Cultural Considerations
Tanzania Excursion

The Roots of Change
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Tanzania Cultural Considerations

Tanzania is an absolute explosion of the senses. Tanzania is an absolute explosion of senses. You will arrive in the vibrant island culture of Zanzibar, with crystal blue waters and the whitest sand you’ve ever seen. Women in colorful scarves walk by with smiles and shouts of Swahili greetings are heard as you arrive in the Kairo village. You will be experiencing the Eastern-influence in the markets and food. As well as the interesting mix of culture of immigrant tribes who come for economic opportunities. This experience is multi-faceted in ethnic experiences, so get ready for many unique adventures ahead.

Zanzibar is a part of Tanzania, however it feels like a different country. Zanzibar only became part of the main land in 1964. Before this time, they had completely different histories, cultures, foods, politics, and religions. From the surface, the only thing they had in common was the Swahili language. Bearing this in mind, the cultural considerations differ between locations.

Zanzibar Island is a melting pot of modern and ancient cultures and traditions. On Zanzibar about 98% are of the Muslim faith and on the mainland, that percentage drops to around 35% Muslim, 30% Christian and 35% indigenous beliefs. Zanzibarian’s have a vibrant culture and are a warm and welcoming group of people. They are also typically religious and conservative so it is important for us to be culturally aware and respectful as guests on the island.

It really is a fascinating region of the world – our mission is to provide you with a better understanding, genuine appreciation, and inspiration to explore even more of it. Here are a few cultural considerations to keep in mind in order to become fully immersed in your Tanzania experience:

1. **Affection in public** – The GIVE family is a tight one and we do like to share the love, but please understand that it is against the Tanzanian culture to kiss or show a lot of affection in public beyond holding hands. Please be respectful while you’re here and always aim to be discrete.

2. **Dressing conservatively** – dressing modestly is very important to Tanzanian people. On Zanzibar, women will always cover their shoulders and knees with loose-fitting clothes when out in public. It is an important part of their religion and culture and we need to be respectful of this. Although you may see other foreigners wear revealing clothes, please consider what makes us unique as GIVE Volunteers: we are not just average tourists, but conscientious and respectful visitors in these communities. You will have the opportunity to stop by the local markets to pick out some new threads and dress like the locals do!

3. **Holy Places** – There are thousands of mosques on Zanzibar Island. These religious landmarks are extremely influential in the Zanzibari culture, so it’s very important to show respect. You will hear the call to prayer every day, 6 times a
time, starting from 4am. Don’t be alarmed when you hear this call, but please be quiet and respectful during the duration of the call.

4. **Handshakes and physical contact** – Women and men do not have any physical contact unless they are married or unless the man initiates it. I.e. Women and men can only shake hands if the man first puts out his hand. Then, the women can respond with a handshake. As a foreigner, men should not shake local women’s hand. Additionally, only shake someone’s hand with your right hand, never your left hand. According to their culture, the left hand is dirty and using it is disrespectful.

5. **Hakuna Matata** – There are no two words in the Swahili Language that do a better job of describing its people. This common phrase means to “take it easy” or “no worries”, which is more a way of life than a piece of advice here. Tanzanians approach life at their own pace and things tend to happen a little more slowly than we’re used to in the western world. Please try your best to be patient, appreciate the moment, and don’t expect things to happen in a hurry.

6. **Gifts for Children** – Although we certainly encourage you to bring donations to aid the communities we work with, please do not distribute gifts directly to children as it encourages begging. Instead you can GIVE donations to an established organization (school) or village elders. All volunteer donations will be graciously accepted and ultimately given to the children who need them most, but it’s important to follow the social guidelines here.

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**Swahili Language – Key Phrases**

- **Hello** – *habari/mambo*
- **Goodbye** – *kwaheri/badaye*
- **How are you?** – *habari yako?*
- **I’m fine** – *Nzuri/poa*
- **Thank you** – *Asante*
- **Please** - *tafadhal*
- **What is your name?** – *jina lako nani?*
- **My name is ___** - *Jina langu ___*
- **Where are you from?** – *unatoka wapi?*
- **I’m from ___** - *ni me toka ___*
- **It’s nice to meet you** – *nina furaha kuonana na wewe*
- **Good morning** – *habari za asubuhi*
Good night – usikumwema
Delicious - tam
Excuse me / Sorry – samahani
Sorry - pole
How much is this? – bei gani
No worries – hakuna matata
You’re welcome - karibu
Slowly – pole pole

Tribes of Tanzania

Tanzania is an amazingly diverse region of the world, both in its environment and culture, and is home to over 120 different tribes and ethnic groups.

The largest tribe in Tanzania is the Sukuma. They have more than 5 million people scattered across the country. Majority of the Sukuma people live in rural areas but a considerable number of them live in major cities like Mwanza and Dar es Salaam. The Sukuma people are predominantly farmers, cultivating potatoes, maize, rice, and cotton, in addition to herding cattle. They mostly speak Sukuma, which means “north,” and Swahili. The majority of Sukuma people practice Christianity and have modernized their way of life over time.

Our main interactions will be with the Masaa tribe. We have many Masaa students at our school and we will get to see their traditional homelands as we drive to safari.

Maasai
Population in Tanzania: Approx 800 000, Origin: Lower Nile Valley

The Masaa are nomadic and traditionally travel with their cattle and families, searching for fresh pastures. Urbanisation has limited the Masaa’s ability to continuously be on the move, and most Masaa now reside near to the Game Parks in the north of Tanzania. Their traditional language is the Maa language, however some have been educated in Tanzania’s official language, Swahili. Their traditional clothing is a red cloth wrapped around the body. This does however vary depending on age and location. Young men, for instance, wear black for several months following their circumcision. Sometimes blue cloth is also worn, to commemorate their ancestors.

Interesting fact: The Masaa are considered to be one of the tallest people in the world with average height of 6 ft 3 inches!

Hello – Sopa. Thank you - Ashe oleng