



Welcome to Kenya

"I felt proud to know my research would be vital in ensuring that these beautiful, gentle creatures do not face extinction. Swimming with the biggest fish in the ocean took my breath away!"

Kenya is situated in the East of Africa and is home to some of the world's most spectacular wildlife. Containing a wide range of impressive scenery, from the sun-baked savannah to snow-capped mountain peaks, stunning coastlines, and vast coral reefs, this country has it all. You can find Africa's Big Five here in abundance: lion, elephant, buffalo, rhino, and leopard, and game parks abound. If you explore the coral reefs you may be lucky enough to spot Olive Ridley or leatherback turtles and many other delightful animals such as dolphins, whales and, of course, the mighty whale shark. Since independence, Kenya has maintained remarkable stability despite changes in its political system and crises in neighbouring countries. Particularly since the re-emergence of multiparty democracy, Kenyans have enjoyed an increased degree of freedom.

Know your History

Kenyan history began about 2000 years BC, when people from the north of Africa moved into the area. Arab traders began frequenting the Kenya coast around the 1st century AD and by the 8th century, Arab and Persian settlements had sprouted all along the coast.

Kenya was exploited immensely during the time of the slave trade, initially by the Muslim world and later on from Zanzibar and it's believed that up to 90% of the Kenyan population was enslaved. The Ameru tribe of Kenya are said to originate from slaves who escaped from Arab lands some time around the year 1700.

European settlement

The first Europeans to explore Kenya were the Portuguese in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Portuguese gained control of the coastal regions and controlled trade across the Indian Ocean through piracy and were able to demand high tariffs on items transported across the ocean. The Omani Arabs were the only real threat to Portuguese control and eventually drove them off the Kenyan Coast by 1730.

The Arabs created clove plantations and intensified the slave trade. Arab governance of all the major ports along the East African coast continued until British interests, aimed particularly at ending the slave trade and creation of a wage labour system, began to put pressure on Omani rule. By the late 19th Century, the slave trade on the open seas had been completely outlawed. The Omani Arab presence continued in Zanzibar and Pemba until the 1964 revolution, although their presence in Kenya had started to be checked by German and British seizure of key ports and the creation of crucial trade alliances with influential local leaders from as early as the 1880s. However, the Omani

Arab legacy in East Africa can still be found in their numerous descendants along the coast. They can directly trace ancestry to Oman and are typically the wealthiest and most politically influential members of the Kenyan coastal community.

The Kenya-Uganda railway

Colonial history begins in 1885 with the establishment of a German protectorate over the coastal possessions of the sultan of Zanzibar and the arrival of the British East Africa Company in 1888. In 1890, Germany handed over their coastal holdings to British rule, leaving Kenya in the hands of the British Empire.

The building of the Kenya-Uganda railway by the British was opposed by several tribes, most notably the Nandi between 1895 and 1905, who were the first tribe to be placed in a reserve to prevent their disruption of the railway. It was during the building of this railway that several Indian railway workers and African labourers were attacked by two lions who were known as the Tsavo Maneaters. The railway allowed further colonisation of Kenya's interior.

20th Century

During the early part of the 20th century, the interior central highlands were settled by British and other European farmers, who became wealthy farming coffee and tea and were afforded substantial political powers because of their effects on the economy. The area was already home to over a million members of the Kikuyu tribe, most of whom had no land claims in European terms and lived as itinerant farmers. To protect their own interests, the settlers banned the growing of coffee and introduced a hut tax and the landless were granted less and less land in exchange for their labour. A massive exodus to the cities ensued as people's ability to earn a living from the land dwindled.

The Mau Mau rebellion

From October 1952 to December 1959, the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule caused Kenya to announce a state of emergency. The governor requested and obtained British and African troops, including the King's African Rifles. In January 1953, Major General Hinde was appointed as director of counter insurgency operations. The situation did not improve as a result of a lack of intelligence, with the result that in May 1953 General Sir George Erskine was appointed commander-in-chief of the colony's armed forces, with the personal backing of Winston Churchill. The capture of Waruhiu Itote, one of the key leaders of the rebellion, on 15th January 1954 and his subsequent interrogation led to a better understanding of the Mau Mau command structure.

