

# History

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF HUMANITY

Kenya is not just old, it's ancient, and the story of humanity may even have started here, way back through the murky mists of evolution and time. Thanks to some inquisitive poking around by the Leakey family around Lake Turkana, in the north of the country, and at Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania), the Great Rift Valley (p229) has been established as the 'cradle of humanity'. The Leakeys' discoveries of several hominid skulls, one of which is estimated to be 2½ million years old, radically altered the accepted theories on the origin of humans.

Before the East African digs, the generally accepted theory was that there were two species of proto-humans: the 'robust' hominids and the 'gracile' hominids, which eventually gave rise to modern humans. However, the Leakey discoveries suggested that there was a third species, *Homo habilis* (able man), and that it was this group that gave rise to modern humans.

Since then, the human family tree has gained several more branches, with the discovery of new species in central Africa, including *Kenyanthropus platyops* (flat-faced man), discovered in 2002 at Lake Turkana by one of the Leakey clan. Another recent discovery was of bones belonging to a six-million-year-old hominid, nicknamed 'Millennium Man', a strong contender for our oldest ancestor. Prehistory buffs can soak up the atmosphere and check out the myriad of animal fossils left on site at the Sibiloi National Park (p338).

**'Prehistory buffs can soak up the atmosphere and check out the myriad of animal fossils left on site at the Sibiloi National Park'**

## EARLY SETTLEMENT

Over the millennia, this part of East Africa has been populated by peoples from all over the continent, from the Galla of northern Somalia to the San (formerly Bushmen) and Khoikhoi (formerly Hottentots) of South Africa. The first to arrive were the tall, nomadic, Cushitic-speaking people from Ethiopia, who began to move south around 2000 BC, basing themselves first at Lake Turkana and moving south as their livestock stripped the vegetation. A second group of pastoralists, the Eastern Cushitics, followed in around 1000 BC and occupied much of central Kenya.

The ancestors of most of the tribes that occupy Kenya today arrived from all over Africa from around AD 1000. The first immigrants were Bantu-speaking people from West Africa (who gave rise to the Gusii, Kikuyu, Akamba and Meru tribes, among others), occupying much of southern and western Kenya by the end of the 15th century. The Nilotic speakers, who gave rise to the Maasai, Luo, Samburu and Turkana tribes, came from the Nile valley in southern Sudan at the end of the 16th century. Although these were the biggest migrations, tribes continued to move into and out of Kenya right up to the beginning of the 20th century.

## ARAB & PERSIAN TRADERS

While tribal migrations were going on in the interior, a non-African force was massing on the coast. Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia

**TIMELINE** 2,500,000 BC

Early hominids inhabit the Rift Valley

2000 BC

The first Cushitic tribes arrive in Kenya

(now Iran) began to visit the coast from the 8th century AD onwards, as part of their annual trade migration around the Indian Ocean. Many set up trading posts along the seaboard, intermarrying with Africans and creating the culture that later became known as Swahili, which is still a distinct influence on the coast today. Slaves and ivory were Africa's primary commodity, but the Arab dhows also exported tortoiseshell, rhino horn and gold.

Before long there were Arab-Swahili city-states all along the coast from Somalia to Mozambique, acting as entrepôts for the trans-Indian Ocean trade; the remains of many of these settlements can be seen on the coast, most notably at Gede (p202). The communities were almost continually at war with each other for supremacy in the region, but these internecine squabbles were generally short-lived.

Arab-Swahili domination on the coast received its first serious challenge with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century.

## PORTUGUESE INVADERS

While the Spanish crown was busy backing expeditions to the Americas, the Portuguese were determined to break the Ottoman Turks' grip on trade with the Far East, particularly their dominance in the lucrative spice market. In 1498 Vasco da Gama stopped in at what is now Malindi on his way to India, scouting out the territory and leaving the navigational pillar that can still be seen on the coast (p207). In 1505, Dom Francisco de Almeida's armada staged a full-scale invasion, and they made short work of the city-states of Sofala, Kilwa (in Tanzania) and Mombasa before sailing on to India. The Portuguese then returned to sack Mombasa again in 1528.

Although they came to dominate the coast, the Portuguese experiment was never a great success. Collecting 'tributes' from the Swahili usually required brute force and all attempts to convert the Muslims to Catholicism were a dismal failure. Some states underwent an annual conversion when the Portuguese ships arrived, reverting to Islam as soon as the ships departed for Goa.

In 1593 the Portuguese constructed Fort Jesus at Mombasa to give them a permanent presence in the region, but the fort changed hands dozens of times in rebellions throughout the 17th century. In response, the Portuguese mounted regular punitive expeditions, which normally involved sailing up the coast and bombarding the least-defended city-state with heavy artillery.

Although the Portuguese are widely blamed for the decline of the Arab-Swahili states from the 17th century onwards, evidence from the abandoned cities along the coast suggests that ultimately it was a combination of failing water supplies, disease and attacks by African tribes that eventually put paid to the Swahili hegemony.

The Portuguese grip on the East African coast was always tenuous and the end came in 1698, when Mombasa fell to Baluchi Arabs from Oman after a 33-month siege. A few token attempts were made to regain power, but by 1729 the Portuguese had left the Kenyan coast for good. Today the mighty Fort Jesus (p157) itself is one of the few surviving signs of their presence.

## OMANI DYNASTIES

The Omani Arabs remained in control of the East African coast until the arrival of the British and Germans in the late 19th century (and, nominally, right up until independence in 1963), and established their main base on Zanzibar, off the Tanzanian coast. Although they shared the same faith, the Swahili regarded them as just as much of a colonising force as the Portuguese, and there were numerous rebellions.

Eventually, Sultan Seyyid Said of Oman decided enough was enough and dispatched the Omani navy to bring the states of Mombasa, Paté and Pema into line in 1822. As part of his East African empire, the sultan established huge clove plantations on Zanzibar, and the spice business soon became so profitable that he moved his entire court there in 1832. Simultaneously, the slave trade went into overdrive to supply workers for the spice plantations and the French coffee and sugar plantations on Mauritius and Réunion.

Although native Africans stood little chance against the firearms of the Arabs, a handful of tribes waged a resistance war against the slavers. The leaders of these tribes included Manwa Sera, who besieged the Swahili stronghold of Kaze in modern-day Tanzania in the 1860s, and chief Mirambo, who accumulated a massive arsenal of guns and caused so much trouble at Kaze during the 1870s that, at one point, the sultan ceded all claim to the area.

## BRITISH EAST AFRICA

While this was happening, Victorian public opinion thousands of miles away in Britain was calling for an end to the East African slave trade. Dr Livingstone's account of the massacre of 400 Bagenya people by slavers at Nyangwe, near Lake Tanganyika, finally forced the British government to play its hand. By using a mixture of knife-edge diplomacy and strong-arm tactics, Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar was forced to sign a treaty banning the slave trade in 1873.

With German expansion into Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania), an agreement was reached between the British and the Germans, granting the sultan a 16km-wide strip of the Kenyan coastline, which would remain under a British Protectorate. The treaty remained in place right up until independence, when the last Sultan of Zanzibar ceded the territory to the new government.

Although control of the coast was largely sewn up, the interior, especially the Rift Valley and the Aberdare highlands, was largely impregnable to outsiders due to the fearsome Maasai and other warlike tribes. A few explorers braved the Maasai heartland – including Gustav Fischer, a German whose party was virtually annihilated at Hell's Gate (p237) in 1882 – but most attempts to enter the Rift Valley were doomed to failure.

The united front of the Maasai began to crack in the late 19th century, following a brutal civil war between the Ilmaasai and Iloikop groups and the simultaneous arrival of rinderpest (a cattle disease), cholera, smallpox and famine. Because of this, the British were able to negotiate a treaty with Olonana (known today as Lenana), the *laibon* (chief or spiritual leader) of the Maasai, allowing them to march the Mombasa–Uganda railway line right through the heart of the Maasai grazing lands. On one

By 1800, more than 8000 slaves were passing through the Swahili slave markets every year. Perhaps four times as many died before ever reaching the markets.

The Portuguese had every reason to target the spice trade – weight for weight, spices were more valuable than gold in Europe at the time.

800

Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia begin to visit the coast

1000

Bantu peoples arrive from West Africa

1498

The first Portuguese explorers reach Malindi

1505

Dom Francisco de Almeida's armada invades Kenya

level, the Maasai were just accepting the inevitable – their end-of-the-world myth spoke of an ‘iron snake’ that would one day crawl across their land. Ironically, this once-crucial line now has just two passenger services (p384), a far cry from its conception as the pride of East Africa.

## WHITE SETTLEMENT

With the completion of the railway, the headquarters of the colonial administration was moved from Mombasa to the cooler small settlement of Nairobi, and white settlers began to occupy the fertile highlands north of Nairobi. Their interests clashed with those of the Maasai, prompting the colonial authorities to pressure Olonana into restricting the Maasai to two reserves, one on either side of the new railway. However, the white settlers soon wanted the northern reserve as well and, in 1910 and 1911, the Maasai who lived there were forced to trek south, despite Olonana’s objections.

Although the Maasai suffered the worst annexations of land, the Kikuyu, a Bantu tribe from the highlands around Mt Kenya and the Aberdares, came to nurse a particular grievance about their alienation from the land. Meanwhile, tribes who lived on poor agricultural land, such as the Luo and Luyha and the tribes of the northeast, were hardly affected at all by British settlement.

White settlement in the early years of the 20th century was led by Lord Delamere, a pugnacious gentleman farmer from Cheshire, England. Since he was not familiar with the land, its pests and its wildlife, his first ventures were disastrous. By 1912, however, Delamere and his followers had shifted to the highlands near Nairobi and established mixed agricultural farms, turning a profit for the colony for the first time and spurring other Europeans to follow suit. These first outposts, Naivasha (p233) and the Ngong Hills (p130), are still heavily white-settled areas today.

The colonial process was interrupted by WWI, when two thirds of the 3000 white settlers in Kenya formed impromptu cavalry units and went off in search of Germans in neighbouring Tanganyika. It resumed after the war, under a scheme where veterans of the European campaign were offered subsidised land in the highlands around Nairobi. The net effect was a huge upsurge in the white Kenyan population, from 9000 in 1920 to 80,000 in the 1950s.

## KENYAN NATIONALISM

Meanwhile, the sense of grievance among Africans was growing stronger. The Kikuyu people spearheaded the movement to reclaim Kenya, led from the 1930s by Johnstone Kamau, later known as Jomo Kenyatta, who went on to become Kenya’s first president. Kenyatta initially joined the East Africa Association, which was campaigning for land reform, better wages, education and medical facilities for Africans. Although it was official British policy to favour African interests over those of the settlers in the event of conflicts, it was hard for these interests to be heard in the whites-only legislative council. Kenyatta soon joined the more outspoken Kikuyu Central Association, which was subsequently banned for campaigning against white rule.

In 1929, with money supplied by Indian communists, Kenyatta sailed for London to plead the Kikuyu case with the British colonial secretary

who, predictably, declined his invitation to a meeting. While in London, Kenyatta hooked up with a group called the League Against Imperialism, which took him to Moscow and Berlin, back to Nairobi and then back to London, where he stayed for the next 15 years. During this time, he perfected his oratory on the crowds in Trafalgar Square, studied revolutionary tactics in Moscow and built up the Pan-African Federation with Hastings Banda (who later became the president of Malawi) and Kwame Nkrumah (later president of Ghana).

By the time Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1946, he was the leader of a bona fide Kenyan liberation movement. Using his influence as leader, he quickly assumed the top spot of the Kenya African Union (KAU), a pro-independence group that had considerable support from African war veterans who had been pressured into fighting for the British in WWII.

## MAU MAU REBELLION

Although the colonial authorities made some concessions to the KAU, the main agitation for independence was going on underground. Tribal groups of Kikuyu, Maasai and Luo took secret oaths, which bound participants to kill Europeans and their African collaborators. The most famous of these movements was the Mau Mau, formed in 1952 by disenchanted Kikuyu people, which aimed to drive the white settlers from Kenya forever.

The first blow was struck early in 1953 with the killing of a white farmer’s entire herd of cattle, followed a few weeks later by the massacre of 21 Kikuyu loyal to the colonial government. The Mau Mau rebellion had started. The government declared a state of emergency and began to gather the tribespeople loyal to them into ‘protected villages’, surrounded by barbed wire and booby-trapped trenches, primarily to keep the villagers from being recruited to the ranks of the Mau Mau revolutionaries.

Within a month of the rebellion, Kenyatta and several other KAU leaders were put on trial as the alleged leaders of the Mau Mau. Kenyatta was convicted on spurious evidence and sentenced to seven years in jail. The various Mau Mau sects came together under the umbrella of the Kenya Land Freedom Army, led by Dedan Kimathi, and staged frequent attacks against white farms and government outposts, including Treetops Lodge (p258), where Britain’s Princess Elizabeth spent her last night before becoming queen.

By the time the rebellion ended in 1956 with the Mau Mau’s defeat, the death toll stood at over 13,500 Africans (guerrillas, civilians and troops) and just over 100 Europeans (including 37 settlers) – fairly predictable numbers for the British Empire! Following the end of the rebellion, Dedan Kimathi was publicly hanged by a British colonel named Henderon, who was later deported from Kenya for crimes against humanity.

Upon his release in 1959, Kenyatta resumed his campaign for independence while under house arrest in Lodwar. Soon even white Kenyans began to feel the winds of change, and in 1960 the British government officially announced their plan to transfer power to a democratically elected African government. Independence was scheduled for December 1963, accompanied by grants and loans of US\$100 million to enable the Kenyan assembly to buy out European farmers in the highlands and restore the land to the tribes.

*Red Strangers: the White Tribe of Kenya* (CS Nicholls) has a different, unusually sympathetic perspective on colonialism, examining the history of Kenya’s white settler population before and after independence.

