseptic cream or wipes, sting relief for insect bites (i.e. anti-itch), diarrhoea tablets and re-hydration salts. It is important to drink plenty of water – a water-bottle that you can carry with you at all times is essential. Clean drinking water is freely available at the centre. It is not advisable to drink tap water in Kenya or to use it for cleaning teeth.

Driving licence

Volunteers are not expected to drive the centre vehicle, other than in an emergency or in special circumstances with permission from the Centre Manager. We suggest you bring an international drivers' licence if you are planning on hiring and driving a vehicle at any point such as after you've left us and wish to do some personal travelling in Kenya.

Laptop

If you are able to bring your own laptop computer this will be a big help for you to keep in touch with friends and family over the internet and will also enable you far greater productivity in your work as you won't have to wait for shared computers to become available. Note that ARK won't be able to take responsibility for any damage incurred and you bring it at your own risk.

It is worth noting that you are not coming to the middle of nowhere. Watamu and Malindi are tourist destinations with supermarkets and pharmacies and other shops which stock toiletries, sunscreen, over the counter drugs etc. If you are here for a long stay you really don't need to bring supplies for the whole time. Marmite lovers, however, please bring your own as the supply here is not reliable.

Items for Mwamba

It can be helpful for items to be brought from overseas for centre use. If you are interested in helping, please ask us whether anything needs to be brought. There must be prior approval from the Mwamba manager so that he can budget for the items. Common things asked for in the past include items such as: printer cartridges; re-writable CDs; flash sticks; (from the UK) old mobile phones with chargers (Europe); rechargeable batteries; pens, pencils, exercise books etc for children's prizes etc at the ASSETS Primary Schools and various books or programmes.

If you know in advance what tasks you will be undertaking as a volunteer at A Rocha Kenya, you may like to enquire before travelling whether it would be helpful if you brought appropriate tools, equipment, clothing or other materials with you that would contribute to your work.

Things to do around Mwamba

Snorkelling

Snorkels can be borrowed from our marine lab at the centre, and are a great way to explore the amazing coral reef ecosystem just at the doorstep of the centre. There are rays, turtles, guitarfish, sharks, and hundreds of different species of fish. Please note however that you have to buy a ticket to snorkel in Watamu Marine National Park (\$22 as from May 2023). The Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS) carry out checks every day, so make sure you have a ticket before going snorkelling! Tickets can be obtained at KWS offices in Blue Bay, Turtle Bay (within walking distance of Mwamba), and at Short Beach.

Diving

Scuba diving is the perfect way to explore Watamu's amazing coral reef ecosystem, with thousands of species of fish, as well as turtles, rays, sharks, morays, cuttlefish, scorpionfish, lionfish, stonefish, and dolphins - just to mention a few! There are several dive centres in Watamu, including...

- Turtle Bay dives
- Aquaventures
- Bluefin Diving Watamu



Boat Trips

Another way to explore Watamu Marine park is to join a boat trip - most trips take you to dolphin point to watch the dolphins (if you're lucky!) and then they will drop you off at the small coral reef for snorkelling. Most trips start at 9am and finish by midday.

Gede Ruins

This is an archaeological site where the ruins of the ancient town of Gede have been excavated. The whole complex is found in a forest and is a good place to spot the endangered elephant shrew, sunis (small antelopes), squirrels, and monkeys.



Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

This is a large forest about 25 minutes drive by car from Mwamba. Here you can spot elephants, baboons, elephant shrews, sunis, and many different bird species. We very much recommend visiting the Sokoke Forest Swamp in the evening, where you can watch the elephants as they come to drink.



Tsavo East National Park

This is the closest national park and is an approximately 2 hour drive from A Rocha. Here you can spot all the big 5 and hundreds of different bird species. Note that you have to bring along a guide to visit the national park and, as in most national parks in Kenya, you should not leave your vehicle at any time when inside the park., except for designated areas where you can do so.

