

NAIROBI PRIME STAY · RELOCATION GUIDE

The Nairobi Relocation Handbook

A practical guide for Americans making the move

Coming home, made simple.



NAIROBI
— PRIME STAY —

EDITION 01 · 2026

WELCOME

Karibu — welcome.

Moving to Nairobi is one of the most rewarding decisions you can make — and one of the most logistical. Visas, neighbourhoods, schools, banking, healthcare, getting connected: there's a lot to hold in your head at once.

This handbook puts the essentials in one calm, honest place. It's written for Americans relocating to Kenya — including the growing community of African Americans choosing Nairobi as a place to come home to — whether you're moving for work, remote freedom, family or a fresh start.

Read it front to back before you move, then keep it close during your first month on the ground.

Everything here reflects the situation as of 2026. Rules and prices change — we flag the official sources to confirm against, and our AI concierge can answer anything this guide doesn't.

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ORIENTATION

Nairobi at a glance

The "Green City in the Sun" — East Africa's business and diplomatic hub, set on a mile-high plateau with one of the most comfortable climates of any major city on earth.

COUNTRY	ELEVATION	CLIMATE
Kenya	~1,795 m	Mild · 15–26°C
SEASONS	LANGUAGES	CURRENCY
Rains Mar–May, Oct–Dec	English & Kiswahili	Shilling (KES)
PAYMENTS	TIME ZONE	POWER
M-Pesa mobile money	EAT · UTC+3	240V · Type G (UK)
DRIVING	DIALING CODE	AIRPORT
On the left	+254	JKIA (NBO)

Time-zone bonus: at UTC+3, Nairobi is 7–8 hours ahead of US Eastern. A 4–5pm finish here still overlaps a US East-Coast morning — workable for remote roles.

01 Visas & immigration

Start here, because your visa decides everything else — how long you can stay, whether you can work, and whether you can open a bank account or sign a lease. The good news: Kenya has modernised. Most travellers now enter on a simple online **eTA**, and there's a dedicated route for remote workers.

THE ENTRY PASS — ETA

Every visitor needs an approved **Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA)** before flying. Apply online at **etakenya.go.ke** at least a few days ahead (a week is safer). You'll need a passport valid 6+ months with a blank page, a photo, your itinerary and proof of where you're staying.

ROUTE	INDICATIVE COST	BEST FOR
eTA (visit)	\$30 · 90 days	Scouting trips, short stays; not for working or residing
Digital Nomad — Class N	\$200 + \$1,000/yr	Remote employees & freelancers paid from abroad
Work permit — Class D	Employer- sponsored	Taking a job with a Kenyan employer
Investor — Class G	Investment- based	Starting or buying into a business
Dependant's pass	Linked to sponsor	Spouse & children of a permit holder

A common path: visit first on the eTA to choose your neighbourhood and see apartments, then apply for the permit that fits your situation before — or shortly after — you move for good.

Visa rules and fees change. Always confirm current requirements on the official portals (etakenya.go.ke and immigration's eFNS/eCitizen) or with a Kenyan immigration lawyer before you travel.

01 Living here legally

DIGITAL NOMAD (CLASS N)

Kenya's remote-work permit lets you live here while working for employers or clients **outside** Kenya. You'll generally need to show income of about **\$24,000+ a year** from foreign sources, proof of accommodation and a clean record. It runs 1–2 years and is renewable.

You **can't** take a Kenyan job or earn locally on this permit. And note: staying more than **183 days** in a tax year can make you a Kenyan tax resident — worth a quick chat with a cross-border accountant.

WORK & INVESTMENT

If a Kenyan employer hires you, they sponsor a **Class D** work permit. If you're starting or buying a business, the **Class G** investor permit applies. Both take time — start early and use a local immigration advisor.

YOUR KRA PIN

Once you hold a permit, register for a **KRA PIN** (tax ID) at itax.kra.go.ke. You'll need it to open a bank account, sign a lease, buy a car or set up utilities — so it's an early priority.

SMART SEQUENCE

- ◆ Enter on the eTA and confirm your plans on the ground

- ◆ Engage an immigration lawyer to file the right permit

- ◆ Register your KRA PIN as soon as the permit is issued

- ◆ Then open your bank account and sign your lease

02 Where to live

Nairobi's expat life concentrates in a handful of leafy, secure western suburbs. Each has its own character — from the diplomatic calm of Gigiri to the buzz of Westlands. Indicative rents below are for **furnished** homes per month; unfurnished and longer leases cost less.

