



Kenya

Introduction

Official Name: Republic of Kenya
Nationality: Kenyan
Area: 582,650 square kilometers (224,962 square miles)
Languages: English (official), Swahili (official), various indigenous languages
Currency: Kenyan shilling (KSH)
Location: Eastern Africa, bordered by Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda with coastline on the Indian Ocean

Statistical Information

Population	36.9 million
0-14 years	42.1 percent
15-64 years	55.2 percent
65+ years	2.6 percent
Birth rate	39 births/1,000
Death rate	11 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	4.8 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	2.799 percent
Life expectancy	55.3 years
Literacy	85.1 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	6.7 percent
Below poverty line	50 percent
Ethnic groups	22 percent Kikuyu 14 percent Luhya 13 percent Luo 12 percent Kalenjin 11 percent Kamba 6 percent Kisii 6 percent Meru 15 percent other African 1 percent non-African (Asian, European, Arab)
Religion	45 percent Protestant 33 percent Roman Catholic 10 percent Muslim 10 percent tribal religions 2 percent other

Economy

Kenya is the regional center of trade and finance in East Africa, but economic growth has been limited by pervasive corruption and low commodity prices. In 1997, the International Monetary Fund suspended loans due to the Kenyan government's failure to combat corruption and institute reforms. From 1999 to 2000, a severe drought rocked the nation, reducing agricultural output and causing water and energy shortages. Strong rains returned in 2001, but corruption, low commodity prices, and low investment continue to stunt economic growth. The government of Mwai Kibaki made some progress in rooting out corruption and instituting reforms, but in 2005 and 2006 the government was hit by high-level scandals. Despite little governmental action against corruption, international lenders and investors are again lending to Kenya, and the economy is growing.

Government

Capital: Nairobi

Kenya is a republic. The president, who has traditionally been both chief of state and head of government, is elected by popular vote to a five-year term. The new power-sharing agreement signed by Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga call for a sharing of power between a president and a prime minister. The cabinet is appointed by the president. The legislature consists of the unicameral National Assembly, which has 224 seats. Two hundred and ten members are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms, 12 are appointed by the president, and the remaining two are ex-officio members (members who are not elected, but who sit on the National Assembly by virtue of their government position).

Climate

Kenya's climate is tropical. It is hot and humid along the coast, and arid in the north and northeast. Kenya is warm year-round, although it is cool early in the morning and late at night. It is hottest from February to March, and coldest from July to August. Kenya

experiences rainy seasons from April to June and from October to December.

Environmental Concerns

Water pollution from urban and industrial wastes as well as poor water quality due to runoff from pesticides and fertilizers create environmental problems in Kenya. In Lake Victoria, water hyacinth infestations damage the lake's ecosystems. Deforestation leads to increasing soil erosion and desertification, and endangered species in national wildlife preserves are threatened by poachers.

History

Kenya's early history is one of individual tribes. Groups of farmers and herders migrated south from Ethiopia between 2000 and 1000 B.C., and Bantu tribes from the Sudan settled in Kenya between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D.

Peoples on the Kenyan coast had formed strong trading relationships with Arabia by 100 A.D. During medieval times, Arabs founded several autonomous city-states along the coast of Kenya, including Mombasa, Malindi, and Pate.

In 1498, Portuguese explorers visited the coast of Kenya. By the end of the 16th century, the Portuguese controlled much of the Kenyan coast, including the Arab settlement of Mombasa. In 1729, the Arabs rebelled, expelling the Portuguese from Mombasa. Two rival Arab dynasties replaced the Portuguese as the leading powers of the Kenyan coast. The Mazrui dynasty ruled in Mombasa; the Busaidi dynasty was first based in Muscat, Oman, and then moved to Zanzibar in 1832. In 1837, the Busaidi defeated the Mazrui and took control of Mombasa. Long-distance caravan trading between Mombasa and Lake Victoria began in the early 19th century.

