



KTH Global Development Hub TRAVEL REPORT

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KTH Programme: Industrial Engineering and Management

GDH Project theme: Renewable Energy

Partner University: Strathmore University

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Introduction

I am studying Industrial Engineering and Management with a specialisation in Energy Systems and Sustainable Development at KTH (Royal Institute of Technology). I did an exchange with GDH for my bachelor thesis in the fourth period of my third year. The exchange took place in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. The partner university was Strathmore University. The exchange was four months (from the end of March to the end of July). I stayed there for some extra time after the studies were done, I went back to Sweden in August. This experience, to live in Nairobi for a rather long period, is one of the most amazing things I have ever done in my life.



Practical Information

Before this adventure I didn't really know what to expect. I had never done an exchange before and I had never been to Africa. Therefore I found it a little bit tricky to prepare myself. I did not want to pack too much or not enough. I knew that Kenya was heading towards their winter when I was about to arrive, but I could not really imagine myself needing winter clothes like in Sweden. In conclusion, I had no idea how to pack for my stay in Kenya. Looking back at it now, I would have brought warmer clothes. July was kind of chilly. Strathmore University has a dress code, so make sure you pack some suitable clothes for that. But do not worry if you pack the wrong things, to shop in Nairobi is a lot of fun (and cheap). Go to Down Town and do some street shopping, it is a lot of laughter and bargaining!

Beforehand, I got to meet the other Swedes that were doing the exchange as well. We did not get to know each other well until we arrived. It was, however, still comforting to know that there were others going through similar experiences as me. In the beginning of my stay, I shared an apartment with another Swedish student. But, because of difficulties we had to change apartment after two months. That was a bit of a struggle since it was in a very short notice, luckily I got to stay with some of my friends for a few days until I was able to get a new apartment.

The traffic was a bit of a surprise at first. The road rules do not really apply in the same way as they do in Sweden and the traffic was, in some ways, a bit crazy. Mostly I used uber or taxi to get around and it worked really well. It does not cost much, depending on how far you go and/or if you get stuck in traffic jam, but usually it costs around 30 SEK. Transportation is cheap compared to Stockholm. Matatus (the buses in Kenya) are very cheap (around 5 SEK). They work perfectly fine, but before you go with one of the buses you should get used to the vibe in Nairobi. They all have different interior design and loud music, it is very nice! Boda bodas (motorbike taxis) is also a fast and handy way to transport yourself. Since there is a lot of traffic jams the boda bodas go between and passes the cars. They are also cheap (around 15 SEK). I would not recommend them when you are going very far or when it is dark, since the traffic is chaotic. When I got to Nairobi I was not used to that kind of traffic with motorbikes, cars, busses and people everywhere, but after some time it felt normal. When I got back to Stockholm it felt weird to stand on the sidewalk pushing a button and wait for the green light, not just run over and zigzag between all the traffic.



When it comes to food and drinks it is also cheap. I rarely cooked in my apartment. The Kenyan food is delicious! Make sure to try chapati, nyama choma, ugali and kachumbari. I recommend that you use hand sanitizer, it is easy to get food poisoning (especially in the beginning when your body is not used to the different bacteria).



Study Experience

Before me and the other students travelled, we were prepared with some meetings and filled in applications for Strathmore University. It was really good to talk the planned studies through, bachelor thesis combined with the project course. I was going to do the bachelor thesis alone since I was the only one in the group with my specialisation, so I had some questions. When I got to the university most questions answered themselves and it was sorted out naturally. Strathmore University is different from KTH. Some differences are that students at Strathmore have closer relationships to the professors, but at the same time it is more of a hierarchy, students does not really question the professors and what to do like we do at KTH. At the university it is also compulsory attendance to class. At KTH I was used to sharp times, when something starts at a certain time it starts at that time. And when a deadline is set it is not negotiable. At Strathmore on the other hand are these two things more flexible. If a class starts at 10 o'clock, it can start at 11 o'clock without being a big deal. If there is a deadline for something you can go and talk to the

professor and they will make individual deadlines. Strathmore University reflects the culture in Kenya, just like KTH reflects the culture in Sweden. In the beginning I was not used to the system, but later on I became used to it and liked it!

The first day of the project we met the classmates and divided ourselves into different groups of five, depending on which theme you were interested in. I knew I wanted to do the project about renewable energy, since that fits my education the most and also what I am interested in. I ended up in a group with four Strathmore students who also picked that theme. I am really happy about my project group and we later on became good friends. But at first we faced some difficulties within the group, what to do in the project and how to do it. After some time, when we had discussed a lot and met some stakeholders we decided to make the project about solar energy. We really investigated the subject and met a lot of different people with different perspectives.



Me and one of the project group members, Alex, trying a solar panel mini car at the university.

Apart from the project course I decided to take one more course: East African Societies. That course was very interesting, it made me understand their history better. The course was a bit tricky for me though, it was difficult to remember the different tribes, traditions, how they started and so on. But I am glad I took that course because here in Sweden (I think in Europe in general) we do not learn the history in such detailed level.

When it comes to my professional development I made progress. I learned how to cooperate professional with people with different backgrounds, perspectives, educations and opinions. Now afterwards I am glad that I was the only European in my project group, it was a challenge to have to argue about things that back home is obvious. I was used to mostly speaking Swedish in professional contexts, but after working closely with my group, taking classes and meeting stakeholders I began to think in English. That was a big and important step for me. Now afterwards I must say

that even though I made progress regarding my professional development, my personal development was even greater. I grew a lot as a person in general.

Cultural Activities/Travel

When thinking of going to Kenya, one of the things I was most excited about was to see all the exotic animals in their natural habitat. I made sure to go to on at least one safari (then I was lucky and able to do three!). My first impression was without a doubt how amazing these animals are and what an extraordinary experience to see them where they actually belong. I saw lions, cheetahs, elephants, wild beasts, rhinos, giraffes, buffalos, hippos, zebras and so on. The animals were living in their natural habitat, which was amazing to see, but it was definitely not undisturbed by humans (because of the safari cars driving around with the tourists). Masai Mara national park was fantastic, so go there! It takes about 7 hours in a safari car to go there from Nairobi, it is a bumpy ride but definitely worth it. Stay there for about 2 nights (as a package with ride, safari, tent camp and food it costs around 3000 SEK). It is on the boarder to Tanzania.



Go to Diani at the East Coast! There are amazing beaches (and a lot warmer than Nairobi), it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to. In comparison with a lot of other “vacay places” around the world, this one is not destroyed by tourism. It was nice to just relax, eat fish, go snorkeling, go on boat trips and enjoy the sun. From Nairobi you can take a train to Mombasa (economy seat costs around 100 kr), it takes five hours and you go through a national park so you see a lot of zebras and elephants. After the train you take a matatu and then the ferry over to Diani. Or you can go directly from Nairobi to Diani with airplane, takes about 45 minutes. I tried both, the first one is more of an adventure (but takes in total like 8 hours), so the second option is definitely faster.



Nairobi is an amazing city to live in. It is a lot going on, all the time, it does not matter what day it is. Make sure to go out a lot and spend time with the locals. People are really friendly and easy to get to know. You will get a lot of friends, that you just randomly meet and the longer you are there the tighter becomes your friendships and you will get to know even more people. When you get invited to cultural activities, join them! It is a lot of fun and different experiences.



Conclusion

Go on the exchange, you will not regret it!!

If there is any questions regarding anything, do not hesitate to contact me:

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