

## Did You Know?

- Some of the world's oldest human fossils have been found in Kenya.
- Kenya's national motto, *Harambee!*, was introduced by the country's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. It means "Let's pull together!" Kenyans use the word *harambee* to describe events, such as fund-raisers, where people help one another.
- Kenya's elephants and rhinos have been hunted for their valuable ivory tusks for a long time. To protect these animals, Kenya has made the ivory trade illegal.
- The Maasai people are a small ethnic group in Kenya, but they have made a name for themselves by continuing to practice their traditional lifestyle. They are famous for the jumping dance, during which men take turns jumping high in the air. Maasai women wear beautiful bead necklaces. For many Maasai, a main food source is cow's blood mixed with milk.
- Only about half of all Kenyans have access to basic health care. Hospital patients have to provide their own medicine and meals.
- The Great Rift Valley of Kenya was formed millions of years ago when the earth's crust split.
- Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2004.

## Flag

The Maasai warrior shield and spears symbolize Kenyans' willingness to fight for freedom. Black symbolizes the Kenyan people, green represents agriculture, red stands for the blood shed for freedom, and white for peace.



## National Image

At 17,058 feet (5,199 m), Mount Kenya is the nation's highest point and the second highest in Africa. Its peak is capped by snow, despite being located on the equator, where temperatures get very hot most of the time. The Kikuyu name for Mt. Kenya is *Kirinyaga*, or "mountain of brightness."



## People and Places

### Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.)  
224,081  
Area (sq. km.)  
580,367



Kenya is roughly the same size as Madagascar or the state of Texas. Kenya is known for its beautiful grasslands, called *savannas*, where zebra, gazelle, and other animals live. But it has other types of terrain, too. The Rift Valley, thousands of miles long, cuts through western Kenya. Kenya is also home to two of Africa’s Great Lakes. Lake Turkana (formerly Lake Rudolf) lies near the Chalbi Desert, and Lake Victoria overlaps the southwestern border. Tall mountains, like Mount Kenya, surround the huge valley. Kenya is famous for its plentiful wildlife. Species include lion, hyena, leopard, cheetah, elephant, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, buffalo, and impala.

The equator runs across Kenya, so the weather is hot. During the wet seasons (April to June, and October to November), it can rain for several hours a day. The rest of the year is dry, especially in the deserts of the north.

**Population**

Population  
45,925,301



Kenya’s population is divided among at least 42 ethnic groups. The largest of these groups is the Kikuyu. They make up more than one-fifth of the population. Other groups include the Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba. The capital city of Nairobi is home to nearly four million people. About a quarter of Kenyans live in large cities like Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Mombasa. Most Kenyans live in the southern two-thirds of the country in small villages in the countryside.

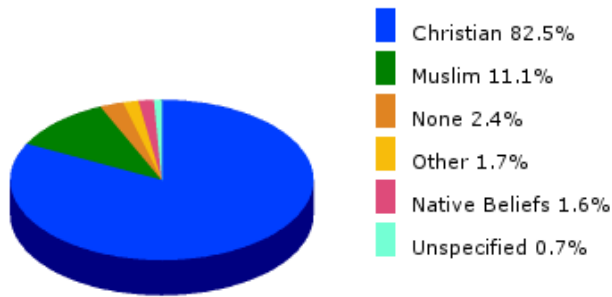
**Language**

Different ethnic groups speak different languages. For example, the Kikuyu people speak the Kikuyu language. However, Kenyans have chosen English and Kiswahili (standard Swahili) as their official languages. This makes it possible for different ethnic groups to communicate with one another. So while Kenyans speak the language of their ethnic group at home, they may speak English or Kiswahili at work. Young people in the cities sometimes speak Sheng, a mixture of Kiswahili, English, and Bantu languages.