In the early 19th century, European explorers such as John Ludwig Krapf and Joseph Thomson began mapping parts of Kenya's interior. An agreement between the British and German governments in 1886 gave control of most of Kenya to the British, and in 1887 the British obtained rights to the Kenyan coast from the sultan of Zanzibar. In 1888, the Imperial British East Africa Company received a royal charter, but it was soon experiencing financial difficulties.

The British government took over the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1895 and established the East Africa Protectorate. From 1895 to 1901, the British constructed a railroad from Mombasa to Lake

Victoria to increase trade with Uganda and the Kenyan interior.

In 1903, colonists of European descent established themselves as large-scale farmers by taking land from the Kikuyu, the Masai, and other African tribes. Around the same time, Indian merchants began moving inland from the coastal areas.

The territory was renamed in 1920; the interior became Kenya Colony and a ten-mile-wide coastal strip became the Protectorate of Kenya. European settlers controlled the government and owned large tracts of land, and Indian merchants owned small trading businesses and were lower-level government officials. Africans were subsistence farmers or laborers.

African dissatisfaction and protest against their inferior status reached a crisis point with the Mau Mau Emergency from 1952 to 1956. An armed underground insurgent group called Mau Mau, comprised mostly of Kikuyu tribespeople, led an armed revolt against British rule in an attempt to restore traditional land rights and ways of governance. The British declared a state of emergency in 1952 and imprisoned Jomo Kenyatta and other nationalist leaders. By 1956, the British had hunted down and executed most of the Mau Mau insurgents. The entire Kikuyu tribe was resettled in a guarded area.

In 1960, the British ended the state of emergency and released nationalist leaders, including Kenyatta. After the revolt, the British increased African representation in the colony's legislature. By 1961, the legislature had an African majority.

On December 12, 1963, Kenya received its independence from Britain. In 1964, it became a republic, with Kenyatta as its first president. The first decade of independence was full of turmoil. Ethnic disputes broke out, mostly between the Kikuyu and Luo tribes, and many Europeans and Asians voluntarily left Kenya. Border disputes with Somalia resulted in sporadic fighting from 1963 to 1968. In 1969, Tom Mboya, a leading government official, was assassinated. Further domestic unrest was caused by Kenyatta's suppression of opponents. The sub-Saharan drought of the early 1970s affected more than 70 percent of Kenya. As the 1970s progressed, Kenya's relations with neighboring countries went downhill; Tanzania closed its border with Kenya when Kenya harbored several of dictator Idi Amin's supporters after the fall of his brutal regime.

After Kenyatta's death in 1978, Vice President Daniel arap Moi became president. Moi followed a policy of Africanization of industry: he placed limits on foreign investment and offered credit to African investors. He refused increasing demands for democracy and continued Kenyatta's policy of silencing opposition. Following rumors of a coup, Moi disbanded the air force and imprisoned those implicated in the plot. Throughout the 1980s, Moi periodically purged his administration of those he felt were disloyal.

In 1988, the arrest of several proponents of a multiparty democracy prompted rioting. In 1991, the legislature passed an amendment to the national constitution allowing multiparty democracy. According to the 1992 elections, however, Moi was reelected president. Opponents accused Moi's government of election fraud and human rights abuses, but the election results stood. Tensions continued to rise as tens of thousands of Somali refugees flooded northeast Kenya. A terrorist bomb killed 250 people in the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi in 1998.

Moi was forced to retire in 2002. He backed Kenyatta's son, Uhuru, in the 2002 presidential elections. Mwai Kibaki, running against Uhuru, was the most prominent opposition candidate. Despite accusations of vote-rigging in Uhuru's favor, Kibaki won a significant majority, and his party won a majority of seats in the National Assembly.

In August of 2004, Masai tribespeople began to protest over land on which the lease (signed with the British 99 years ago) had expired. Continuing protests raised the issue of many unfair long-term land leases which the British had forced on the indigenous peoples. Some of the disputed land leases were over 900 years long. In early 2005, fighting erupted between Kikuyu farmers and Masai herders over water supplies.

In 2004 and 2005, corruption scandals tore through the government. Upon election, Kibaki had promised to take strong action against government corruption, but had done little. The British ambassador to Kenya accused Kenyan officials of graft, or taking items of value not related to their official pay, often money from government accounts.

