The AhaBulb Party Game

STUFF EVERY TRAVELER SHOULD SAY IN SWAHILI

How to play (30 seconds)

1. The reader reads a card and its three answers out loud.
2. Everyone says "One, two, three, Goldilocks!" and holds up 1, 2, or 3 fingers.
3. The reader flips the card and reads the answer and the Why.
4. Everyone who was right takes a point.
5. The reader reads the joke with a straight face. Anyone laughs or groans? The reader takes a point. Nobody got it right? The reader takes a point.
6. Pass the deck left. Most points when the points run out wins.

What you need

These cards and the point tokens on the last two pages. No tokens? Use coins, buttons, pebbles, or marshmallows. 3 to 10 players, ages 8 and up.

Expert rule: Bet It

Before the reader flips the card, you may put one of your points on your answer. Right: take your normal point plus one extra. Wrong: your bet goes back to the pile. That's it.

Printing

Print single-sided, on cardstock if you have it. Cut on the dashed lines. Each card is a 3.5 x 5 inch index card. The answer half is upside down on purpose, so the table can't peek.

Cards 1 to 50 of 56. More cards and the free daily online game at sesk.info. Built 2026-10-14.

LANGUAGES

In the greeting 'Hujambo', what does the root word 'jambo' literally mean?

A News

B A matter or affair

C Peace

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B A matter or affair

WHY Jambo means a matter, thing or affair. Hu-jambo asks 'you have nothing the matter?' and si-jambo answers 'I have nothing the matter', which is a polite way of saying all is well.

STRAIGHT FACE
A Swahili teacher asked what's the matter.
Hujambo, I said. Technically correct!

SESK.INFO #9564

LANGUAGES

Someone greets you with 'Hujambo?' What is the standard Swahili reply?

A Sijambo

B Marahaba

C Hujambo

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Sijambo

WHY Hujambo asks if anything is the matter with you. Sijambo answers that nothing is the matter, so you are fine. Replying 'Hujambo' just asks the same question back.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said 'Hujambo?' to my mirror. It said the same thing right back, so we are both fine.

SESK.INFO #9563

LANGUAGES

How do you ask 'How is your morning?' in Swahili?

A Habari za jioni?

B Habari za asubuhi?

C Habari za usiku?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Habari za asubuhi?

WHY Add a time of day after 'habari za' (news of). Asubuhi is morning, mchana is afternoon, jioni is evening and usiku is night. Answer it with nzuri, just like plain habari.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why is asubuhi the friendliest word? It always starts the day on a good note.

SESK.INFO #9566

LANGUAGES

Someone asks you 'Habari gani?' Which reply means 'fine' or 'good'?

A Hapana

B Kwaheri

C Nzuri

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Nzuri

WHY Habari gani literally asks 'what news?' The usual answers are nzuri, njema, salama or safi, all meaning fine or good. Hapana means no and kwaheri means goodbye.

STRAIGHT FACE
What's the news? Nzuri! No news is good news, and good news is nzuri.

SESK.INFO #9565

LANGUAGES

A young person greets you with 'Mambo?' What is the casual reply?

A Marahaba
B Sijambo
C Poa

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Poa

WHY Mambo or Mambo vipi means 'what's up?' and is street talk between friends your age. Answer poa (cool), safi or freshi. Use it with peers, never with elders, who should get shikamoo.

STRAIGHT FACE
Mambo? Poa! That's the whole conversation, and honestly, it's poa.

SESK.INFO #9570

LANGUAGES

You greet an elder with 'Shikamoo'. What do they normally answer?

A Marahaba
B Sijambo
C Poa

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Marahaba

WHY Shikamoo and marahaba always go together: the younger person says shikamoo, the elder replies marahaba. Sijambo answers hujambo, and poa is street slang for cool.

STRAIGHT FACE
Shikamoo and marahaba are the best pair in Swahili. They never leave each other hanging.

SESK.INFO #9568

LANGUAGES

What does the Swahili greeting 'Shikamoo' literally mean?

A I am delighted
B I touch your feet
C Welcome home

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B I touch your feet

WHY Shikamoo comes from a phrase meaning 'I touch your feet', showing humble respect to an older person. 'I am delighted' is the meaning of the elder's reply, marahaba.

STRAIGHT FACE
Shikamoo means I touch your feet. Good thing it is a greeting and not a handshake.