The first major Kenyan film to tackle the thorny subject of the Mau Mau rebellion, *Kibaara Kaugi’s Enough is Enough* is a fictionalised biopic of Wamuyu wa Gakuru, a Kikuyu woman who became a famed guerrilla fighter and rebel commander in charge of distributing rations.

1593

The Portuguese construct Fort Jesus in Mombasa

1729

Omani Arabs replace the Portuguese as coastal rulers

1873

British pressure ends the Arab slave trade

1887

Work begins on the East African Railway

The dark side of the British Empire in Kenya is the subject of not one but two controversial recent books: *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*, by David Anderson, and *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, by Caroline Elkins.

In the meantime, a division occurred in the ranks of the KAU between those who wanted a unitary form of government with centralised control in Nairobi, and those who favoured *majimbo*, a federal setup. The centralists renamed their party the Kenya African National Union (KANU), while the federalists split off to become the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). Kenyatta was released from house arrest in mid-1961 and assumed the presidency of the KANU.

Although some resistance by white settlers was inevitable, the run up to independence was surprisingly smooth. Over subsequent years, a few farms owned by white settlers were bought out by the government and divided up into small subsistence plots supporting 15 to 20 people. The experiment wasn't a great success; Kenyans regarded it as too little, too late, while white farmers feared that the trickle would soon turn into a flood. As Zimbabwe was to discover nearly 40 years later, the immediate effect of land redistribution was a significant decline in agricultural production, from which Kenya has never quite recovered.

The Mau Mau themselves didn't do too well out of their supposed victory either. Once independence had been achieved, Kenyatta declared that the rebellion was a 'disease' and outlawed the group, fearful of Kenyans on either side of the conflict seeking to settle old scores. This 'forgive and forget' policy persisted under Daniel arap Moi, and even today there are no memorials or monuments to mark the guerrillas' struggle, while veterans complain they are forgotten and neglected by the country they fought to save. However, this may change under the new government – President Kibaki is himself a Kikuyu, and one of his first acts on taking power was to repeal the old law banning the Mau Mau, suggesting that now, 50 years on, a reconciliation of this controversial chapter of national history may be possible.

## INDEPENDENCE

With independence scheduled for 1963, the political handover began in earnest in 1962. The KANU and KADU formed a coalition government, but the coalition was abandoned after the first Kenyan elections in May 1963. Jomo Kenyatta became Kenya's first president on 12 December 1963, ruling until his death in 1978. Under Kenyatta's presidency, Kenya developed into one of Africa's most stable and prosperous nations. The opposition KADU party was voluntarily dissolved in 1964.

While Kenyatta is still seen as one of the few success stories of Britain's withdrawal from empire, he wasn't without his faults. Biggest among these were his excessive bias in favour of his own tribe and his escalating paranoia about dissent. Opponents of his regime who became too vocal for comfort frequently 'disappeared', and corruption soon became endemic at all levels of the power structure.

At the same time, the British kept a toehold in Kenya in order to provide a training ground for the British Army. Over the next 40 years, huge amounts of ordnance were lobbed around, much of it ending up unexploded in rural areas. In July 2002, the British government finally agreed to pay nearly UK£7 million in compensation to the hundreds of Maasai and Samburu tribespeople injured or killed after accidentally detonating unexploded bombs.

## THE 1980S

Kenyatta was succeeded in 1978 by his vice president, Daniel arap Moi. A Kalenjin, Moi was regarded by establishment power brokers as a suitable front man for their interests, as his tribe was relatively small and in thrall to the Kikuyu. Moi went on to become one of the most enduring 'Big Men' in Africa, ruling in virtual autocracy for nearly 25 years. In the process, he accrued an incredible personal fortune; today many believe him to be the richest man in Africa.

Although Moi's regime was stable compared to the desperate situation in many surrounding countries, it was also characterised by nepotism, corruption, arrests of dissidents, censorship, the disbanding of tribal societies and the closure of universities, as well as the disruptive, sometimes violent activities of KANU Youth, the party's student body. Nyayo House (p101), the main government building and police headquarters in Nairobi, was known and feared throughout the country for the torture cells in its basement, where many opponents of the regime found themselves.

In 1982 KANU publicly banned opposition parties, leading to a military coup by the air force, which was promptly quashed by pro-government forces. In the run-up to the 1987 election, Moi introduced a new voting system and jailed opposition leaders without trial, ensuring that the sole candidate from the sole political party in the country won the election, and there's no prizes for guessing who that was!

After his 'win', Moi expanded the cabinet to fit in more of his cronies and rushed through constitutional reforms allowing him to dismiss senior judges and public servants without any redress. When dissenting politicians were arrested, Christian church leaders took up the call for change, supported by another outspoken critic of government nepotism, Professor Wangari Maathai (see p56), leader of the Green Belt Movement.

Sooner or later, something had to give.

## THE 1990S

With the collapse of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union it was no longer necessary for Western powers to prop up corrupt non-communist regimes in Africa. Donors who had previously turned a blind eye to civil rights misdemeanours began calling for multiparty elections if economic aid was to be maintained. The multiparty movement gained huge grassroots support in Kenya.

In response, KANU Youth was mobilised to disrupt pro-democracy rallies and harass opposition politicians. Things came to a head on 7 July 1990 when the military and police raided an opposition demonstration in Nairobi, killing 20 and arresting politicians, human-rights activists and journalists.

The rally, known thereafter as Saba Saba ('seven seven' in Swahili), was a pivotal event in the push for a multiparty Kenya. The following year, the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) party was formed, led by Jamagori Oginga Odinga, a powerful Luo politician who had been vice-president under Jomo Kenyatta. FORD was initially banned and Odinga was arrested, but the resulting outcry led to his release and, finally, a change in the constitution that allowed opposition parties to register for the first time.

The stories of some of the torture victims held at Nyayo House are told in the haunting 2004 documentary *Walking Shadows*, directed by Ndungi Githuki.

1920

Kenya becomes a British colony

1929

Pro-independence politician Jomo Kenyatta goes to London

1946

Jomo Kenyatta returns to Kenya

1953

The Mau Mau rebellion starts

Faced with a foreign debt of nearly US\$9 billion and blanket suspension of foreign aid, Moi was pressured into holding multiparty elections in early 1992, but independent observers reported a litany of electoral inconsistencies. Just as worrying, about 2000 people were killed during ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley, widely believed to have been triggered by KANU agitation. Nonetheless, Moi was overwhelmingly re-elected.

After the elections, the KANU bowed to some Western demands for economic reforms, but harassment of opposition politicians continued. The 1997 election was also marred by violence and rioting, particularly during the Saba Saba anniversary rally. Again, mysterious provocateurs stirred up ethnic violence, this time on the coast. European and North American tour companies cancelled their bookings and around 60,000 Kenyans lost their jobs. Moi was able to set himself up as peacemaker, calming the warring factions and gaining 50.4% of the seats for KANU, compared to the 49.6% won by the divided opposition parties.

The scene was set for a confrontational parliament, but in a trademark Moi manoeuvre, the KANU immediately entered into a cooperative arrangement with the two biggest opposition parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and the National Development Party (NDP). Other seats were taken by FORD-Kenya and its various splinter groups.

While all this was going on, Kenya was lashed first by torrential El Niño rains and then by a desperate drought that continued right up to 2000, causing terrible hardship in rural areas.

Preoccupied with internal problems, Kenya was quite unprepared for the events of 7 August 1998. Early in the morning, massive blasts simultaneously ripped apart the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, killing more than 200 people. The effect on Kenyan tourism, and the economy as a whole, was devastating. During the next four years, however, coastal businesses slowly moved to rebuild the tourist industry, helped in part by Italian tour operators, who filled the gap left by American, British and German companies.

Further terrorist activity shook the country on 28 November 2002, when suicide bombers slammed an explosives-laden car into the lobby of the Paradise Hotel at Kikambala, near Mombasa. Moments before, missiles were fired at an Israeli passenger plane taking off from Mombasa's airport. Al-Qaeda subsequently claimed responsibility for both acts.

Despite a slump in tourism immediately after the attacks, the impact has been nowhere near as great as in 1998, and visitor numbers on the coast are now as healthy as ever. However, recent worldwide events have reawakened fears of terrorism, and there was widespread controversy when the press reported a shoot-to-kill order for terror suspects supposedly issued by National Security minister John Michuki. In a country with a significant Muslim population, it's small wonder that a jittery atmosphere prevails around these issues.

## AND IT'S GOODBYE FROM MOI

In June 2001, the KANU entered into a formal coalition government with the NDP and DP, creating a formidable power base for the ruling party. However, with Moi's presidency due to end in 2002, many feared that Moi would alter the constitution again. This time, though, he announced his

Just in case he was in any doubt about his popularity by the end of his regime, outgoing president Moi was pelted with mud during his final presidential speech!

## LEAKEY POLITICS

Of all the famous names in Kenyan public life, one family crops up time and time again: the Leakeys. As if it wasn't enough to discover missing links in humankind's evolutionary chain, published over 100 books and articles and single-handedly reform the Kenya Wildlife Service, patriarch Richard Leakey has played a pivotal role in national politics for years, despite losing both legs and enduring beatings in the course of his work.

Leakey entered the political arena in 1994 by creating a new opposition party called Safina, which contested the national elections on an anti-corruption ticket. Despite its reformist agenda, Safina was unable to allay the nation's unease about white men being involved in politics and polled just six seats.

After this disappointing performance, Leakey returned to his job as head of the KWS, but in 1999 President Moi unexpectedly appointed his erstwhile opponent – a man he once described as the 'Antichrist' and an 'atheistic colonial' – to the Head of the Civil Service. The appointment was probably a sweetener for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who refused to lend the government money unless it adopted widespread reforms, but it did allow Leakey to weed out some of the corrupt old guard.

The anti-corruption purge, though, was only able to go so far before it hit an impassable wall. The most prominent corruption case, the Goldenberg Scandal – an incredible KSh20 billion compensation scam – threatened to implicate both the government and the nation's duty-free shops. The anti-corruption unit was wound down in 2001, and Leakey stepped down in March of that year, returning to his old job at KWS. The IMF promptly re-imposed its moratorium on aid to Kenya.

These days Leakey is not so active in national politics, but he still speaks and writes frequently on a whole range of topics, enjoying an unrivalled status as Africa's most prominent palaeontologist, environmentalist, conservationist and political commentator. With his daughter Louise following the academic family path, you can be sure that Kenya hasn't heard the last of the Leakeys just yet.

For more on Kenya's great white dynasty, [www.leakey.com](http://www.leakey.com) charts the fortunes of the family over 100 years in East Africa.

intention to retire – on a very generous benefits package – with elections to be held in December 2002.

Moi put his weight firmly behind Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta, as his successor. He even went as far as to fire vice-president George Saitoti for refusing to support Kenyatta's nomination. Meanwhile, 12 opposition parties (including FORD-Kenya, FORD-Asili, the National Party of Kenya and Saba Saba-Asili) as well as several religious groups united under the umbrella of the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK), an organisation that was later known as the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc). Presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki was the former head of the Democratic Party.

Although the party was initially dogged by infighting, within weeks the opposition transformed itself into a dynamic and unified political party. When the election came on 27 December 2002, it was peaceful and fair, and the result was dramatic: a landslide two-thirds majority for Mwai Kibaki and Narc. Despite being injured in a car accident while campaigning, Kibaki was inaugurated as Kenya's third president on 30 December 2002.

President Moi's retirement package, which included several private jets, was eagerly supported by opposition MPs – they were concerned that if it wasn't lavish enough he might stay in power.

1963

Kenya gains independence; Kenyatta becomes president

1978

Kenyatta dies; Moi assumes presidency

1990

Violence at Saba Saba rally forces multiparty elections

1998

Terrorist attacks shake Nairobi and Dar es Salaam

For more on Kenya's fossil finds look up [www.leakeyfoundation.org](http://www.leakeyfoundation.org). Members can even sign up for trips with the Leakeys themselves.

## A NEW ERA?

The optimism that swept Narc into power faded fast, and Kibaki's brave new democracy has been plagued by a constant stream of party infighting, accusations of corruption and economic problems. Even his own wife has had several high-profile brushes with the media. Most Kenyans still support the president himself, but there is a widespread perception that he is too much of a 'quiet man', unwilling to speak up on important issues while his government runs amok around him.

Above all, the path to reform has been slower and more tortuous than many people had hoped, leading to dissatisfaction and an increasing tendency to blame the government for the country's ills. The year 2005 was another uncomfortable one for Kibaki, who faced criticism over his handling of the national housing crisis, the Tom Cholmondeley murder case and the civil service strikes, where thousands of bureaucrats were sacked for taking strike action over pay and conditions.

Some progress has certainly been made since 2002 – you only have to look at the new matatu regulations and omnipresent anti-corruption signs to see the efforts being made. However, security remains a worrying issue, locals complain that the cost of living has almost doubled, and it's feared that some politicians are trying to line their pockets in anticipation of losing their seats in the next election. The new constitution promised for 2003, a highly symbolic component of Narc's election platform, has been bogged down in discussions, disagreements and committees and seems no nearer to fruition, reinforcing the general disillusion.

With elections due to occur once again in 2007 and an energetic Uhuru Kenyatta at the head of the newly regrouped KANU – strengthened by their time in opposition and backed by the increasingly frail Moi – the next few years will be an interesting time in Kenyan politics, and Kibaki certainly has plenty of challenges still to come.

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**2002**

Moi retires; Mwai Kibaki wins national elections

**2005**

Strikes, shootings, scandals – business as usual?

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

It's fair to say that there is not a great sense of national consciousness in Kenya. Many residents of Kenya are more aware of their tribal affiliation than of being a 'Kenyan' – this is one of the more fascinating aspects of Kenyan life, but the lack of national cohesion undoubtedly holds the country back.

