

K12 ACADEMICS — INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERIES

Studying in Kenya

A guide for international students & families — how Kenyan higher education works, the student pass, English-medium study at East Africa's hub, and the rules.



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2026 EDITION

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Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

ENGLISH-MEDIUM, EAST AFRICA'S HUB, AFFORDABLE

Kenya is **East Africa's economic hub** and a leading English-medium study destination, hosting 15,000+ international students at respected universities — the University of Nairobi, Strathmore, and the US-accredited USIU-Africa. Degrees are **internationally recognized and taught in English** at costs well below the West. Students get a **student pass**. This guide walks it in **ten steps**.

General guidance, not legal or immigration advice. Kenyan rules, tuition, and the funds requirement change. The details here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with the Department of Immigration Services, your university, and the Kenyan mission.**

Understand Why Students Choose Kenya

WHAT TO KNOW

Kenya offers **English-medium, internationally recognized universities (including the US-accredited USIU-Africa); East Africa's economic hub with strong internship links; affordable costs; and a welcoming, vibrant setting** — a leading regional destination.

BY THE NUMBERS

English-medium

recognized universities

East Africa hub

internship links

Affordable

+ vibrant

HOW TO HELP

Weigh Kenya's **English-medium quality, hub location, and affordability** against a no-work rule — for English-taught study with strong regional career links, it's excellent.

GOOD TO KNOW

USIU-Africa is **US-accredited (WASC) as well as Kenyan-accredited** — a rare American-model degree in East Africa.

Understand the System

WHAT TO KNOW

Public universities lead — the **University of Nairobi** (top), Kenyatta University, and JKUAT (agriculture/technology) — alongside strong private universities: **Strathmore** (business, law) and **USIU-Africa** (American-model, US-accredited). English is the medium throughout; most universities are in **Nairobi** (also Mombasa, Eldoret, Kisumu).

BY THE NUMBERS

Public

Nairobi, Kenyatta, JKUAT

Private

Strathmore, USIU-Africa

English

medium throughout

HOW TO HELP

Choose a **public university** (Nairobi, Kenyatta) or a **private university** (Strathmore; USIU-Africa for a US-model degree) by field — all English-medium.

GOOD TO KNOW

USIU-Africa follows an **American model**, and Strathmore is a leading private university — both strong in business and ICT.

Get the Student Pass

WHAT TO KNOW

International students need a **student pass** (it's an offence to study without one), applied for through the **Department of Immigration Services (eCitizen portal)** — ideally three months before, and at least 30 days before travel. Provide your acceptance letter, funds proof, passport, medical records, and police clearance; the pass is endorsed at **Nyayo House**, Nairobi.

BY THE NUMBERS

Student pass

required (Immigration Services)

Apply

3 months / 30+ days ahead

Endorsed

at Nyayo House

HOW TO HELP

Apply for the **student pass** via the Department of Immigration Services (with acceptance, funds, passport, medical, police clearance), well ahead of travel — it's endorsed at Nyayo House.

WATCH OUT

East African Community citizens (Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi) are **exempt from the pass fee** but must still apply; over 90 days, all foreigners register as "Aliens".

Apply to Universities

WHAT TO KNOW

Apply **directly to each university**. Entry is based on your secondary results (the KCSE grade C+ or equivalent; international qualifications are equated by the **Commission for University Education**). Non-native English speakers show **English proficiency** (e.g., USIU-Africa requires TOEFL 79+). Apply early and pay the application fee.

BY THE NUMBERS

Apply directly

to each

Entry

KCSE C+ / equated by CUE

English

proof (e.g., TOEFL 79+)

HOW TO HELP

Apply **directly** to your chosen university, have foreign qualifications equated by the CUE, and show English proficiency where required — apply early.

GOOD TO KNOW

International qualifications are **equated to the KCSE by the Commission for University Education** — arrange this as part of your application.

Plan for Tuition & Scholarships

WHAT TO KNOW

Tuition runs roughly **\$2,000–5,000/year at public universities** and **\$3,000–15,000 at private ones** (postgraduate and professional programs like medicine/engineering cost more) — affordable versus the West. Scholarships and financial aid vary — check each university.

BY THE NUMBERS

Public

\$2,000–5,000/yr

Private

\$3,000–15,000/yr

Scholarships

per university

HOW TO HELP

Budget the tuition (public \$2k–5k; private \$3k–15k; more for postgrad/professional) plus living costs, and check each university for scholarships.

GOOD TO KNOW

Living costs in Nairobi run **~\$400–800/month** — affordable, with accommodation around \$100–300.

