



East African Essentials Packing Guide

I've noticed that people tend to over-pack when volunteering and traveling in Africa. Maybe they get advice from family and friends who've never been here and end up focusing on the wrong things?

Whether you're volunteering or backpacking, you don't want to be bogged down with too much stuff. Most airlines don't allow more than 1 piece of luggage anyway.

Lend a hand International has hosted many international volunteers since 2017. That's a lot of luggage. Trust me, I know what you need from home and what you can buy out here.

My Uganda packing list is simple, articulated, and aims to get you prepped with all you need and still leave space for a few souvenirs. Our economy needs the boost!

Lend a Hand International offers 2 – 12 week locally-led community-based volunteer programs.



A Few Important Points

- It is hot here. You will be sweaty. You'll get dirty. Jeans are not your friend.
- Side walks are rare. Your rolling suitcase will be great until you leave the airport.
- Opt for a backpack with a great cover. You'll be safe from rain and quick hands.
- No matter how long you're away, you only need to pack enough for 5 to 7 days.
- Your carry-on should double as a day pack. Ensure it is light weight, has many pockets, and is big enough to carry 2 days' supplies. This way you can leave your main pack at your home base/hostel for short side trips.
- Get a U-shaped travel pillow. Not only will you sleep better on the plane, you'll have something soft to lay your head on when you arrive. Culturally, we don't use pillows out here. The ones available are usually awful.
- Relax, you can buy toilet paper here. Know that most daily use items are widely available in towns and cities.
- Mosquito nets are found in almost all hotels, hostels, and home stays. If not, they're super easy and cheap to buy here.
- Do not wear camouflage clothing in Uganda. That's only for police and military.
- It is illegal to bring a drone into Uganda. Leave yours at home.

- East Africa is not all about project work and wildlife safari. You'll end up in a night club at some point. Plan to still look cute!

This post contains affiliate links. If you click on a link and go on to buy anything, Lend a Hand International receives a small commission, at no extra cost to you. We then provide scholarships to high-performing but underprivileged disabled children in Ugandan.

Okay, enough said. Here's our East Africa essentials packing guide, which includes everything you need to bring for a month or 6!

Documents

There's a lot of paperwork involved in East African travel. Put it all in one file. It'll stay together and you'll always know everything is.

- Emergency contact information, including whom to call in case of emergency.
- A list of all medications you're taking, including malaria prophylaxis, any allergies/pre-existing conditions, and dietary restrictions.
- Travel and medical insurance information. Copies of your passport, credit cards, and insurance. You should also leave copies of these at home with someone.
- Passport sized photos. You'll need these when connecting local phone lines, or for tourist visas arranged on the go.
- Printed return airline ticket. Our border guards don't always accept screen shots.
- Passport valid for at least 6 months beyond your arrival.
- E-visa approval letter. All East African countries have an e-visa application process. **[Read here on how to obtain one for Uganda.](#)**
- [East Africa travel guide](#). While this is heavy, its invaluable for planning weekend getaways and general regional travel. I don't recommend getting a digital version – way to hard to flip around to quickly access info.

Clothing

When volunteering in Uganda, you want light breathable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty: Packs down small. Easy to wash. Quick to dry.

- 3 loose khaki trousers for the guys, and a combo of knee length or longer skirts/dresses and loose trousers for women.
- 3 button up shirts, t-shirts and/or sleeveless tops. Make sure all your tops and bottoms go together to optimize outfit combinations.
- One nice outfit in case of a party or other event. People graduate, marry, and pass away at alarming rates out here. You'll be invited to everything.
- 1 bathing suit and 1 pair shorts. Its always nice to hit the beach. But know this is a conservative region. Ladies, bring a [light wrap or sarong](#) and never wear those shorts in small towns and villages. That sarong can be used to cover your hair during dusty journeys or around your shoulders during random chilly evenings, as well.
- 1 long sleeved shirt.
- [Light weight rain poncho](#). This one packs down small, but is big enough at the back to go over your backpack.
- Sturdy walking sandals and a pair of flip flops. The flip flops are for the shower or around home, never for the street.
- Enough undies for 4 days. This way you have one on, one washing, one drying, and one for just in case!
- Sunhat and sunglasses. We're on the equator. The sun hits you directly from above.
- [Microfiber travel towel](#). Packs down super small, easy to wash and quick to dry.