This focus on tribe, however, is usually accompanied by an admirable live-and-let-live attitude, such that only on rare occasions do tribal animosities or rivalries spill over into violence. In fact, Kenyans generally approach life with great exuberance. Be it on a crowded matatu, in a buzzing marketplace or enjoying a drink in a bar, you cannot fail to notice that Kenyans are quick to laugh and are never reluctant to offer a smile. There is a very happy-go-lucky approach to life, despite the fact that many of them live in dire economic circumstances.

Kenyans, too, are extremely gregarious. Rare is the occasion when you will see a lone Kenyan. At the slightest sign of activity a crowd will gather, from the smallest child to the most self-important businessman who happens along. Passers-by become onlookers – events are observed and participated in and, before long, pundits will be offering their version of proceedings and their opinions on all and sundry. This inclusivity often extends to others – any traveller who is willing is sure to be asked to participate in a spontaneous dance or a game of football.

This willingness to participate in life as it happens is perhaps a reflection of the casual approach to time. You will be doing well to press a Kenyan into rushing anything. As is the case for many Africans, Kenyans tend to find that they have a lot of time on their hands so they don't see the need to do anything particularly urgently. The oft-heard maxim 'any time is chai time' is indicative of the Kenyan attitude that few things are so pressing that you needn't sit down and have a chat and a cup of chai before getting on with the job.

Education is of primary concern to Kenyans. Literacy rates are around 85% and are considerably higher than in any of the country's neighbours. Although education isn't compulsory, the motivation to get an education is huge, and you'll see children in school uniform everywhere in Kenya, even in the most impoverished rural communities.

Despite their often exuberant and casual approach, Kenyans are generally quite conservative, and are particularly concerned with modesty in the way they dress. T-shirts and shorts are almost unheard of and while foreign men may *just* be able to pull it off, you may feel like the only person at the wedding who came in casual dress! Shirts are an obsession for Kenyan men and almost everyone wears one, often with a sweater or blazer.

As Kenya undergoes a slow process of modernisation, tradition and modernity are locked in an almighty struggle. This produces some intriguing sights – Samburu nomads in the arid north sporting digital watches alongside their traditional beads, wideboys in traditional Lamu sporting nylon dreads and Rasta caps (amid the *bui-buis* and headscarves) – but inevitably such a process results in the marginalisation of some elements of society. This is particularly the case as urbanisation happens apace. Kenya has its fair share of poverty, alienation and urban overcrowding, but even in the dustiest shanty towns life is lived to the full.

**'You cannot fail to notice that Kenyans are quick to laugh and are never reluctant to offer a smile'**

## LIFESTYLE

Tribe may be important in Kenya, but family is paramount. Particularly as the pace and demands of modern life grow, the role of the extended family has become even more important. It is not unusual to encounter Kenyan children who are living with aunts, uncles or grandparents in a regional town while their parents are working a desk job in Nairobi or working at a resort in Watamu. Nonetheless, filial bonds remain strong – affection is doled out as equally to one's nieces or nephews as to one's own children – and the separation that brings about such circumstances in the first place is without exception a result of a parent's desire to capitalise on opportunities for their family and their children.

The strength of the family in Kenya is mirrored in the community. Life is generally played out in the streets and communal places. There is no such thing as day care for young Kenyans. You will inevitably encounter the archetypal African scene where a range of children of different ages, usually with at least one older sister clutching a younger sibling on her hip, congregate and observe the hustle and bustle of daily life. This happens across Kenya, from coastal communities to villages in the Central Highlands to the shanty towns in Nairobi. And even as urbanisation happens and traditional community structures are fractured, street life remains lively. In any town of any size the afternoon rush hour is always a spectacle – it seems that all the world is afoot as they head home past street stalls and wandering pedlars and the dust rises gently into the coppery African twilight.

For all this, as Kenya gains a foothold in the 21st century it is grappling with ever-increasing poverty. Once categorised as a middle-income country, Kenya fell to be a low-income country, with the standard of living falling drastically from 2002 to 2005. In the UN's 2005 Human Development Report Kenya was ranked at 154 of 177 countries, a drop of 20 places from the previous report in 2002. The Kenyan government said it was not surprised by and indeed 'welcomed' the findings, claiming, rather obtusely, that the report would allow it to now develop policies to address the situation.

## POPULATION

Kenya's population in 2001 was estimated at 30,765,900. The population growth rate, currently at around 2.6%, has slowed in the last few years due to the soaring incidence of HIV/AIDS, which now infects 15% of adults.

According to 2001 UN figures, life expectancy in Kenya is 52 years, although some sources place it as low as 47, due to the effects of HIV/AIDS. Only 42% of the population has access to clean drinking water but 87% are now thought to have access to adequate sanitation. The infant-mortality rate is 65 per 1000 births (a marked increase on the 1997 figure) and 51% of the population is aged under 18. A sign of growing poverty in rural regions is migration to urban areas, where 33% of all Kenyans now live, many of them in squalid shanty towns.

## SPORT

Football (soccer) is a big deal in Kenya. People are nuts about it, and the big teams draw big crowds. Harambee Stars, AFC Leopards and Mathare United are among the best teams in the Kenyan Premiership. The grounds and pitches are not on a par with those in Europe, but the action is fast, furious and passionate – passion that at times spills out onto the terraces. Tickets to a game cost between KSh300 and KSh600 and it's quite an experience. Check out the *Daily Nation* for fixtures. Kenyans, too, seem

to have a national obsession with the English Premiership league. Every Kenyan supports either Arsenal, Man U or Liverpool, even if they can't name a single Kenyan player.

Kenyan long-distance runners are among the world's best, although much of their competitive running takes place outside the country. Even trials and national events in Kenya sometimes fail to attract these stars, despite these events being flagged in the press well in advance. **Moi Stadium** (Thika Rd), outside Nairobi, is a popular venue for events.

The annual **East African Safari Rally** ([www.eastafriansafarirally.com](http://www.eastafriansafarirally.com)) is a rugged 3000km rally – which has been held annually since 1953 – passing through Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania along public roadways, and attracting an international collection of drivers with their vintage (pre-1971) automobiles. If you're here, the spectacle is worth seeking out.

## MULTICULTURALISM

Kenya's population is made up almost entirely of Africans, with small (although influential) minorities of Asians (about 80,000), Arabs (about 30,000) and Europeans (about 30,000).

### Africans

Kenya is home to over 70 tribal groups. The most important distinguishing feature between the tribes is language. The majority of Kenya's Africans fall into two major language groups: the Bantu and the Nilotic. The Bantu people arrived in East Africa from West Africa after 500 BC, and include the Kikuyu, Meru, Gusii, Embu, Akamba and Luyha, as well as the Mijikenda, who preceded the Swahili in many parts of the coast.

Nilotic speakers migrated into the area from the Nile Valley some time later. This group includes the Maasai, Turkana, Samburu, Pokot, Luo and Kalenjin, which, together with the Bantu speakers, account for more than 90% of Kenya's African population. The Kikuyu and the Luo are by far the most numerous groups, and between them hold practically all the positions of power and influence in the country.

A third language grouping, and in fact the first migrants into the country, are the Cushitic speakers. They occupy the northeast of the country and include such tribes as the El-Molo, Somali, Rendille and Galla.

On the coast, Swahili is the name given to the local people who, although they have various tribal ancestries, have intermarried with Arab settlers over the centuries and now have a predominantly Arabic culture.

See *Tribes of Kenya* (p43) for more details on the major groups and their diverse cultures.

### Asians

India's connections with East Africa go back to the days of the spice trade, but the first permanent settlers from the Indian subcontinent were indentured workers, brought here from Gujarat and the Punjab by the British to build the Uganda Railway. After the railway was finished, the British allowed many workers to stay and start up businesses, and hundreds of *dukas* (small shops) were set up across the country.

Asian numbers were augmented after WWII and the Indian community came to control large sectors of the East African economy. However, few gave their active support to the black nationalist movements in the run-up to independence, despite being urged to do so by India's prime minister, and were hesitant to accept local citizenship after independence. This earned the distrust of the African community, who felt the Indians were simply there to exploit African labour.

Kenya has close to 550,000 AIDS orphans, and an estimated 78,000 children living with HIV/AIDS.

Since 1968, Kenya has won gold in the Olympic steeplechase in every Games the country has competed in. In the 2004 Olympics Kenya took out gold, silver and bronze medals.



Although Kenya escaped the anti-Asian pogroms that plagued Uganda during Idi Amin's rule, thousands of shops owned by Asians were confiscated and Asians were forbidden to trade in rural areas. Fortunately, Kenya has learned from the lessons of Uganda's economic collapse and calls for Asians to 'go home' have faded from the political agenda.

## RELIGION

Generally speaking, most Kenyans outside the coastal and eastern provinces are Christians, while most of those on the coast and in the east of the country are Muslim. Muslims make up some 10% of the population. In the more remote tribal areas you'll find a mixture of Muslims, Christians and those who follow their ancestral tribal beliefs, although these are definitely a minority.

### Christianity

As a result of intense missionary activity from colonial times to the present, just about every Christian denomination is represented in Kenya, from Lutherans and Catholics to Seventh-Day Adventists and Wesleyans. The success enjoyed by all these groups is largely due to their combination of Jesus with education and medicine – getting to the soul through the body, if you will.

As in Central and South America, African Christianity is frequently a combination of traditional and Christian beliefs. There are also many pure, home-grown African Christian groups that do not owe allegiance to any of the major Western groups. Street preachers are common throughout the country, and their fire-and-brimstone sermons normally attract a large crowd.

Hardcore evangelism is making inroads, too. Many TV-style groups, especially from the US, have a strong following here, and if you're channel surfing you will come across televised 'crusades', miracle shows and the like.

It's worth visiting a church to attend a service while you're in Kenya. Even if you can't understand the words, you'll certainly be captivated by what only Africans can do with such beauty and precision – unaccompanied choral singing.

### Islam

Most Muslims in Kenya belong to the Sunni branch of the faith and they generally practise a moderate version of Islam, although Wahabi fundamentalism is on the rise due to the numerous *madrassas* (religious schools) built here by Saudi Arabia. Religious demonstrations – usually against America or Israel – are on the increase, and hardline beliefs such as *pardah* (requiring women to cover everything but their eyes) are becoming more and more common along the coast.

Only a small minority of Kenyans belong to the Shiah branch of Islam, and most are found among people from the Indian subcontinent. Within the Asian community are representatives of virtually all Shiite sects, but the most influential are the Ismailis – followers of the Aga Khan. As with all Ismailis, they represent a very liberal version of Islam and are perhaps the only branch of the faith strongly committed to the education of women at all levels as well as their participation in commerce and business.

### Hinduism

There are a considerable number of Hindu temples in larger urban areas where people from the Indian subcontinent settled after the completion

of the Uganda Railway. Both Mombasa and Nairobi have some grand and ornate temples, most of them used by part of the Swaminarayan sect, who are firm devotees of Vishnu. There are scores of other Hindu sects in Kenya – too numerous to mention here – and many are economically quite influential. Westlands in Nairobi has probably the most influential Hindu population.

### Traditional Beliefs

Most people leading a tribal existence in Kenya are animists, and their beliefs and rituals are closely linked to the coming of the rains. God is most commonly manifested in the sun, moon, stars, thunder, lightning and trees, particularly the wild fig tree. Colours are also associated with the manifestations of God – black is considered a 'cool', and therefore good, colour, while red and white are bad, 'hot' colours. Another common belief is in spirit beings, who dwell in powerful places and can be violent and unpredictable. Witchdoctors and soothsayers are employed to act as intermediaries with the spirit world.

Most tribes employ rites of passage for both men and women, marking the boundary between childhood and adulthood. Circumcision is still an important ritual for boys, and groups such as the Bukusu, from near Bungoma, stage mass circumcisions every August. Although female circumcision – or, more correctly, female genital mutilation – is illegal in Kenya, tribal cults such as the Mungiki sect, whose members have carried out forced circumcisions and massacres, have issued frequent edicts that all Kenyan women should be circumcised. See below for more details on this contentious issue. Scarification of men and women is still widely practised and most *morani* (warriors) have distinctive scars on their cheeks.

## WOMEN IN KENYA

To a degree, gender roles remain rigid in Kenya. It is not uncommon to hear conservative views of the a-woman's-place-is-in-the-kitchen variety espoused. That said, women are increasingly gaining more educational opportunities, and, particularly in the cities, are coming to play a more prominent role. Some women are breaking the barriers that are traditionally part of a patriarchal society. Women are visible in Kenyan politics and business.

'Witchdoctors and soothsayers are employed to act as intermediaries with the spirit world'

*I Laugh So I Won't Cry: Kenya's Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives*, edited by Helena Halperin, offers fascinating glimpses into the lives of Kenyan women.

### FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

The controversial practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), often euphemistically termed 'female circumcision', is still widespread across Africa, including throughout Kenya. In some parts of tribal Kenya more than 90% of women and girls are subjected to FGM in some form.

The term FGM covers a wide range of procedures from a small, mainly symbolic, cut to the total removal of the clitoris and external genitalia (known as infibulation); the open wound is then stitched up.

The effects of FGM can be fatal. Other side effects, including chronic infections, the spread of HIV, infertility, severe bleeding and lifelong pain during sex, are not uncommon.

Thanks to decades of work by international and local human rights' groups, FGM is now banned in Kenya for girls under 17, but the ritual still has widespread support in parts of the community and continues clandestinely. Despite backing from the World Health Organisation, attempts to stamp out FGM are widely perceived as part of a Western conspiracy to undermine African cultural identity. Many local women's groups, such as the community project Ntanira na Mugambo (Circumcision Through Words), are working towards preserving the rite of passage aspect of FGM without any surgery. It seems likely that it will be African initiatives such as Ntanira na Mugambo, rather than Western criticism, that will finally put an end to FGM.