**Can You Say It in Swahili?**

Hello	<i>Jambo</i>	(JAH-mboh)
Good-bye	<i>Kwa heri</i>	(kwah HAIR-ee)
Please	<i>Tafadhali</i>	(tah-fah-DHA-lee)
Thank you	<i>Asante</i>	(ah-SAH-ntay)
Yes	<i>Ndiyo</i>	(n-DEE-yo)
No	<i>Hapana</i>	(hah-PAH-nah)

## Religion








Source: *The World Factbook 2016. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2016.*

The majority of Kenyans are Christians. Some of them belong to various Protestant churches and others are Roman Catholic. A smaller percentage of Kenyans are Muslims. Most Muslims live along the coast and in the northeast. Many Kenyans mix their faith in traditional Christianity or Islam with native African religious beliefs. For example, belief in magic is widespread.

## History

### Time Line

AD 600		
AD 600	Arabs begin settling the coastal areas, setting up trading stations with Persia and India	
1400		
1400	Bantu tribes occupy much of eastern Africa	
1498	The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama reaches Africa's eastern coast	
1500		
1593	The Portuguese begin construction of Fort Jesus at Mombasa harbor	
1698	Arabs conquer Fort Jesus	

1800		
1846	The first Christian mission is established near Mombasa	
1887	The British East Africa Company <i>leases</i> (rents) the coast from the sultan of Zanzibar	
1895	Kenya becomes a British <i>protectorate</i> (country protected by another country)	
1896	The British build a rail line across Kenya	
1900		
1920	Kenya becomes a British crown colony	
1952	The Mau Mau Rebellion begins; a state of emergency is declared	
1956	The Mau Mau Rebellion is finally put down after thousands of Africans are killed	
1963	Britain grants Kenya independence	
1964	Jomo Kenyatta is elected the first president of Kenya	
1978	Kenyatta dies, and Daniel arap Moi becomes president	
1982	Moi declares the Kenya African National Union the only legal political party	
1992–93	Approximately two thousand people die in the fighting over land and territory between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu ethnic groups	
1992	Multiple political parties are again allowed, after demonstrations and riots cause hundreds of deaths	
2000		
2000	A severe <i>drought</i> (dry period) strikes Kenya, destroying food supplies	
2001	Parliament passes a bill allowing Kenya to <i>import</i> (buy from other countries) cheap versions of anti-AIDS drugs	
2004	Kenyan ecologist Wangari Maathai wins the Nobel Peace Prize, the first African woman to win the award	

2006	Flooding leaves thousands homeless; President Kibaki declares a national disaster because of <i>drought</i> in northern Kenya; four million people need emergency food aid	
2008	Following a presidential election at the end of 2007, violent protests lead to more than 1,500 deaths	
2009	At least 10 million people, or one third of the population, are in need of food aid; the military distributes food, water, and medicine to areas hit hardest by the <i>drought</i>	
2010	Voters approve a new constitution that will limit the president's powers, do away with the role of the prime minister, and create a second lawmaking body	
2011	Kenyan troops enter Somalia to stop rebels raiding settlements along the border	
2013	Islamic rebels from Somali terrorist group al-Shabab attack the Westgate Mall in Nairobi with automatic weapons and grenades, killing over 60 people and wounding close to 200 others over the course of four days	
2015	Al-Shabab gunmen kill 148 people at a university in Garissa in their deadliest attack in Kenya to date	
PRESENT		

### On the Move

Kenya's first inhabitants were hunting groups who lived on the area's huge plains. Most of the ancestors of modern Kenyans *migrated* (moved from one area to another) to Kenya within the last two thousand years. From the western part of Africa came the Bantu people, ancestors of ethnic groups like the Kikuyu. From the north of Africa came Nilotic tribes, the ancestors of the Luo, the Kalenjin, and others. Then came Arab sailors, who built settlements along the coast. By the 1400s, Kenya was a mix of many groups of people. These mixed peoples eventually developed the Kiswahili language. More than half of Kenya's current ethnic groups have Bantu origins.

### Battles for the Coast

In 1498, Portuguese explorers arrived on the Kenyan coast. The Portuguese established trading posts and built a large fort at Mombasa. In doing so they controlled the sea trading routes linking Europe and Asia. But Arabs from Oman also wanted to control the coastal trade. In 1696, Arab ships surrounded the Mombasa fort. Although the fort held off attacks for nearly three years, the Arabs finally captured it. They drove out all the Portuguese, established their own trading posts, and became the region's dominant power. The Arabs ruled the Kenyan coast from the island of Zanzibar.