SESK.INFO #9569

LANGUAGES

Who should you greet with 'Shikamoo'?

A A close friend your own age
B A small child
C An elder or older person

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C An elder or older person

WHY Shikamoo is the respectful greeting a younger person says first to someone older, like a grandparent, teacher or parent figure. It is heard most in Tanzania and on Zanzibar, where greeting etiquette matters a lot.

STRAIGHT FACE
My grandpa loves Swahili lessons. Every time I say shikamoo, he gets a little taller.

SESK.INFO #9567

LANGUAGES

How do you say 'please' in Swahili?

A Asante

B Samahani

C Tafadhali

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Tafadhali

WHY Tafadhali turns a plain command into a polite request: 'Karibu, kaa tafadhali' is 'Welcome, please sit.' Asante means thank you and samahani means excuse me or sorry.

STRAIGHT FACE
Tafadhali has four syllables. That's a lot of please for one little word.

SESK.INFO #9572

LANGUAGES

How do you ask a whole group 'How are you all?' in Swahili?

A Hujambo?

B Hamjambo?

C Sijambo?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Hamjambo?

WHY The jambo greeting changes with how many people you greet. Hujambo is for one person; Hamjambo is for you all. The group replies Hatujambo, meaning we are fine.

STRAIGHT FACE
I greeted a busload of tourists with 'Hamjambo?' and got a 40-person 'Hatujambo!' Best echo ever.

SESK.INFO #9571

LANGUAGES

A shopkeeper calls out 'Karibu!' as you walk past. What are they saying?

A Welcome

B Goodbye

C Excuse me

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Welcome

WHY Karibu means welcome, and you will hear it in shops, homes and hotels. Answer with asante. 'Karibu ndani' means welcome inside, and karibu also answers 'asante', like 'you're welcome'.

STRAIGHT FACE
Every shop in Zanzibar said karibu. I've never felt so welcome while holding so little money.

SESK.INFO #9574

LANGUAGES

Your whole safari crew helped you. Which word thanks all of them at once?

A Kwaherini

B Asanteni

C Karibuni

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Asanteni

WHY Asanteni thanks a group. Kwaherini says goodbye to a group, and karibuni welcomes a group.

STRAIGHT FACE
I thanked the whole tour bus with asanteni. The driver asked for his own asante, so I gave him two.

SESK.INFO #9573

LANGUAGES

How do you say 'My name is...' in Swahili?

A Jina lako ni...

B Ninatoka...

C Jina langu ni...

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Jina langu ni...

WHY Jina is name, langu is my and ni is is. Jina lako ni nani? asks 'What is your name?', and ninatoka means 'I come from'.

STRAIGHT FACE
I introduced myself as 'Jina langu ni Hungry.' The waiter brought me chapati, so it worked.

SESK.INFO #9575

LANGUAGES

How do you ask someone 'What is your name?' (literally 'You are called who?') in Swahili?

A Unaitwa nani?

B Unatoka wapi?

C Uko wapi?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Unaitwa nani?

WHY Unaitwa nani? means 'you are called who?' The answer starts with ninaitwa, I am called. Unatoka wapi? asks where you are from, and uko wapi? asks where you are right now.

STRAIGHT FACE
I asked my GPS 'Unaitwa nani?' It said 'Recalculating.' Strange name.

SESK.INFO #9576

LANGUAGES

A vendor offers you a souvenir you don't want. How do you say 'no' in Swahili?

A Hapana

B Ndiyo

C Asante

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Hapana

WHY Hapana is no. 'Hapana, asante' (no, thank you) is the polite way to turn down a seller. Ndiyo is yes, and asante alone only says thank you.

STRAIGHT FACE
I learned hapana on day one of my trip. My wallet thanked me on day two.

SESK.INFO #9577

LANGUAGES

What is the number 5 in Swahili?

A Tatu

B Tano

C Tisa

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Tano

WHY Count one to ten: moja, mbili, tatu, nne, tano, sita, saba, nane, tisa, kumi. Tatu is 3 and tisa is 9, so tano sits right in the middle.

STRAIGHT FACE
Give me tano! That's a Swahili high five.

SESK.INFO #9578

LANGUAGES

What is the Swahili word for the shillings used to pay in Kenya?

