History

CRADLE OF HUMANITY

East Africa, with its valleys, plains and highlands, has one of the longest documented human histories of any region in the world. Ancient hominid (humanlike) skulls and footprints, some over three million years old, have been found at various sites, including at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania and Lake Turkana in Kenya. Although similarly ancient traces have also been found elsewhere on the continent, the East African section of the Rift Valley is popularly considered the 'cradle of humanity'.

By about one million years ago, these early ancestors had come to resemble modern humans, and had spread well beyond East Africa, as far as Europe and Asia. Roughly 100,000 years ago, possibly earlier, *homo sapiens* – or modern man – arrived on the scene.

See www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/humans/humankind/d.html for an overview of human evolution in East Africa.

The earliest evidence of modern-day East Africans dates to about 10,000 years ago, when much of the region was home to Khoisan-speaking hunter-gatherer communities. On the western fringes of East Africa, including parts of the area that is now Rwanda and Burundi, there were also small populations of various so-called Pygmy groups.

THE RELATIVES ARRIVE

Beginning between 3000 and 5000 years ago, a series of migrations began that were to indelibly shape the face of East Africa. Cushitic- and Nilotic-speaking peoples from the north and Bantu-speakers from the west converged on the Khoisan and other peoples already in the area, eventually creating the rich tribal mosaic that is East Africa today.

The first to arrive were Cushitic-speaking farmers and cattle herders who made their way to the region from present-day Ethiopia, and settled both inland and along the coast. They moved mostly in small family groups, and brought with them traditions that are still practiced by their descendents, including the Iraqw around Tanzania's Lake Manyara, and the Gabbra and Rendille in northern Kenya.

Africa – A Biography of the Continent by John Reader takes you on a sweeping journey through Africa from its earliest days, and includes some fascinating text on East Africa.

The next major influx began around 1000 BC, when Bantu-speaking peoples from West Africa's Niger Delta area began moving eastwards, arriving in East Africa around the 1st century BC. Thanks to their advanced agricultural skills, and knowledge of ironwork and steel production, these Bantu-speakers were able to absorb many of the Cushitic- and Khoisan-speakers who were already in the region, as well as the Pygmy populations around the Great Lakes. Soon they became East Africa's most populous ethno-linguistic family – a status which they continue to hold today.

A final wave of migration began somewhat later, when smaller groups of Nilotic peoples began to arrive in East Africa from what is now southern Sudan. This influx continued through to the 18th century, but the main movements took place in the 15th and 16th centuries. Most of these Nilotic peoples – whose descendants include the present-day Maasai and Turkana – were pastoralists, and many settled in the less fertile areas of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania where their large herds would have sufficient grazing space.

Today the population diversity resulting from these migrations is one of the most fascinating aspects of travel in East Africa.

MONSOON WINDS

As these migrations were taking place in the interior, coastal areas were being shaped by far different influences. Azania, as the East African coast was known to the ancient Greeks, was an important trading post as early as 400 BC, and had probably been inhabited even before then by small groups of Cushitic peoples, and by Bantu-speakers. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a navigator's guide written in the 1st century AD, mentions a place called Raphta as the southernmost trading port of the region. Although Raphta's location remains a mystery, it is believed to have been somewhere along the Kenyan or Tanzanian coast, possibly on the mainland opposite Manda or Paté Islands (north of Lamu), or further south near the Pangani or Rufiji estuaries.

'....Two days' sail beyond, there lies the very last market-town of the continent of Azania, which is called Rhapta... in which there is ivory in great quantity, and tortoise-shell....' (*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*)

Trade seems to have grown steadily throughout the early part of the first millennium. Permanent settlements were established as traders, first from the Mediterranean and later from Arabia and Persia, came ashore on the winds of the monsoon and began to intermix with the indigenous peoples, gradually giving rise to Swahili language and culture. The traders from Arabia also brought Islam, which by the 11th century had become entrenched.

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, these coastal settlements flourished. Ports including Shanga (on Paté Island), Gede, Lamu and Mombasa (all in present-day Kenya) and those on the Zanzibar Archipelago and at Kilwa Kisiwani (both in Tanzania) traded in ivory, gold and other goods with places as far away as India and China.

Chinese porcelain fragments have been discovered at Gede and elsewhere along the East African coast – testaments to old trade routes between Africa and the Orient.

THE FIRST EUROPEANS

The first European to reach East Africa was the intrepid Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who arrived in 1498, en route to the Orient. Within three decades, the Portuguese had disrupted the old trading networks and subdued the entire coast, building forts at various places, including Kilwa and Mombasa. Portuguese control lasted until the early 18th century, when they were displaced by Arabs from Oman.

SWAHILI

The word 'Swahili' ('of the coast', from the Arabic word *sāhil*) refers both to the Swahili language, as well as to the Islamic culture of the various people inhabiting the East African coast from Mogadishu (Somalia) in the north down to Mozambique in the south. Both language and culture are a rich mixture of Bantu, Arabic, Persian and Asian influences.

Although Swahili culture began to develop in the early part of the 1st millennium AD, it was not until the 18th century, with the ascendancy of the Omani Arabs on Zanzibar, that it came into its own. Swahili's role as a lingua franca was solidified as it spread throughout East and Central Africa along the great trade caravan routes. European missionaries and explorers soon adopted the language as their main means of communicating with locals. In the second half of the 19th century, missionaries, notably the German Johan Ludwig Krapf, also began applying the Roman alphabet. Prior to this, Swahili had been written exclusively in Arabic script.

TIMELINE

c 3.5 million years ago	c 100 BC	c 750 AD	1498
Hominid (humanlike) creatures wander around the East African plains	Bantu-speakers arrive in the region	Islam reaches the East African coast; Swahili civilisation begins to prosper	Vasco da Gama arrives in East Africa

Portuguese influence is still seen in architecture, customs and language of the area – the Swahili *gereza* (jail), from Portuguese *igreja* (church), dates to the days when Portuguese forts contained both in the same compound.

As the Omani Arabs solidified their foothold, they began to turn their sights westwards, developing powerful trade routes that stretched inland as far as Lake Tanganyika and Central Africa. Commerce grew at such a pace that in the 1840s, the Sultan of Oman moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar.

The slave trade also grew rapidly during this period, driven in part by demand from European plantation holders on the Indian Ocean islands of Réunion and Mauritius. Soon slave traders, including the notorious Tippu Tip, had established stations at Tabora (Tanzania) and other inland towns. By the mid-19th century, the Zanzibar Archipelago had become the largest slave entrepôt along the East African coast, with nearly 50,000 slaves – abducted from as far away as Lake Tanganyika – passing through Zanzibar's market each year.

COLONIAL CONTROL

Tales of both the horrors of the slave trade and of the attractions of East Africa soon made their way back to Europe, and Western interests were piqued. In 1890 Germany and Great Britain signed an agreement defining 'spheres of influence' for themselves, which formally established a British protectorate over the Zanzibar Archipelago. Most of what is now mainland Tanzania, as well as Rwanda and Burundi, came under German control, and was known as German East Africa (later Tanganyika), while the British took Kenya and Uganda.

The 19th century was also the era of European explorers, including Gustav Fischer (a German whose party was virtually annihilated by the Maasai at Hell's Gate on Lake Naivasha in 1882), Joseph Thomson (a Scot who reached Lake Victoria via the Rift Valley lakes and the Aberdare Ranges in 1883) and Count Teleki von Szek (an Austrian who explored the Lake Turkana region and Mt Kenya in 1887). Anglican bishop James Hannington set out in 1885 to establish a diocese in Uganda, but was killed when he reached the Nile. Other explorers included Burton and Speke, who were sent to Lake Tanganyika in 1858 by the Royal Geographical Society, and the famous Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone.

For an intriguing glimpse at life in precolonial Kenya, look for a copy of Khadambi Asalache's *A Calabash of Life*.

By the turn of the 20th century, Europeans had firmly established a presence in East Africa. Both the British and German colonial administrations were busy building railways and roads to open their colonies to commerce, establishing hospitals and schools, and encouraging the influx of Christian missionaries. Kenya's fertile and climatically favourable highlands proved suitable for European farmers to colonise. In Tanganyika, by contrast, large areas were unable to support agriculture and were plagued by the tsetse fly, which made cattle grazing and dairy farming impossible.

The Lunatic Express by Charles Miller is a very readable recounting of the expansion of East Africa's rail network and other colonial interventions.

THE SLAVE TRADE

Slavery has been practised in Africa throughout recorded history, but its greatest expansion in East Africa came with the rise of Islam, which prohibits the enslavement of Muslims. Demands of European plantation holders on the islands of Réunion and Mauritius were another major catalyst, particularly during the second half of the 18th century.

At the outset slaves were taken from coastal regions and shipped to Arabia, Persia and the Indian Ocean islands. Kilwa Kisiwani, off the southern Tanzanian coast, was one of the major export gateways. As demand increased, traders made their way further inland, so that during the 18th and 19th centuries slaves were being brought from as far away as Malawi and the Congo. By the 19th century, with the rise of the Omani Arabs, Zanzibar had eclipsed Kilwa Kisiwani as East Africa's major slave-trading depot. According to some estimates, by the 1860s between 10,000 and as many as 50,000 slaves were passing through Zanzibar's market each year. Overall, close to 600,000 slaves were sold through Zanzibar between 1830 and 1873, when a treaty with Britain paved the way for the trade's ultimate halt in the region by the early 20th century.