This isn't to say that Kenyan women have traditionally been pushovers. Far from it! In rural communities women have long been the backbone of society, performing the bulk of farming work and playing a prevalent role in the day-to-day life of the community. Older women have always been accorded respect in tribal societies – many are the tales of matriarchal figures who influence the daily happenings of villages and communities through the judicious use of smiles and bouts of wrath.

## ARTS Music

Although there is an indigenous Kenyan music scene, the overriding musical influences have come from outside, originally from nearby Democratic Republic of Congo. More recently reggae and hip-hop have permeated the Kenyan pop scene.

The live-music scene in Nairobi is quite fluid, but always vibrant, and a variety of clubs cater for traditional and contemporary musical tastes. A good reference is the *Daily Nation*, which publishes weekly top 10 African, international and gospel charts and countrywide gig listings on Saturday. Live-music venues are listed under Entertainment headings throughout this book.

### AFRICAN MUSICAL STYLES

The Congolese styles of *rumba* and *soukous*, known collectively as *lingala*, were first introduced into Kenya by artists such as Samba Mapangala (who is still playing) in the 1960s and have come to dominate most of East Africa. This upbeat party music is characterised by clean guitar licks and a driving *cavacha* drum rhythm.

Kenyan bands were also active during the 1960s, producing some of the most popular songs in Africa, including Fadhili William's famous *Malaika* (Angel), and *Jambo Bwana*, Kenya's unofficial anthem, written and recorded by the hugely influential Them Mushrooms.

Music from Tanzania was influential in the early 1970s, when the band Simba Wanyika helped create Swahili *rumba*, which was taken up by bands such as the Maroon Commandos and Les Wanyika.

*Benga* is the contemporary dance music of Kenya. It originated among Luo people in western Kenya and became very popular from the 1950s onwards. Since then it has spread throughout the country and been taken up by Akamba and Kikuyu musicians. The music is characterised by clear electric guitar licks and a bounding bass rhythm. Some well-known exponents of *benga* include DO Misiani (a Luo) and his group Shirati Jazz, which has been around since the 1960s and is still churning out the hits. You should also look out for Globestyle, Victoria Kings and Ambira Boys.

Contemporary Kikuyu music often borrows from *benga*. Stars include Sam Chege, Francis Rugwati and Daniel 'Councillor' Kamau, who was popular in the 1970s and is still going strong. Joseph Kamaru, the popular musician and notorious nightclub owner of the late 1960s, converted to Christianity in 1993 and now dominates the gospel music scene.

*Taarab*, the music of the East African coast, originally only played at Swahili weddings and other special occasions, has been given a new lease of life by coastal pop singer Malika.

Popular bands today are heavily influenced by *benga*, *soukous* and also Western music, with lyrics generally in Swahili. These include bands such as Them Mushrooms (now reinvented as Uyoya) and Safari Sound. For upbeat dance tunes, Ogopa DJs, Nameless, Redsan and Deux Vultures are recommended acts.

The Homeboyz Academy ([www.africanhiphop.com](http://www.africanhiphop.com)) in Nairobi aims to give budding artists and producers a head start; it's said you need to crack it in Nairobi if you're going to make it in East Africa!

### RAP, HIP-HOP & OTHER STYLES

Having arrived in Kenya in the 1990s, American-influenced gangster rap and hip-hop are also on the rise, including such acts as Necessary Noize, Poxi Presha and Hardstone. The similarities between the slums of Nairobi and the ghettos of North America may be relatively few, but both have proved cauldrons in which potent rap music has developed. In Nairobi, you're unlikely to miss seeing Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent emblazoned on the side of a matatu, or hearing their music blaring. Admiration for these big names has translated into a home-grown industry. In 2004, Dutch producer Nynke Nauta gathered rappers from the Eastlands slums of Nairobi and formed a collective, Nairobi Yetu. The resultant album, *Kilio Cha Haki* (*A Cry for Justice*), featuring raps in Sheng (a street-smart melange of Swahili and English), has been internationally recognised as a poignant fusion of ghetto angst and the joy of making music.

Rapper Emmanuel Jal, a former south-Sudanese child soldier now resident in Nairobi, topped the Kenyan charts in 2005 and later that year performed to great acclaim at Live8 in Britain. He has subsequently recorded an album, *Ceasefire*, with the Sudanese *oud* maestro Abdel Gadir Salim. E-Sir is a popular young singer/rapper who died in a car crash this year and has become something of a hero.

Kenya pioneered the African version of the Reggaeton style (a blend of reggae, hip-hop and traditional music), which is now becoming popular in the US and UK. Dancehall is also huge here – Shaggy has a third home in Kenya and Sean Paul visits regularly.

Other names to keep an eye or ear out for include Prezzo (Kenya's king of bling), Nonini (a controversial women-and-boozie rapper), Nazizi (female MC from Necessary Noize) and Mercy Myra (Kenya's biggest female R&B artist).

### Sigana

This is a traditional African performance form. It contains elements of all the major traditional African cultural forms – narration, song, music, dance, chant, ritual, mask, movement, banter and poetry – blending into one long, wonderful storytelling performance. This is not something you'll find very often on the tourist trail, but you have a chance of seeing a show at the **Mzizi Arts Centre** (☎ 574372; Sonalux House, Moi Ave) in Nairobi, which puts on monthly Sigana performances (for more details see p106).

### Literature

There are plenty of novels, plays and biographies by contemporary Kenyan authors, but they can be hard to find outside Africa, despite being published by the African branches of major Western publishing companies. The Heinemann's African Writers Series offers a major collection of such works but they are generally only available in Nairobi and Mombasa.

Two of Kenya's best authors are Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi. Ngugi is uncompromisingly radical, and his harrowing criticism of the neocolonialist politics of the Kenyan establishment landed him in jail for a year (described in his *Detained: A Prison Writer's Diary*), lost him his job at Nairobi University and forced him into exile. Meja Mwangi sticks more to social issues and urban dislocation, but has a mischievous sense of humour that threads its way right through his books.

Titles by Ngugi wa Thiong'o include *Petals of Blood*, *Matigari*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Devil on the Cross*. All offer insightful portraits of Kenyan life and will give you an understanding of the daily concerns of modern Kenyans. He has also written extensively in his native

[www.artmatters.info](http://www.artmatters.info) is a fabulous resource covering many aspects of the arts scene throughout Kenya and the rest of East Africa.

Indian-born Tanzanian writer MG Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, set in 1950s Nakuru, explores the twin themes of childhood innocence and the decline of the colonial system.

language, Gikuyu. Notable titles by Meja Mwangi include *The Return of Shaka*, *Weapon for Hunger* and *The Cockroach Dance*. His most recent title, *Mzungu Boy*, depicts the friendship of white and black Kenyan boys at the time of the Mau Mau uprising. Most of these titles are published by Heinemann, although some have since been reissued.

One of Kenya's rising stars on the literary front is Binyavanga Wainaina, currently resident in South Africa and a writer for the South African *Sunday Times* newspaper, who won the Caine Prize for African Writing in July 2002. The award-winning piece was the short story *Discovering Home*, about a young Kenyan working in Cape Town who returns to his parents' village in Kenya for a year.

For writing by women in Africa try *Unwinding Threads*, a collection of short stories by many authors from all over the continent. An interesting female writer working in Kenya is Marjorie Oludhe Magoye, whose *The Present Moment* follows the life stories of a group of elderly women in a Christian refuge in Kenya. *The Man from Pretoria* is an interesting novel by Kenyan conservationist and journalist Hilary Ngweni.

### Dance, Theatre & Performance

There are a number of contemporary dance troupes and theatre groups in Kenya, although the majority of performances take place in Nairobi. The Phoenix and Miujiza Players, Mbalamwezi Theatre Group, plus the La Campagne Gaara and Bakututu dance groups, and Sigana Troupe, are all names to look out for. Other than in purpose-built theatres, plays and performances are often held in the various foreign cultural centres in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu.

For more details on the Kenyan scene contact the **Mzizi Arts Centre** (☎ 574372; Sonalux House, Moi Ave, Nairobi) and check in Saturday's *Daily Nation* to see what's on across the country (see also p106).

The dance troupes of the Bomas of Kenya offer an interesting, if touristy, overview of various tribal dances (for more information see p124).

### Cinema

The home-grown film-making industry has long struggled in Kenya, as elsewhere in East Africa. Nonetheless, foreign film makers have often used Kenya as the backdrop for their works. Sydney Pollack's Academy Award-winning 1986 movie *Out of Africa*, starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, is perhaps the best-known film shot in Kenya. More recently Caroline Link's *Nowhere in Africa* paints a sympathetic portrait of WWII Kenya seen through the eyes of a refugee Jewish family.

Domestically, a new breed of Kenyan directors is emerging, inspired by the runaway success of the Nigerian video industry and helped along by East African cultural initiatives and forums such as the Zanzibar International Film Festival. One such auteur is Kibaara Kaugi, whose *Enough is Enough* (2004), a brave exploration of the Mau Mau uprising, was shot on a shoestring budget and has garnered critical praise.

Brazilian director Fernando Meirrelles turned his gaze to Kenya to shoot *The Constant Gardener* (2005), the film adaptation of the bestselling John Le Carré novel. Interestingly, the novel was banned in Kenya as it depicted corrupt African officials, but the film's producers were able to charm local authorities into allowing filming to be done in the Kibera slum in Nairobi.

*Nowhere in Africa* won the 2002 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. One of the indisputable highlights of the film was the interaction of veteran Kenyan actor Sidede Onyulo and five-year-old German actress Lea Kurka, bantering all the while in Swahili.

# Tribes of Kenya

There are more than 70 tribal groups in Kenya, although distinctions between many of the groups are becoming increasingly blurred, largely as a result of migration to the cities and encroaching Western cultural values. Many smaller tribes have also come in under the umbrella of larger tribal groups to gain protection in intertribal disputes.

Even though many Africans have outwardly drifted away from tribal traditions, the tribe is still the most important aspect of a Kenyan's identity: upon meeting a fellow Kenyan, the first question on anyone's lips is: 'What tribe do you come from?'

Although most Kenyans are nominally Christian, a surprising number still practise traditional religious customs.

## AKAMBA

The region east of Nairobi towards Tsavo National Park is the traditional homeland of the Akamba people, which they call Ukambani. Their ancestors were Bantu-speaking, and the Akamba migrated from areas further south several centuries ago. The Akamba became great traders in ivory, beer, honey, iron weapons and ornaments, covering the region all the way from the coast to Lake Victoria and up to Lake Turkana. They traded for food stocks from the neighbouring Maasai and Kikuyu, as their own low-altitude land was relatively poor and couldn't sustain their increasing population.

During colonial times, the Akamba were highly regarded by the British for their aptitude and fighting ability, and were drafted in large numbers into the British Army. After WWI the British tried to limit the number of cattle the Akamba could own (by confiscating them) and also settled more Europeans in Ukambani. In the 1930s the Akamba responded by marching en masse to Nairobi to squat peacefully at Kariokor Market in protest. After three weeks, the administration gave way and the cattle were eventually returned to the people.

All adolescents go through initiation rites to adulthood at about the age of 12. Young parents are known as 'junior elders' (*mwanake* for men, *mwitu* for women) and are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the village, later becoming 'medium elders' (*nthele*) and then 'full elders' (*atumia ma kivalo*), when they take on the responsibility for death ceremonies and administering the law. The last stage of a person's life is that of 'senior elder' (*atumia ma kisuka*), when they are charged with responsibility for maintaining holy places.

The Akamba are famous for their *makonde*-style (ebony) carvings. Subgroups of the Akamba include the Kitui, Masaku and Mumoni.

## BORANA

The Borana are one of the cattle-herding Oromo peoples, indigenous to Ethiopia, who migrated south into northern Kenya in the early years of the 20th century. They are now concentrated around Marsabit and Isiolo. Life revolves around a family's animals – traditionally cattle, but also goats, sheep and sometimes camels. The Borana observe strict role segregation between men and women, men being responsible for care of the herds while women are in charge of children and day-to-day life. Borana groups may pack up camp and move up to four times a year, depending on weather conditions and available grazing land. As a nomadic group their reliance on oral history is strong, with many traditions passed on through song.

Many Akamba lost their lives during WWI fighting for the British Army.

Women of the El-Molo tribe from Lake Turkana.  
PHOTO BY TOM COCKER



## EL-MOLO

This tiny tribal group has strong links with the Rendille, their close neighbours on the shores of Lake Turkana. The El-Molo rely on Lake Turkana for their existence, living on a diet mainly of fish and occasionally crocodile, turtle and other wildlife. Hippos are hunted from doum-palm rafts with harpoons, and great social status is given to the warrior who kills a hippo.

An ill-balanced, protein-rich diet and the effects of too much fluoride have taken their toll on the tribe which, over the centuries, has become increasingly vulnerable to disease and attacks from stronger tribes. At one stage there were just 500 El-Molo, living in two small villages on islands on the lake.

Intermarriage with other tribes and abandonment of the nomadic lifestyle has helped to raise their numbers to about 4000, who now live on the mainland near Loyangalani. Traditional costume is now uncommon and the traditional dome-shaped huts of the El-Molo are slowly being replaced by permanent concrete homes.

## GABBRA

This small pastoral tribe of striking Arabic-looking people lives in the far north of Kenya, from the eastern shore of Lake Turkana up into Ethiopia. Many Gabbra converted to Islam during the time of slavery. Traditional beliefs include the appointment of an *abbr-olla* (father of the village), who oversees the moral and physical wellbeing of the tribe. Fathers and sons form strong relationships, and marriage provides a lasting bond between clans. Polygamy is still practised by the Gabbra, although the practice is becoming less common as old attitudes to women – as status symbols and unpaid workers – are being eroded.