A Dola
B Shilingi
C Pesa

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Shilingi

WHY Kenya's money is the shilling, shilingi in Swahili. Pesa is the general word for money, and dola means dollars. Tanzania and Uganda use shillings too, but each has its own.

STRAIGHT FACE
I tried to pay in compliments, but the shopkeeper only took shilingi.

SESK.INFO #9582

LANGUAGES

A driver says the fare is 'shilingi elfu moja'. How much is that?

A 100 shillings
B 10 shillings
C 1,000 shillings

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C 1,000 shillings

WHY Elfu is thousand, so elfu moja is 1,000 and elfu mbili is 2,000. Mia is 100 and kumi is 10. Prices in shillings often run into the thousands, so elfu is a must-know word.

STRAIGHT FACE
I heard 'elfu' and thought the driver said 'elf'. Turns out the fare was not magical.

SESK.INFO #9581

LANGUAGES

A price tag says 'shilingi mia moja'. What does 'mia' mean?

A Ten
B One hundred
C One thousand

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B One hundred

WHY Mia means hundred, so mia moja is 100 and mia mbili is 200. Kumi is ten and elfu is thousand. Hundreds come up all the time with shilling prices.

STRAIGHT FACE
I gave the vendor mia moja and a smile. He kept the shillings but gave back the smile.

SESK.INFO #9580

LANGUAGES

How do you say 11 in Swahili?

A Kumi na moja
B Kumi na mbili
C Mia moja

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Kumi na moja

WHY Kumi is ten and na means and, so 11 is ten and one. Kumi na mbili is 12, and mia moja is 100.

STRAIGHT FACE
Kumi na moja means ten and one. Swahili math shows its work.

SESK.INFO #9579

LANGUAGES

Your guide says to meet at 'saa nane mchana'. What time on your watch is that?

- A 8:00 pm
- B 8:00 am
- C 2:00 pm

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C 2:00 pm

WHY Nane means eight and mchana means afternoon. Count eight hours from 6 am and you get 2 pm. Travelers who read 'nane' as 8 o'clock show up six hours off.

STRAIGHT FACE
I showed up at 8 for a saa nane meeting. Six hours early is still technically punctual.

SESK.INFO #9586

LANGUAGES

In Swahili time, what is 'saa moja asubuhi' (literally 'hour one, morning')?

- A 1:00 am
- B 7:00 am
- C 6:00 am

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B 7:00 am

WHY Near the equator the sun rises around 6 am all year, so the Swahili day starts counting at sunrise. The first hour, saa moja, is 7 am. Add or subtract six hours to convert.

STRAIGHT FACE
My alarm in Tanzania said saa moja. I was six hours early and right on time.

SESK.INFO #9585

LANGUAGES

While bargaining, what does 'Bei ghali!' mean?

- A The price is too high!
- B That is a fair price.
- C Please give me change.

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A The price is too high!

WHY Ghali means expensive, so bei ghali is a high price. Say it with a smile to start bargaining. A fair price is bei nafuu, and a cheap one is bei rahisi.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said 'bei ghali!' to the souvenir seller. He said 'bei ghali!' to my bargaining skills.

SESK.INFO #9584

LANGUAGES

You want to bargain. How do you say 'Please lower the price' in Swahili?

- A Ongeza kidogo, tafadhali
- B Bei rahisi sana
- C Punguza bei, tafadhali

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Punguza bei, tafadhali

WHY Punguza means reduce or lower, and bei is price. Ongeza kidogo means add a little more, the opposite. Bei rahisi sana means a very cheap price, which no vendor wants to hear from a buyer.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said 'punguza bei' so nicely that the vendor lowered the price and raised my spirits.

SESK.INFO #9583

LANGUAGES

What is the Kenyan Swahili word for a shared minibus taxi?

A Dala dala
B Bodaboda
C Matatu

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Matatu

WHY In Kenya, the vans and minibuses that run set routes around cities are called matatus. In Tanzania the same ride is a dala dala.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the matatu break up with the bus? It needed its own route in life.

SESK.INFO #9588

LANGUAGES

What does the Swahili question word wapi mean?

A When?
B Where?
C Who?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Where?

WHY Wapi is the question word for places. It usually comes at the end, as in Choo kiko wapi? (Where is the toilet?).

STRAIGHT FACE
I asked wapi my map was. It was in the last place I looked, of course.

SESK.INFO #9587

LANGUAGES

What kind of ride is a bodaboda in East Africa?