As well as the human horrors, the slave trade caused major social upheavals on the mainland. In the sparsely populated south of present-day Tanzania it fanned up interclan warfare in the politically decentralised area, as ruthless entrepreneurs raided neighbouring tribes for slaves. In other places, the slave trade promoted increased social stratification and altered settlement patterns. Some tribes, for example, began to build fortified settlements encircled by trenches, while others concentrated their populations in towns as self-defence. Another fundamental societal change was the gradual shift in the nature of chieftaincy, from being religiously based to becoming a position resting on military power or wealth – both among the 'gains' of trade in slaves and commodities.

The slave trade also served as an impetus for European missionary activity in East Africa, prompting the establishment of the first Christian stations and missionaries' penetration of the interior. One of the most tireless campaigners against the horrors of slavery was the Scottish missionary-explorer David Livingstone (1813–74), whose efforts, combined with the attention attracted by his funeral, were the decisive factors mobilising British initiatives to end human trafficking.

INDEPENDENCE

As the European presence in Africa solidified, discontent with colonial rule grew and nationalist demands for independence became insistent. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the various nationalist movements coalesced and gained strength across East Africa, culminating in the granting of independence to Tanzania (1961), Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi (all in 1962), and Kenya (1963). Independence and postindependence trajectories varied from country to country. In Kenya, the path leading to independence was violent and protracted; in Tanzania and Uganda the immediate preindependence years were relatively peaceful, while in Rwanda and Burundi, long-existing tribal rivalries were a major impediment.

In Kenya, the European influx increased rapidly during the first half of the 20th century, so that by the 1950s there were about 80,000 settlers in the country. Much of the land expropriated for their farms came from the homelands of the Kikuyu people. The Kikuyu responded by forming an opposition political association in 1920, and they instigated the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, something which marked a major turning point in Kenyan politics.

Zamani – A Survey of East African History, edited by renowned Kenyan historian BA Ogot with JA Kieran, is one of the best introductions to the region's precolonial and colonial history from an African perspective.

In Tanganyika, the unpopular German administration continued until the end of WWI, when the League of Nations mandated the area to the British, and Rwanda and Burundi to the Belgians. British rule was equally unpopular, however, with the Brits neglecting development of Tanganyika in favour of the more lucrative and fertile options available in Kenya and Uganda. Political consciousness soon began to coalesce in the form of farmers' unions and cooperatives, through which popular demands were expressed. By the mid-20th century, there were over 400 such cooperatives, which soon joined to form the Tanganyika Africa

Association (TAA), a lobbying group for the nationalist cause based in Dar es Salaam.

In Uganda, the British tended to favour the recruitment of the powerful Buganda people for the civil service. Members of other tribes, unable to acquire responsible jobs in the colonial administration or to make inroads into the Buganda-dominated commercial sector, were forced to seek other ways of joining the mainstream. The Acholi and Lango, for example, chose the army and became the tribal majority in the military. As resentment grew, the seeds were planted for the intertribal conflicts that were to tear Uganda apart following independence.

Shake Hands With the Devil by Roméo Dallaire is a searing account of the Rwandan genocide by the head of the UN peacekeeping mission to Rwanda.

In Rwanda and Burundi, the period of colonial rule was characterised by the increasing power and privilege of the Tutsi. The Belgian administrators found it convenient to rule indirectly through Tutsi chiefs and their princes, and the Tutsi had a monopoly on the missionary-run educational system. As a result long-existing tensions between the Tutsi and Hutu were exacerbated, igniting the spark that was later to explode in the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

For more about the independence movements, and the history of each country since independence, see the country chapters.

INTO THE FUTURE

Take a stroll through East Africa today, and you'll see all these threads of history come to life: from Olduvai Gorge, with its fascinating fossil finds, to the winding lanes and ornate lintels of old Swahili settlements such as Lamu and Zanzibar's Stone Town, to bustling coastal dhow ports, Portuguese-era garrisons and the more recent colonial architecture lining Dar es Salaam's waterfront. Interspersed with all this is East Africa's more modern face – glitzy high-rise office blocks, elegant luxury lodges, crass Western-style resorts – and tying it all together are the rich tribal heritages that are the region's lifeblood.

Browse www.nationmedia.com/eastafrican/current/index.htm to keep up with what's happening in East Africa today.

The next decades are going to involve a continual reconciling of all these threads – traditional and modern, foreign and local. Yet, in many ways, East Africa has never been better positioned to do this. Peace has gained a foothold in the previous trouble spots of Rwanda and Uganda, and is slowly progressing in Burundi. Tourism is more than holding its own as a burgeoning regional industry, while the local cultural scene continues to be as vibrant as ever. Whatever the future holds, it's likely that East Africa's move into the next chapter of its history won't be fast, but it will certainly be fascinating.

1994
Rwandan genocide unleashed

2002
Peaceful and fair elections in Kenya

The Culture

DAILY LIFE

Despite East Africa's size and diversity, daily life follows remarkably similar patterns throughout much of the region. In general, rural rhythms set the beat: life is centred around tending small farm plots, and money – especially for paying school fees or building a house – is a constant concern. Women always work, either outside the home or tending to the family and garden, and many students don't have the opportunity to finish secondary school. Throughout the region tourism provides employment opportunities, though good positions are for the lucky few, and both unemployment and underemployment are rife. At the other end of the spectrum are the small cadres of wealthy in Nairobi and other capital cities who drive fancy 4WDs, live in Western-style houses in posh residential areas and send their children to university in London or elsewhere. Most East Africans fall somewhere in between these scenarios, although far more are closer to the former than the latter.

Throughout East Africa, family life is central, with weddings, funerals and other events holding centre stage, and celebrations being grand affairs – often aimed at demonstrating status.

Family ties are strong, and it is expected that those who have jobs will share what they have with the extended family. The extended family also forms an essential support network in the absence of government social security systems. Given that average per capita income in the region ranges between about US$150 in Burundi and US$400 in Kenya (compared with about US$24,000 in the UK), the system works remarkably well, with surprisingly few destitute people on the streets in most areas.

Invisible social hierarchies lend life a sense of order, with men ruling the roost in the working world and, at least symbolically, in the family as well. Although women arguably form the backbone of the economy

I Laugh So I Won't Cry: Kenya's Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives, edited by Helena Halperin, offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of East African women. Also look for *Three Swahili Women: Life Histories from Mombasa, Kenya* by Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel.

AIDS IN EAST AFRICA

Together with malaria, AIDS is now the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa, and East Africa is no exception. In Uganda alone, there are almost one million AIDS orphans under 15 years of age – one of the highest figures in the world – and an estimated 53,000 children 14 years old or younger living with HIV/AIDS. The figures elsewhere in the region are just as sobering. Kenya has close to 550,000 AIDS orphans, and an estimated 78,000 children living with HIV/AIDS. Women are particularly hard hit. In Burundi, for example, where an estimated 20% of urban dwellers and 6% of rural dwellers are HIV positive, infection rates in girls aged 15 to 19 years old are four times greater than those for similarly aged boys.

On the positive side, East African governments now discuss the situation openly, and you'll notice AIDS-related billboards in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and elsewhere in the region. Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni is often cited for his outspokenness and leadership in combating the scourge, and thanks to vigorous public awareness campaigns and other government efforts Uganda's AIDS rates have dropped over the past decade. Yet, at the grass-roots level in many areas of the region, the stigma remains. AIDS-related deaths are often kept quiet, with 'tuberculosis' used euphemistically as a socially acceptable catch-all diagnosis. Also, many of the AIDS clinics and counselling centres that exist still operate anonymously; if a sign were hung out, many victims wouldn't enter for fear of recognition. In one study in Kenya, over half of the women surveyed who had acquired HIV hadn't told their partners because they feared being beaten or abandoned.

throughout the region – with most juggling child-rearing plus work on the family farm or in an office – they are frequently marginalised when it comes to education and politics. Exceptions include Kenya, which is notable for its abundance of nongovernmental organisations, many headed by women, and Uganda, where women play prominent roles in educational and literary circles.

In coastal areas, watch for henna painting – intricate designs on the hands and feet made with a paste from leaves of the henna plant, and traditionally applied only to brides and married women.

With the exception of Tanzania, where local chieftaincies were abolished following independence, tribal identity and tribal structures are generally strong – sometimes with disastrous consequences, as seen in the Rwandan genocide. Otherwise, clashes between traditional and modern lifestyles are generally fairly low profile, with outside indications often limited to nothing more than the occasional disparaging remark about the neighbours.

The spectre of AIDS looms on the horizon throughout East Africa (see p33). While there has been some high profile public awareness campaigns, East African societies in general are conservative, and away from urban centres real discussion remains limited.

ECONOMY

Take a look at East Africa's economy, and you'll find a mixed picture. On the one hand, inflation is at low to moderate levels, economies are growing and tourism – despite several hard blows in recent years – is a major and increasingly important money earner. Yet all of the five countries covered in this book are ranked in the bottom third of the global United Nations' Human Development Index, which measures the overall achievements of a country according to factors such as income, life expectancy and education standards. And annual per capita income levels are just a fraction of what they are in most western countries.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation (FGM) – often euphemistically referred to as 'female circumcision' – is the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia. In Kenya, an estimated 50% of women – most in the northeast, near Somalia – have undergone FGM. In Tanzania, the figures are estimated at between 10% and 18%, while in Uganda, it's about 5%.

