



Kenya



Full name: The Republic of Kenya

Population: 38.5 million.

Approximately six million people live in the urban areas.

Kenya has a diverse population comprising of 42 ethnic groups.

Capital: Nairobi

Area: 582,646 sq km (224,961 sq miles)

Major languages: Swahili, English and many tribal languages

Major religion: Christianity

Life expectancy: 53 years (men)

55 years (women)

Monetary unit: 1 Kenya shilling = 100 cents (1 US\$ = 7-kSh)

Main exports: Tea, coffee, horticultural products,
petroleum products

Time: GMT +3

President: Raila Odinga



History

- The first of many human footprints to be stamped on Kenyan soil were left way back in 2000 BC by nomadic Cushitic tribes from Ethiopia. As tribes migrated throughout the interior, Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula and Shirazis from Persia (now Iran) settled along the East African coast from the 8th century AD onwards.
- Drawn by the aroma of spices and money, the Portuguese started showing interest in the 15th century. The Portuguese settled in for a long period of harsh colonial rule, playing one sultan off against another. By the late 19th century, years of civil war between the Maasai's two opposing factions had weakened the tribe. Disease and famine had also taken their toll. This opened the way for the English to negotiate a treaty with the Maasai laibon (chief, or spiritual leader) and begin work on the Mombasa-Uganda railway - which cut straight through the Maasai grazing lands. The halfway point of this railway is roughly where Nairobi stands today. It was downhill from here for the Maasai. As white settlers demanded more fertile land, the Maasai were herded into smaller reserves.
- White settlement in the early 20th century was initially disastrous, but - once they began to learn a little about the land - the British succeeded in making their colony viable. At the 2002 elections, the National Rainbow Coalition, led by Mwai Kibaki was voted into power.
- Opposition leader Raila Odinga was sworn in as prime minister in April 2008, fulfilling a key step in a power-sharing deal aimed at ending a violent political crisis.

Religion and Society

Kenya has a strong Christian following, particularly in the central and western areas. On the coast, Islam is also widespread. Traditional beliefs are still practised, particularly in the more rural areas, where access to more formal medicines is poor and expensive.



The People

In the present day, Kenya's ethnic diversity has produced a vibrant culture, but is also a source of conflict. Other pressing challenges include high unemployment, crime and poverty; most Kenyans live below the poverty line of \$1 a day. One of Africa's more politically-stable countries, Kenya has been a leading light in the Somali and Sudanese peace processes.

Economy

- The regional hub for trade and finance in East Africa, Kenya has been hampered by corruption and by reliance upon several primary goods whose prices have remained low. In 1997, the IMF suspended Kenya's Enhanced Structural Adjustment Program due to the government's failure to maintain reforms and curb corruption. A severe drought from 1999 to 2000 compounded Kenya's problems, causing water and energy rationing and reducing agricultural output.
- With its scenic beauty and abundant wildlife, Kenya is one of Africa's major safari destinations and has a lucrative tourist industry.
- In the key 27 December 2002 elections, Daniel Arap Moi's 24-year-old reign ended, and a new opposition government took on the formidable economic problems facing the nation. In 2003, progress was made in rooting out corruption and encouraging donor support, with GDP growth edging up to 1.7%.
- In Jan 2007 the country faced political turmoil but the raging parties of Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga soon came together to unite Kenya once more.



Climate

- Kenya has a tropical climate with moderate temperatures averaging about 22 0C throughout the year. It is hot and humid at the coast, temperate inland and dry in the north and northeast parts of the country.
- There are two seasons: short rains (October to December) and long rains (March to June). The hottest period is from January to March.

Landscapes

- Kenya straddles the equator and covers an area of 225,000 sq. miles, which includes around 5,251 sq. miles of inland water in the form of lakes. It is bordered to the north by Ethiopia and Sudan, to the east by Somalia and the Indian Ocean coastline, to the west by Uganda and Lake Victoria and to the south by Tanzania.
- The country can be divided into four main zones: the coastal belt, the Rift Valley and central highlands, western Kenya, and northern and eastern Kenya.
- The country is bisected by the great Rift Valley which extends for 8,700 km on the surface of the earth from the Dead Sea in Jordan to Beira in Mozambique.
- Kenya has the second highest snow capped mountain (Mt. Kenya) in Africa rising to a height of 5,199 metres, after Mt. Kilimanjaro.
- Kenya's population centres are concentrated in the southern portion



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Some 1,500 people died in fighting and 300,000 were displaced following the elections in the previous December, which both Mr Odinga and President Kibaki claimed to have won.

With the violence escalating, the rivals agreed in February to share power - but then wrangled for weeks over how to divide up their coalition cabinet.

Eventually 40 cabinet ministers took up their positions, 20 each from both camps. Mr Kibaki's Party of National Unity retained the key finance and internal security ministries. However, cracks soon appeared in the new power-sharing arrangements, with Mr Odinga accusing Mr Kibaki of undermining the coalition deal and bypassing ministers from his Orange Democratic Movement in decision-making.

In April 2009, he announced a boycott of cabinet meetings amid a further dispute over control of the influential committee that sets parliament's legislative agenda.

Raila Odinga claimed the presidency, but in the end settled for new post of premier

[Profile: Raila Odinga](#)