

Kibera: The Friendliest Slum in the World

Welcome in Kibera in Nairobi, the largest slum in East-Africa. When I arrived in Kibera for the first time I immediately felt welcome because of the many children calling 'hello, how are you?' to me and trying to give me a hand.



Despite all the challenges Kibera represents for its habitants, it also has numerous opportunities and hope to offer to them. It is an interesting place to visit for the tourists in Kenya. The guides of Kiberatours, a tour-company specialized in tours in Kibera, are proud to be living in Kibera because of the community-sense, the creativity and the positive attitude of the people and like to show tourists the positive sides of Kibera. To illustrate this Kibera is also often called in the media 'the friendliest slum in the world'.

History of Kibera

The name "Kibera" is derived from a Nubian word meaning "forest" or "jungle." The slum originated in 1918 as a Nubian soldiers' settlement in a forest outside Nairobi, with plots allotted to soldiers as a reward for service in the First World War and earlier wars.

The British colonial government of the time allowed the settlement to grow informally, primarily because of the Nubians' status as former servants of the British crown.

Essentially, since the early 1970s landlords have rented out their property to a significantly greater number of tenants than the laws permit. Since the slum-dwellers find the offered rates to be comparatively affordable, the number of residents in Kibera has increased accordingly despite its unauthorized nature. Its population is put at anything between between 600,000 and 1.2 million.

Geography

Kibera is situated southwest of Nairobi city centre and is framed by a railroad line and the Ngong River. In an area of about 4 square kilometers there are approximately one million people living, one third of Nairobi's population. However the figure might be even higher – there are no precise figures. People say

it is the densest populated area on earth.



Kibera has residents coming from all the major ethnic backgrounds with some areas being specifically dominated by one tribe. This multi-ethnic nature coupled with the tribalism of Kenyan politics has led Kibera to be the site of small ethnic conflicts throughout its near 100 year history.

A railway line passes through Kibera, thus passengers heading for Kisumu can view the slum. This railway has got a lot of history as you will find out during the tour. It's 'the voice' of the people of Kibera in politics.

Kibera is heavily polluted by soot, dust, and other wastes. Open sewage routes, in addition to the common use of flying toilets, also contribute to contamination of the slum with human and animal feces.

Tourists in Kibera, Why?

Like the reason for tourism in all other parts of the world, tourists are coming to Kibera to see the local customs and habits and to meet the local people. Also local businesses and schools can be very interesting to them, because they are so different from the businesses and schools at their home-countries.

For the people living in Kibera, tourism offers an opportunity to make a living (also like in all other parts of the world). Furthermore, for some people in Kibera tourism also offers an opportunity to promote Kibera. They feel that the image of Kibera in the media is too negative and tourism gives them the opportunity to show tourists the other, more positive sides of Kibera.

Like Fredrik Otieno, who is the co-founder and guide of Kiberatours. He also works as a volunteer in the Kibera Youth Club, and likes working in the tourism-business because this way he is able to show his Kibera as a 'city of hope'. He likes the fact that Kibera has a strong and united voice and he likes to tell tourists about his positive experiences in Kibera.



Promoting Kibera

Also the mission of the tour operator is to promote Kibera as a city of hope by organizing tours and showing the mostly unseen part of Kenya to tourists staying in the country. The tours show Kibera as it is. The tourists thus visit different places and see the positive sides of Kibera as well as the ways people try to improve their lives and work hoping for a better future.

Many of the tour operators also provide new hope by (co-)funding the projects and organizations that they visit during their tours.

Since most of them are a community-based non-profit organizations, all profits go to Kibera-based projects to improve the lives of the people and children of Kibera. To illustrate this, Kiberatours supports different projects including an orphanage, a school and a children's youth club. Some of the income is saved to support new small businesses by giving micro-credits. Furthermore, the tours provide employment and additional business for several people in Kibera.

Kibera Tours started organizing tours within Kibera in 2009. The first tours were developed in cooperation with S4L, a Dutch employment project in Kibera. The enthusiastic reviews of the first tourists inspired the guides to go ahead. The spin-off of the tours is very diverse and more than planned for.

Besides the more economical benefits of the tours mentioned above, the tours have also led to more cultural and social contacts between the people from Kenya (Kibera) and European countries. Last Christmas for example there was a charity football match in Kibera between a team from Kibera and a Dutch-Swedish team.

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