

# Short Guide to: Kenya

**Location:** Kenya is a country in East Africa with a coastline on the Indian Ocean.

**Population:** 51.4 million

**Capital City:** Nairobi

**Language:** Swahili is the official first language but English is also an official language.

**Major Religions:** Approximately 70% of Kenyans are Christians (38% Protestant, 28% Catholic); about 25% are made up of indigenous religions; 6% are Muslim.

**Major Ethnic Groups:** There are over 40 distinct ethnic groups in Kenya with no main majority. However, the 5 largest groups – Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kalenjin make up 70% of the population.

## Geography and Landscape

Kenya is located in East Africa. It has wide variation in landscape and many of its areas of natural beauty are known worldwide and used in many well-known movies, TV shows, adverts and books. Kenya's landscape is the landscape most think of when they think of Africa. Kenya is known for its hot and dry savannahs, lakelands, the dramatic Great Rift Valley and mountain highlands. Millions of people visit Kenya each year to see its endless savannah and the animals that inhabit it: elephants, lions, cheetahs, giraffes, zebras, hippos, rhinos and more. The Kenyan government has set up more than 50 reserves and parks to protect these animals. Kenya's ecosystems also include deserts, swamps, mountain and forests. Each region has its own mix of plants and animals that are suited to the area's particular conditions. Kenya's highland forests are home to many animals found nowhere else in the world! Kenya's location between the Indian Ocean and Lake Victoria means that people from all over Africa and the Middle East have travelled and traded across it for centuries. Land locked countries around East Africa use Kenya's port to receive shipments, this has created a diverse culture with many ethnic groups and languages.

## Food and Drink

Known as "the cradle of mankind," Kenya has no single culture that identifies it. Each ethnic group has its own unique culture. As a result, there is no single dish that represents all of Kenya. While different communities have their own foods, the staple foods in Kenya include cereals



(maize, millet, sorghum and others depending on the region) eaten with various meats and vegetables. The Maasai, cattle-herding people, rely on cow and goat products, such as meat and milk. The Maasai traditionally do not eat wild game or fish, depending only on the livestock they raise for food. The Kikuyu grow corn, beans, potatoes, and greens. They mash all of these vegetables together to make a dish known as Irio. They roll Irio into balls and dip them into meat or vegetable stews. In western Kenya, the people living near Lake Victoria (the second-largest freshwater lake in the world) mainly prepare fish stews, vegetable dishes and rice. The staple of the Luo cuisine is ugali (a polenta-like corn meal) paired with sukuma wiki (sautéed greens) or steamed cabbage and carrots. Special meals include fish, chicken, stewed lentils (mung beans), rice and chapatti. People in the coast of Kenya have their own distinct foods such as pilau, coconut rice, biryani, samosas, kaimati (dumplings coated with syrup), fried cassava, seafood, mabuyu (baobab seeds coated with sugar and red food colouring), Achari (dried mango). The Kenyan diet also includes tea, of which Kenya is a major exporter, which is prepared by adding loose tea in a pot of equal parts of water and whole milk, plus sugar and ginger and bringing to the boil. It is then sieved and served for breakfast with bread, chapatti or Kenyan donuts known as Mandazi, at meal times and during Kenya's regular tea time.

## Traditions

Kenyans love to visit the coastline during major holidays. Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu are the favourite sandy beaches. After a long day at work, Kenyans love to catch up with friends over a cold beer or a 'Dawa' a cocktail. Security is a big issue in Kenya due to terrorist attacks. You cannot enter a building in major cities without being frisked. Affluent areas have their own protective enclosures using barbed wire. "Kaa chonjo" is a phrase that everyone needs to know. It means 'be alert' and can be used in many examples of life, from driving, to crime. But 'Kaa chonjo' has become a way of life in Kenya. Another Kenyan phrase is "Hakuna Matata", which became world famous when it was used in a song in the movie, Lion King. It means, "no worries". For the Luo Community, mourning the dead is an elaborate affair. The mourning is defined by singing and dancing that is meant to chase away the spirits of death. It has to be lively to avoid gossip and embarrassment to the family. For the Maasai Community, Enuoto, an event of shaving the Morans, is a once in a lifetime ceremony. Any Moran who does not go through this ceremony is not allowed to marry. Their hair is decorated with red paint, beads and plaited. It is washed off then shaved by their mother. For the Kipsigis Community, land is given to their unmarried women if they look unlikely to get a suitor. She can then farm and make a house for herself. Reasons people may have to leave Kenya to seek safety, as in all contexts, can be wide ranging but might include: Fear of persecution on account of at least one of the five protected grounds; race, religion, nationality, political opinion or a particular social group. Trafficking and slavery.