Gigiri	The diplomatic heart — UN HQ and embassies, heavily patrolled, calm and green. Top pick for UN/embassy staff.	\$1,500–4,000+
Runda & Muthaiga	Large gated homes with gardens, very secure, family-favourite estates beside Gigiri.	\$1,800–4,000+
Karen	Space, greenery and low density — equestrian, suburban calm, excellent schools nearby.	\$1,000–3,000
Lavington	Cosmopolitan and family-friendly; gardens, embassies and good schools, close to the centre.	\$700–1,800
Kileleshwa	Quieter than Kilimani, modern apartments and townhouses, central and discreet.	\$650–1,500
Westlands	Urban energy — restaurants, nightlife, offices and malls. Great for singles and social professionals.	\$550–1,200
Kilimani	Central, modern and busy; the most affordable of the prime apartment areas.	\$500–1,000
Riverside	High-end residences and embassies along the river, close to Westlands and the CBD.	\$900–2,500
Upper Hill	Nairobi's business district — hospitals and HQs; convenient for executives who want a short commute.	\$700–1,600

02 Choosing your area

Start with your anchor — your office, your children's school, or your lifestyle — and let that point you to two or three areas to view in person.

IF YOU'RE...	LOOK FIRST AT
UN, embassy or NGO staff	Gigiri, Runda, Muthaiga — minutes from the UN complex
A family with school-age children	Karen, Lavington, Kileleshwa, Runda (near top schools)
A remote worker or young professional	Westlands, Kilimani, Riverside — social, central, walkable-ish
An executive wanting a short commute	Upper Hill, Riverside, Westlands
Seeking space, quiet and greenery	Karen, Runda, Muthaiga

BEFORE YOU SIGN, CHECK THE "NAIROBI FIVE"

- ◆ **Backup generator** — power cuts happen; you want cover
- ◆ **Water supply & storage** — tanks/boreholes smooth out shortages
- ◆ **Security** — 24/7 guards, gated access, cameras
- ◆ **Fibre internet** — confirm a provider already serves the building
- ◆ **Management & cleaning** — responsive on-site management matters

Don't rent sight-unseen. Photos flatter. Use your eTA scouting trip — or a serviced apartment for the first month — to view homes, test the commute in traffic, and feel the neighbourhood before committing to a year.

03 Housing & serviced apartments

HOW RENTING WORKS

Most prime homes are let furnished or unfurnished on 12-month leases. Expect a **deposit of 1–3 months** plus the first month up front. Agents are common; a good one saves you weeks. Always get a written lease and an inventory, and confirm who covers service charge, security and water.

You'll usually need your **KRA PIN** and ID/permit to sign. Pay deposits only after viewing and verifying the landlord — never wire money for a place you haven't seen.

THE SOFT-LANDING STRATEGY

Don't lock into a year-long lease from abroad. A **serviced apartment** for your first 4–8 weeks gives you a secure, fully-equipped base — Wi-Fi, cleaning, generator, security included — while you view homes, test commutes and choose your neighbourhood with confidence.

- ◆ Flexible monthly terms, all-inclusive
- ◆ No furniture, utilities or setup headaches
- ◆ Move once you're sure — not before

Land softly — start with a serviced apartment

Tell our AI concierge your budget, dates and work location; we'll match you in minutes.

ASK THE CONCIERGE

04 Cost of living

Nairobi rewards a Western income. You can live very comfortably for a fraction of US costs — the big variables are rent, schooling and how much domestic help and dining out you choose.

\$1,000–1,800	Included	\$15–40	\$0.50–1
Luxury serviced apartment, all-in / mo	Utilities · internet · cleaning	Specialist doctor visit	Matatu / short city hop

A SAMPLE MONTHLY BUDGET — COMFORTABLE PROFESSIONAL

ITEM	INDICATIVE (USD / MONTH)
Luxury serviced apartment · 1–2 bed, 1–3 bath utilities, internet & cleaning included	\$1,000 – 1,800
Groceries	\$250 – 450
Transport (ride-hailing / fuel)	\$80 – 200
Domestic help (part-time)	\$100 – 250
Dining & leisure	\$150 – 400

Indicative 2026 ranges for orientation only; your actual costs depend on area and lifestyle. International school fees (Section 07) are a separate, major line for families.