Gadgets

Despite what you may have heard, we're very tech friendly out here. Don't forget these when packing to volunteer in Uganda:

- Your smart phone. If its unlocked you can easily hook up a local phone line with internet data package for less than \$20. If its locked, you'll find wi-fi in larger cities and towns. But it won't be awesome. Look into getting your phone unlocked before you leave home.
- Charger for that phone.
- [Portable charger/external power bank for that phone.](#) Access to electricity is less than you're used to.
- Camera. Admittedly, I only use a proper camera for wildlife safari. Otherwise my iphone6 does the job just fine. It's much easier to connect with local people when you're not shoving a huge camera in their face.

- [Universal electrical adapter with USB ports.](#) This one can be used in 150 countries, including all East African countries, and has a surge protector and 2 USB charging ports. It's super small too.
- [Headlamp/torch](#) This one is small, light, and comes with batteries. There are rolling power outages or no power at all in many places in Uganda. I personally could not live without my headlamp.
- [E-reader.](#) Books are heavy and there's lots of down time out here. This E-reader has a long battery life and glare free screen and works well with a headlamp.
- Portable music player. Try to bring one that uses headphones *and* connects to a speaker. We like to dance out here.
- As stated above, do not bring a drone to Uganda. If you really want to use one, there are government-regulated companies that rent them.

Medical Kit & Toiletries

All these are widely and cheaply available in East Africa. Bring a *small* starter kit and supplement as you volunteer and travel.

- Small pouch containing pain killers, anti-bacterial creme, [electrolytes/oral re-hydration salts](#), and antacids.
- Small travel medical kit. The [I Go First Aid Kit](#) contains 85 pieces, including a range of dressings, gloves, scissors, and even a whistle. It weighs less than 1 pound!
- Something for diarrhea.
- Something for constipation.
- Anti-malaria medication. If you're going to take doxycycline, you can get it out here for about 5 cents a pill. No prescription required.
- Multi-vitamins for stays over 4 weeks. Your nutrition level may suffer due to the new diet and all the moving around.
- Toothpaste and toothbrush.
- Hand sanitizer. Get a few [travel sized bottles](#).
- Body wash or bathing soap.
- Light moisturizer.

Essentials From Home

These are neither widely available nor affordable in East Africa. Pack enough to last you.



♥ 4 likes

catnipping What #makeup should a fair-skinned Londoner wear in tropical and dusty Uganda? The bare minimum! My essentials L-R: #protectandperfect factor 50! Heavy duty concealer for any breakouts; #clarins Instant Light concealer for those office-induced dark circles; eyebrow gel and last but DEFINITELY not least waterproof mascara! This lot held up well over the past 10 days @therealuganda #ugandanmakeup #uganda #londonerabroad #fairskin #alamtravel

- An extra refill of any medications you're taking. Sometimes you lose things...
- Shampoo and conditioner, if you have European hair.
- Basic makeup. Check out a former volunteer's recommendations above.
- Deodorant.
- Tampons.
- [Ear plugs](#). East Africans like to party and there's little municipal noise control.
- Sunscreen. An absolute must as anti-malarial medication can make you sun-sensitive!
- Insect repellent.
- [Something for sunburn](#).
- Contact lens solution.
- Granola bars and trail mix. I add this mostly because these are pretty much the only things I miss from my native Canada. But it's easy to get chocolate, peanuts, popcorn and other snacky things out here.

Well, there you have it. Our comprehensive East Africa packing list for travellers and volunteers. Please use it, share it, and let us know if it helped you.

Want To Volunteer In Uganda?