### In Come the British

At the end of the 1800s, the British took an interest in Kenya. They wanted to take over the area around Lake Victoria, a source of water for Britain's lands in North Africa along the Nile River. British farmers were encouraged to settle in Kenya and grow crops such as coffee beans. The British also introduced Christianity and brought thousands of people from India and other parts of its empire to work on large organizational projects, such as the railroad. By the time World War I began in 1914, thousands of British citizens were living in Kenya, and the country became a British military base throughout the war.



### Kenyans Fight Back

Kenyans found that being a British colony was a heavy burden. The local people were forced onto poor land, since the best land was taken for British farms. Kenyans established organizations to fight against the British. One of these groups, the Mau Mau, began attacking the British in 1952. The Mau Mau Rebellion was the first, largest, and most successful uprising of its kind in British Africa. By the time British troops were able to defeat the Mau Mau three years later, as many as 13,000 Africans and 100 British had died. After the uprising, the British colonial government began allowing Africans to grow coffee and created a few spots on the *legislative* (lawmaking) council for elected African members.



### A Free Kenya

The Mau Mau Rebellion proved to Britain that it would not be able to control Kenya for much longer. In 1963, it granted Kenya independence. Jomo Kenyatta, who led the independence struggle and who had been put in prison during the rebellion, was elected president of the new country. He formed a strong central government under one political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Kenyatta led Kenya for the next 15 years until his death in 1978. Leaders have worked to create unity among Kenya's many ethnic groups. However, division and fighting between the groups continues to be a problem today.



## Lifestyle

### Games and Sports

Kenyans play soccer more than any other sport. Soccer leagues exist throughout the nation. Highly organized leagues operate in even the poorest areas but have very little equipment. They give young Kenyans a chance to develop discipline, teamwork, and physical skills. Kenyans are also among the best long-distance runners in the world. Most top runners are from Kenya's highlands, where the air is thin, which is good for training. Kenyans regularly win Olympic gold medals and the world's most famous marathons. In the cities, field hockey, *cricket* (similar to baseball), and rugby are also popular.



## Holidays

*Jamhuri* (Independence) Day, on 12 December, is the anniversary of the day in 1963 when Kenya became a free nation. People celebrate it by visiting friends and family and preparing big meals. They watch sporting events like the *Jamhuri* Day Cup, in which two soccer teams from the national league play. Choir performances and parades are also held. In Nairobi, the president gives a speech, which is later read aloud by local officials in cities throughout the country.



For the Islamic population, the country also observes *Idul-Fitr*, a three-day feast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*. The first day is an official holiday for Muslims, but celebrations on the next two days occur after working hours. During *Ramadan*, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset, after which they eat meals and visit one another.

## Food

Many people in Kenya don't have refrigerators, so they eat a lot of grains and other foods that won't spoil easily. The most common food is *ugali*, a thick dough made from ground corn. Kenyans eat *ugali* with green vegetables, beans, and sometimes meat or fish. *Sukuma wiki* (collard greens) is grown in nearly every garden and is a popular side dish to *ugali*. *Githeri* is a popular dish made from corn and beans cooked together. On the coast, dishes are spicier, and coconuts are used to make sauces. Many different kinds of fruit are popular in Kenya, including pineapples, mangoes, oranges, bananas, *plantains* (similar to bananas), and papaya.



## Schools

Adult Literacy  
78%



All kids between the ages of six and fourteen are required to go to school. Schooling is free, and classes go from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Students wear uniforms with their school colors. All classes are now taught in English, though students do learn Swahili as well. At age 14, students can go on to four years of *secondary* (high) school if they pass the national exams and if their families have enough money to pay the school fees. Children who attend *rural* (countryside) schools often walk over two miles to arrive in the morning and then walk back home once school is over.

Public schoolteachers are employed by the government. However, in recent years, schools in general (and especially *rural* schools) have suffered from not enough money. Some teachers take second jobs to get by. Parents are often willing to pay for their children to go to private school to get a better education. Many children also go to boarding school from an early age. Kenyan parents regularly spend a lot of time searching for the right school to send their children to.