Gabbra men usually wear turbans and white cotton robes, while women wear *kangas*, thin pieces of brightly coloured cotton. Although *nagaya* (peace) is a core value of the Gabbra, tribal wars with the Samburu were once common. The Gabbra are famous for their bravery, hunting lion, rhino and elephant in preference to ‘weak’ animals such as antelope.

The Gabbra lost many of their cattle herds to drought and rinderpest epidemics in the 19th century, and were decimated by malaria and smallpox before being driven into the Chalbi Desert from their lands in

Like their neighbours the Rendille, the El-Molo worship a god called Wak and bury their dead under stone cairns.

Cattle-rustling is still commonplace among the Gabbra and Pokot, and these days is carried out with automatic weapons.

Ethiopia by the army of Emperor Menelik. Somehow the Gabbra survived this and today continue to live in the harshest environment in Kenya.

## GUSII

The Gusii inhabit an area in the western highlands, east of Lake Victoria, forming a small Bantu-speaking island in a mainly Nilotic-speaking area. They were driven from their original territory near Mt Elgon to the Kisii highlands about 200 years ago, as the Luo, Maasai and Kipsigis advanced into their lands. The Gusii strongly resisted the British advance and were later conscripted in large numbers into the British Army.

The Gusii family typically consists of a man, his wives and their married sons, all of whom live together in a single compound. Initiation ceremonies are performed for both boys and girls, and rituals accompany all important events. Traditionally, the Gusii are primarily cattle herders and crop cultivators, and some also brew millet beer.

As is the case with many of Kenya’s tribal groups, medicine men (*abanyamorigo*) have a highly privileged and respected position. They are responsible for maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing of the group – performing the combined role of doctor and social worker. One of the more bizarre practices was (and still is) trepanning: the removal of sections of the skull or spine to aid maladies such as backache or concussion.

## KALENJIN

The term Kalenjin was formulated in the 1950s to describe the group of peoples previously called the Nandi by the British. The Kalenjin comprise the Nandi, Kipsigis, Eleyo, Marakwet, Pokot and Tugen (former president Moi’s people) and occupy the western edge of the central Rift Valley area. They first migrated to the area west of Lake Turkana from southern Sudan around 2000 years ago, but gradually filtered south as the climate became harsher.

Although originally pastoralists, most Kalenjin groups took up agriculture. Beekeeping is still a common activity and the honey is used in trade and for brewing beer. The Kipsigis, on the other hand, have a passionate love for cattle and cattle-rustling continues to cause friction between them and neighbouring tribes.

The Nandi, the second-largest of the Kalenjin communities, settled in the Nandi Hills between the 16th and 17th centuries. They had a formidable military reputation and, in the late 19th century, managed to delay the construction of the Uganda railway for more than a decade until Koitalel, their chief, was killed.

As with most tribes, Kalenjin have age-sets into which a man is initiated after circumcision. Polygamy was widely practised in the past. Administration of the law is carried out at the *kok* (an informal court led by the clan’s elders). The Kalenjin doctors, who are mostly (and unusually) women, still use herbal remedies in their work. Other specialist doctors still practise trepanning.

## KIKUYU

The country’s largest tribal group, the Kikuyu make up 20% of the population. Due to this and the influence of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, the Kikuyu remain the most politically influential tribe in Kenya. The original Kikuyu are thought to have migrated to the area from the east and northeast from the 16th century onwards. Their heartland now surrounds Mt Kenya. Famously warlike, the Kikuyu overran the lands of

Among the Gusii, death is considered to be the work of ‘witchcraft’ rather than a natural occurrence.

Many Kenyan athletes are Nandi or Kipsigis.

the Athi and Gumba tribes, becoming hugely populous in the process. The Kikuyu also fiercely resisted the British, spearheading the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s that was a major catalyst for the end of British rule.

The Kikuyu territory borders that of the Maasai, and intertribal raids on property and cattle were once common. Despite this, intermarriage between them has resulted in many cultural similarities between the tribes today.

The administration of the clans (*mwaki*) – made up of many family groups (*nyumba*) – was originally taken care of by a council of elders, with a good deal of importance being placed on the role of the witchdoctor, the medicine man and the blacksmith. An important tool of the witchdoctor is the *mwano*, a gourd filled with bones and pebbles, used for divination.

The Kikuyu god, Ngai, is believed to reside on Mt Kenya (Kirinyaga – which means either the ‘mountain of brightness’ or ‘black-and-white peak spotted like ostrich feathers’), which accounts for the orientation of Kikuyu homes with the door facing Mt Kenya.

Initiation rites for both boys and girls are important ceremonies and consist of ritual circumcision for boys and female genital mutilation for girls (although the latter is slowly becoming less common). Each group of youths of the same age belongs to a *riikaan* (age-set) and passes through the various stages of life, and their associated rituals, together.

Subgroups of the Kikuyu include the Embu, Ndia and Mbeere.

## LUHYA

The Luhya are of Bantu origin and are made up of 17 different groups. They are the second-largest group after the Kikuyu, but occupy a relatively small area in western Kenya centred on Kakamega, where they settled around the 14th century. Population densities here are incredibly high.

In times past, the Luhya were skilled metal workers, forging knives and tools that were traded with other groups, but today most Luhya are agriculturists, farming groundnuts, sesame and maize. Smallholders also grow large amounts of cash crops such as cotton and sugar cane.

Many Luhya are superstitious and still have a strong belief in witchcraft, although to the passing traveller this is rarely obvious. Traditional costume and rituals are becoming less common, due mostly to the pressures of the soaring Luhya population.

## LUO

The Luo people are Kenya’s third-largest tribal group, making up about 12% of the population. They live in the west of the country on the shores of Lake Victoria. Along with the Maasai, they migrated south from the Nile region of Sudan around the 15th century.

The Luo’s cattle herds suffered terribly from the rinderpest outbreak in the 1890s and most Luo switched to fishing and subsistence agriculture.

During the struggle for *uhuru* (Swahili for ‘national independence’), many of the country’s leading Kenyan politicians and trade unionists were Luo, including Tom Mboya (assassinated in 1969) and the former vice president Oginga Odinga, who later spearheaded the opposition to President Moi’s one-party state.

The Luo are unusual among Kenya’s tribal groups in that circumcision is not practised for either sex. The Luo traditionally extract four or six teeth from the bottom jaw, although this is uncommon today. The family group consists of the husband, wife (or wives) and their sons and daughters-in-law. The house compound is enclosed by a fence and includes separate huts for the man and for each wife and son.

The Kikuyu are renowned for their entrepreneurial skills and for popping up everywhere in Kenya (the Kikuyu name Kamau is as common as Smith is in Britain).

Few Luo today wear traditional costume – they have a reputation for ‘flashiness’, often carrying two mobile phones.

The family unit is part of a larger grouping of *dhoot* (families), several of which in turn make up an *ogandi* (group of geographically related people), each led by a *ruoth* (chief). As is the case with many tribes, great importance is placed on the role of the medicine man and the spirits.

The Luo, like the Luhya, have two major recreational passions, soccer and music, and there are many distinctive Luo instruments made from gourds and gut or wire strings.

## MAASAI

For many, the Maasai are the definitive symbol of ‘tribal’ Kenya. With a reputation (often exaggerated) as fierce warriors and a proud demeanour, the tribe has largely managed to stay outside the mainstream of development in Kenya and still maintains large cattle herds along the Tanzanian border.

The Maasai first migrated to central Kenya from current-day Sudan, but in the late 19th century they were decimated by famine and disease, and their cattle herds were plagued by rinderpest. The British gazetted the Masai Mara National Reserve in the early 1960s, displacing the Maasai, and they slowly continued to annexe more and more Maasai land. Resettlement programs have met with limited success as the Maasai scorn agriculture and land ownership.

Maasai women are famous for wearing vast plate-like bead necklaces, while men typically wear a red-checked *shuka* (Maasai blanket) and carry a distinctive ball-ended club. Blood and milk are the mainstay of the Maasai diet, supplemented by a drink called *mursik*, made from milk fermented with cow’s urine and ashes, which has been shown to lower cholesterol.

At around the age of 14, males become *el-moran* (warriors) and build a small livestock camp (*manyatta*) after their circumcision ceremony, where they live alone for up to eight years, before returning to the village to marry. *Morans* traditionally dye their hair red with ochre and fat. Female genital mutilation is common among the Maasai, despite the best efforts of various human rights groups.

Tourism provides an income to some, either through being guides and camp guards (*askaris*), selling everyday items (gourds, necklaces, clubs

There is a strong Maasai taboo against ‘piercing’ the soil, and the dead are traditionally left to be consumed by wild animals.



Maasai men dancing.  
PHOTO BY JANE SWENEY

and spears), dancing or simply posing for photographs. However, the benefits are not widespread. In recent years, many Maasai have moved to the cities or coastal resorts, becoming doormen for restaurants and hotels.

## MERU

The Meru arrived in the area northeast of Mt Kenya from the coast around the 14th century, following invasions by Somalis from the north. The group was led by a chief (*mogwe*) up until 1974, when the last incumbent converted to Christianity. Justice was administered by a group of tribal elders (*njuuri*), along with the *mogwe* and witchdoctor, who would often carry out summary executions by giving poison-laced beer to an accused person. Other curious practices included holding a newly born child to face Mt Kenya and then blessing it by spitting on it. Circumcision is also still common.

The Meru now live on some of the most fertile farmland in Kenya and grow numerous cash crops. Subgroups of the Meru include the Chuka, Igembe, Igoji, Tharaka, Muthambi, Tigania and Imenti.

## POKOT

The Pokot are Kalenjin by language and tradition, but their diet is dominated by meat, supplemented with blood drawn from cattle, milk and honey. Pokot warriors wear distinctive headdresses of painted clay and feathers, similar to those of the Turkana. Flat, aluminium nose ornaments shaped like leaves and lower-lip plugs are common among men. Circumcision is part of the initiation of men and many Pokot women undergo female genital mutilation at around 12 years old.

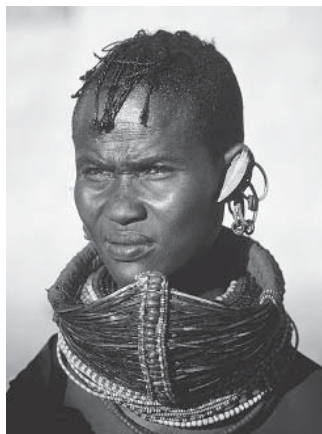
The pastoral Pokot herd their cattle and goats across the waterless scrub north of Lake Baringo and the Cherangani Hills. Cattle-raiding, and the search for water and grazing, has often brought them into conflict with the Turkana, Samburu and the Ugandan Karamojong.

Pokot hill farmers are a separate and distinct group who grow tobacco and keep cattle, sheep and goats in the hills north of Kitale, on the approaches to Marich Pass. These hill farmers have a strong craft tradition, producing pottery and metalwork, as well as snuff boxes from calabashes or horns.

## RENDILLE

The Rendille are pastoralists who live in small nomadic communities in the rocky Kaisut Desert in Kenya's northeast. They have strong economic and kinship links with the Samburu and rely heavily on camels for many of their daily needs, including food, milk, clothing, trade and transport. The camels are bled by opening a vein in the neck with a blunt arrow or knife. The blood is then drunk on its own or mixed with milk.

The colonial administration in this region found the Rendille to be a thorn in its side, as they managed to avoid taxation and forced labour through indifference and outright



The Meru are particularly active in the cultivation of *miraa*, the stems of which contain a stimulant similar to amphetamines and are exported to Somalia and Yemen.

After giving birth to their first child, Rendille women adopt a clay head decoration known as a *doko*, which resembles a rooster's comb.

A woman of the Rendille tribe from Loyangalani. The Rendille are nomadic cattle and camel herders.

PHOTO BY ANI ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

hostility. Rendille society is strongly bound by family ties, and these centre around monogamous couples. Mothers have a high status and the eldest son inherits the family wealth. It is dishonourable for a Rendille to refuse a loan, so even the poorest Rendille often has claims to at least a few camels and goats.

Rendille warriors often sport a distinctive visor-like hairstyle, dyed with red ochre, while women may wear several kilos of beads.

## SAMBURU

Closely related to the Maasai, and speaking the same language, the Samburu occupy an arid area directly north of Mt Kenya. It seems that when the Maasai migrated to the area from Sudan, some headed east and became the Samburu.

Like the Rendille, Samburu warriors often paste their hair with red ochre to create a visor to shield their eyes from the sun. Age is an important factor in assigning social status and a man passes through various stages before becoming a powerful elder in his 30s. Circumcision heralds a boy's transition to a *morán*, while female genital mutilation is performed on the day of marriage for girls (usually at around 16 years old). After marriage, women traditionally leave their clan, so their social status is much lower than that of men. Samburu women wear similar colourful bead necklaces to the Maasai.

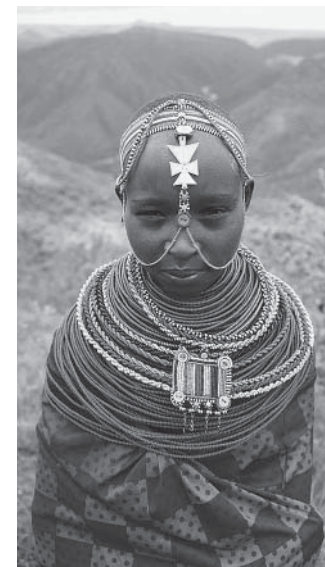
Samburu families live in a group of huts made of branches, mud and dung, surrounded by a fence made of thorn bushes. Livestock, which are kept inside the fence perimeter at night, are used for their milk rather than for meat.