Meet the Financial Requirement

WHAT TO KNOW

For the student pass you show **proof of financial support** for at least one academic year; immigration typically expects evidence of about **\$6,000–10,000/year** available (via a bank statement or a parent/guardian commitment letter). Confirm the exact figure with the Department of Immigration Services.

BY THE NUMBERS

Funds

1+ academic year

Expected

~\$6,000–10,000/yr

Via

bank statement/commitment

HOW TO HELP

Prepare **proof of funds for at least one academic year** (immigration expects ~\$6,000–10,000) via a bank statement or commitment letter — confirm the figure with Immigration Services.

GOOD TO KNOW

Show funds are available for **the full course**, not just year one — from a dependable, documented source.



Meet Language Requirements

WHAT TO KNOW

English is Kenya's **official language and the medium of instruction** (Swahili is also widely spoken), so there's no language barrier for English speakers; non-native speakers show English proficiency (e.g., TOEFL/IELTS). Basic Swahili enriches daily life.

BY THE NUMBERS

English

official & medium

Swahili

widely spoken

Proof

for non-native speakers

HOW TO HELP

Study **in English** (no barrier for English speakers; non-native speakers show proficiency), and pick up some Swahili for daily life.

GOOD TO KNOW

For English speakers, **language is not a barrier** — a key advantage, with Swahili useful day to day.

Prepare for the Move

WHAT TO KNOW

After your pass, **arrange housing, complete registration, register as an "Alien" (over 90 days), and set up banking**. Most students are based in **Nairobi**, a vibrant, well-connected capital. Kenya is generally safe within university areas; follow local guidance, and enjoy the country's culture and wildlife.

BY THE NUMBERS

Housing + registration

first tasks

Alien card

over 90 days

Based

in Nairobi

HOW TO HELP

Handle arrival admin — **housing, registration, Alien card (over 90 days), banking** — in vibrant Nairobi; Kenya is generally safe in university areas.

GOOD TO KNOW

Foreigners staying over 90 days must **register as "Aliens"** (an Alien card) — your university helps with the process.

Understand Work Rules

WHAT TO KNOW

Be clear on this: the **student pass does not authorise any employment** (paid or unpaid) in Kenya — you'd need a separate Work Permit. Plan to **fund your studies fully**. Curriculum-linked internships may be arranged through your university where permitted.

BY THE NUMBERS

Student pass

no employment

Work Permit

needed to work

Fund fully

don't rely on work

HOW TO HELP

Understand that the **student pass doesn't permit any employment** — a Work Permit is separate — so plan to fund your studies fully.

WATCH OUT

The student pass is **explicitly not authority to work** — budget accordingly and treat any work opportunity as requiring a separate permit.

Thrive & Work After Study

WHAT TO KNOW

Kenya's position as **East Africa's economic hub** offers strong opportunities in business, technology, and beyond; graduates can pursue a **Work Permit** with a job offer. Confirm the current post-study pathways, and use your regional networks.

BY THE NUMBERS

East Africa hub

strong opportunities

Work Permit

after a job offer

Post-study

confirm pathway

HOW TO HELP

Leverage Kenya's **hub economy and your networks** for opportunities in business and tech, and pursue a Work Permit with a job offer — confirm the current post-study pathways.

GOOD TO KNOW

Post-study, a **Work Permit with a job offer** is the route to working in Kenya — confirm current requirements.

Studying in Kenya: The Essentials

A snapshot — figures change, so confirm with the Department of Immigration Services, your university, and the Kenyan mission.

The system

Public universities (University of Nairobi — top — Kenyatta University, JKUAT) and private universities (Strathmore; USIU-Africa — American-model, US-accredited via WASC and by Kenya's CUE); English is the medium throughout; most are in Nairobi.

The visa

International students need a student pass (it's an offence to study without one) via the Department of Immigration Services (eCitizen), applied for 3 months / at least 30 days before travel and endorsed at Nyayo House; EAC citizens are fee-exempt but must apply; register as an "Alien" over 90 days.

Tuition & entry

~\$2,000–5,000/year at public universities, \$3,000–15,000 at private ones (more for postgrad/professional); entry via the KCSE grade C+ or CUE-equated qualifications; English proficiency for non-native speakers (e.g., TOEFL 79+).

Money & language

Show proof of funds for at least one academic year (immigration expects ~\$6,000–10,000); English is the official medium (Swahili widely spoken); living ~\$400–800/month in Nairobi.

Work & after

The student pass does not authorise any employment (a Work Permit is separate) — fund your studies fully; post-study, a Work Permit with a job offer allows work in East Africa's economic hub.

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