## Life as a Kid

The average Kenyan family has between three and five children. Most Kenyan kids live in the countryside. Families usually have small farms, where every family member needs to help. Even the smallest children do their part. They help out with the seeding and planting, take care of the family cattle, and fetch water from the nearest stream or well. By the time they are old enough to go to school, Kenyan kids often already know how to plant and harvest crops such as corn or *kale* (a kind of cabbage). Often kids live with or near their extended families. That means that older kids not only have to look after their brothers and sisters, but their cousins, too. It also means they have close relationships with their aunts and uncles. Children in some ethnic groups call a *maternal* (on the mother's side) aunt "younger mother" or "older mother," depending on the aunt's age in relation to the child's mother. There aren't many toy stores in Kenya, but Kenyan kids often make their own toys using sticks, old wires, and bottle tops, and they make soccer balls out of plastic bags. In the cities, some families hire teenagers from the country to come work in their homes as maids.



## Society

### Government

#### Capital

Nairobi

#### Head of State

President Uhuru Kenyatta

#### Head of Government

President Uhuru Kenyatta

The leader of Kenya's government is the president. The president is elected to five-year terms. The 349 members of the National Assembly, or *Bunge*, and the 67-member Senate make Kenya's laws. For many years, only the president's political party was allowed to exist. This made it difficult for people to voice their opinions. Today, there are several political parties, and Kenyans are working to make their country more *democratic* (government by the people). The voting age is 18. Kenya is divided into 47 counties, each with a local government.

### Money and Economy

#### Currency

Kenyan shilling



Kenya is a poor country, and most Kenyans live simply. Seventy-five percent of the population relies on farming to make a living. Many farmers produce just enough food to provide for their families. Larger farms grow coffee beans and tea leaves and ship them for sale to other countries. The Kenyan economy also gets a boost from tourists,



who come to visit the nation's beaches and see its wildlife.

## Getting Around

Since most Kenyans don't own cars, one of the most popular ways to travel is by *matatu*. These are small vans or pickup trucks with seats in the back. *Matatus* run on regular routes, but they don't have schedules. They get very crowded but can still be fun to ride. Many are decorated with bright colors, and the drivers often like to play loud music. For shorter distances, people just walk or ride bicycles. Travel by train or bus is often slow or unreliable, and most country roads are unpaved. Taxis are common on the streets of the capital city of Nairobi, and traffic flows on the left side of the road.



## Culture Facts & Contacts

### Music

Music is an important part of Kenyan life. Musicians in *rural* (countryside) areas play homemade drums like the *ngoma*, which is made by stretching a skin (like cowhide) over a hollowed tree trunk. From a very young age, Kenyan kids sing and learn to play the drums, usually in a religious or cultural setting. Instead of trumpets, many *rural* musicians blow cattle horns. They play the harp-like *nyatiti* by plucking its strings. In the cities, people listen to fast dance music played with modern instruments, like the electric guitar.



One of the most popular locally-developed styles is the contemporary dance music known as *benga*. *Benga* first became popular during the 1970s and mixes traditional rhythms of the Luo ethnic group with modern instruments such as the electric guitar. Native music styles and dance vary by region. *Taraab* music has Arab roots and developed in coastal areas. The Maasai are famous for singing multipart harmonies. The Luo play the *nyatiti* to accompany lyrics about *tales* (short tales with a moral or lesson) and legends. The Kenya National Theater, in Nairobi, offers drama, concerts, and dance programs.

### Learn More

Contact the Kenya Consulate and Tourist Office at the Embassy of the Republic of Kenya, 2249 R Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 387-6101; web site [www.kenyaembassy.com](http://www.kenyaembassy.com).

# Kenya



Covering 224,961 square miles (582,650 sq km), Kenya is about the size of Texas.

Covering 26,828 square miles (69,485 sq km), Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa.

The Tana is Kenya's longest river; it is 440 miles (708 km) long.

Nairobi is one of the world's fastest-growing cities.

Built on an island, Mombasa is Kenya's second largest city and one of the nation's main shipping ports.