## SOMALI

Nomadic, camel-herding Somali have long lived in the arid deserts of Kenya's northeast. Indeed, the Cushitic-speaking peoples, amongst whom the Somalis are numbered, arrived in Kenya before any of the Bantu-speaking peoples. The northeastern towns where Somalis are in the majority are now largely off limits due to security concerns, but you will also encounter Somalis in most large Kenyan towns, where they often run hotels, general stores and mechanical workshops.

Somalis are generally tall and thin with fine aquiline features, and all hail from the same tribe, which is divided into nine clans. The clan in particular and genealogy in general is of tremendous importance to Somalis. Most Somalis are adherents of Islam, although their version of Islam is markedly low key and, as a nomadic people, storytelling and poetry are considered highly.

Many Somalis claim to have originated in the Arabian Peninsula, but historical and linguistic evidence disputes this.



Northern Maasai Samburu girl in wedding attire.

PHOTO BY CHRISTER FREDRIKSSON

Somali cuisine often features spaghetti, a legacy of the Italian colonisation of southern Somalia.

## SWAHILI PEOPLE

Although the people of the coast do not have a common heritage, they do have a linguistic link: Kiswahili (commonly referred to as Swahili), a Bantu-based language that evolved as a means of communication between Africans and the Arabs, Persians and Portuguese who colonised the East African coast. The word *swahili* is a derivative of the Arabic word for coast – *sawihil*.

The cultural origins of the Swahili come from intermarriage between the Arabs and Persians with African slaves from the 7th century onwards. The Swahili were to become one of the principal slaving forces in Africa. Islam is practised by almost all Swahili, although it usually takes a more liberal form than that practised in the Middle East.

Swahili subgroups include Bajun, Siyu, Pate, Mvita, Fundi, Shela, Ozi, Vumba and Amu (residents of Lamu).

## TURKANA

The Turkana are one of Kenya's more colourful (and also most war-like) people. Originally from Karamojong in northeastern Uganda, the Turkana number around 250,000 and live in the virtual desert country of Kenya's northwest.

Like the Samburu and the Maasai (with whom they are linguistically linked), the Turkana are primarily cattle herders, although recently, fishing on the waters of Lake Turkana and small-scale farming is on the increase. The Turkana are one of the few tribes to have voluntarily given up the practice of circumcision.

Traditional costume is still commonplace and Turkana men cover part of their hair with mud, which is then painted blue and decorated with ostrich and other feathers. Despite the intense heat of the region, the main garment is a woollen blanket, often with garish checks. Turkana accessories include a pillow-come-stool carved out of a single piece of wood, a wooden fighting staff and a wrist knife. A woman's attire is dictated by her marital and maternal status; the marriage ritual itself is quite unusual and involves the kidnapping of the bride.

Tattooing is also common. Men were traditionally tattooed on the shoulders for killing an enemy – the right shoulder for killing a man, the left for a woman. Witchdoctors and prophets are held in high regard and scars on someone's lower stomach are usually a sign of a witchdoctor's attempt to cast out an undesirable spirit using incisions.

The website [www.bluegecko.org/kenya/](http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/) is a brilliant source of information about the arts and various peoples of Kenya.

A surprising number of Turkana men still wear markings on their shoulders to indicate that they have killed another man.

Turkana women in traditional dress.

PHOTO BY ARI CHRISTER FREDRIKSSON





# Environment

## THE LAND

Kenya straddles the equator and covers an area of some 583,000 sq km, which includes around 13,600 sq km of Lake Victoria. The country is bordered by both land and desert: to the north by the arid bushlands and deserts of Ethiopia and Sudan, to the east by the Indian Ocean and the wastes of Somalia, to the west by Uganda and Lake Victoria, and to the south by Tanzania.

Kenya is dominated by the Rift Valley, a vast range of valleys rather than a single valley, that follows a 5000km-long crack in the earth's crust. Within the Rift Valley are numerous 'swells' (raised escarpments) and 'troughs' (deep valleys, often containing lakes), and there are some huge volcanoes, including Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Mt Kilimanjaro (across the border in Tanzania). The floor of the Rift Valley is still dropping, although – at the rate of a few millimetres per year – you are hardly likely to notice!

The Rift Valley divides the flat plains of the coast from the gentle hills along the lakeshore. Nairobi, the capital, sits in the Central Highlands, which are on the eastern edge of the Rift Valley. The other main population centres are Mombasa, on the coast, and Kisumu, on the shores of Lake Victoria. Kenya can roughly be divided into four zones: the coastal plains, the Rift Valley and Central Highlands, the lakeshore, and the arid wastelands of northern Kenya.

The main rivers in Kenya are the Athi/Galana River, which empties into the Indian Ocean near Malindi, and the Tana River, which hits the coast midway between Malindi and Lamu. Aside from Lake Victoria in the west, Kenya has numerous small volcanic lakes and mighty Lake Turkana, also known as the Jade Sea, which straddles the Ethiopian border in the north.

Within volcanic craters, and on the Rift Valley floor, are several soda lakes, rich in sodium bicarbonate, created by the filtering of water through mineral-rich volcanic rock and subsequent evaporation.

For an evocative picture of Kenya's physical, environmental and cultural make-up, track down Peter Matthiessen's classic *The Tree Where Man Was Born*, an account of the author's epic journey through East Africa in the 1960s.

## TSUNAMI – THE DISASTER THAT WASN'T

The tsunami that devastated the Asian coast in December 2004 did reach Kenya's Indian Ocean shoreline, 2800km away, but amazingly the area escaped the fatalities suffered by neighbouring Somalia and other affected countries. Just one person died as a result of the wave, fewer even than in Tanzania, which was further away from the epicentre of the earthquake.

This remarkable feat is credited to the swift action of local officials, alerted to the danger by news reports and US authorities, who took immediate steps to get people off the beaches, implementing an evacuation plan originally conceived for emergencies such as oil spills. Police, navy and national media all contributed to the process, an organisational triumph in a country little known for its efficient emergency services.

Of course, the scale of the tsunami's impact was much less than in areas closer to the epicentre, such as Thailand, and only the immediate coastline was affected, with most damage concentrated around Mombasa and Malindi. Fishing communities were worst hit, while the main tourist areas suffered considerable sand erosion but little permanent damage.

Not all communities took the warnings too seriously, however: certain Diani Beach residents even set up deckchairs on the beach to watch the tsunami arrive, claiming disappointment when it was little more than a big swell!

## WILDLIFE

### Animals

There's such a dazzling array of animals in Kenya that viewing them in the national parks is one of the main reasons for visiting for most people. The Big Five (lion, buffalo, elephant, leopard and rhino) and a huge variety of other less famous but equally impressive animals, from zebras and baboons to elands and mongooses, can be seen in at least two of the major parks. Some of the most interesting are described in the *Wildlife Guide* in this book, or in much more detail in Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife East Africa*.

The bird life is equally varied and includes such interesting species as the ostrich, vulture and marabou stork, whose spooky bill-clacking can be heard in thorn trees across the country. Around bodies of water, you may see flamingos, exotic cranes and storks, and pelicans, while the forests are home to huge hornbills and rare species such as the yellow weaver bird, sunbird and touraco. Superb starlings are a beautiful bronze and turquoise and you'll see them everywhere. There are also dozens of species of weaver bird, which make the distinctive baglike nests seen hanging from acacia trees.

### ENDANGERED SPECIES

Many of Kenya's major predators and herbivores have become endangered over the past few decades, because of the continuous destruction of their natural habitat and merciless poaching for ivory, skins, horn and bush meat.

The black rhino is probably Kenya's most endangered species. It is commonly poached for its horn, which is used to make Yemeni and Omani dagger-handles and, to a lesser extent, aphrodisiacs in Asia. Faced with relentless poaching by heavily armed gangs in the 1980s, the wild rhino population plummeted from 20,000 in 1969 to just 458 today. **Rhino Ark** (☎ 020-604246; www.rhinoark.org) raises funds to create rhino sanctuaries in the national parks, complete with electric fencing, and donations are always appreciated. There are currently sanctuaries in Tsavo and Lake Nakuru National Parks, while Aberdare National Park is in the process of being fenced.

While the elephant is not technically endangered, it is still often the target of poachers. A number of elephants are killed every year, especially in the area around Tsavo East National Park. Current numbers are estimated at 28,000.

### DUDUS

Because of its lush climate, Kenya has some huge tropical bugs, known as *dudus* in Swahili. Arachnophobes should watch out for the plum-sized golden orb spider, with its famously strong web, and the delightfully named Mombasa golden starburst baboon spider, regarded as a 'small' tarantula since it reaches only 12cm in diameter! There are also several large species of scorpion, often seen after rain.

Perhaps Kenya's most notorious *dudu* is the safari ant. These huge red ants sweep across the countryside in huge columns, consuming everything that lies in their path. Locally they're often known as 'army' or 'crazy' ants for their brutal search-and-destroy tactics. Tribespeople use the pincers of safari ants as improvised stitches for wounds.

An altogether friendlier species is the *jongo* or giant millipede. Although these insect behemoths can reach 20cm in length, they eat only decaying wood and will roll themselves up into a defensive coil if approached.

Having trouble telling your dik-dik from your serval? Try the hand-illustrated *Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals* (Jonathon Kingdon), widely considered to be the definitive guide to the continent's fauna. It's also available in a pocket edition.

## Plants

Kenya's flora is notably diverse because of the country's wide range of physiographic regions. The vast plains of the south are characterised by distinctive flat-topped acacia trees, interspersed with the equally recognisable baobab trees and savage whistling thorn bushes, which made early exploration of the continent such a tortuous process.

The savanna grassland of the Masai Mara supports a huge variety of animal life. The grass grows tremendously fast after the rains, and provides food for an enormous range of herbivores and insects, which in turn feed a variety of predators. The trampling and grazing of the various herbivores that call the Mara home promotes the growth of grasses, rather than broadleaf plants, which are more vulnerable to damage from grazing, drought and fire.

On the slopes of Mt Elgon and Mt Kenya the flora changes as the altitude increases. Thick evergreen temperate forest grows between 1000m and 2000m, giving way to a belt of bamboo forest that reaches as high as about 3000m. Above this height is mountain moorland, characterised by the amazing groundsel tree and giant lobelias (see p262). In the semidesert plains of the north and northeast the vegetation cover is thorny bush, which can seem to go on forever. In the northern coastal areas mangroves are prolific, and there are still a few small pockets of coastal rainforest.

## NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

Kenya's national parks and reserves rate among the best in Africa and around 10% of the country's land area is protected by law. Despite the ravages of human land exploitation and poaching, there is still an incredible variety of birds and mammals in the parks.

Going on safari is an integral part of the Kenyan experience, and more popular parks such as Masai Mara National Reserve and Amboseli National Park can become so overcrowded in the high season (January to February) that you'll struggle to get a wildlife photo without a crowd of Nissan Urvans in the background.

Fortunately, the smaller and more remote parks, such as Saiwa Swamp National Park, see only a handful of visitors at any time of year. In addition to protecting wildlife, some parks have been created to preserve the landscape itself – Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon, Hell's Gate, Mt Longonot and Kakamega Forest are all worth investigating.

A number of marine national parks have also been established, providing excellent diving and snorkelling (see p180, p184, p199 and p207).

The most important national parks and reserves are shown in the accompanying table. Smaller parks and reserves include the following:

**Central Island National Park** (p343) Volcanic island rising out of Lake Turkana.

**Longonot National Park** (p231) Great Rift Valley views from the crater rim of Mt Longonot.

**Marsabit National Park** (p329) Featuring large herbivores and dense forest.

**Ruma National Park** (p297) Home to the country's only population of roan antelope.

**Sibilo National Park** (p338) Remote park, home to the remains of *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*.

Chyulu Hills National Park (p140) and Tana River National Primate Reserve (p212) are, for the most part, unknown quantities, as the infrastructure for tourism in these parks is not yet really in place.

Entry fees to national parks are controlled by the **KWS** (Kenya Wildlife Service; ☎ 020-600800; www.kws.org; PO Box 40241, Nairobi), while national reserves, such as Masai Mara, are administered by the relevant local council. See p55 for park categories and prices.

Kenya's national bird is the lilac-breasted roller, which can be seen in many national parks, including the Masai Mara, Lake Nakuru and Meru National Parks.

Three sites in Kenya are included on the Unesco World Heritage list: Mt Kenya, the Lake Turkana national parks and Lamu's old town.

**NATIONAL PARK & RESERVES**

Park/Reserve	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit
Aberdare National Park (p256)	dramatic highlands, waterfalls and rainforest; elephants, black rhinos, bongo antelope, black leopards	trekking, fishing, gliding	year-round
Amboseli National Park (p137)	dry plains and scrub forest; elephants, buffaloes, lions, antelope	wildlife drives	Jun-Oct
Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve (p201)	coastal forest; Sokoke scops owls, Clarke's weavers, elephant shrews, Amani sunbirds, butterflies, elephants	bird tours, walking, running, cycling	year-round
Hell's Gate National Park (p237)	dramatic rocky outcrops and gorges; lammergeyers, eland, giraffes, lions	cycling, walking	year-round
Kakamega Forest Reserve (p304)	virgin tropical rainforest; red-tailed monkeys, flying squirrels, 330 bird species	walking, bird-watching	year-round
Lake Bogoria National Reserve (p246)	scenic soda lake; flamingos, greater kudu, leopards	bird-watching, walking, hot springs	year-round
Lake Nakuru National Park (p243)	hilly grassland and alkaline lakeland; flamingos, black rhinos, lions, warthogs, over 400 bird species	wildlife drives	year-round
Masai Mara National Reserve (p286)	savanna and grassland; Big Five, antelope, cheetahs, hyenas	wildlife drives, ballooning wildebeest migration	Jul-Oct
Meru National Park (p277)	rainforest, swamplands and grasslands; white rhinos, elephants, lions, cheetahs, lesser kudu	wildlife drives, fishing	year-round
Mt Elgon National Park (p312)	extinct volcano and rainforest; elephants	walking, trekking, fishing	Dec-Feb
Mt Kenya National Park (p261)	rainforest, moorland and glacial mountain; elephants, buffaloes, mountain flora	trekking, climbing	Jan-Feb, Aug-Sep
Nairobi National Park (p125)	open plains with urban backdrop; black rhinos, birdlife, rare antelope	wildlife drives, walking	year-round
Saiwa Swamp National Park (p315)	swamplands and riverine forest; sitatunga antelope, crowned cranes, otters, black-and-white colobus	walking, bird-watching	year-round
Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba National Reserves (p324)	semiarid open savanna; elephants, leopards, gerenuks, crocodiles	wildlife drives	year-round
Shimba Hills National Reserve (p169)	densely forested hills; elephants, sable antelope, leopards	walking, forest tours	year-round
Tsavo East & West National Parks (p142)	sweeping plains and ancient volcanic cones; Big Five	wildlife drives, rock climbing, walking	year-round

**NATIONAL PARK ENTRY FEES**

Admission to parks in Kenya is gradually being converted to a 'smartcard' system, for payment of entry and camping fees. The cards must be charged with credit in advance and can only be topped up at certain locations. Any credit left on the card once you finish your trip cannot be refunded.