A Motorcycle or bicycle taxi
B Public bus
C Ferry boat

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Motorcycle or bicycle taxi

WHY Bodaboda means a bicycle taxi or motorcycle taxi, handy for short trips. Agree on the fare before you climb on.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the bodaboda take the long way? It wanted to drum up extra fare.

SESK.INFO #9590

LANGUAGES

You are boarding a dala dala in Tanzania. How do you ask 'What's the fare?'

A Ni mbali kutoka hapa?
B Nauli kiasi gani?
C Kituo cha basi kiko wapi?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Nauli kiasi gani?

WHY Nauli means fare and kiasi gani asks how much. A dala dala is Tanzania's shared minibus; in Kenya it is a matatu.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the dala dala count its passengers twice? It wanted fare play.

SESK.INFO #9589

LANGUAGES

What does the Swahili word chakula mean?

A Food
B Drink
C Money

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Maji

WHY Maji means water. Tafadhali kunywa maji means please drink water, good advice on a hot day.

STRAIGHT FACE
I asked for maji and got a glass of water, which was a liquid experience.

SESK.INFO #9594

LANGUAGES

How do you say water in Swahili?

A Maziwa
B Chai
C Maji

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Food

WHY Chakula is the general word for food. Its plural, vyakula, means foods or kinds of food.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the tourist learn chakula first? Because priorities.

SESK.INFO #9593

LANGUAGES

How do you ask where the toilet is in Swahili?

A Choo ni nini?
B Choo kiko wapi?
C Choo ni wakati gani?

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Choo kiko wapi?

WHY Choo means toilet or restroom. Kiko wapi asks where it is, the same pattern as Kitu cha basi kiko wapi? (Where is the bus station?).

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the tourist practice Choo kiko wapi? Because it was the number one phrase.

SESK.INFO #9592

LANGUAGES

What does the Swahili phrase pole pole mean?

A Quickly
B Stop here
C Slowly

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Slowly

WHY Pole pole means slowly or gently. A well known saying is Pole pole ndio mwendo: slow, slow is the way to go.

STRAIGHT FACE
I learned pole pole on safari, mostly because the tortoise was giving directions.

SESK.INFO #9591

LANGUAGES

What is ugali in East Africa?

A Sweet donut

B Spicy rice

C Stiff maize porridge

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Stiff maize porridge

WHY Ugali is a stiff porridge made from maize (corn) flour and water. It is a staple served with stews, greens or grilled meat.

STRAIGHT FACE
Ugali never panics in the kitchen. It always holds its shape.

SESK.INFO #9596

LANGUAGES

What is nyama choma in East Africa?

A Vegetable stew

B Grilled or roasted meat

C Fried fish

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Grilled or roasted meat

WHY Nyama means meat, and kuchoma means to roast. Lessons often write the full form, nyama ya kuchoma.

STRAIGHT FACE
Nyama choma is so good it should be called nyama cham-a.

SESK.INFO #9595

LANGUAGES

How do you say room in Swahili, as in a hotel room?

A Chumba

B Choo

C Chumvi

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Chumba

WHY Chumba means room. Ninataka chumba means I want a room. Do not mix it up with choo, the toilet.

STRAIGHT FACE
I asked for a chumba with a view. I got a great view of another chumba.

SESK.INFO #9598

LANGUAGES

What does hoteli mean in Swahili?

A Hospital

B Hotel or restaurant

C Post office

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Hotel or restaurant

WHY Hoteli means a hotel, and it is also used for a place to eat. Context tells you whether it has beds or just meals.

STRAIGHT FACE
I booked a hoteli that turned out to be a restaurant. The food was so good I forgot I needed a bed.

SESK.INFO #9597

LANGUAGES

What does soko mean in Swahili?

- A Market
- B School
- C Hospital

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Market

WHY Soko means market, the place to buy fruit, vegetables and everyday goods. Kwenda sokoni means to go to the market.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why did the tomato go to the soko? It wanted to catch up with its peels.

SESK.INFO #9600

LANGUAGES

What is a duka in Swahili?

- A Bus stop
- B Restaurant
- C Shop or store

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Shop or store

WHY Duka means a shop or store. Duka la dawa is a pharmacy and duka la vitabu is a bookstore.

STRAIGHT FACE
I went into a duka for one thing and left with three, which makes it a super duka.

