



Language barriers, religion, not knowing what to pack, or even how uncomfortable the restroom situations will be, are only a few of the fears that people have when traveling to a new country.

For Texas Tech College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources student, Kassie Davidson, packing was the most challenging part about preparing for her study abroad trip to Kenya, Africa.

“When you think of Africa in general, you don’t realize how different each country is and how different their climates are, so I wasn’t really sure what to expect,” said Davidson. “That was mainly where my nerves were, just making sure I had everything I needed and fitting it all into my suitcase.”

As for Michael Kanyi, a Kenya native who moved to Texas in the fall of 2012 to get his doctoral degree at Texas Tech, he had preconceived notions about the people he would interact with in America. Kanyi explained that before he moved to the United States, he had a very different opinion about the country and the people in general, but he was very surprised that he fit in so well here.

Lucky for both of them, Texas Tech professor, Dr. Lawver was able to give his advice on how to feel as comfortable as possible in a new environment. Dr. Lawver had previously spent time in Kenya when he got his Fulbright at Egerton University, where he met Michael in 2009. Dr. Lawver kept in close contact with Michael over the years and soon convinced him to study at Texas Tech. In fall of 2012, Michael began his doctoral program with CASNR and worked under Dr. Lawver as a teaching assistant. Having Michael and Dr. Lawver as mentors on the trip really helped students feel comfortable and also helped them learn even more about the culture. Michael gave the students a list of about 50 Swahili words to study before landing in Kenya.

“Michael was really good about telling us what the cultural values were like and how people act and also the education system, which is something he is very proud of. Of course, once you get over there it really hits you so I think he wanted to give us a base so we wouldn’t be clueless when we arrived,” said Davidson.



Photo Courtesy of Kassie Davidson

Traveling across the world to another continent may seem intimidating to any college student. For the eight CASNR students who went on the trip, they didn't quite know what to expect during their 25-hour journey to Kenya.

"Kenya is very exotic. You are more likely to experience a completely different culture than we have in the United States. Of the 42 tribes in Kenya, very few of them still dress traditionally.

Many are becoming westernized which is why it was great to have the trip when we did," said Lawver.

One of the most important things to do before traveling abroad is research. Dr. Lawver prepared the students by having meetings before they left to familiarize them with the Kenyan culture. Immunization requirements, getting your visa and passport and what clothes to bring that are appropriate for the more conservative lifestyle of Kenya, were only some of the subjects they discussed.

"Kenya looks a lot like Texas. You've got your piney regions, your costal regions, and desert areas as well. So it reminded me a lot of home, which made for a great connection with the land. However, when it comes to being uncomfortable... the toilet and the restroom systems, they are, umm...they need some updating. You never know what to expect," Davidson said.

Like any foreign country, things are different than what Americans are use to. The simplest things to us can seem backwards to them. Things like finding a place to live, where to shop, how to bank and even how to cross the street.

"One thing I had to explain to Michael was that we are conditioned to look left, then right before crossing the street because everyone is driving on the right hand

side," Lawver said. " Well, in Kenya, everyone drives on the left hand side of the road so their natural tendency is to look right, and then step, which could put them right into traffic."

Davidson and Dr. Lawver both agreed that the best thing students can do when studying abroad is to be open to new experiences and try things you wouldn't normally do.

"No one can tell you about another country. You have to go and experience it yourself to really find out."

"Africa overall is more diverse than any other country. In Kenya, we have 42 tribes that all have very different ways of living. No one can tell you about another country, you have to go and experience it yourself to really find out," Michael said.

Whether you're going to another country or experiencing America for the first time, at Texas Tech,

there is someone who can help you and many times, that person is a faculty member. While there is much to know before you travel, there is one thing that Lawver says is a certainty.

"It's going to be different." 🇹🇽



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Photo Courtesy of Dr. Lawver



Photo Courtesy of Kelli Neuman