"Operation Anvil" opened on 24th April 1954 after weeks of planning by the army and with the approval of the War Council. The operation effectively placed Nairobi under military siege and the occupants were screened and Mau Mau supporters moved to detention camps. May 1953 also saw the Home Guard officially recognised as a branch of the Security Forces. The Home Guard formed the core of the government's anti-Mau Mau strategy, as it was composed of loyalist Africans as opposed to foreign forces such as the British Army and King's African Rifles. By the end of the emergency the Home Guard had killed no fewer than 4,686 Mau Mau, amounting to 42% of the total number of insurgents. The capture in Nyeri of rebel leader, Dedan Kimathi, on 21st October 1956 signified the ultimate defeat of the Mau Mau and essentially ended the military offensive.

Elections

The first direct elections for Africans to the Legislative Council took place in 1957. Despite British hopes of handing power to "moderate" African rivals, it was the Kenya African National Union (KANU) of Jomo Kenyatta that formed a government shortly before Kenya became independent on 12th December 1963. In the same year the Kenyan army fought against Somali Shiftas, determined to see the Northern Frontier District (NFD, now known as the North Eastern Province) join with the Republic of Somalia. The Shiftas inflicted heavy casualties on the Kenyan armed forces but were defeated in 1967. Kenya, fearing an invasion from militarily stronger Somalia, signed a defence pact with Ethiopia in 1969, which is still intact. Suffering from droughts and floods, NFD is the least developed region in Kenya, but throughout the 1990s wealthy Somali businessmen have transformed Eastleigh from a residential community to the commercial centre of Eastlands and their presence is also increasingly felt in much of Nairobi.

In 1963, Kenyatta became Kenya's first president. At Kenyatta's death in 1978, Daniel arap Moi became President. Daniel arap Moi retained the presidency, being unopposed, in elections held in 1979, 1983 and 1988, all of which were held under the single party constitution.

Political strife

The 1983 elections were held a year early and were the direct result of an abortive military coup attempt on 1st August 1982. The abortive coup was masterminded by a lowly ranking airforce serviceman, Senior Private Hezekiah Ochuka, and was staged mainly by enlisted men in the airforce. The attempt was quickly suppressed by loyalist forces led by the army, the General Service Unit, a paramilitary wing of the police, and later the regular police, but not without civilian casualties. This event led to the disbanding of the entire airforce and a large number of its former members were either dismissed or court martialled.

The election held in 1988 saw the advent of the mlolongo (queuing) system, under which voters were supposed to line up behind their favoured candidates instead of there being a secret ballot. This was seen as the climax of a very undemocratic regime and led to widespread campaigning for constitutional reform. Several contentious clauses, including the one allowing only one political party, were changed in the following years.

In democratic, multiparty elections in 1992 and 1997, Daniel arap Moi won reelection. In 2002, Moi was constitutionally barred from running and Mwai Kibaki, running for the opposition coalition "National Rainbow Coalition", was elected president. The elections, judged free and fair by local and international observers, marked a turning point in Kenya's democratic evolution.

The 2007 election crisis

The 2007 elections sparked outrage from opposition party Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) when their candidate Raila Odinga was heavily defeated by Kibaki, when he had initially been winning. Odinga announced himself as the "people's president" and demanded a recount. When the protests escalated into violence, former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan stepped in and brokered a peaceful solution. In February 2008, Kibaki and Odinga signed an agreement making Odinga Kenya's prime minister and equal in power. This coalition government will serve until the end of the term or until either party steps away.

Money Talks

Kenya's market-based economy, with many state-owned infrastructure enterprises and liberalised external trade system, depends heavily on rain-fed agriculture and tourism, leaving it vulnerable to

frequent cycles of boom and bust. Nearly 75% of the country's 38 million people are employed in the agricultural sector, but half of the sector's output still remains subsistence production.

Rapid population growth and declining economic performance over the past few decades has resulted in a reduced income for much of the population, increased poverty countrywide and worsening unemployment levels. Kenya's economic performance is heavily influenced by and dependent on agricultural exports, which are vulnerable to world price fluctuations and vulnerable to population growth outstripping economic growth, prolonged drought, meaning power rationing, deteriorating infrastructure and limited opportunities to develop skills as a result of extreme discrepancies in wealth. Poor governance and corruption has made it expensive to do business in Kenya – a country that ranks among the world's six most corrupt countries. 23% of Kenyans live on less than US\$1 per day, yet pay on average around 16 bribes a month. Two thirds of encounters with public officials end in bribery, costing Kenya roughly US\$1 billion a year. On top of this, Kenya is one of the areas of highest concern, with a huge proportion of the population suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Under the Kibaki government, prospects are brightening, with policy aims including budgetary reform and debt restraint. Despite a negative feeling towards the government at the beginning, the economy has seen broad-based expansion, with strong performances in tourism and telecommunications and improved post-drought results in agriculture, particularly the essential tea sector.