05 Money & banking

M-PESA RUNS DAILY LIFE

Kenya practically invented mobile money. **M-Pesa** (on Safaricom) is how people pay for everything — taxis, rent, the market, your fibre bill. Register a line and M-Pesa at the **airport on arrival** with just your passport; Safaricom kiosks at JKIA do it in minutes. It will quickly become your main wallet.

BRINGING MONEY IN

Services like Wise and bank transfers move USD to KES easily, and you can top up M-Pesa from abroad. Keep a US card for international spend; many places also take Visa/Mastercard.

OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT

For a local account you'll typically need a valid **immigration permit**, your **KRA PIN**, passport and proof of address — and, if employed, an employer letter. Investors show a Class G permit or KenInvest letter. A small opening deposit (KES 1,000–5,000) is normal.

- ◆ Major banks: Equity, KCB, Stanbic, NCBA, Absa, StanChart
- ◆ Tourists/eTA visitors generally can't open accounts
- ◆ Sort your permit & KRA PIN first, then the bank

Tax note: spend more than 183 days in a tax year and you may become a Kenyan tax resident. If you keep US income, get cross-border tax advice early — the US taxes citizens worldwide.

06 Healthcare

Nairobi has some of the best private hospitals in Africa, with English-speaking specialists and standards close to what you're used to. The key is simple: **carry good private or international insurance** and use the private system.

HOSPITAL	AREA	KNOWN FOR
Aga Khan University Hospital	Parklands	JCI-accredited; cardiac, cancer, full specialist care
The Nairobi Hospital	Upper Hill	Long-established, broad specialties, expat-trusted
Karen Hospital	Karen	Convenient for the southern suburbs
MP Shah Hospital	Parklands	Well-regarded private general hospital
Gertrude's Children's Hospital	Muthaiga	Paediatrics specialist — for families

COSTS & COVER

Private consultations run roughly **\$15–40**; bigger procedures are far cheaper than the US but still meaningful — insurance with regional or international cover (and medical evacuation) is strongly advised.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Bring a yellow-fever certificate if arriving from an endemic country, carry a supply of any prescription meds with documentation, and check routine vaccines are current. Pharmacies are well-stocked in the suburbs.

07 Schools & education

Nairobi has a deep bench of international schools, several following the **American curriculum** — a big reason families settle here easily. Most cluster around Gigiri, Runda and Karen, which shapes where families choose to live.

SCHOOL	CURRICULUM	AREA	INDICATIVE FEES / YR
International School of Kenya (ISK)	American + IB	Gigiri	~\$20,000–28,000
Rosslyn Academy	American + AP	Runda	~\$10,000
Braeburn Schools	British	Several	~\$16,000–20,000
Brookhouse Schools	British	Karen / Runda	High end

APPLY EARLY

The best schools have waitlists. Begin enquiries **months ahead**, gather transcripts and records, and ask about the assessment and intake dates. Many align to a US/August academic year.

CHOOSING WELL

Match curriculum to your children's next step (US college, IB, British). Visit campuses, ask about transport routes from your shortlisted neighbourhoods, and factor buses into your area choice.

Tip: ISK near the UN draws diplomats and US families — pairing it with a home in Gigiri or Runda gives short school runs and a ready-made international community.

08 Getting around

DAY TO DAY

Uber and Bolt are the expat default — safe, cheap and payable by card or M-Pesa. For a city hop, fares are a few dollars. **Matatus** (shared minibuses, KES 50–100) are the local lifeblood but take some learning. Many residents buy a car for school runs and weekends.

DRIVING

Kenya drives **on the left**. You can drive on your US licence short-term (carry an International Driving Permit); for longer stays, convert to a Kenyan licence. Traffic is the real challenge — plan around rush hours and keep doors locked.

FURTHER AFIELD

The **SGR** express train links Nairobi to Mombasa in around 5–6 hours (from ~KES 1,500) — a scenic alternative to flying. Domestic flights reach the coast and safari strips quickly. **JKIA** is Nairobi's main international airport; Wilson handles light aircraft and safari hops.

- ◆ Use ride-hailing rather than hailing on the street

- ◆ Avoid boda-boda (motorbike) taxis if you can

- ◆ Allow generous time for cross-town trips in traffic

Reality check: Nairobi's distances are short but its traffic is not. Where you live relative to work and school will shape your daily life more than almost anything else — choose your neighbourhood with the commute in mind.

09 Connectivity & remote work

Nairobi — "Silicon Savannah" — is genuinely well-connected, which is why remote workers thrive here. Home fibre is fast and affordable, mobile data is cheap, and the time zone works for US teams.

