



# Kenya

## Islam and Swahili Cultural Identity

**Credits** 16

**Program Base** Mombasa

**Language Study** Swahili

**Homestay** Mombasa, 2 weeks

**Rural Visit/Homestay** Taita Hills, 10 days

**Educational Excursions** Lamu archipelago  
*dhow* safari, coast of Tanzania, island of Zanzibar

**Independent Study Project** 4 weeks

**Prerequisites** None

### Islam and Swahili Cultural Identity Seminar

AFRS 3000 / 4 credits / 60 class hours

An interdisciplinary course conducted in English, with required readings, examining the diverse cultures of the East African coast that are brought together by the Swahili language and the prevalence of Islam. Through lectures, readings, and field experience, students examine the profound impact of Swahili language and religion in the region and in interactions with other regions of the globe. Resources utilized in the delivery of course content include the University of Nairobi, the Swahili Resource Center, the Marine Research Institute, and the National Museums of Kenya. Lectures and discussions for this course generally include the following topics:

#### *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 postindependence history and politics; the role of external forces in the development of East African precolonial, colonial, and postindependence countries; current affairs and prognosis for the future.

#### *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 island of Unguja (Zanzibar). Through hands-on exploration of Swahili history and culture, excursions offer students unique perspectives on the ethos of coastal Kenya and beyond.

#### *Rural Visit*

To afford direct knowledge of rural life, participants live for 10 days in a rural setting in the Taita Hills. Village conditions are basic, frequently with no electricity or running water, and provide an invaluable opportunity to learn from rural Kenyans.

#### *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. 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; new and traditional fishing practices of the Bajuni; Swahili oral history; effects of tourism on coastal cultures; an inquiry of Muslim opposites; Swahili poetry.

#### *Homestay*

Two weeks in Mombasa and 10 days in a rural setting in the Taita Hills. Other accommodations during the program include hostels, guest houses, private homes, or small hotels.

### Swahili Society Across Nations

Students benefit from complementary opportunities to interact with most of the 42 ethnic groups in Kenya and gain a deep understanding of Swahili culture across nations. The equatorial Kenyan coast, often called the "cradle of Swahili civilization," reflects a long history of trade and integration between peoples of many races and ethnicities. An excursion along the coast of Tanzania and to Zanzibar encourages students to apply their knowledge of the Kiswahili language to conduct research and engage with diverse coastal residents. Along the way, students begin to recognize the power of Kiswahili as a lingua franca as they come face to face with historical links from Mogadishu to Madagascar.