Exports

Kenya's major exports include tea and coffee and petroleum. However, corruption and poverty means that much of Kenya's produce stays within the country, or is illegally traded.

Money

The local currency is the Kenya shilling (KES). ATM machines are present in most major towns, although withdrawals may have a small surplus charge which is likely to be similar to traveller's cheque commission rates. Credit and debit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted for cash withdrawals at most banks but rarely for general payments. However a credit card will come in useful in the event of an emergency.

Get Culture Savvy

Kenya is a diverse country, with many different cultures represented. Notable cultures include the Swahili on the coast, pastoralist communities in the north, and several different communities in the central and western regions. Today, the Maasai culture is well known, as a result of its heavy exposure from tourism, although it is only a minor tribe. The Maasai are known for the jewellery which adorns their upper bodies.

Tribes

There are about 42 different tribes in Kenya – each with its own unique culture but the majority with intertwining cultural practices brought about by the close resemblance in the languages, the similar environment and the physical proximity of the tribes. The tribes are grouped into larger sub-groups which are based on their cultural and linguistic similarities.

National identity

The Maasai culture owes its high profile to the tourist industry, which has exploited the tribe largely for commercial purposes.

The historical and current politics of division practised first by the colonisers and then by subsequent community leaders has led to a situation where Kenyans themselves barely know their own culture, let alone that of their neighbours. The colonial administration in partnership with missionary activities and formal education wiped out most cultural practices, leaving a gap that was filled by Western cultural attitudes and identification, especially by the youth.

Clothing

The recent attempts at coming up with a national dress testifies to the difficult nature of Kenyans' cultural identity. The top-down formula employed rendered the entire process irrelevant, as it only involved the urban areas and hence the better educated and wealthier segments of society. The result was a narrow set of pre-approved national dresses and outfits with questionable aesthetic appeal to the majority of Kenyans.

Literature

Kenyan literature has reached international acclaim over the years with "Weep Not, Child" by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Giller Prize winner "The In-Between World of Vikram Lall" by M.G. Vassanji. Literary journal Kwani? continues to publish contemporary Kenyan literature.

Music

Kenya boasts one of the most diverse ranges of music forms in Africa and is home to a number of music colleges and schools, which is perhaps why Western classical music is becoming increasingly popular too. The country's having over 40 regional languages has led to a huge range of folk music, which is often found shoulder to shoulder with Zanzibaran taarab music, hip hop, reggae, soul, soukous, rock and roll, funk and Europop. The following comprise some forms of traditional music.

Akamba

The Akamba are well known for their percussion music and it is divided into groups according to age. For example, Kilumi is a dance for mainly elderly women and men, Mbeni is confined to young and agile girls and boys and Kyaa is for old men and women. In the Kilumi, the typically female drummer is also the lead singer and she sits down to play a drum mukanda, made with goatskin on one end and open the other to act as a resonator.

Bajuni

Primarily from the Lamu islands, Mombasa or Kilifi, it is the women's work song "Mashindano Ni Matezo" that the Bajuni are most famous for.

Borana

Borana music is influenced by its exponents' proximity to the Ethiopian border, reflecting Ethiopian and Somali traditions. The Borana people are best known for their use of the chamonge guitar – a cooking pot strung with metal wires.

Chuka

The Chuka, who live near Mount Kenya, are best known for polyrhythmic percussion music.

Gusii

This is one of the most distinctive forms of folk music in Kenya. The Gusii use a lute-like instrument called the obokano, as well as the ground bow. The ground bow is made by pegging animal skin over a large hole in the ground in which a small hole is cut and a single string placed across it.

Kikuyu

The Kikuyu live near the capital and are one of the largest communities in Kenya. Traditional songs and dances are still performed by local women at the Ruiki cultural centre, including music for initiations, courting, weddings, hunting and working.

Luhya

The Luhya play Bantu-style drums, especially sukuti drums.

Luo

For the Luo, music is the most widely practiced art, but it was not made for its own sake. All music and dances were functional, whether for ceremonial, religious, political or incidental purposes. Funerals were marked with tero buru, beer parties with dudu and ohangla dance, wrestling matches with ramogi and music was even used to keep people up at night. There were work songs and the nyawawa was used to banish evil spirits. Luo music, therefore, has become very distinct, with its own melodies, rhythms and mode of presentation. Melodies are very lyrical and the rhythms are characterised by syncopation and acrusic beginnings. This unique style and sound includes pitches and specific moments in songs – chanting, ululations, and solo-response styles. Traditional costumes were used to enhance the movement of the dance. In the 1950s, benga music began to emerge as the Luo tried to modernise their tribal rhythms and pair them with Western instruments. Benga is popular with other tribes, and is no longer considered purely to be a Luo style.