INTERNET

Safaricom Home Fibre offers tiers around 40 / 60 / 150 Mbps, with routers and free install; **Zuku** and **Faiba (JTL)** are strong alternatives.

Confirm a provider already serves your building. Mobile data is inexpensive — pick up a Safaricom or Airtel SIM (or eSIM) on arrival.

POWER

Outages happen. A building with a **backup generator** or your own inverter/UPS keeps calls and Wi-Fi alive — essential if you work from home.

WHERE TO WORK

Coworking is excellent — spaces like **Nairobi Garage, Ikigai** and others offer fast Wi-Fi, meeting rooms and community across Westlands, Kilimani, Lavington and Karen. Cafés in these areas are laptop-friendly too.

TIME ZONE

At UTC+3 you're ahead of the US, so mornings are heads-down and your afternoon overlaps the US East-Coast start — a comfortable rhythm for transatlantic teams.

10 Safety & staying secure

With sensible precautions, expats live comfortably and happily in Nairobi. Most live in **gated communities with 24/7 guards**, and the prime suburbs are well-patrolled. The main risk is opportunistic petty crime, not personal danger — treat it like any major city.

EVERYDAY STREET SENSE

- ◆ Keep phones and valuables out of sight, especially in traffic

- ◆ Use Uber/Bolt after dark rather than walking

- ◆ Keep car doors locked and windows up in jams

- ◆ Withdraw cash inside malls/banks, not at quiet ATMs

- ◆ Trust local advice on which areas to skip at night

BE SET UP

- ◆ Choose a home with guards, gates and cameras

- ◆ Save emergency numbers: **999** or **112**

- ◆ Enrol in the US State Dept **STEP** programme

- ◆ Keep digital copies of passport, permit & insurance

- ◆ Know your nearest private hospital (Section 06)

Perspective: thousands of American and international families live here without incident. Good habits and a secure home do most of the work — then you're free to enjoy the city.

11 Daily life & culture

LANGUAGE & PEOPLE

English is an official language and spoken everywhere, so you'll never be stuck. But a little **Kiswahili** opens doors: Jambo / Habari (hello), Karibu (welcome), Asante (thank you), Pole pole (slowly). Kenyans are famously warm — greetings matter, so never skip the hello before getting to business.

EATING & SHOPPING

Try **nyama choma** (grilled meat), **ugali** and Swahili-coast dishes; the dining scene spans Ethiopian, Indian and international, with superb local coffee. Modern malls — **Village Market, Two Rivers, Sarit, The Hub, Westgate** — and supermarkets like Carrefour and Naivas cover everything you need.

WEEKENDS & ESCAPES

Few capitals offer this: **Nairobi National Park** has lions and rhino minutes from downtown, alongside the Giraffe Centre and elephant orphanage. Beyond the city lie the **Maasai Mara, Lake Naivasha & Nakuru, Amboseli** under Kilimanjaro, and the white sands of **Diani** on the coast.

GOOD MANNERS

- ◆ Ask before photographing people

- ◆ Dress smart-casual; modest outside the home

- ◆ Tip around 10% in restaurants

- ◆ Respect elders and local customs

Climate, simply: mile-high Nairobi stays mild all year. Carry a layer for cool evenings, and an umbrella in the long rains (Mar–May) and short rains (Oct–Dec).

Leave the booking to us

We don't just hand you a list. We help you **handpick the right apartment** from a large, carefully vetted selection — with guaranteed quality and service, the whole process made easy, and full protection from booking to move-in.

WHY BOOK WITH US

- ◆ We help you **handpick the right apartment**
- ◆ A **large selection** of quality serviced homes
- ◆ **Guaranteed quality** and service
- ◆ Fully furnished, with regular cleaning
- ◆ Everything handled — **easily**, end to end
- ◆ **Full protection** on every booking

HOW TO RESERVE

- 1 Reserve with a \$50 deposit.** This small deposit secures your chosen apartment and locks in your dates.
- 2 Pay the balance on arrival.** The rest is settled on your day of arrival — nothing more to pay before you travel.

Simple, easy and fully protected — we handpick your home, guarantee the quality, and take care of everything. A \$50 deposit confirms it; the balance is paid when you arrive.