At the time of writing the smartcard system was in use at Nairobi, Lake Nakuru, Aberdare, Amboseli, Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. The other parks still work on a cash system. You can purchase and charge smartcards at the KWS headquarters in Nairobi and Mombasa, at the main gates of the participating parks, and at the Malindi Marine National Park office.

There are five categories of parks in Kenya. These are as follows:

Category	Park
A	Aberdare, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru
B	Meru, Tsavo East & West
C	Nairobi, Shimba Hills
D	All other land-based parks, except Arabuko Sokoke and Kakamega
Marine	Kisite, Kiunga, Malindi, Mombasa, Mpunguti, Watamu

The Masai Mara, Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba National Reserves have the same entry fees as category A national parks; entry to Mt Kenya National Park is US\$15/8 per adult/child. Arabuko Sokoke and Kakamega Forest Reserves are joint KWS and Forestry Department projects and charge US\$10/5 per adult/child.

Entry and camping fees to the parks per person per day are as follows:

Category	Nonresident Adult/child (US\$)	Resident Adult/child (KSh)	Camping adult/child Nonresident (US\$)/resident (KSh)
A	30/10	500/200	10/300
B	27/10	500/200	10/300
C	23/10	500/200	10/300
D	15/5	500/200	8/200
Marine	5/2	100/50	-

The land-based parks and reserves charge KSh200 for vehicles with fewer than six seats and KSh500 for vehicles seating six to 12. In addition to the public camping areas, special campsites cost US\$10 to US\$15 per adult nonresident, plus a KSh5000 weekly reservation fee. Guides are available in most parks for KSh500 per day.

All fees cover visitors for a 24-hour period, but a recent change in regulations means that most parks will no longer allow you to leave and re-enter without paying twice.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

As a country with some of Africa's most spectacular national parks and reserves, and with some of the most amazing animals on earth, it is fortunate that environmental issues have grown in importance over the past few decades.

**Wildlife Conservation****KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE (KWS)**

With a total ban on hunting imposed in the country in 1977, the KWS was free to concentrate solely on conserving Kenya's wildlife. This came just in time, as the 1970s and '80s were marred by a shocking amount of poaching linked to the drought in Somalia, when hordes of poachers were driven across the border into Kenya by their lack of success in their

### WANGARI MAATHAI, NOBEL LAUREATE

On Earth Day in 1977 Professor Wangari Maathai planted seven trees in her back yard, setting in motion the grass-roots environmental campaign that later came to be known as the Green Belt Movement. Since then, more than 30 million trees have been planted throughout Kenya and the movement has expanded to more than 30 other African countries. The core aim of this campaign is to educate women – who make up some 70% of farmers in Africa – about the link between soil erosion, undernourishment and poor health, and to encourage individuals to protect their immediate environment and guard against soil erosion by planting 'green belts' of trees and establishing tree nurseries.

Maathai, who is now Assistant Minister for the Environment, has worked extensively with various international organisations to exert leverage on the Kenyan government, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her tireless campaigning on environmental issues. However, the Moi regime consistently vilified her as a 'threat to the order and security of the country' and throughout the years she has been the target of repeated acts of violence at the hands of government agents. Maathai's personal views have also attracted controversy in some circles, particularly on the subject of AIDS, which she claims was created by scientists for use in 'biological warfare' against blacks!

Whatever her beliefs, Maathai is certainly a fascinating figure, and the Green Belt Movement is still one of the most significant environmental organisations in Kenya. Maathai's book *The Green Belt Movement* was republished in a new edition in 2005 and is well worth tracking down if you are interested in environmental issues.

own country. A staggering number of Kenya's rhinos and elephants were slaughtered and many KWS officers worked in league with poachers until famous palaeontologist Dr Richard Leakey cleaned up the organisation in the 1980s and '90s. A core part of his policy was arming KWS rangers with modern weapons and high-speed vehicles and allowing them to shoot poachers on sight, which seems to have dramatically reduced the problem.

However, there have been several new raids on elephant and rhino populations since 2001. As a result, there is now open talk of abandoning some of the more remote parks (such as those parks that are close to the Ethiopian or Somali borders) and concentrating resources in the parks where they can achieve the best results and that receive most visitors. At the same time, community conservation projects are being encouraged, and many community-owned ranches are now being opened up as private wildlife reserves, with the backing of both the KWS and international donors.

### PRIVATE CONSERVATION

It has been claimed that more than 75% of Kenya's wildlife lies outside the country's national parks and reserves, and an increasing number of important wildlife conservation areas now exist on private land. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (p321), near Isiolo, is a prime example of this trend. Private wildlife reserves often have the resources to work more intensively on specific conservation issues than national parks and preserves can, and it is no accident that some of the largest concentrations of rhinos are within these areas. Supporting these projects is a great way for visitors to contribute to Kenyan communities as well as assist in the preservation of the country's wildlife.

The **Laikipia Wildlife Forum** (☎ 062-31600; www.laikipia.org) is an umbrella organisation that represents many lodges and conservation areas in Laikipia, the large slab of ranch land northwest of Mt Kenya. Ranches

in this area are particularly active in wildlife conservation, and the Laikipia Wildlife Forum is a good source of up-to-date information about projects and accommodation in the region. Other private game ranches and conservation areas can be found around Tsavo and Amboseli National Parks.

### Deforestation

If we do not protect our remaining forests, Kenya will become progressively thirstier, hungrier, uglier and poorer. The forest excisions are like an axe hanging over the future of our country.

*Kenya Forests Working Group*

More than half of Africa's forests have been destroyed over the last century, and forest destruction continues on a large scale in parts of Kenya – today, less than 3% of the country's original forest cover remains. Land grabbing, charcoal burning, agricultural encroachment as well as illegal logging have all taken their toll over the years. However, millions of Kenyans still rely on wood and charcoal for cooking fuel, so travellers to the country will almost certainly contribute to this deforestation whether they like it or not.

The degazetting of protected forests is another contentious issue, sparking widespread protests and preservation campaigns. On the flipside, locals in forest areas can find themselves homeless if the government does enforce protection orders, as in the recent Mau Forest controversy (p246).

Despite these problems, some large areas of protected forest remain. The Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Aberdare National Parks, Kakamega Forest Reserve and Arabuko Sokoke Forest are all tremendous places to visit, packed with thousands of species of fauna and flora.

### Tourism

The tourist industry is the cause of some of Kenya's environmental problems, most notably heavy use of firewood by tourist lodges and erosion caused by safari minibuses, which cut across and between trails and follow wildlife into the bush, creating virtual dustbowls in parks

### GOOD WOOD

A growing issue in Kenya is the consumption of native hard woods by its woodcarvers. An incredible 80,000 trees are chopped down every year just to provide wood for the carving industry, and trees such as mahogany and ebony (from which the popular black *makonde*-style carvings are made) are increasingly threatened.

In partnership with Kew Gardens in London, WWF-UK and Unesco run a 'Good Wood' campaign to promote the use of common fast-growing trees such as neem, jacaranda, mango and olive. These woods need to be cured before carving, but the end results are almost indistinguishable from carvings made from hard woods. Many handicraft cooperatives now exclusively use wood that is approved by the Forest Stewardship Council, an international body which certifies wood from managed forests.

Visitors buying carvings are strongly encouraged to ask about the source of the materials and to insist that the carver use the above woods. It is hoped that this consumer pressure will help persuade carvers in Kenya to switch over to 'good woods', which will protect the livelihoods of 60,000 carvers as well as Kenya's dwindling hardwood forests. For more information, visit the website [www.kenyagatsby.org](http://www.kenyagatsby.org).

The East African Wildlife Society ([www.eawildlife.org](http://www.eawildlife.org)), based in Nairobi, is the most prominent conservation body in the region and a good source of information.

For a list of ecofriendly tour companies, contact the Ecotourism Society of Kenya ([www.esok.org](http://www.esok.org)).

such as Amboseli, Samburu and Masai Mara. A number of operators were recently banned from the Mara for misdemeanours ranging from non-payment of rent for tented camps to harassment of wildlife, but there are few signs that the ban is being enforced.

The KWS now insists that every new lodge and camp must be designed in an ecofriendly manner. As a result, there are growing numbers of 'ecolodges' in Kenya, which keep their impact on the environment to a minimum through recycling, use of renewable energy resources, and strict controls on dumping of refuse and the types of fuel that are used.

As a visitor, the best way to help combat these problems is to be very selective about who you do business with and very vocal about the kind of standards you expect – see p66 for tips on minimal-impact safaris. The more tourists insist on responsible practices, the more safari operators and hotels will take notice, and while you may end up paying more for an ecofriendly trip, in the long term you'll be investing in a sustainable tourist industry and the preservation of Kenya's delicate environment.

# Food & Drink

The Kenyan culinary tradition has generally emphasised feeding the masses as efficiently as possible, with little room for flair or innovation. Nonetheless, Kenya is blessed with a cornucopia of natural produce and the ‘foodies’ scene is definitely on the improve. Kenyan markets are bursting with crisp vegetables, the steamy coast provides abundant tropical fruit and fresh seafood, and throughout the country, meat – be it beef, goat, mutton, or even camel – is consumed with gusto. So, while traditional fare may veer towards the bland and filling, if you are prepared to be adventurous you may well have some memorable or unique gastronomic experiences.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Although there are some interesting Kenyan dishes, travellers mostly encounter simple meat stews and curries with fillers such as rice, potatoes or another high-starch option. These aren’t culinary masterpieces – it’s just survival food for the locals offering the maximum opportunity to fill up at minimum cost. Vegetarian visitors are likely to struggle; meat features in most meals and many vegetable dishes are cooked in meat stock.

Breakfast in Kenya is generally a simple affair consisting of chai (tea; see p90) accompanied by a *mandazi*, a semi-sweet flat doughnut. *Mandazi* are best in the morning when they’re freshly made – they become rubbery and less appetising as the day goes on. Another traditional breakfast dish is *uji*, millet-based porridge similar to *ugali*. *Uji* is best served warm with lashings of milk and brown sugar.

## Main Dishes

The true staples of the Kenyan diet are *ugali* and *sukuma wiki*. *Ugali* is maize meal cooked into a thick porridge until it sets hard, then served up in flat slabs. It’s incredibly stodgy and tends to sit in the stomach like a brick, but most Kenyans swear by it. It will fill you up after a long day’s safari but it won’t set your taste buds atingle. Many Kenyan dishes are accompanied by *sukuma wiki* – braised or stewed spinach. *Sukuma wiki* in Swahili means literally ‘stretch the week’, the implication being that they are so cheap they allow the householder to stretch the budget until

*Cooking the East African Way*, by Constance Nabwire, is a basic introduction to the food and culinary traditions of the region.

### KENYA’S NATIONAL DISH

Vegetarians beware – *nyama choma* (literally ‘barbecued meat’) is Kenya’s unofficial national dish and it’s a red-blooded, hands-on affair. Most places have their own butchery on site, and *nyama choma* is usually purchased by weight, often as a single hunk of meat. Half a kilogram is usually enough for one person (taking into account bone and gristle), and it’ll be brought out to you chopped into small bite-sized bits with vegetable mash and greens. Goat is the most common meat, but you’ll see chicken, beef and even antelope and zebra in some of the upmarket places.

Don’t expect *nyama choma* to melt in the mouth, though. Its chewiness is probably indicative of the long and eventful life of the animal you are consuming. You’ll need a good half hour at the end of the meal to work over your gums with a toothpick. Copious quantities of Tusker beer tend to help it go down. That said, at least one restaurant – Carnivore (p129) in Nairobi – has elevated *nyama choma* into a gourmet experience. It has made it onto at least one list of the 50 best restaurants in the world, so they must be doing something right.

the next weekly pay cheque. Despite its ubiquity, a dish of well-cooked *sukuma wiki* with tomatoes, stock and capsicum makes a refreshing change from the preponderance of meat in other recipes.

Another noteworthy staple, especially in the Central Highlands, is *irio* (*kienyi* in Swahili), made from mashed greens, potatoes and boiled corn or beans. Also common is *mukimo*, a kind of hash made from sweet potatoes, corn, beans and plantains. Vegetarians can find *githeri* – a mix of beans and corn – in most local eateries.

But Kenyan food is all about meat. Kenyans are enthusiastic carnivores; their recognised national dish is *nyama choma* (barbecued meat; see p89), and most other dishes are based around stewed meat, accompanied by a generous portion of carbohydrate. Beef, goat and mutton are the most common, and they tend to be pretty tough. Carbohydrates come in five major forms: *ugali*, potatoes, rice, chapati and *matoko*. The chapati is identical to its Indian predecessor. *Matoko* is mashed green plantains, which when well prepared can taste like buttery, lightly whipped mashed potato.