After voters rejected a new draft constitution in 2005, Kibaki closed the legislature and dismissed his cabinet, replacing opposition cabinet members with allies. Drought in northeast Kenya led to crop failure and mass starvation late in 2005.

Civil unrest erupted following the 2007 presidential elections. Kibaki was declared the winner of the election, but supporters of opposition candidate Raila Odinga protested, claiming the election was rigged. Pro-Odinga demonstrations turned violent when police began firing on demonstrators. Much of the political violence was directed against the Kikuyu people, since Kibaki is Kikuyu. Violence continued to escalate as Kikuyus retaliated. On January 1, 2008, a church in Eldoret serving as a shelter for displaced peoples was set on fire, burning 35 Kikuyu refugees to death. The violence has a definite ethnic character, since Odinga is Luo and Kibaki is Kikuyu; both Odinga's supporters and Kibaki's have been accused of ethnic cleansing. Odinga planned to proclaim himself the people's president. He and Kibaki began negotiations in January, mediated by former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

On February 28, 2008, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga signed a power-sharing agreement which has been widely accepted throughout Kenya. The agreement was ratified by the parliament on March 18. As a result of the power-sharing agreement, civil unrest in Kenya has subsided considerably.

Ethnic Groups

Around 22 percent of Kenya's population is Kikuyu. The tribe most likely migrated to Kenya with other Bantu tribes. They were originally hunter-gatherers, but became farmers. The Kikuyu coexisted peacefully with the Masai tribe until the colonial period, when conflicts began. The Kikuyu were removed from their native land and forced onto a small reserve. Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, was Kikuyu, as is Mwai Kibaki. Kikuyu culture is patriarchal. Traditionally, Kikuyu men may take multiple wives. Kikuyu homesteads consisted of multiple huts. The husband had his own hut, called a *thingira*. Each wife had a hut where she and her children slept. Today, many Kikuyu live away from their homeland, in cities or other areas of the country. Kikuyu customs highly value and protect the chastity of unmarried women. Nearly three-quarters of Kikuyu are Christian; the rest follow the traditional Kikuyu religion, which is monotheistic. The creator, Ngai, lives atop Mount Kenya; he created the land and gave it to the people. The Kikuyu religion also values ancestors and the forest. Kikuyu tribespeople speak Kikuyu, which is a form of Bantu. Many also speak Swahili and English.

The Luhya make up around 14 percent of Kenya's total population. They live in the fertile highlands of western Kenya, the most densely populated region in the country. They are traditionally farmers, and grow

crops such as sugar cane, wheat, and cassava. Traditional Luhya leadership was democratic; leaders were called *Mwami*. Luhya traditionally practiced both male and female circumcision, but due to government intervention, female circumcision has largely been abandoned. Polygamy is allowed if the man marries under Muslim or traditional African law. Deaths are a major event in Luhya culture; mourners often stay at a funeral for a week or more. Most Luhya today are Christians; their word for God is *Nyasaye*. The Bukusu subgroup still practices its native tribal religion, and retains most traditional cultural values.

The Luo are the third-largest ethnic group in Kenya. They are traditionally fishermen, and speak the Dholuo language. Today, most Kenyan Luo are Christians. Everyone in the Luo community is expected to marry; traditionally, a Luo man could have up to five wives, but in modern society most Luo are monogamous. Traditional Luo culture revolved heavily around music, with different types of music for different occasions (ceremonial, political, etc.). The Kenyan politician Raila Odinga belongs to the Luo tribe.

There are several smaller tribal groupings within the Kalenjin group of people. The Kalenjin tribes are traditionally shepherds, and their languages belong to the Nandi language family. The Kalenjin have been called “the running tribe” because of the large number of successful Olympic runners the tribe has produced.