SESK.INFO #9599

LANGUAGES

What does safari mean in Swahili?

- A Journey or trip
- B Lion
- C Camera

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Journey or trip

WHY Safari simply means journey or trip. English borrowed the word for a wildlife tour.

STRAIGHT FACE
I planned a safari to the grocery store, but there were no wildebeest in aisle five.

SESK.INFO #9602

LANGUAGES

A seller asks if you need help. How do you say 'I am just looking' in Swahili?

- A Ninakula tu
- B Ninaangalia tu
- C Ninaogelea tu

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Ninaangalia tu

WHY Kuangalia means to look, ni-na- makes it I am, and tu means just or only. It lets you browse without promising to buy.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said Ninaangalia tu, then I bought a basket, so I was not just looking after all.

SESK.INFO #9601

LANGUAGES

How do you say elephant in Swahili?

A Kiboko
B Chui
C Tembo

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Tembo

WHY Tembo means elephant, and ndovu is another word for the same animal. Kiboko is hippo and chui is leopard.

STRAIGHT FACE
I asked for the Swahili word for elephant and got two good answers. It was a tembo and ndovu situation.

SESK.INFO #9604

LANGUAGES

How do you say lion in Swahili?

A Tembo
B Simba
C Twiga

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Simba

WHY Simba means lion. Tembo is elephant and twiga is giraffe, the other two big names on a safari checklist.

STRAIGHT FACE
Simba is the only lion that can sing on Broadway and still catch dinner.

SESK.INFO #9603

LANGUAGES

How do you say hippopotamus in Swahili?

A Kifaru
B Kiboko
C Chui

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Kiboko

WHY Kiboko means hippopotamus. Kifaru is rhino and chui is leopard, so do not mix them up on safari.

STRAIGHT FACE
Why do you not argue with a kiboko? It always gets the last splash.

SESK.INFO #9606

LANGUAGES

How do you say giraffe in Swahili?

A Twiga
B Tembo
C Simba

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Twiga

WHY Twiga means giraffe. You will hear it often on safari in Kenya and Tanzania.

STRAIGHT FACE
The giraffe won the spelling bee because twiga starts with T, for tall.

SESK.INFO #9605

LANGUAGES

How do you say hospital in Swahili?

A Daktari
B Duka
C Hospitali

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Kwaheri

WHY Kwaheri is the standard goodbye to one person. Use kwaherini for a group.

STRAIGHT FACE
I practiced kwaheri so much that my mirror started waving back.

SESK.INFO #9610

LANGUAGES

How do you say goodbye to one person in Swahili?

A Kwaheri
B Kwaherini
C Karibu

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C Hospitali

WHY Hospitali means hospital. Nitaenda hospitalini means I will go to the hospital.

STRAIGHT FACE
I went to the duka instead of the hospitali and asked for a bandage. They sold me a chapati.

SESK.INFO #9608

LANGUAGES

How do you say doctor in Swahili?

A Polisi
B Daktari
C Mwalimu

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Pole

WHY Pole is used to say sorry or I feel for you after a small mishap, an illness or a tiring day. Pole sana means very sorry.

STRAIGHT FACE
I dropped my chapati and someone said pole. The chapati did not get up.

SESK.INFO #9609

LANGUAGES

When someone trips or drops something, which Swahili word shows sympathy?

A Haraka
B Pole
C Sawa

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

B Daktari

WHY Daktari is the everyday word for a medical doctor. Polisi is police and mwalimu is teacher.

STRAIGHT FACE
I told the daktari I felt like a deck of cards. He said he would deal with me later.

SESK.INFO #9607

LANGUAGES

How do you say 'Thank you very much' in Swahili?

A Asante sana

B Karibu sana

C Pole sana

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

A Asante sana

WHY Asante is thank you, and adding sana makes it 'very much'. Karibu sana means you are very welcome, and pole sana means I am very sorry for your trouble.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said asante sana so many times on safari that the lions started saying karibu.

SESK.INFO #10650

LANGUAGES

What does tutaonana mean in Swahili?

A Good morning

B Welcome

C See you later

FLIP FOR THE ANSWER

C See you later

WHY Tutaonana means we will see each other, a friendly see you later. Kwaheri, tutaonana baadaye means goodbye, see you later.

STRAIGHT FACE
I said tutaonana to my reflection and now it will not leave me alone.

SESK.INFO #9611

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