FGM is usually carried out for reasons of cultural or gender identity, and is entrenched in tribal life in some areas. Long-standing traditional beliefs about hygiene, aesthetics and health also play a role in the continuance of FGM. Yet among the very real risks of the procedure are infection, shock and haemorrhage, as well as lifelong complications and pain with menstruation, urination, intercourse and childbirth. For women who have had infibulation – in which all or part of the external genitalia are removed, and the vaginal opening then narrowed and stitched together – unassisted childbirth is impossible, and many women and children die as a consequence.

Since the mid-1990s there have been major efforts to reduce the incidence of the practice, and while concrete successes have been limited, the very fact that FGM can now be openly discussed is a major step forward.

In Kenya, government hospitals have been instructed by the Ministry of Health to stop the practice, and several nongovernmental women's organisations have taken a leading role in bringing FGM to the forefront of media discussion. There is also a growing movement towards alternative rites that offer the chance to maintain traditions while minimising the health complications, such as *ntanira na mugambo* or 'circumcision through words'.

In Uganda, FGM has been declared illegal and condemned by the government. While the practice continues in the northeast, support is waning and local community leaders have declared that they want to eradicate it completely within the next decade.

In Tanzania, although the overall prevalence of FGM is significantly lower than in neighbouring Kenya, progress in reducing its incidence has been slower. In 1998 FGM was declared illegal for girls under 18 years old, but there have been few if any prosecutions, and mass 'circumcisions' continue in some areas.

The very readable *African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village* by Patricia Caplan takes an inside look at local culture and customs on Tanzania's Mafia Island.

These figures are tempered by the extensive informal economy that exists throughout the region, as well as by wide variations between rural and urban areas. There are also significant income disparities; for example Kenya, one of the world's poorest countries, also registers one of the largest gaps between rich and poor.

In human terms the statistics mean that daily life is a struggle for most East Africans. Life expectancy averages around 45 years for the region as a whole, and at birth an average East African has between a 30% and 50% statistical probability of not surviving to the age of 40. Reliable banking services and savings accounts remain inaccessible for most people, especially rural dwellers, and it's a common scenario for those few students who make it through secondary school to be faced with only meagre job prospects upon graduation.

While all this can be rather discouraging, it's worth keeping in mind that East Africa is not a historically cohesive area where sweeping generalities can easily be made, whether the topic be economic development or politics. It's only relatively recently that the region has been packaged into the neatly bordered national entities that we take for granted today, and just 200 years ago the main forces were relatively small, community-based tribal groupings. This means that, as a traveller, the most encouraging aspects of the East African economic picture that you're likely to see are those at the village or community level – a sustainable microlending scheme, for example, or a profitable women's cooperative. While successes at this level are no excuse for neglecting the bigger picture, they at least help to put some of the statistics into a more balanced perspective, and serve as proof that the efforts of one or several individuals can make a difference.

The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior: An Autobiography by Tepilit Ole Saitoti presents an intriguing perspective on the juxtaposition of traditional and modern in East Africa.

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

East Africa has made headlines in recent years, during the Kenyan elections (for more see p270) and with the slow but steady steps towards the reactivation of a modified version of the old East African Community (EAC) customs union. Until 1977 Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania were members of the EAC, an economic union which linked the currencies of the three countries and provided for freedom of movement and shared telecommunications and postal facilities. In 1996, following the EAC's break-up and a decade of regional disputes, the presidents of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda established the Tripartite Commission for East African Cooperation, which laid the groundwork for re-establishing the old economic and customs union in 2000. It is this new East African Community which today serves as the main intragovernmental organisation in the region. A common passport was adopted in 1997, and in early 2005 a customs union came into effect with the ultimate goal of duty-free trade between the three countries. Next on the agenda is a common currency, and a loose political federation, although a realisation of these is probably still well in the future.

Former Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta once argued that FGM was such an integral part of initiation rites and Kikuyu identity that its abolition would destroy the tribal system.

MULTICULTURALISM

Almost since the dawn of humankind, outsiders have been arriving in East Africa to be assimilated into its seething, simmering and endlessly fascinating cultural melting pot. From the Bantu-, Nilotic- and Cushitic-speaking groups that made their way to the region during the early migrations (see p28), to Arab and Asian traders and colonial-era Europeans, a long stream of migrants have left their footprints here. Today the region's modern face reflects this rich fusion of influences, with over 300 tribal groups, plus small

but economically significant numbers of Asians, Arabs and Europeans – most well-integrated linguistically – all rubbing shoulders.

Coastal East Africa's rich cultural melting pot is surveyed on www.pbs.org/wonders/fr_e2.htm.

While national identities have become entrenched over the past half-century of independence, tribal loyalties also remain strong in many areas. The highest profile conflicts resulting from intertribal clashes have been in Rwanda – where in 1994 long-standing tensions exploded into brutal genocidal violence, the effects of which have scarred the nation – and in Burundi, where intertribal conflicts culminated in a long civil war that still casts shadows over the country.

At the other end of the spectrum is Tanzania, which has earned itself a name for its remarkably harmonious society, and its success in forging tolerance and unity out of diversity.

There are dozens of beautiful photojournal books documenting East Africa's diverse cultures, including *Turkana: Kenya's Nomads of the Jade Sea* by Nigel Pavitt, and *African Warriors* by Thomasin Magor.

While intrareligious frictions do exist (primarily between Christians and Muslims) they are at a generally low level, and not a major factor in contemporary East African politics.

SPORT

Football (soccer) dominates sporting headlines throughout the region and throughout the year, and matches always draw large and enthusiastic crowds. Kenya's team, the Harambee Stars, regularly participate in pan-African competitions and World Cup qualifiers, and there are also occasional appearances by Uganda's Kobs and Rwanda's Amavubi (Wasps).

More low-key than football at home, but surpassing it on the international sports stage, is running, where Kenya dominates in long-distance competitions throughout the world.

THE GENDER GAP

The good news on the East African educational scene is that at primary school level, the 'gender gap' (the difference between the percentage of boys versus the percentage of girls enrolled in school) is gradually lessening, and in some cases has been completely eliminated. In Tanzania and Kenya, for example, initial primary school enrolment is roughly evenly divided between boys and girls. In Uganda, which has the highest level of overall primary school enrolment in the region, the gender gap is about 9%, in favour of boys, but less than it was a decade ago. However, the rest of the picture is less rosy. In Tanzania, only 5% of girls obtain a secondary level education, while in Uganda and Kenya the figures are 9% and 22% respectively.

Comparatively low initial enrolment numbers and high drop-out rates among girls at the secondary level are due in part to cultural attitudes, with traditional preferences for sons diminishing the value of girls' education. Early marriage and early pregnancies are another factor. In Uganda – which has the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in sub-Saharan Africa – 43% of girls are either pregnant or have given birth by age 17, and 70% by age 19. HIV/AIDS is also a major contributor. As the number of AIDS orphans in the region rises, girls are required to stay home to take care of ill family members or younger siblings. Among East Africa's nomadic and pastoralist communities, such as those in parts of northeastern Kenya, the demands of a migratory lifestyle often cause families to remove girls from school. Sexual harassment both in and out of school also leads to nonattendance and drop out.

Several countries in the region have signed on to a continentwide African Girls' Education Initiative, although there has been little measurable progress thus far. A few countries, including Kenya, have also adopted re-entry policies for school-aged girls who give birth, although these remain largely ineffectual. There are a handful of private girls' schools around the region which have registered some impressive gains, and steady progress is also being made at the grass-roots level in increasing awareness of the value of education for all children, including girls. However, especially in rural areas, attitudes are slow to change and there's still a long way to go.

BAO

It's not exactly sport, but *bao* (also known as *kombe*, *mweso* and by various other names) is one of East Africa's favourite pastimes. It's played throughout the region, and is especially popular on the Zanzibar Archipelago and elsewhere along the coast, where you'll see men in their *kanzus* (white robe-like outer garment worn by men) and *kofia* (a cap, usually of embroidered white linen, worn by men) huddled around a board watching two opponents play. The rules vary somewhat from place to place, but the game always involves trying to capture the pebbles or seeds of your opponent, which are set out on a board with rows of small hollows. Anything can substitute for a board, from finely carved wood to a flattened area of sand on the beach, and playing well is something of a patiently acquired art form. For more on the intricacies of *bao* see the comprehensive www.gamecabinet.com/rules/Bao.html or www.driedger.ca/mankala/Man-1.html.

The East African Safari Rally is another attention-getter. This rugged 3000-km rally – which has been held annually since 1953 – passes along public roadways through Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and attracts an international collection of drivers with their vintage (pre-1971) automobiles.

See www.eastafricansafarirally.com for the latest news about the region's most famous road race.

Also likely to get increasing regional press coverage in the near future is Kenya's recent surprise announcement of its intention to bid for the 2016 Olympic Games.

RELIGION

Africans in general are profoundly spiritual in their outlook on life, and East Africans are no exception. The major religions are Christianity and Islam, with Islam especially prevalent in coastal areas. A sizable number of people also observe traditional religions, and there are small communities of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains.