General Travel around the Centre (see map on following page)

Mwamba is approx 5km from Watamu village and 3km from Turtle Bay, which is a terminus for local minibuses (matatus). These run frequently during daylight hours between Turtle Bay and Malindi (24km), joining the main coast road at Gede. From Gede, other matatus run to Mombasa. Long-distance buses to / from Nairobi also call there (one daytime, one overnight journey per day). In some places, three-wheeled taxis called tuk-tuks are available. Between Turtle Bay and Mwamba, transport (if required) is a taxi or boda-boda (bicycle taking a passenger on the back, pronounced 'border-border'). It is a 30-40min walk along the road or beach.

The following is a guide to approximate fares:

*Note: High season is from August to April; Low season is from May-July.

Flights

Nairobi ↔ Malindi

Ksh 7,000

- 540.com to/from Jomo Kenyatta Airport.
- AirKenya or Skyward Express to/from Wilson airport

Nairobi ↔ Mombasa

- Ksh 6,000
- Kenya Airways, several daily.
- 540.com, several daily

Long-distance bus

Nairobi ↔ Watamu

Ksh 1,500-1,800 MASH, Bus car, Modern coast- overnight or daytime (10hrs)-one way

Matatu

Turtle Bay ↔ Gede Ksh 50 One way

Turtle Bay ↔ Malindi Ksh 100-150 One way

Gede ↔ Mombasa Ksh 600 One way

Saloon Taxi/ Cab

Mwamba ↔ Malindi Airport Ksh 3,000 One way

Mwamba ↔ Mombasa Ksh 8,000 One-way

Motorbike Taxi (Bodda Bodda)

Mwamba ↔ Turtle Bay Ksh 50 One way

Tuk-tuk

Mwamba ↔ Watamu Ksh 300 One way

Fares for Bodda Boddas and Tuk-Tuks can vary depending on how good you are at negotiating! Therefore, knowing the 'normal' price can be useful in avoiding getting ripped off!

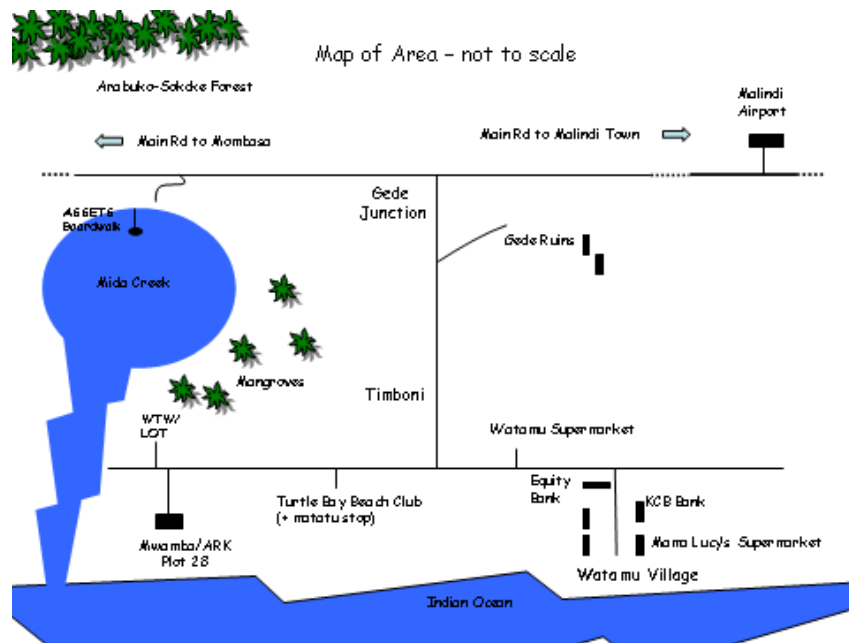
We hope this document has been helpful in preparing you for your time with us at Mwamba.
We look forward to having you with us!

A Rocha Management

Maps

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE!

Watamu & surrounding area



Other project sites