Your first 30 days

BEFORE YOU FLY

- ◆ eTA approved & printed
- ◆ Serviced apartment booked for month one
- ◆ International health insurance active
- ◆ Digital + paper copies of all documents
- ◆ Airport pickup arranged

WEEK ONE

- ◆ SIM + M-Pesa at JKIA on arrival
- ◆ Settle in; learn your area on foot & by Bolt
- ◆ Start viewing homes in 2–3 neighbourhoods
- ◆ Meet your agent / relocation contact
- ◆ Scope schools if you have children

WEEKS TWO–FOUR

- ◆ File / progress your permit
- ◆ Register your KRA PIN
- ◆ Open a bank account
- ◆ Choose your home & sign the lease
- ◆ Set up fibre, utilities & help

Not sure where to start?

Our concierge can build your first-month plan around your dates, budget and work location.

ASK THE CONCIERGE

Pre-departure checklist

DOCUMENTS

- Passport valid 6+ months, blank pages
- Approved eTA (and permit paperwork started)
- Driver's licence + International Driving Permit
- Birth/marriage certificates (notarised)
- Children's school records & transcripts
- Vaccination records (incl. yellow fever)

HEALTH & MONEY

- International insurance with medical evacuation
- Prescription meds + doctor's letters
- Notify your US bank of the move
- A money-transfer app set up (e.g. Wise)
- Some USD cash for day one
- A fee-free international debit/credit card

HOME & TECH

- First-month accommodation confirmed
- Unlocked phone for a local SIM/eSIM
- Type G (UK) plug adapters
- Cloud backup of key documents

Shipping, pets & what to bring

MOVING YOUR THINGS

Travel light. Nairobi's malls and markets stock most things, and prime apartments often come furnished. For a full household, use a reputable international mover (sea freight is cheaper but takes weeks; air freight is fast and costly). Keep an essentials bag for your first nights.

ELECTRONICS

Kenya runs **240V on Type G (UK) plugs**. US devices need adapters and, for anything not dual-voltage, a converter. Phones and laptops are fine with a simple adapter.

BRINGING PETS

Pets are welcome with paperwork. You'll generally need an **import permit** from Kenya's veterinary authority, a recent health certificate, and up-to-date rabies vaccination. Start **well ahead** — approvals and airline pet bookings take time — and use a pet-relocation specialist if in doubt.

WORTH PACKING

- ◆ Specific medications & favourite toiletries
- ◆ Pro work gear you rely on
- ◆ A few comforts of home

Rule of thumb: bring what's hard to replace and personal; buy the bulky and everyday here. It's almost always cheaper than shipping.

A little Swahili

You'll get by in English everywhere — but these few words earn instant smiles.

ENGLISH	KISWAHILI
Hello / How are you?	Jambo / Habari?
I'm fine	Nzuri
Welcome	Karibu
Please	Tafadhali
Thank you (very much)	Asante (sana)
Yes / No	Ndiyo / Hapana
No problem	Hakuna matata

ENGLISH	KISWAHILI
How much?	Bei gani?
Where is...?	...iko wapi?
Let's go	Twende
Slowly	Pole pole
Friend	Rafiki
One / Two / Three	Moja / Mbili / Tatu
Goodbye	Kwaheri

Greetings come first. Kenyans value a proper hello before any request — a quick "Habari?" and a smile go a long way in shops, taxis and offices.

Useful contacts & resources

WHAT	WHERE
Emergencies (police / ambulance / fire)	999 or 112
eTA — travel authorization	etakenya.go.ke
Immigration & permits	ecitizen.go.ke (eFNS / immigration services)
KRA PIN & tax	itax.kra.go.ke
US Embassy Nairobi	United Nations Avenue, Gigiri · ke.usembassy.gov
US travellers' programme (STEP)	step.state.gov
Leading private hospitals	Aga Khan UH, The Nairobi Hospital, Karen Hospital (Section 06)
Mobile & M-Pesa	Safaricom — register at JKIA on arrival
Nairobi Prime Stay concierge	hello@vitanovaland.com · AI concierge, 24/7

Always verify the official source. Visa fees, permit rules and requirements change — check the government portals above (or ask our concierge) before you act on anything time-sensitive.

This handbook is for general guidance only and isn't legal, tax, immigration or medical advice. Details reflect publicly available information as of 2026 and may change; confirm with official authorities and qualified professionals.

Cover & closing photograph: Nairobi CBD © Keshie Muchai, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA), treated for this guide. Swap for your own photography anytime.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Karibu Nairobi.

You've got the map. When you're ready for the apartment, the neighbourhood and the soft landing, our concierge is here — day or night — to make the move feel easy.

hello@vitanovaland.com



NAIROBI
— PRIME STAY —