The Kamba, or Akamba, are an ethnic group of Bantu origin who live in Kenya’s Eastern Province. Their land is called *Ukambani*. They speak a language called Kikamba. The family is very important in a Kamba community. The man is head of the family and works as a trader, farmer, herder, or hunter. The woman grows most of the family’s food. The traditional Kamba religion centers around one invisible, transcendental god, Ngai, who created life on earth. Departed ancestors intercede between Ngai and the living. The Kamba people love music and dance.

The Kisii tribe is another group of Bantu origin. They live in western Kenya; traditionally, their land was surrounded by tribes hostile to them. As a result, the Kisii developed a war-like culture to defend themselves against cattle raids. Today, the Kisii are known for being tough, resilient, and hardworking. The Kisii community is very economically active and has some of the highest fertility and population growth rates in Kenya.

There are many other, smaller African ethnic groups in Kenya such as the Meru and the Masai. There are over 40 ethnic groups in Kenya, each with their own customs and traditions. Kenya’s diverse population includes most major ethnic and linguistic groups of Africa. There are also populations of ethnic Indian groups, such as Baluchs and Punjabis, as well as people of British and Omani descent.

Religion

A majority of Kenyans are Christians. Around 45 percent are Protestant, and 25 percent are Roman Catholic. Kenya also has the largest community of Quakers in a single nation. According to the Friends World Committee for Consultation, there are around 133,000 Kenyan Quakers, living mostly in the western parts of Kenya. Approximately 10 percent of Kenyans are Sunni Muslims. Most communities of Sunni Muslims are centered along Kenya’s coast. Other minority religions include Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Bahá’í.

Culture

Food—Corn is the staple of the Kenyan diet. It is ground into flour and made into a porridge called *posho*, which may be served with mashed beans, potatoes, or other vegetables to make a dish called *irio*. Another popular dish is a beef stew known as *ugali*. Boiled greens, or *mboga*, and banana porridge, or *matoke*, are common dishes. Meat is expensive in Kenya, so few families eat it regularly. In Mombasa, a variety of Indian foods are available. Tea with milk and sugar is a popular drink, as are palm wine and beer. One type of Kenyan beer, called *uki*, is made with honey.

Social status—Many Kenyans are poor. Many of the more affluent Kenyans are of the Kikuyu tribe, followed by the Luo. Affluent Kenyans tend to have assimilated more elements of Western culture than their less-affluent countrymen. Expensive name-brand clothing is a status indicator among urban Kenyans. Among traditional herders such as the Masai, one’s wealth is measured by the number of cattle owned. Having many children is also considered a sign of wealth.

Marriage—Traditionally, polygamy was legal and common in Kenya. The practice is much less common today due to the influence of Christianity. When a Kenyan man chooses a wife, he pays a bride price to the woman’s father, usually either money or cattle.

Education—The Kenyan government offers free primary school for children ages seven

through 14. Secondary school is for those aged 14 to 18, but is too expensive for much of the population. After both primary and secondary school, there is a series of national exams which students must pass to continue their education. Those who can afford it usually continue on to one of Kenya's universities or go abroad for higher education.

Etiquette—Most Kenyans are very friendly and hospitable people. Greetings are valued, and usually include inquiries about one's health and family. A host will generally offer visitors tea or food; it is impolite to decline. Kenyan elders are treated with great respect.

Dress

In urban areas, many people dress in Western styles. Many women wear a *kanga*, a large, colorful piece of cloth that can be wrapped around the body as a skirt or shawl. Head scarves are also common. Some Kenyan tribal groups retain their traditional styles of dress. Women of the northern nomadic tribes wear *gorfa*, a sheepskin or goatskin dyed red or black, wrapped around the body, and tied with a leather cord or rope belt. Different types of jewelry and hairstyles indicate wealth and social status in many tribal groups.

Travel/Transportation

Driving is on the left side of the road in Kenya. Local driving habits tend to be unpredictable, which is hazardous for the unaccustomed driver. Roads are often unpaved, bumpy, and full of potholes. Many local vehicles lack safety equipment. In the case of heavy traffic jams, Kenyan drivers are known to cross the median and drive toward oncoming traffic.