Christianity

The first Christian missionaries reached East Africa in the mid-19th century. Since then the region has been the site of extensive missionary activity, and today most of the major denominations are represented, including Lutherans, Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists and Baptists. In many areas, mission stations have been the major, and in some cases the only, channels for development assistance. This is particularly so with health care and education, with missions still sometimes providing the only schools and medical facilities in remote areas.

We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda by Philip Gourevitch is a compelling account of the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath, as told by survivors.

In addition to the main denominations, there is also an increasing number of home-grown African sects, especially in Kenya. Factors that are often cited for the growth of such local Christian sects include cultural resurgence, an ongoing struggle against neocolonialism, and the alienation felt by many job-seekers who migrate to urban centres far from their homes.

Church services throughout East Africa are invariably beautifully vibrant and colourful. Even if you can't understand the language, you'll certainly be captivated by the unaccompanied choral singing, which only Africans can do with such beauty and precision.

Islam

Islam was founded in the early 7th century by the Prophet Mohammed. By the time of his death, the new religion had begun to spread throughout the Arabian peninsula, from where it was then carried in all directions over the subsequent centuries, including along the East African coast.

The five pillars of Islam that guide Muslims in their daily lives include the following:

Haj (pilgrimage) It is the duty of every Muslim, who is fit and can afford it, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once.

Sala (prayer, sometimes written *salat*) This is the obligation of prayer, done five times daily when muezzins call the faithful to pray, facing Mecca and ideally in a mosque.

Sawm (fasting) Ramadan commemorates the revelation of the Qur'an to Mohammed, and is the month when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk.

Shahada (the profession of faith) 'There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet' is the fundamental tenet of Islam.

Zakat (alms) Giving to the poor is an essential part of Islamic social teaching.

Most East African Muslims are Sunnis, with a small minority of Shiites, primarily among the Asian community. The most influential of the various Shiite sects represented are the Ismailis, followers of the Aga Khan.

Traditional medicine in East Africa is closely intertwined with traditional religion, with practitioners using divining implements, prayers, chanting and dance to facilitate communication with the spirit world.

Traditional Religions

East Africa's traditional religions are animist, centring on ancestor worship, the land and various ritual objects. Most acknowledge the existence of a supreme deity with whom communication is possible through the intercession of ancestors. Ancestors thus play a strong role in many areas, with their principal function to protect the tribe or family. Some groups also recognise lesser gods in addition to the supreme deity, while among the Maasai and several other tribes, there is no tradition of ancestor worship; the supreme deity is the sole focus of devotion.

ARTS

Architecture

East Africa is an architectural treasure-trove, with its colonial-era buildings and religious architecture, including both churches and mosques. The real highlights, however, are the old town areas of Zanzibar, Lamu (both Unesco World Heritage sites) and Mombasa, all of which display mesmerising combinations of Indian, Arabic, European and African characteristics in their buildings and street layouts.

In Lamu, Paté and elsewhere along the coast you'll see examples of Swahili architecture. At the simplest level, Swahili dwellings are plain rectangular mud and thatch constructions, set in clusters and divided by small, sandy paths. More elaborate stone houses are traditionally constructed of coral and wood along a north–south axis, with flat roofs and a small open courtyard in the centre, which serves as the main source of light.

The various quarters or neighbourhoods in Swahili towns are symbolically united by a central mosque, usually referred to as the *msikiti wa Ijumaa* or 'Friday mosque'. In a sharp break with Islamic architectural custom elsewhere, traditional Swahili mosques don't have minarets; the muezzin gives the call to prayer from inside the mosque, generally with the help of a loudspeaker.

The ZIFF website (www.ziff.org) is the best jumping-off point into the world of East African cinema.

Cinema

East Africa's long-languishing, and traditionally underfunded, film industry received a major boost with the opening of the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF, p253), which has been held annually on Zanzibar since 1998, and is now one of the region's premier cultural events. The festival serves as a venue for artists from the Indian Ocean basin and beyond, and has had several local prize-winners, including *Maangamizi – The Ancient One,* co-directed by Tanzanian Martin M'hando and shot in Tanzania. M'hando is also known for his film *Mama Tumaini* (Women of Hope).

Rwandan Eric Kabera is known worldwide for his *Keepers of Memory, 100 Days* (produced together with Nick Hughes) and *Through My Eyes* – all documenting the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath, and also ZIFF award-winners.

Another notable East African cinematographer is Tanzanian Flora M'mbugu-Schelling, who won acclaim for *These Hands,* a short but powerful documentary focusing on the life of Mozambican women refugees working crushing rocks in a quarry near Dar es Salaam.

For more on films from the region, see the country chapters.

Literature

East Africa's first known Swahili manuscript is an epic poem dating from 1728 and written in Arabic script. However, it wasn't until the second half of the 20th century – once Swahili had become established as a regional language – that Swahili prose began to develop. One of the best known authors from this period is Tanzanian Shaaban Robert (see p110).

Swahili prose got a relatively late start, but Swahili oral poetry traditions have long roots. See www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/swahili/SwahiliPoetry/index.htm for an excellent overview and anthology.

In more recent years there has been a flowering of English-language titles by East African writers, including *Weep Not, Child* and *Detained: A Prison Writer's Diary,* both by Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o; *Song of Lawino* by Ugandan Okot p'Bitek; and *Abyssinian Chronicles* by Ugandan Moses Isegawa. See the country chapters for more on these and other authors.

There is also a rich but often overlooked body of English-language literature by East African women, particularly in Uganda, where female writers have organised as Femrite, the Ugandan Women Writers' Association. Some names to watch for include Mary Karooro Okurut, whose *A Woman's Voice: An Anthology of Short Stories by Ugandan Women* provides a good overview, and the internationally recognised Kenyan writer Grace Ogot, known in particular for *The Promised Land*.

Music & Dance

The single greatest influence on the modern East African music scene has been the Congolese bands that began playing in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in the early 1960s, and which brought the styles of rumba and *soukous* (Congolese dance music) into the East African context. Among the best known is the Orchestre Super Matimila, which was propelled to fame by the renowned Congolese-born and Dar es Salaam-based Remmy Ongala ('Dr Remmy'). Many of his songs (most are in Swahili) are commentaries on contemporary themes such as AIDS, poverty and hunger, and Ongala has been a major force in popularising music from the region beyond Africa's borders. Another of the Congolese bands is Samba Mapangala's Orchestra Virunga. Mapangala, a Congolese vocalist, first gained a footing in Uganda in the mid-1970s with a group known as Les Kinois before moving to Nairobi and forming Orchestra Virunga.

For an overview of the East African music scene check out http://members.aol.com/dpaterson/eamusic.htm.

As Swahili lyrics replaced the original vocals, a distinct East African rumba style was born. Its proponents include Simba Wanyika (together with offshoot Les Wanyika), which had its roots in Tanzania, but gained fame in the nightclubs of Nairobi.

In the 1970s Kenyan *benga* music rose to prominence on the regional music scene. It originated among the Luo of western Kenya and is characterised by its clear electric guitar licks and bounding bass rhythms. Its ethnic roots were maintained, however, with the guitar taking the place of the traditional *nyatiti* (folk lyre), and the bass guitar replacing the drum, which originally was played by the *nyatiti* player with a toe ring. One of

the best-known proponents of *benga* has been DO Misiani, whose group Shirati Jazz has been popular since the 1960s.

On Zanzibar and along the coast, the music scene has long been dominated by *taarab* (Zanzibari music combining African, Arabic and Indian influences), which has experienced a major resurgence in recent years, and which gets airplay in other parts of the region as well (for more, see p142).

A good starting point for learning more about *taarab* music is the Dhow Countries Music Academy (www.zanzibarmusic.org).

Throughout East Africa, dance plays a vital role in community life, although masked dance is not as common in most parts of the region as it is in West Africa. A wide variety of drums and rhythms are used, depending on the occasion, with many dances serving as expressions of thanks and praise, or as a means of communicating with the ancestors or telling a story. East Africa's most famous dance group is the globally acclaimed Les Tambourinaires du Burundi.

Textiles & Handicrafts

The brightly coloured lengths of printed cotton cloth seen throughout the region – typically with Swahili sayings printed along the edge – are known as *kanga* in Kenya, Tanzania and parts of Uganda. Many of the sayings are social commentary or messages – often indirectly worded, or containing puns and double meanings – that are communicated by the woman wearing the *kanga,* generally to other women. Others are simply a local form of advertising, such as those bearing the logo of political parties.

Kanga sayings range from amorous outpourings to pointed humour. For a sampling of what's being said around you, see www.glcom.com/hassan/kanga.html.

In coastal areas, you'll see the *kikoi*, which is made of a thicker textured cotton, usually featuring striped or plaid patterns, and traditionally worn by men. Also common are beautiful batik-print cottons depicting everyday scenes, animal motifs or geometrical patterns.

Basketry and woven items – all of which have highly functional roles in local society – have also become popular as tourist souvenirs, particularly in Nairobi.

Jewellery, especially beaded jewellery, is another local art form, notably among the Maasai and Turkana. It is used in ceremonies as well as in everyday life, and often indicates the wearer's wealth and marital status.

Visual Arts

PAINTING

In comparison with woodcarving, painting has a fairly low profile in East Africa. One of the most popular styles is Tanzania's Tingatinga painting (for more, see p111).

SCULPTURE & WOODCARVING

African Art by Frank Willet surveys the entire continent, and is a good introduction if you're interested in East African sculpture and woodcarving.

