

The Unofficial Students' Guide to Princeton in Dar es Salaam¹

Everything you need to know before you go and while you're there.

Why Princeton in Dar es Salaam?

If you have even half as much fun as we did in 2009, you're in for a great summer. The Princeton in Dar es Salaam program has a number of advantages:

- 1) The best way to learn a language is to be surrounded by native speakers. Your Swahili will get exponentially better.
- 2) You're probably taking Swahili because you're interested in Sub-Saharan Africa. Tanzania is in Sub-Saharan Africa. This program is a great way to get a taste of East Africa before you commit yourself to any JPs or a thesis on the region.
- 3) Dar es Salaam is on the Indian Ocean and has what are probably some of the most beautiful beaches you will ever see.
- 4) You get two semesters of language credit in two months in a surprisingly low-stress environment.
- 5) Mwalimu Mahiri is awesome. And you get to spend two months with him.

Before you go

Getting there

Buy your plane tickets early! The best way to buy them is through a student discount site and many of us found Student Universe to be the cheapest. Make sure you confirm arrival and departure dates before you book your tickets, as most student discount tickets are non-refundable. You'll want to arrive before the first Monday, which is when classes will start, and leave after the final exam, which is the last day of the program.

Most of us flew Emirates, which ended up being the cheapest and nicest of the available airlines and which stops over in Dubai. If your layover is longer than eight hours, check with the airline and they'll probably give you a free hotel room. This is most likely if you're coming from somewhere other than the East Coast.

Something to think about: You may want to book an extra week into your ticket if you're interested in seeing more of Tanzania, climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro (which takes at least five days), or seeing some other countries in the region. As of last summer, it was \$25 for an entry visa to Kenya, and Rwanda was reportedly free to Americans. Many of us ended up wishing we'd booked some extra time to do sight-seeing. Seriously, do it. You'll want to at least see more of Tanzania, if not the rest of East Africa. Take at least a week; you won't regret it.

Money

Food is generally cheap (you can eat for as little as \$3-\$5 per day), but you may want to buy souvenirs, finance trips, and eat the occasional expensive meal! Most places will not take credit cards, but there are ATM machines on campus that you can use. You don't need to carry a lot of

¹ * *Suggestions from past alumni; compiled by Rachel "Amani" Jackson – Princeton in Dar '09*

cash with you; you can get money in local currency through ATM with a debit card (Visa or Mastercard are most reliable).

Communication

Cell phone communication is fairly cheap and easy in Dar. After arriving, you can buy a cell phone, SIM card, and phone cards (minutes) to make calls. Phone cards are widely available. If your U.S. cell phone uses a SIM card, you can just bring it with you and insert a Tanzanian SIM card (You may, however, need to have your U.S. provider “unlock” it before you leave).

Packing

The question of what to bring was a huge concern for many of us last summer, so I’m hoping that this will give you a bit of an idea of what to expect.

Clothing:

You’re not going to be roughing it out in the wilderness so you don’t need to bring survival gear. That said, you’ll spend at least the first month washing your clothes by hand so don’t bring anything that has any special washing requirements. Working in the orphanage can be pretty hard on clothing, so you won’t want to wear anything that can’t get fairly dirty. Specifically, you’ll want light long pants to keep you protected from mosquitoes, probably one sweater/sweatshirt for the rare times it gets a bit cold at night, and, of course, don’t forget a swimsuit. You may want to bring one nice outfit in case you get invited to a wedding, but you won’t need more than one. As far as shoes go, you’ll be walking a lot, so be prepared for that. Unless you are planning on taking some time to climb Kili, you won’t need hiking boots, but do bring a sturdy pair of running shoes for the hike you’ll do in Mikumi. Mostly, we wore sandals the entire time. Also, you’ll want a pair of shower shoes for the hostel. As far as clothing style goes, don’t worry about it. Everyone will be able to tell you’re a *mzungu* anyway. (That said, see the note below.)

Important note on modesty: Tanzania is a fairly conservative country, and one important thing to remember is dressing modestly, the standards for which are slightly different from the U.S. For girls: Try to make sure that whatever you wear covers your knees. If you bring shorts you probably won’t end up wearing them outside of the hostel, but it probably wouldn’t hurt to bring one pair. What you wear on top is less important, but to avoid unwanted attention, you might want to steer clear of tank tops or low cut shirts. For guys: you won’t see any Tanzanian men wearing shorts, but you won’t encounter any problems if you do.

Medicines

McCosh is pretty helpful with making sure you know absolutely everything about the medicines you’ll have to take while you’re there, but if you’re particularly attached to a specific type of painkiller, cold medicine, vitamins, or other over-the-counter medicine, make sure you bring enough with you for two months, as you probably won’t be able to find it there. Also, remember your allergy medication if you’re sensitive to pollen or dust. It might be a good idea for at least one person in the group to have a first aid kit.

Miscellaneous

You won't need sheets, but you will want a towel. If you're bringing a digital camera, bring extra memory cards; electronics are expensive in Dar. You won't need a laptop; there are internet cafes everywhere, and wireless can be difficult to find, but if you do bring one, it will be safe in the hostel during the day. Other things to consider bringing include: a flashlight (for when the lights occasionally go out), an adapter/plugs, a combination lock and chain, and a money belt.

You'll probably be bringing home a lot of souvenirs, so remember to leave space or bring clothing you can leave behind. If you are planning to extend your trip, remember that there is a one bag checked luggage limit for flights between East African countries.

Gifts

You'll be staying with a host family for most of July and you might want to bring a gift for them. Many of us bought gifts once we were there, which were also well received. This can be difficult, but your family is likely to enjoy something they can use. As a side note, candy is usually meant for children, so a box of chocolates may not be the best idea.

Additionally, anything you bring for the English school at Mwenge or the orphanage will be both needed and greatly appreciated. Clothing and schools supplies are greatly needed at the orphanage, and easy toys like jump ropes or playing cards would be nice as well. Soccer balls are a big favorite, but I'd recommend buying one in Tanzania

The students at Mwenge are desperate for English language books, and children's books or learning English books are best. Pencils, pens, and notebooks are also in short supply. Also, you may want a learning English book to use as a guideline for teaching, and you can leave it behind at the end of the summer.

Additional Notes

In general, you'll be happy if you pack things that you can leave behind at the end of the trip. Extra clothing or shoes are always appreciated at the orphanage or by your students and Mwenge. And the space in your luggage will be needed for your souvenirs!

Pack lightly if you can and remember that you'll be buying things there (even if you don't intend to now). If you're planning to fly to another East African country afterward, the baggage limit on most airlines is one checked bag at 20kg. If you're taking a bus, you'll also want to have as little luggage as possible.

While you're there (coming soon)