The most distinctive Kenyan food is found on the coast. Swahili dishes reflect the history of contact with the Arabs and other Indian Ocean traders and incorporate the produce of the region. The results can be excellent. Grilled fish or octopus will be a highlight of any menu, while coconut and spices such as cloves and cinnamon feature prominently. The rice-based dishes, *biriyani* and pilau, are clearly derived from Persia; they should be delicately spiced with saffron and star anise, and liberally sprinkled with carrot and raisins.

You will also encounter Indian food. Most restaurants serve curries and Indian-inspired dishes such as masala chips (ie with a curry sauce) and Indian restaurants on the coast and elsewhere dish up traditional curries and other fare. Western dishes such as roast chicken and steak are staples in more upmarket restaurants found in the bigger towns.

## Fruit

Because of the country's varied climate, there is often an excellent array of fruits to be found. Depending on the place and the season, you can buy mangoes, papayas, pineapples, passion fruits, guavas, oranges, custard apples, bananas (of many varieties), tree tomatoes and coconuts. Chewing on a piece of sugar cane is also a great way to end a meal. Prices are low and the quality is very high.

## DRINKS

Chances are that when you're out in the sun you'll work up quite a thirst. Fortunately Kenya can provide a diverse range of beverages – hot or cold, alcoholic or nonalcoholic – to please all palates.

### Nonalcoholic Drinks

#### TEA & COFFEE

Despite the fact that Kenya grows some excellent tea and coffee, getting a decent cup of either can be difficult, as the best stuff is exported.

Chai is the national obsession and is drunk in large quantities, but it bears little resemblance to what you might be used to. As in India the tea, milk and masses of sugar are boiled together and stewed for ages, and the result is milky and very sweet – it may be too sickly for some, but the brew just might grow on you. Spiced chai masala with cardamom and cinnamon is very pleasant and rejuvenating. For tea without milk ask for *chai kavu*.

As for coffee, the stuff you get served is often sweet and milky and made with a bare minimum of instant coffee. In Nairobi and other larger towns

For the lowdown on various Kenyan recipes, including the ubiquitous *ugali* and *sukuma wiki*, check out [www.blissites.com/kenya/culture/recipes.html](http://www.blissites.com/kenya/culture/recipes.html).

though, there is a steadily increasing number of coffee houses serving very good Kenyan coffee, and you can usually get a good filter coffee at any of the big hotels. With all the Italian tourists who visit the coast, you can now get a decent cappuccino pretty much anywhere between Diani Beach and Lamu.

### SOFT DRINKS

All the old favourites are here, including Coke, Sprite and Fanta; they go under the generic term of soda and are available everywhere. As with beer, prices vary depending on where you buy it. In most places you pay around KSh30 per bottle, but in the more exclusive places you can pay up to KSh100. Stoney's ginger ale (known just as Stoney's) is hugely popular, as is Vimto, a fizzy fruity concoction that has a taste that grows on you.

### JUICE

With all the fresh fruit that's available in Kenya, fruit juices are a national obsession and the best on offer are breathtakingly good. All rely on modern blenders, however, so there's no point asking for a fruit juice during a power cut. Prices range from KSh30 to KSh150. Although you can get juices made from almost any fruit, the nation's favourite is passion fruit. It is known locally simply as passion, although it seems a little odd asking a waiter or waitress whether they have passion and how much it costs!

Pineapple, orange and mango juices also feature on most menus. If you're worried about hygiene, try to ensure it is blended in front of you and they don't add any tap water. Alternatively, the bottled juices produced by the Picana company are also very good.

## Alcohol

### BEER

Kenya has a thriving local brewing industry and formidable quantities of beer are consumed. You'll usually be given a choice of 'warm' or 'cold' beer. 'Why warm?' you might well ask. Curiously, most Kenyans appear to prefer it that way, despite the fact that room temperature in Kenya is a lot hotter than room temperature in the USA or Europe.

The local beers are Tusker, White Cap and Pilsner, all manufactured by Kenya Breweries and sold in 500ml bottles. Tusker comes in three varieties, Tusker Export, Tusker Malt Lager and just plain Tusker, which are all basically the same product with different labels (although locals swear they can tell the difference). Guinness is also available, but it's nothing like the genuine Irish article. Castle (a South African beer) is made under licence in Kenya by, you've guessed it, Kenya Breweries.

Other local bottled drinks include Hardy's cider, Redd's (a sort of apple alcopop) and Kingfisher (another fruity concoction that's available in several awful flavours).

### LETHAL BREW

Kenya has a long tradition of producing its own bootleg liquor, but you should steer well clear of *chang'a*. In mid-2005, 48 people died near Machakos after drinking a bad batch of *chang'a*. A further 84 were hospitalised and apparently treated with vodka! Such incidents are not uncommon. The drink, Sorghum Baridi, from Central Province, contains so much methyl alcohol that the bottles are actually cold to the touch! Perhaps the most dangerous *chang'a* comes from Kisii, and is fermented with marijuana twigs, cactus mash, battery alkaline and formalin. Needless to say these brews can have lethal effects and we don't recommend that you partake.

The most long-lasting impact that Portuguese explorers had on Kenya was in the culinary field. Portuguese travellers introduced maize, cassava, potatoes and chillies from South America – all of which are now staples of the Kenyan diet.

Beers are cheapest when bought from a supermarket, where a 500ml bottle will cost you around KSh45. If bought from a regular bar, you are looking at KSh80. Bought at a bar in a five-star hotel, though, beer can cost up to KSh200.

### WINE

Kenya has a fledgling wine industry and the Lake Naivasha Colombard wines are said to be quite good. This is something that cannot be said about the most commonly encountered Kenyan wine – papaya wine. Quite how anyone came up with the idea of trying to reproduce a drink made from grapes using papaya instead is a mystery, but the result tastes foul and smells unbearable.

On the other hand, you can get cheap imported South African, European and even Australian wine by the glass for around KSh150 in upmarket Nairobi restaurants. In the big supermarket chains such as Nakumatt and Uchumi, you can pay anything from KSh500 to KSh1500 for a bottle of South African wine.

### COCKTAILS

The cocktail of the moment is known as *dawa*. Clearly based on the Brazilian *caipirinha*, it's made with vodka, limes and honey. We suggest you enjoy a tippie at a sunset bar overlooking the coast. *Dawa* translates from the Swahili as 'medicine' but we think it may have the opposite effect on you.

### LOCAL BREWS

Although it is strictly illegal for the public to brew or distil liquor, this still goes on. *Pombe* is the local beer, usually a fermented brew made with bananas or millet and sugar. It shouldn't do you any harm. The same cannot be said for the distilled drinks known locally as *chang'a*, which are laced with genuine poisons. See p91 for more on the perils of drinking *chang'a*.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

The most basic local eateries are usually known as *hotels* or *hotelis* and they often open only during the daytime. You may find yourself having dinner at 5pm if you rely on eating at these places. However, if you have the resources, even in smaller towns it's usually possible to find a

Pilau flavoured with spices and stock is the signature dish at traditional Swahili weddings. The expression 'going to eat pilau' means to go to a wedding.

### KENYA'S TOP FIVE

- Carnivore (p129), Nairobi – how can you argue with a place voted among the world's top 50 gastro experiences? Flush locals enjoy this place as much as the tourists, even though you can't eat zebra here any more.
- Ali Barbour's Cave Restaurant (p177), Diani beach – a truly unique setting for one of the coast's top eateries, peering out of a coral cave at starry skies and a silky beach. Simply gorgeous.
- Kisumu's lakeside fish-fry shanties (p294) – wade into the smoke, sink into a chair and enjoy fried fish with locals on the shore of Lake Victoria.
- Tamarind Mombasa (p164) – expensive, but totally worth it for the romantic open Swahili-style terrace overlooking the harbour. The seafood's as smart as they come.
- Haandi (p112), Nairobi – undisputed top dog among Kenya's many Indian restaurants, this classy curryhouse provides an authentic taste of the subcontinent.

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

If you're lucky (!) and game, you may be able to try various cattle-derived products beloved of the pastoral tribes of Kenya. Samburu, Pokot and Maasai warriors have a taste for cattle blood. Taken straight from the jugular it does no permanent damage to the cattle, but it is certainly an acquired taste. *Mursik* is made from milk fermented with grass ash and is served in smoked gourds. It tastes and smells pungent, to say the least, but it contains compounds that reduce cholesterol, enabling the Maasai to live quite healthily on a diet of red meat, milk and blood. You may be able to sample it at villages in the Masaai Mara.

restaurant that offers a more varied menu at a higher price. Often these places are affiliated with the towns' midrange and top-end hotels, and are usually open in the evening. You'll find that many of the big nightclubs also serve food until late into the night.

Menus, where they exist in the cheaper places, are usually just a chalked list on a board. In more upmarket restaurants, they are usually written just in English.

### Quick Eats

Eating fast food has taken off in a big way and virtually every town has a place serving greasy but cheap chips, burgers, sausages, pizzas and fried chicken. Lashings of tomato and chilli sauces are present to help lubricate things. A number of South African fast-food chains have taken hold in Nairobi.

Unlike much of Africa, Kenya has no great tradition of street food, although you may encounter roasted corn cobs (costing just a few shillings) and deep-fried yams, eaten hot with a squeeze of lemon juice and a sprinkling of chilli powder. *Sambusas*, deep-fried pastry triangles stuffed with spiced mincemeat, are good for snacking on the run and are obvious descendants of the Indian samosa. The best *sambusas* are crisp and spicy but they tend to become cold and clammy later in the day. Something you don't come across often, but which is an excellent snack, is *mkate mayai* (literally 'bread eggs'), a wheat dough pancake, filled with minced meat and egg and fried on a hotplate. On the coast street food is more common and you will find cassava chips, chapatis and *mishikaki* (grilled kebabs, usually beef, on skewers).

Many of Kenya's staples and specialities are good for quick eats (see p89 for details).

### Self-Catering

Preparing your own food is a viable option if you are staying in a place with a kitchen, or if you're camping and carrying cooking gear. Every town has a market, and there's usually an excellent range of fresh produce. Western-style supermarkets are found in major towns.

### VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegetarians will have few options, but with a bit of scouting around you will be able to find something. You may find yourself eating a lot of *sukuma wiki* (p89), while other traditional dishes such as *githeri* are hearty, if not particularly inspiring. Beans will also figure prominently in any vegetarian's culinary encounters in Kenya. Many Indian restaurants will provide a vegetarian *thali* (an all-you-can-eat meal) that will certainly fill you up. Buying fresh fruit and vegetables in local markets can help relieve the tedium of trying to order around the meat on restaurant menus.

For information on Swahili cuisine and a selection of tangy coastal recipes, go to [www.mwambao.com/dishes.htm](http://www.mwambao.com/dishes.htm).



## EAT YOUR WORDS

Want to know *mayai* from *maandazi*? *Samaki* from *sukari*? Make the most of the cuisine scene by getting to know the language. For pronunciation guidelines, see p395.

### Useful Phrases

**I'm a vegetarian.**

*Nakula mboga tu.*

**I don't eat meat.**

*Mimi sili nyama.*

**Is there a restaurant near here?**

*Je, kuna hoteli ya chakula hapo jirani?*

**Do you serve food here?**

*Mnauza chakula hapa?*

**I'd like ...**

*Ninaomba ...*

**Without chilli pepper, please.**

*Bila pilipili, tafadhali.*

**Please bring me the bill.**

*Lete bili tafadhali.*

### Menu Decoder

**biryani** – casserole of rice and spices with meat or seafood

**mchuzi** – sauce, sometimes with bits of beef and very-well-cooked vegetables

**mishikaki** – kebab

**nyama choma** – barbecued meat

**pilau** – spiced rice cooked in broth with seafood or meat and vegetables

**supu** – soup; usually somewhat greasy, and served with a piece of beef, pork or meat fat in it

**ugali** – thick, porridge-like maize- or cassava-based staple, served in a solid form, sold everywhere

**wali na kuku/samaki/nyama/maharagwe** – cooked white rice with chicken/fish/meat/beans

### Food Glossary

#### BASICS

**baridi** – cold

**joto** – hot

**kijiko** – spoon

**kikombe** – cup

**kisu** – knife

**kitambaa cha mikono** – napkin

**sahani** – plate

**tamu** – sweet

**uma** – fork

#### STAPLES

**chipsi** – chips

**maharagwe** – beans

**mkate** – bread

**matoke** – cooked and mashed plantains

**ndizi ya kupika** – plantains

**viazi** – potatoes

**wali** – rice (cooked)

#### MEAT & SEAFOOD

**kaa** – crab

**kuku** – chicken

**nyama mbuzi** – goat

**nyama ng'ombe** – beef

**nyama nguruwe** – pork

**pweza** – octopus

**samaki** – fish

#### FRUITS & VEGETABLES

**chungwa** – orange

**dafu** – coconut (green)

**embe** – mango

**kitunguu** – onions

**mboga** – vegetables

**nanasi** – pineapple

**nazi** – coconut (ripe)

**ndizi** – banana

**nyanya** – tomatoes

**papai** – papaya

**sukuma wiki** – spinach (boiled)

**tunda** – fruit

**viazi** – potatoes

#### OTHER DISHES & CONDIMENTS

**chumvi** – salt

**mayai (yaliyochemshwa)** – eggs (boiled)

**maziwa ganda** – yogurt

**sukari** – sugar

#### DRINKS

**bia (baridi/yamoto)** – beer (cold/warm)

**maji (ya kuchemsha/ya kunywa/ya madini)** – water (boiled/drinking/mineral)

**maji ya machungwa** – orange juice

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