East Africa is renowned for its exceptional figurative art, especially that of Tanzania's Makonde, who are acclaimed throughout the region for their skill at bringing blocks of hard African blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon* or, in Swahili, *mpingo*) to life in often highly fanciful depictions. Among the most common carvings are those with *ujamaa* motifs, and those known as *shetani,* which embody images from the spirit world. *Ujamaa* carvings are designed as a totem pole or 'tree of life' and contain interlaced human and animal figures around a common ancestor. Each generation is connected to those that preceded it, and gives support to those that follow. Tree of life carvings often reach several metres in height, and are almost always made from a single piece of wood. *Shetani* carvings are much more abstract, even grotesque, with the emphasis on challenging viewers to new interpretations while giving the carver's imagination free reign.

FOOD & DRINK

Imagine dining under the stars with your feet in the sand, sitting down in the shade of palm trees to a plate of freshly grilled fish, or relishing five-star cuisine at one of East Africa's luxurious safari camps. While it's not all like this – it would be easy to come away from East Africa thinking that the region subsists almost entirely on rice or *ugali* (thick, porridgelike maize- or cassava-based staple) and sauce – there are some surprising treats to be found. In general, the best cuisine is found along the coast, where savoury seafood dishes cooked with coconut milk, coriander and other spices are the speciality. Elsewhere, meals centre around a staple with beans or sauce, with the best part of the dining experience the surrounding ambience and friendly local company, rather than the food itself.

Staples & Specialities

Throughout the region, you'll find East Africans sitting down to piping hot plates of *ugali*. While beloved by many locals, it's somewhat of an acquired taste for most foreigners. Rice – best on the coast, where it is frequently flavoured with coconut milk – and *matoke* (cooked plantains) are other common staples, while chips, potatoes and chapati are ubiquitous in larger towns.

According to local belief, lurking inside many carvings are the spirits they represent, thus giving them supernatural powers.

Most visitors have more of an affinity for *nyama choma* (seasoned, roasted meat), *sambusas* (deep-fried pastry triangles stuffed with spiced mince meat – be sure they haven't been sitting around too long) and *maandazi* (semisweet doughnutlike products). *Chipsi mayai* is another local favourite – basically a puffy omelette with chips mixed in. On almost every street corner you'll find vendors selling corncobs roasted on a wire grill over a bed of hot coals. Another popular street-corner snack is deep-fried yam, eaten hot with a squeeze of lemon juice and a sprinkling of chilli powder. Along the coast, the offerings are rounded out by an abundance of delectable seafood dishes, often grilled, or cooked in coconut milk or in a curry style.

Three meals a day is the norm, with the main meal eaten at midday, and breakfast frequently nothing more than coffee or tea and bread. In out-of-the-way areas, many places are closed in the evening and the only option may be street food.

Drinks

Sodas (soft drinks) – especially Coca Cola and Fanta – are found almost everywhere, even where bottled water isn't. Fresh juices, including pineapple, sugar cane and orange are widely available and a treat, although check first to see whether they have been mixed with unsafe water. Another delicious variant is the milkshake – fresh juice, chilled milk and syrup. Most refreshing of all, though, and never a worry hygienically, is the juice of the *dafu* (young coconut), which you'll find along the coast. Western-style supermarkets sell imported fruit juices.

Although cash is becoming an increasingly common replacement, cattle are still a coveted bride price in many parts of East Africa.

Although East Africa exports high-quality coffee and tea, what you'll usually find locally is far inferior, with instant coffee the norm. Both tea and coffee are generally drunk with lots of milk and sugar.

East Africa has several local beers, and a good selection of imports. Among the most common are Kenya's Tusker Lager and South Africa's Castle Lager, which is also produced locally. Especially in Kenya, many locals prefer their beer warm, so getting a cold beer can be a task.

Kenya and Tanzania have small and very fledgling wine industries, although it is doubtful either will be putting wine importers out of business anytime soon.

Locally produced home-brews – commonly fermented mixtures made with bananas or millet and sugar – are widely available. However, avoid anything distilled – in addition to being illegal, it's also often lethal.

Where to Eat & Drink

For dining local style, nothing beats taking a seat in a small local eatery – known as *hoteli* in Swahili-speaking areas – and watching life pass by. Many *hoteli* will have the day's menu – rarely costing more than US$1 – written on a chalkboard, and often a TV in the corner broadcasting the latest football match. Rivalling *hoteli* for local atmosphere are the bustling night markets that you'll find in some areas, where vendors set up grills along the roadside and sell *nyama choma* and other street food.

For something more formal, or for Western-style meals, stick to cities or main towns, where you'll find a reasonable array of restaurants, most moderately priced compared with their European equivalents. There's at least one Chinese restaurant (often somewhat East-Africanised) in every capital. Especially in coastal areas, there's usually also a good selection of Indian cuisine, found both at inexpensive eateries serving up good Indian snacks, and in pricier restaurants. Most main towns have at least one supermarket selling imported products such as canned meat, fish and cheese.

Vegetarians & Vegans

While there isn't much in East Africa that is specifically billed as 'vegetarian', there are many veggie options, and you can find *wali* (cooked rice) and *maharagwe* (beans) almost everywhere. The main challenges away from major towns will be keeping some variety and balance in your diet, and getting enough protein, especially if you don't eat eggs or seafood. In larger towns, Indian restaurants are the best places to try for vegetarian meals. Elsewhere, try asking Indian shop owners if they have any suggestions; many will also be able to help you find good yogurt. Peanuts (*karanga* in Swahili-speaking areas) are widely sold on the streets, and fresh fruits and vegetables are abundant throughout most of the region. If you eat seafood, you'll have no problems along the coast or near any of the lakes, and even in inland areas good fish is often available from rivers and streams. Most tour operators are willing to cater to special dietary requests – such as vegetarian, kosher or halal – as long as they have advance notice.

DINING EAST AFRICAN STYLE

If you're lucky enough to be invited to share a meal with East Africans, you'll find that some customs are different from what you may be used to.

Before eating, a bowl and a pitcher of water are often passed around for washing hands. If the bowl is brought to you first as the guest, and you aren't sure what to do, indicate that it should be taken to the head of the family, then do what they do. The usual procedure is to hold your hands over the bowl while your hostess pours water over them. Sometimes soap is provided, and a towel for drying off.

The centre of the meal is usually *ugali* (thick, porridgelike maize- or cassava-based staple) or similar, which is normally taken with the right hand from a communal pot, rolled into a small ball with the fingers, dipped into some sort of sauce, and eaten. Eating with your hand is a bit of an art and may seem awkward at first, but after a few tries it will start to feel more natural. Food is never handled or eaten with the left hand, and in some areas it is even considered impolite to give someone something with the left hand, as this is normally reserved for toiletries.

The underlying element in all meal invitations is solidarity between the hosts and the guests, and the various customs, such as eating out of a communal dish, are simply expressions of this. If you receive an invitation to eat but aren't hungry, it's OK to explain that you have just eaten. However, you should still share a few bites of the meal in order to demonstrate your solidarity with the hosts, and to express your appreciation.

At the end of the meal, don't be worried if you can't finish what is on your plate, as this shows your hosts that you have been satisfied. However, do try to avoid being the one who takes the last handful from the communal bowl, as this may leave your hosts worrying they haven't provided enough.

Other than fruit, desserts are generally not served. Following the meal, the water and wash basin are brought around again so that you can clean your hand. Saying *'chakula kizuri'* (delicious food!) in Swahili-speaking areas, or whatever the local equivalent is, lets your host know that the food was appreciated.

Eating With Kids

East Africans are generally quite family-friendly, and dining out with children is no problem. Hotel restaurants in tourist areas often have highchairs, and staff do their best to be sure that everyone stays happy. While special children's meals aren't common, it's easy enough to find menu items that are suitable for young diners. The main things to avoid are curries and other spicy dishes, uncooked or unpeeled fruits and vegetables, meat from street vendors (as it's sometimes undercooked) and unpurified water. Child-size boxes of fresh juice are sold at supermarkets in major towns and make good snacks, as do fresh fruits (tangerines, bananas and more), which are widely available. For more on travelling with children, see p621.

Habits & Customs

Meals connected with any sort of social occasion are usually drawn out affairs for which the women of the household will have spent several days preparing. Typical East African style is to eat with the (right) hand from communal dishes in the centre of the table. There will always be somewhere to wash your hands, either a basin and pitcher of water that are passed around or a sink in the corner of the room. Although food is shared, it's not customary to share drinks, and children generally eat separately.

For East Africa's Maasai and other Nilotic peoples, milk – sometimes curdled – is a dietary mainstay, often mixed together with blood drawn from living cows' jugular veins.

Street snacks and meals-on-the-run are common. European-style restaurant dining – while readily available in major cities – is not an entrenched part of local culture. Much more common are large gatherings at home, or perhaps at a rented hall, to celebrate special occasions, with the meal as the focal point.

Throughout East Africa, lunch is served between about noon and 2.30pm, and dinner from around 6.30pm to about 10pm. The smaller the town, the earlier its dining establishments are likely to close; after about 7pm in rural areas it can be difficult to find anything other than street food. During Ramadan many restaurants in coastal areas close completely during daylight fasting hours.

