

- 1) Experience with Army
- 2) Experience with Police

Ad 1) Army

I was a guest at a National Reserve (park) in Kenya, which is run by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

Head in this park is the warden. Also there is a deputy-manager, a sergeant, a lieutenant and guides. And some more armed man walking around. These are military who run the park.

Also there are administrative people, cooks, and cleaning ladies, and so on.



In general they keep the park very clean and ordered. And show a hospitality atmosphere. Also this organization does many good things to preserve wildlife in Kenya. Not nearly sufficient, but they make an effort. Do not get me wrong, many of these people do very good work!

In the few days I spend in this reserve I experienced discrimination, felt threatened, and was asked to give money. (Discrimination is never acceptable!)

Among people working in the park are many friendships. But also there is lots of envy as salary is (relative!) low for some groups of people. Many of the employees in the park are looking for jobs elsewhere to have a better standard of living. Enthusiasm for preservation of nature is not always present.

Villagers around the park need wood to burn fires for cooking, but not many trees are left. So people enter the reserve to cut down trees. Some of them are caught, but regardless of brutal punishment they will again continue to take wood, as food for the family is essential for survival.

Also millions of new trees are being planted, but this is mostly beneficial for goat herds.

In this setting my experience as a person born white skinned was hard. Kenyan people want money.

They lie, break agreements, and want more money, even for services they did not give me.

All military people in the park had plenty of time to ask me questions; even questions like "Are you planning a bomb in Nairobi? Are you practicing Voodoo?". Luckily I did not understand these last 2 questions at that moment because they many times switch the conversation from English to Swahili

whenever it suits them best. So they can say whatever they like without me knowing what they discuss or just told me I should do (most of the time why I should pay).

One day I walked out of the park with my backpack, to the village, but I was brought back nicely by an army truck. I was told I could leave only after payment (I did get nice colorful official papers with many stamps; and I agree that administration of funds should be done very carefully). I had to pay for things I did not use or ordered. And regardless of different agreements made the day before and promises I was told the day before; I had to pay money (after some discussion in which they had to figure out what they could come up with for me to pay for). To be more detailed, I was told before that I could stay 2 weeks as a friend of one of the people working in the park (whom I had met a previous visit to this park) after my already to high payments which I made at arrival at the park; this was agreed with the warden. But the next day the deputy decided that new payments needed to be made, regardless of previous agreement and regardless if I used any of the services in the park.

I do understand that white people need to bring money to the park because these parks have expenses, but I cannot be happy about how the people walking around carrying guns try every way to let you pay money.

Ad 2) Police

When in Kenya, I rented a car for a few days. And one day I drove to the very center of Nairobi.

During a few hours it happened 2 times that a police officer stopped my car.



The first time “I made a wrong turn” (this police officer was actually waiting at the exit of the big shopping mall for an interesting car to come his way!) and the second time “I did not stop before entering a roundabout”.

Both times I argued that I did nothing wrong and had driven just as thousands of other cars did at that spot, but the police man just simply repeated that I really had done something wrong. Then I must show my driver license and he keeps it. He gets in my car and waits on the back seat. Then he will just sit there (or let you drive a few blocks) and tells you that you are in big problems. You feel uncomfortable and want this person out of your car. I had seen this situation in other countries, so I played along and told him I had an urgent appointment and wanted to continue driving, “maybe we could settle this?”; I suggested 30 euro, but the police officer told me 50 euros was better. Then more than half of the time the discussion is about the price of an offence you did not even commit. So you argue about the price I should pay some time. Then I give him the money, or better let the money drop on the floor in front of him next to his feet, so he did “not really take” it from me. And

they even might give you back 10 euro if you actually give them the full 50. I get my driver license back. Then the police officer speaks friendly to you, asks about your plans and gives you some advice about the best direction to drive on and leaves your car.



What happened to me; this day I drove the car into the heart of Nairobi; is not a single incident. These practices happen every day all the time and most police man are involved.

It is called “open corruption” and it is discussed many times in the local newspapers. And examples are given of higher ranking police men are known to spend large amount of money on house with money they could never have gotten from the salary they earn.

Also I find that some Kenyans might lie; as probably all people in any country do. But this combination with other aspect of life in Kenya, can create a corrupt environment. You can never be sure if the police officer next to you only wants your money or is a kind person. Sure this might be an exaggeration, but in total picture these feelings for money and of suspected lying are deeply embedded and strongly rooted in the character and culture in Kenya and this will not change quickly. This situation is strengthened by discrimination and bribes.