Local buses called *matatus* are fairly dangerous. They are often driven erratically and at excessive rates of speed. *Matatus* pose dangers to other vehicles on the road and to pedestrians. There have been many fatal accidents involving *matatus*.

During the rainy season, heavy rains and flooding make many unpaved roads impassable. The government repairs many roads and bridges damaged by flooding each year.

Kenya will accept an international driving permit (IDP) for foreigners who wish to drive while in Kenya. An IDP is a document which allows a motorist to operate a vehicle in another nation when accompanied by a valid driver's license from his or her own country.

You can apply for an IDP in the United States or Canada before you travel. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are the only organizations in the U.S. authorized by the State Department to issue IDPs. The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) is authorized to issue IDPs to Canadian citizens. The cost of an IDP is under \$20, and the application will need to be accompanied by two passport-sized photos.

For more information on Kenyan driving permits, insurance, or other transportation issues, email the Kenyan Embassy at info@kenyaembassy.com.

Illness/Injury

Adequate health facilities are available in Nairobi. See the Immunizations section for disease risks in Kenya.

Crime

Kenya has a high rate of crime, especially in major cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa. Visitors should not carry valuables on their person, as pickpocketing and purse-snatching are common. Avoid walking alone at night, especially in downtown areas, public parks, on beaches, and in poorly lit areas.

Armed carjackings and home burglaries are becoming increasingly frequent. *Matatus* and other forms of public transportation are often targeted because they carry more passengers and thus more targets. Thieves usually will not harm victims who do not resist.

Highway banditry is common in the North Eastern Province, Eastern Province, the northern part of Coast Province, and the northern part of Rift Valley Province. These areas are remote, and lone vehicles are vulnerable. Travelers in North Eastern Province and the North Rift Valley Region should only travel with police escorts or government convoys.

There have been instances of armed banditry in Kenya's national parks and game reserves, particularly the Samburu, Leshaba, and Masai Mara game reserves. The Kenya Wildlife Service and national police have strengthened security in national parks and game reserves, but the problem has not been eliminated. Safaris should be undertaken with at least two vehicles in case of a mechanical failure, and camping is safest in groups.

Safety and Security

The security situation in Kenya was tenuous following the disputed presidential elections in

December of 2007. There was a surge in ethnic violence, particularly between the Kikuyu and Luo ethnic groups. Many homes and businesses have been burned, and Kenyan citizens have been killed or driven out of their homes. Since the power-sharing agreement was signed on February 28, 2008, much of the ethnic and political violence has subsided, though tensions remain.

Border areas in northern Kenya often have incidences of cross-border inter-tribal violence. This can include large-scale cattle rustling, counter-raids, and other tribal or clan rivalry. Insecurity caused by these clashes may make travel unsafe.

Entry/Exit Requirements

A passport and visa are required. It is best to obtain a Kenyan visa in advance, although airport visas are available. Travelers who opt to obtain an airport visa upon arrival should expect delays. A traveler's passport must be valid for at least six months in order to enter Kenya. For more information on Kenyan visas, contact the Embassy of Kenya, 2249 R Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20008.

Immunizations

The CDC recommends that all travelers to Kenya aged nine months or older receive a yellow fever vaccination. Vaccinations for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid, and polio are also recommended. All areas of Kenya outside Nairobi are risk areas for malaria. Travelers should take a course of antimalarial drugs recommended by a travel health professional; chloroquine is not an effective antimalarial for Kenya.

Special Circumstances

Villagers in rural areas are sometimes suspicious of strangers, especially around their children. Travelers should use caution if they are not well-known in the village, as taking pictures or offering children candy may cause deep alarm or panic among some village adults. There have been some instances of violence against adults, both Kenyan and foreign, who have been suspected of stealing children.

Tap water is not safe to drink in Kenya. Sealed bottled water is safe and may be purchased in restaurants, grocery stores, and hotels.

Electricity

Kenya uses 240V/50Hz power, comparable to the European Union. A power converter is necessary to use most American appliances in Kenya. A set of adapter plugs will also be necessary to convert American types A and B plugs to fit in Kenyan type G receptacles.