Eat Your Words

Want to know *mkate* from *maandazi*, and *ndizi* from *nyama*? Conquer the cuisine scene by getting to know the language. The following Swahili words and phrases will help in Kenya, Tanzania and some parts of Uganda, and occasionally in Rwanda and Burundi as well. For pronunciation guidelines see p649.

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…	*Ninataka/Ninaomba ...*
Without hot pepper, please.	*Bila pilipili, tafadhali.*
Please bring me the bill.	*Nipe bili/risiti tafadhali.*

Always boil or purify water, and be wary of ice and fruit juices diluted with unpurified water. With fruits and vegetables, it's best to follow the adage: 'Cook it, peel it, boil it or forget it.' For more on water safety see p648.

MENU DECODER

biryani	casserole of spices and rice with meat or seafood
maandazi	semisweet, flat doughnuts
matoke	cooked plantains
mchuzi	sauce, sometimes with bits of beef and very well-cooked vegetables
mishikaki	kebab
mochomo	barbecued meat
ndizi	banana
nyama choma	roasted 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, porridgelike maize- or cassava-based staple, available almost everywhere, and known as *posho* in Uganda.
wali na…	cooked white rice with...
kuku	chicken
nyama	meat
maharagwe	beans
samaki	fish

FOOD GLOSSARY

Basics

baridi	cold
kijiko	spoon
kikombe	cup
kisu	knife
kitambaa cha mikono	napkin
sahani	plate
tamu	sweet
uma	fork
ya moto	hot

Staples

chipsi	chips
maharagwe	beans
matoke	plantains (when cooked and mashed)
mkate	bread
ndizi	plantains
viazi	potatoes
wali	rice (cooked)

Other Dishes & Condiments

asali	honey
chumvi	salt
mayai (ya kuchemsha)	eggs (boiled)
mgando, mtindi, maziwalala	yogurt
sukari	sugar

Meat & Seafood

kaa	crab
kuku	chicken
nyama mbuzi	goat
nyama ya ng'ombe	beef
nyama ya nguruwe	pork
pweza	octopus (usually served grilled, at street markets)
samaki	fish

Fruits & Vegetables

chungwa	orange
dafu	coconut (green)
embe	mango
matunda	fruit
mboga	vegetables
nanasi	pineapple
nazi	coconut (ripe)
ndizi	banana
nyana	tomatoes
papai	papaya
sukuma wiki	spinach (boiled)
viazi	potatoes
vitunguu	onions

Drinks

bia (baridi)	beer (cold)
jusi ya machungwa	orange juice
maji (ya kuchemsha/ya kunywa/safi)	water (boiled/drinking/mineral)
waragi	millet-based alcohol
soda	soda

Along the coast, look for *chai masala* (spiced tea), or buy your coffee from vendors strolling the streets with a freshly brewed pot in one hand, cups and spoons in the other.

The Peoples of East Africa

East Africa has a rich mosaic of tribal cultures, with over 300 different groups packed into an area roughly a quarter the size of Australia. The vitality of their traditions is expressed in everything from splendid ceremonial attire to pulsating dance rhythms, refined artistry and highly organised community structure. Experiencing and witnessing all this is likely to be a highlight of your travels.

AKAMBA

The heartland of the Bantu-speaking Akamba people is in the area east of Nairobi. Relative newcomers to East Africa, the Akamba first migrated here from the south about 200 years ago in search of food. Because their own low-altitude land was poor, they were forced to barter to obtain food stocks from the neighbouring Maasai and Kikuyu. Soon, they acquired a reputation as great traders, with business dealings extending from the coast as far inland as Lake Victoria and north to Lake Turkana.

Renowned for their martial prowess, many Akamba were drafted into Britain's WWI army; today, they're still well-represented among Kenyan defence and law enforcement brigades.

The recent history of the Akamba illustrates the tensions that have marked so many encounters between East Africa's traditional cultures and Western 'values'. In the 1930s, during the height of the colonial era, the British administration settled large numbers of white farmers on traditional Akamba lands, and tried to limit the number of cattle the Akamba could own by confiscating them. In protest, the Akamba formed the Ukamba Members Association, which marched en masse to Nairobi and squatted peacefully at Kariokor Market until their cattle were returned. Large numbers of Akamba were subsequently dispossessed to make way for Tsavo National Park.

All Akamba go through initiation rites at about the age of 12, and have the same age-set groups common to many of the region's peoples (see below). Young parents are known as 'junior elders' (*mwanake* for men, *mwiitu* for women) and are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the village. They later become 'medium elders' *(nthele)*, and then 'full elders' *(atumia ma kivalo)*, with responsibility for death ceremonies and administering the law. The last stage of a person's life is that of 'senior elder' *(atumia ma kisuka)*, with responsibility for holy places.

AGE SETS

The great significance of age among many of East Africa's traditional cultures is seen in the widespread use of age-based groups. In these, all youths of the same age belong to an age-set, and pass through the various stages of life and their associated rituals together. Each group has its own leader and community responsibilities, and definition of the age-sets is often highly refined. Among the Sukuma, for example, who live in the area south of Lake Victoria, each age-based group traditionally had its own system for counting from one to 10, with the system understood by others within the group, but not by members of any other group. Among the Maasai, who have one of the most highly stratified age group systems in the region, males are organised into age-sets and further into subsets, with interset rivalries and relationships being one of the defining features of daily life. Although the importance of age-sets among some tribes has diminished in recent times, they continue to play an important role in many areas.

BUGANDA

The Bantu-speaking Buganda are Uganda's largest tribal group, comprising about 17% of the population. Their traditional lands are in the areas north and northwest of Lake Victoria, including Kampala, although today you will meet Buganda throughout the country. Due to significant missionary activity most Buganda are Christian, although animist traditions do survive.

The Buganda are the source of Uganda's name, which means Land of the Buganda.

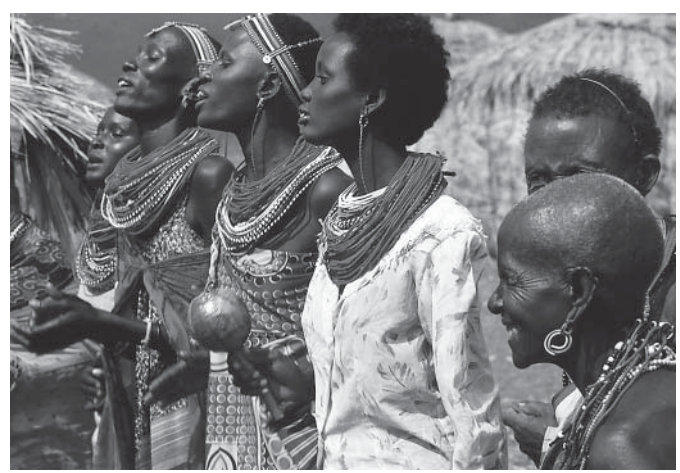
Historically, the Buganda, together with the neighbouring Haya, were known as one of East Africa's most highly organised tribes. Their political system was based around the absolute power of the *kabaka* (king), who ruled through district chiefs. This system reached its zenith during the 19th century, when the Buganda came to dominate various neighbouring groups, including the Nilotic Iteso people (who now comprise about 8% of Uganda's population; see p466). Buganda influence was solidified during the colonial era, with the British favouring their recruitment to the civil service. During the chaotic Obote/Amin years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bugandan monarchy was abolished, to be restored in 1993, although with no political power.

EL-MOLO

The Cushitic-speaking El-Molo are one of East Africa's smallest tribes, numbering less than 4000. Historically the El-Molo were one of the region's more culturally distinct groups, but in recent times they have been forced to adapt or relinquish many of their old customs in order to survive, and intermarriage with members of other tribes is now common.

The El-Molo traditionally subsisted on fish, supplemented by the occasional crocodile, turtle, hippopotamus or bird.

The ancestral home of the El-Molo is on two small islands in the middle of Lake Turkana in Kenya. Over the years an ill-balanced diet and the effects of too much fluoride began to take their toll. The El-Molo became increasingly susceptible to disease and, thus weakened, to attacks from stronger tribes, and their numbers plummeted.



Women of the El-Molo tribe (left) from Lake Turkana, Kenya
PHOTO BY TOM COCKREM

TRADITION, MODERNITY & THE FORESTS

East African society is full of contrasts, but nowhere is the clash between the traditional and the Western way of life more apparent than among the region's hunter-gatherer and forest-dwelling peoples. These include the Twa, who live primarily in the western forests of Rwanda and Burundi, where they comprise less than 1% of the overall population, and the Hadzabe, whose traditional lands are in north-central Tanzania around Lake Eyasi. Typically, these communities are among the most marginalised in East African society, lacking political influence and discriminated against by more prominent groups.

For the Twa, the Hadzabe and other communities, loss of land and forest means loss of the only resource base that they have. Over the past decades, the rise of commercial logging, the ongoing clearing of forests in favour of agricultural land, and the establishment of parks and conservation areas have combined to dramatically decrease the forest resources and wildlife on which these people depend for their existence. Additional pressures come from hunting and poaching, and from nomadic pastoralists – many of whom in turn have been evicted from their own traditional areas – seeking grazing lands for their cattle. The Hadzabe say that the once plentiful wildlife in their traditional hunting areas is now gone, and that many days they return empty-handed from their daily search for meat. Others lament the fact that once-prized skills such as animal tracking and knowledge of local plants are being relegated to irrelevance.