Maasai

Maasai music was strictly polyphonic vocal music, as instruments were considered to cumbersome for the pastoralist living. Most songs are sung in a call and response form called namba and the performances are often competitive in nature and divided between age and gender.

Mijikenda

Mijikenda literally means "the nine tribes" and is found on the coast of Tanzania, Kenya and southern Somalia. The vibrant folk tradition still remains somewhat untouched by the influence of Christian missionaries and is mostly percussion based.

Samburu

Related to the Maasai, the Samburu play almost no instruments, other than simple pipes and a form of guitar.

Taraab

Taraab music often mimics Bollywood music tracks in sound and is influenced by a mix of Arabic, Indian and Mijikenda music. The Taraab are found in the coastal regions of Kenya, Zanzibar, Pemba and the islands off East Africa.

Turkana

The remoteness of the Turkana people means they have retained most of their ancient traditions – music is call and response and almost entirely vocal. They also play a horn made from the Kudu Antelope.

Holidays

1st January New Year's Day
 Varies (Friday before Easter) Good Friday
 Varies (Monday after Easter) Easter Monday
 1st May Labour Day
 1st June Madaraka Day
 1st Shawwal (Islamic calendar) Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)
 10th October Moi Day
 20th October Kenyatta Day
 10th Dhul Hijja (Islamic calendar) Eid al Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice)
 12th December Independence Day
 25th December Christmas Day
 26th December Boxing Day

Learn the Lingo

English is the official language while Kiswahili is the national language. That means that government and education are in English, while everything else tends to be in Swahili. And, in actuality, most of government is in Swahili also. In addition to these two languages, most of the people in Kenya also speak what they would call their mother tongue – the language that they grew up speaking. While an increasing number of city dwellers are growing up speaking English, most rural people still speak their tribal language when they go home.

ENGLISH	KISWAHILI	ENGLISH	KISWAHILI
Greetings		Numbers	
Hello!	Jambo!	1	moja
How are you?	Habari?	2	mbili
Fine / Okay	Sawa sawa	3	tatu
Pleased to meet you	Nafurahi kukuona / Nimefurahi kukutana nawe	4	nne
Good morning	Habari ya asubuhi	5	tano
Good afternoon	Habari ya mchana	6	sita
Good evening	Habari ya jioni	7	saba
Goodnight	Usiku mwema / Lala salama (sleep well)	8	nane
Goodbye	Kwaheri	9	tisa

10	kumi		
About Yourself		20	ishirini
What's your name?	Jina lako ni nani?	50	hamsini
My name is...	Jina langu ni...	100	mia (moja)
Where are you from?	Unatoka wapi?	1000	elfu (moja)
I am from...	Natoka...	1 million	milioni (moja)
I don't understand	Sielewi		
Do you speak English?	Unazungumza kiingereza?		
Please speak more slowly	Tafadhali sema polepole		
How do you say... in Swahili?	Unasemaje ... kwa Kiswahili?		
General Phrases		Animals	
How much is this?	Hii ni bei gani?	Whale shark	Papa shillingi
Excuse me (to get past)	Samahani nipishe	Lion	Simba
Excuse me (to get attention or say sorry)	Samahani	Elephant	Tembo
Yes	Ndiyo	Buffalo	Nyati
No	Hapana	Rhino	Kifaro
(very) Good	Mzuri (sana)	Leopard	Chui
Where	Wapi	Giraffe	Twiga
Please	Tafadali	Hippo	Kiboko
Thank you (very much)	Asante (sana)	Antelope	Swala
Water	Maji	Bird	Ndegi

There are three major unifying languages: the Bantu-speaking people of the coastal region, the central highlands and the Western Kenya Region; the Nilotes, who are mainly found in the Rift Valley and the Lake Victoria Region; and the Cushites, who are mainly composed of pastoralists and nomads in the drier north-eastern part of the country. These sub-groups span a vast area of not just Kenya, but the east, central and southern African region as a whole.

Lay of the Land

The geography of Kenya is diverse. This East African country has a coastline on the Indian Ocean, large plains and numerous hills. Central and western Kenya is typified by the Great Rift Valley. The three highest mountains of Africa are located in Kenya or its vicinity, being Mount Kenya, Mount Elgon and Mount Kilimanjaro. The Kakamega Forest in western Kenya is a relic of an East African rainforest, but much larger is Mau Forest, the largest forest complex in East Africa.

