

Kenya

Islam and Swahili Cultural Identity

Explore issues of identity and the diverse cultures of the East African coast brought together by the Swahili language and the prevalence of Islam.

Coursework

Islam and Swahili Cultural Identity Seminar

AFRS 3000 / 4 credits / 60 class hours

An interdisciplinary course conducted in English with required readings and relevant educational excursions. Students examine the profound impact of the Swahili language and Islamic religion in the region and in interactions with other regions of the globe. Lecturers are drawn from the University of Nairobi, the Swahili Resource Center, the Marine Research Institute, and the National Museums of Kenya.

Seminar topics typically include:

Kenyan Coastal Cultures

East African Islam in relation to the broader Islamic world; Swahili culture and its relations with communities of the interior; ethnicity in East Africa; educational systems; health and healing; women's roles and women's health; continuity and change in East African art, music, architecture, and daily life.

History and Politics

Origins of political and social harmony and conflicts in Kenya and Tanzania; archaeological evidence of continuity and change in the region; precolonial, colonial, and post-independence history and politics; the role of external forces in the development of East African precolonial, colonial, and post-independence countries; current affairs and future prognosis.

Geography and Economics

Urban issues in Kenya; rural development in Kenya; marine resources and conservation; informal-sector economic development in Kenya; theories of African development; tourism and development.

Educational Excursions

The program generally includes an excursion to the Lamu archipelago and the twelfth-century site of Gede in Malindi, as well as a field trip to the coastline of Tanzania and the islands of Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba). Through hands-on explorations of Swahili history and culture, excursions offer students unique perspectives on the ethos of coastal Kenya and beyond.

Intensive Language Study: Swahili

SWAH 1000–2000 / 6 credits / 90 class hours

Emphasis on speaking and comprehension skills through classroom and field instruction.

Following an in-country evaluation that includes oral proficiency testing, students are placed in intensive beginning and intermediate classes, with additional language practice taking place through homestays, lectures, and field visits, including a one-week homestay on Pemba, in the Zanzibar archipelago of Tanzania. The course meets daily for five hours over a three-week period, with an additional six hours of instruction each week provided through one-on-one tutorials with native Swahili speakers.

Field Study Seminar

ANTH 3500 / 2 credits / 30 class hours

A course in the concepts of learning across cultures and from field experience. Introduction to the Independent Study Project. Material includes cross-cultural adaptation and skills building; project selection and refinement; appropriate methodologies; field study ethics and the World Learning/SIT Human Subjects Review Policy; developing contacts and finding resources; developing skills in observation and interviewing; gathering, organizing, and communicating data; maintaining a field journal.

Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 / 4 credits / 120 class hours

Conducted in coastal Kenya or in another approved location appropriate to the project. Sample topic areas: women's employment in the informal sector; traditional boat building; Swahili marriage traditions; coastal archaeology; Islamic education; rural development on a community level; primary health care; Swahili wood carving; traditional healing; midwifery among the Swahili; new and traditional fishing practices of the Bajuni; Swahili oral history; effects of tourism on coastal cultures; HIV/AIDS on the Kenyan coast; an inquiry of Muslim opposites; Swahili poetry.



Credits 16

Program Base Mombasa

Language Study Swahili

Homestays Mombasa, 2 weeks; Pemba, 1 week

Rural Visit/Homestay Taita Hills, 10 days

Other Accommodations Hostels, guest houses, private homes, or small hotels

Independent Study Project 4 weeks

Prerequisites None

SIT Kenya alumnus Daniel Low (Pomona College) was awarded the Donald A. Strauss Public Service Foundation Scholarship and a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship **to return to Africa** to pursue his interest in medicine and health care. While in Kenya with SIT, Daniel researched the health and education problems of street children in Mombasa. Learn more about his experience and future plans at www.sit.edu/KEM.