Although some Hadzabe have turned to tourism and craft-making for subsistence, the benefits of this are sporadic and limited in scope. Some now only hunt for the benefit of the increasing numbers of tourists who come to their lands, and a few have given up their traditional lifestyle completely. In Rwanda, the Twa have begun mobilising to gain increased political influence and greater access to health care and education, but the government response has thus far been negligible. Throughout the region, it's likely to be at least several decades before these people are given their voice, and the chance to define their own role in East African society.

Today, while the El-Molo have managed to temporarily stabilise their population, they face an uncertain future. While some continue to eke out a living from the lake, others have turned to cattle herding or work in the tourism industry. Commercial fishing supplements their traditional subsistence, and larger, more permanent settlements in Loyangalani, on Lake Turkana's southeastern shores, have replaced the El-Molo's traditional dome-shaped island homes of sticks covered with thatch and animal skins.

HAYA

The Haya, who live west of Lake Victoria around Bukoba, have both Bantu and Nilotic roots, and are one of the largest tribes in Tanzania.

The Haya are renowned dancers and singers, and count East African pop stars Saida Karoli and Maua among their number.

While they're not the most colourful of the groups you'll encounter during your travels, the Haya have an exceptionally rich history, and in the precolonial era boasted one of the most highly developed early societies on the continent.

At the heart of traditional Haya society were eight different states or kingdoms, each headed by a powerful and often despotic *mukama,* who ruled in part by divine right. Order was maintained through a system of appointed chiefs and officials, assisted by an age group–based army. With the rise of European influence in the region, this era of Haya history came to an end. The various groups began to splinter, and many chiefs were replaced by persons considered more malleable and sympathetic to colonial interests.

Resentment of these propped-up leaders was strong, spurring the Haya to regroup and form the Bukoba Bahaya Union in 1924. This association was initially directed towards local political reform but soon

Man of the Hadzabe tribe (opposite), Tanzania
PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

developed into the more influential and broad-based African Association. Together with similar groups established elsewhere in Tanzania it constituted one of the country's earliest political movements and was an important force in the drive towards independence.

HUTU

The Hutu are the original Bantu-speaking farmers who inhabited the area that is now Rwanda and Burundi. Their origins are unclear, although it is thought that they were settled in the region by the 11th century, and had possibly begun arriving as early as the 5th century. From around the 14th century, the Hutu were joined by the Tutsi, who over the years were able to wrest control of significant political and economic power. Gradually the Hutu lost ownership of their land, with many living under Tutsi domination in a feudalistic client-patron relationship known as *ubuhake* in which land and cattle (and thus power) became further concentrated in the hands of the Tutsi minority.

Under the *ubuhake* system, many Hutu were forced to indenture themselves to Tutsi overlords, leading to almost total Hutu disenfranchisement.

The resentment engendered by the inequities of this system was given full vent in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, with which the Hutu are inextricably linked – although large numbers of Hutu have also been massacred in neighbouring Burundi over the years. Reconciliation between the two groups has made gradual progress in Rwanda, but in Burundi the Hutu remain outside the political spectrum, and extremist elements continue to be an ongoing force for instability in the region (see p56 for more).

KALENJIN

The Kalenjin people are one of the largest groups in Kenya and – together with the Kikuyu, Luo, Luyha and Kamba – account for 70% of the country's population. Although viewed as a single ethnic entity, the term 'Kalenjin' was actually coined in the 1950s to refer to a loose collection of several different Nilotic groups, including the Kipsigi, Nandi, Marakwet, Pokot and Tugen (Former Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi's people). These groups speak different dialects of the same language (Nandi), but otherwise have distinct traditions and lifestyles. Thanks to the influence of arap Moi, the Kalenjin have amassed considerable political power in Kenya.

The traditional homeland of the various Kalenjin peoples is along the western edge of the central Rift Valley area, including Kericho, Eldoret, Kitale, Baringo and the land surrounding Mt Elgon. Originally pastoralists, Kalenjin today are known primarily as farmers. An exception to this are the cattle-loving Kipsigi, whose cattle rustling continues to cause friction between them and neighbouring tribes.

The Kalenjin are known for their female herbalist doctors, and for their many world-class runners, including Paul Tergat and Tecla Lorupe.

The Nandi, who are the second largest of the Kalenjin communities and comprise about one-third of all Kalenjin, settled in the Nandi Hills between the 16th and 17th centuries, where they prospered after learning agricultural techniques from the Luo and Luyha. They had a formidable military reputation and, in the late 19th century, managed to delay construction of the Uganda railway for more than a decade until Koitalel, their chief, was killed.

As with many tribes, the Kalenjin have age-sets into which a man is initiated after circumcision. Administration of the law is carried out at the *kok,* an informal court led by the clan's elders.

KARAMOJONG

The marginalised Karamojong – at home in Karamoja, in northeastern Uganda – are one of East Africa's most insulated, beleaguered and colourful tribes. As with the Samburu, Maasai and other Nilotic pastoralist peoples, life for the Karamojong centres around cattle, which are kept at night in the centre of the family living compound and grazed by day on the surrounding plains. Cattle are the main measure of wealth, ownership is a mark of adulthood, and cattle raiding and warfare are central parts of the culture. In times of scarcity, protection of the herd is considered so important that milk is reserved for calves and children.

When cattle are grazed in dry-season camps away from the family homestead, the Karamojong warriors tending them live on blood from live cattle, milk and sometimes meat.

Long the subject of often heavy-handed government pressure to abandon their pastoralist lifestyle, the Karamojong's plight has been exacerbated by periodic famines, and by the loss of traditional dry-season grazing areas with the formation of Kidepo Valley National Park in the 1960s. While current Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni has permitted the Karamojong to keep arms to protect themselves against raids from other groups, including the Turkana in neighbouring Kenya, government expeditions targeted at halting cattle raiding continue. These factors, combined with easy access to weapons from neighbouring Sudan and a breakdown of law and order, have made the Karamoja area off limits to outsiders in recent years.

KIKUYU

The heartland of the Kikuyu, who comprise about 20% of Kenya's population and are the country's largest ethnic group, surrounds Mt Kenya. They are Bantu people, who are believed to have migrated into the area from the east and northeast from around the 16th century onwards, and to have undergone several periods of intermarriage and splintering. According to the rich oral traditions of the Kikuyu, there are nine original *mwaki* (clans), all of which trace their origins back to male and female progenitors known as Kikuyu and Mumbi. The administration of these clans, each of which is made up of many *nyumba* (family groups) was originally overseen by a council of elders, with great significance placed on the roles of the witch doctor, medicine man and blacksmith.

The Kikuyu god, *Ngai*, is believed to reside on Mt Kenya, and many Kikuyu homes are still oriented to face the sacred peak.

Initiation rites consist of ritual circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls, though the latter is becoming less common. The practice of clitoridectomy was a source of particular conflict between the Kikuyu and Western missionaries during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Kikuyu witch doctor (left) and his assistant, Kenya.
PHOTO BY ANDERS BLOMQVIST

The issue eventually became linked with the independence struggle, and the establishment of independent Kikuyu schools.

The Kikuyu are also known for the opposition association they formed in the 1920s to protest against the European seizure of large areas of their lands, and for their subsequent instigation of the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s. Due to the influence of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, the Kikuyu today are disproportionately represented in government and business. This has proved to be a source of ongoing friction with other groups, and a persistent stumbling block on Kenya's path to national integration.

LUO

The northeastern shores of Lake Victoria are home to the Nilotic Luo people, who began their migration to the area from Sudan around the 15th century. Although their numbers are relatively small in Tanzania, in Kenya they comprise about 12% of the population and are the country's third-largest group.

Instead of circumcision, the Luo traditionally extracted four to six teeth at initiation.

During the independence struggle, many of Kenya's leading politicians and trade unionists were Luo – including Tom Mboya (assassinated in 1969) and the former vice president of Kenya, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga – and they continue to form the backbone of the Kenyan political opposition.

The Luo have also had a decisive influence on the East African musical scene. They are notable in particular for their contribution of the highly popular *benga* style (characterised by its electric guitar licks and bounding bass rhythms), which has since been adopted by musicians from many other tribes.

The Luo were originally cattle herders, but the devastating effects of rinderpest (an acute contagious viral disease of cattle) in the 1890s forced them to adopt fishing and subsistence agriculture, which continue to be the main sources of livelihood for most Luo today. Luo family groups consist of the man, his wife or wives, and their sons and daughters-in-law. The family unit is part of a larger grouping of families or *dhoot* (clan), several of which in turn make up an *ogandi* (a group of geographically

Luo village children (p401), Mfangano Island, Kenya
PHOTO BY DAVE LEWIS

related people), each led by a *ruoth* (chief). Traditional Luo living compounds, which you'll still see when travelling around Lake Victoria, are enclosed by fences, and include separate huts for the man and for each wife and son. The Luo view age, wealth and respect as converging, with the result that elders control family resources and represent the family to the outside world.

MAASAI

Although comprising less than 5% of the population in Kenya and Tanzania, it is the Maasai, more than any other tribe, who have become for many the definitive symbol of 'tribal' East Africa. With a reputation (often quite exaggerated) as fierce warriors, and a proud demeanour, the Maasai have insisted on maintaining their ethnic identity and traditional lifestyle, often in the face of great government opposition. Today the life of the Maasai continues to be inextricably bound with that of their large herds of cattle, which they graze along the Tanzania–Kenya border.