Kenya lies astride the equator on the eastern coast of Africa and shares borders with Ethiopia and Sudan in the north, Somalia in the east, Tanzania in the southwest and Uganda in the west. In addition, Kenya is bordered by the Indian Ocean on the southeast and Lake Victoria to the west.

The low-lying, fertile coastal region, fringed with coral reefs and islands, is backed by a gradually

rising coastal plain, a dry region covered with savannah and thorn bush. 483 km inland, the plain gives way to a high plateau in the southwest, which is home to around 85% of Kenya's population. This high plateau, known as the Kenya Highlands, rises in places to dramatic heights of over 3,000 m. Here you will find mountains such as Mount Kenya (5,200 m), Mount Elgon and the Aberdare Ranger.

The Great Rift Valley, which can be traced from Syria, through the Red Sea and Eastern Africa, to Mozambique, bisects Kenya's plateau from north to south. The northern part of the valley is broad and shallow, embracing Lake Turkana, while further south it narrows and deepens, walled by towering escarpments which rise between 600 m and 900 m high.

What's the Weather like?

Although Kenya lies across the equator, annual rainfall over most of the country is surprisingly low and rather variable from year to year. Temperatures over much of Kenya are subtropical or temperate and are similar to those in summer in France or southern Britain rather than those elsewhere in equatorial Africa.

Only the coastal lowlands experience the constant high temperatures and humidity normally associated with equatorial latitudes. Even here they are less oppressive than one might expect, because of the regular daytime sea breezes and longer hours of sunshine.

It is not surprising that with such a favourable climate – sunny, only moderately wet, and not too hot – and a great variety of scenery, wild life, game parks and good communications, Kenya has many attractions for the tourist.

The variety of relief and the range of altitude in Kenya produce a considerable number of distinctive local climates and weather patterns, although it is often divided into four main regions. There is a double rainy season between March and May and between November and December, with two intervening dry seasons. There is a small difference in temperature from month to month through the year. In Nairobi, for instance, it ranges from 9 to 29°C in January and 7 to 26°C in July).

Biodiversity

Rich in wildlife, a considerable portion of the country is home to wildlife habitat, including the well known Maasai Mara reserve in the southwest. Named after the Maasai tribespeople who are indigenous to the area, and the Mara River which runs through the centre, it is famous for an exceptional population of game, and the annual migration of the wildebeest in September and October, a migration so immense that it has been named the Great Migration. Although threatened by high population growth and its side effects, the environment of Kenya remains home to a vast array of wonderful species, such as blue wildebeest, lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino and elephant, which are found in national parks and game reserves throughout Kenya.

Good Books

Guidebooks

- Kenya, 6th Edition. Tom Parkinson & Matt Phillips. Lonely Planet, 2006. ISBN 9781740597432
- The Rough Guide to Kenya, 8th Edition. Richard Trillo. Rough Guides, 2006. ISBN

9781843536512

- Kenya & Tanzania: the Insider's Guide. Ian Michler. Struik Publishers, 2006. ISBN 9781770070110
- Africa (Lonely Planet Healthy Travel). Isabelle Young. Lonely Planet, 2000. ISBN 9781864500509
- Swahili (Lonely Planet Phrasebook) 3rd Edition. Martin Benjamin. Lonely Planet, 2005. ISBN 9781864502824

Wildlife

- Diving with Sharks and Other Adventure Dives. Jack Jackson. New Holland Publishers Ltd., 2005. ISBN 9780762726684
- Top Dive Sites of the World, 2nd Edition. Jack Jackson. New Holland Publishers Ltd., 2003. ISBN 9781843304579
- Dive Atlas of the World: An Illustrated Reference to the Best Sites. Jack Jackson. New Holland Publishers Ltd., 2003. ISBN 9781843303640
- Scuba Diver's Travel Companion (Falcon Guide). Jeremy Agnew. Globe Pequet Press, 2003. ISBN 9780762726684
- Wildlife of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (Traveller's Guide). David Hosking & Martin Withers. Collins, 2007. ISBN 9780007248193

Fiction / Travel writing

- Bill Bryson's African Diary. Bill Bryson. Doubleday, 2002. ISBN 9780385605144
- Adventures in Africa. Gianni Celati. University of Chicago, 2000. ISBN 9780226099552
- The White Masai. Corinne Hofmann. Arcadia Books, 2006. ISBN 9781905147083
- Jungle Child. Sabine Keugler. Virago Press, 2005. ISBN 9781844082612
- Jambo Mama. Melinda Atwood. Cypress House, 2000. ISBN 9781879384385

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