The Maasai leave drums and other instruments behind in their famous dancing, which is accompanied only by chants and vigorous leaping.

The Maasai are Nilotic people who first migrated to the region from Sudan about 1000 years ago. They eventually came to dominate a large area of what is now central Kenya until, in the late 19th century, their numbers were decimated by famine and disease, and their cattle herds routed by rinderpest.

During the colonial era in Kenya, it was largely Maasai land that was taken for European colonisation through two controversial treaties. The creation of Serengeti National Park in Tanzania and the continuing colonial annexation of Maasai territory put much of the remaining traditional grazing lands of the Maasai off limits. During subsequent years, as the populations of both the Maasai and their cattle increased, pressure for land became intense and conflict with the authorities was constant. Government-sponsored resettlement programs have met with only limited success, as Maasai traditions scorn agriculture and land ownership.

One consequence of this competition for land is that many Maasai ceremonial traditions can no longer be fulfilled. Part of the ceremony where a man becomes a *moran* (warrior) involves a group of young men around the age of 14 going out and building a small livestock camp after their circumcision ceremony. They then live alone there for up to eight years before returning to the village to marry. Today though, while the tradition and the will to keep it up survive, the land is often unavailable.

The Maasai have vibrant artistic traditions that are most vividly seen in the striking body decoration and beaded ornaments worn by both men and women. Women in particular are famous for their magnificent beaded platelike necklaces, while men typically wear the red-checked *shuka* (blanket) and carry a distinctive balled club.

While tourism provides an income to an increasing number of Maasai, the benefits are not widespread. In recent years many Maasai have moved to the cities or coastal resorts, becoming guards for restaurants and hotels.

The Samburu people who live directly north of Mt Kenya are closely related to the Maasai linguistically and culturally.

MAKONDE

Although they have their home in one of the most isolated areas of East Africa, the Makonde have gained fame throughout the region and beyond for their beautiful and highly refined ebony woodcarvings.

The Makonde traditionally practised body scarring. Many elders still sport facial markings and (the women) wooden lip plugs.

The tribe has its origins in northern Mozambique, where many Makonde still live – though in recent years a subtle split has begun to develop between the group's Tanzanian and Mozambican branches. Today most Tanzanian Makonde live in southeastern Tanzania, on the waterless Makonde plateau, although many members of the carving community have since migrated to Dar es Salaam.

Like many of their southern neighbours, the Makonde are matrilineal. Although customs are gradually changing, children and inheritances normally belong to the woman, and it's still common for husbands to move to the villages of their wives after marriage. Makonde settlements are widely scattered – possibly a remnant of the days when they sought to evade slave raids – and there is no tradition of a unified political system. Despite this, a healthy sense of tribal identity has managed to survive. Makonde villages are typically governed by a hereditary chief and a council of elders.

Because of their remote location, the Makonde have succeeded in remaining largely insulated from colonial and postcolonial influences. They are known in particular for their steady resistance to Islam. Today most Makonde continue to adhere to traditional religions, with the complex spirit world given its fullest expression in their well-known carvings.

PARE

The Bantu-speaking Pare people inhabit the Pare Mountains in northeastern Tanzania, where they migrated several centuries ago from the Taita Hills area of southern Kenya.

Among the patrilineal Pare, a deceased male's ghost influences all male descendants for as long as the ghost's name is remembered.

The Pare people are one of Tanzania's most educated groups and, despite their small numbers, have been highly influential in shaping the country's recent history. In the 1940s, they formed the Wapare Union, which played an extremely important role in Tanzania's drive for independence.

The Pare are also known for their rich oral traditions, and for their elaborate rituals centring on the dead. Near most villages are sacred areas in which skulls of tribal chiefs are kept. When people die, they are believed to inhabit a netherworld between the land of the living and the spirit world. If they are allowed to remain in this state, ill fate will befall their descendants. As a result, rituals allowing the deceased to pass into the world of the ancestors hold great significance. Traditional Pare beliefs also hold that when an adult male dies, others in his lineage will die as well until the cause of his death has been found and 'appeased'. Many of the possible reasons for death have to do with disturbances in moral relations within the lineage or in the village, or with sorcery.

SUKUMA

The Sukuma, who live in the southern Lake Victoria region, comprise almost 15% of Tanzania's total population, although it is only relatively recently that they have come to view themselves as a single entity. Bantu-speakers, they are closely related to the Nyamwezi, who are Tanzania's second-largest tribal group and based around Tabora.

The Sukuma are renowned for their daring hyena, snake and porcupine dances, though dancers (and often animals, too) are usually treated with traditional medicines beforehand – as protection for the dancers, and to calm the animals.

The Sukuma are renowned for their sophisticated drumming, and for their skilled and energetic dancing. Among the focal points of tribal life are lively meetings between the two competing dance societies, the Bagika and the Bagulu.

The Sukuma are also known for their highly structured form of village organisation, in which each settlement is subdivided into chiefdoms ruled by a *ntemi* (chief) in collaboration with a council of elders. Divisions of land and labour are made by village committees consisting of similarly aged members from each family in the village. These age-based groups perform numerous roles, ranging from assisting with the building of new houses to farming and other community-oriented work. As a result of this system – which gives most families at least a representational role in many village activities – Sukuma often view houses and land as communal property.

SWAHILI

East Africa's coast is home to the Swahili (People of the Coast), descendants of Bantu-Arab traders who share a common language and traditions. Although they are generally not regarded as a single ethnic group, the Swahili have for centuries had their own distinct societal structures, and consider themselves to be a single civilisation.

Swahili is now spoken in more countries and by more people than any other language in sub-Saharan Africa.

Swahili culture first began to take on a defined form around the 11th century, with the rise of Islam. Today almost all Swahili are adherents of Islam, although it's generally a more liberal version than that practised in the Middle East. Thanks to this Islamic identity, the Swahili have traditionally considered themselves to be historically and morally distinct from peoples in the interior, and believe they have links northeastwards to the rest of the Muslim world.

Swahili festivals follow the Islamic calendar. The year begins with Eid al-Fitr, a celebration of feasting and almsgiving to mark the end of Ramadan fasting. The old Persian New Year's purification ritual of *Nauroz* (or *Mwaka*) was also traditionally celebrated, with the parading of a bull counterclockwise through town followed by its slaughter and several days of exuberant dancing and feasting, though in many areas *Nauroz* has now become merged with Eid al-Fitr and is no longer observed. The festival of Maulid (marking the birth of the Prophet) is another major Swahili festival, marked by decorated mosques and colourful street processions.

Arabic Swahili (opposite) henna design being made, Kenya.
PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

TURKANA

The Turkana, one of East Africa's most colourful tribes, are a Nilotic people who live in the harsh desert country of northwestern Kenya, where they migrated to from southern Sudan and northeastern Uganda. Although the Turkana only emerged as a distinct ethnic group during the early to mid-19th century, they are notable today for their very strong sense of tribal identification. The Turkana people are closely related both linguistically and culturally to Uganda's Karamojong people (see p50).

Turkana men were traditionally tattooed on the shoulder and upper arm for killing an enemy – the right shoulder for killing a man, the left for a woman.

Like the Samburu and the Maasai (with whom they are also linguistically linked), the Turkana are primarily cattle herders, although in recent years increasing numbers have turned to fishing and subsistence farming. Some also earn a livelihood through basket weaving and producing other crafts for the tourism industry. Personal relationships based on the exchange of cattle, and built up by each herd owner during the course of a lifetime, are of critical importance in Turkana society and function as a social security net during times of need.

The Turkana are famous for their striking appearance and traditional garb. 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 Turkana lands, the main garment is a woollen blanket, often with garish checks. Turkana accessories include a stool carved out of a single piece of wood, a wooden fighting staff and a wrist knife. Tattooing is another hallmark of Turkana life. Witch doctors and prophets are held in high regard, and scars on the lower stomach are usually a sign of a witch doctor's attempt to cast out an undesirable spirit.

In addition to personal adornment, other important forms of artistic expression include finely crafted carvings and refined a cappella singing. Ceremonies play a less significant role among the Turkana people than among many of their neighbours, and they do not practice circumcision or clitoridectomy.

TUTSI

The Watusi – popular in the USA in the 1960s – is a Westernised version of a traditional Tutsi dance.

The tall, warriorlike Tutsi people are thought to have migrated to present-day Rwanda and Burundi from Ethiopia or southern Sudan between the 14th and 17th centuries. Through their ownership of cattle and advanced combat skills, they were soon able to establish economic and political control over the local Hutu, and this dominance continues to the present day. At the top of the Tutsi-Hutu feudal relationship (see p49) was the Tutsi king, or *mwami*, who was believed to be of divine origin.

While thousands of Tutsi were massacred during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, in Burundi the Tutsi-dominated regime has also been responsible for the deaths of many Hutu in the period since independence. Relations between the Tutsi and neighbouring tribes remain fraught with mistrust.

Environment

THE LAND

Straddling the equator, edged to the east by turquoise Indian Ocean tides and to the west by a long chain of Rift Valley lakes, is East Africa – a region that is as diverse geographically and environmentally as it is culturally.

One of the most inviting zones is the coast, with its coral reefs, sultry white-sand beaches, river deltas teeming with life, littoral forest and – most famously – the Lamu and Zanzibar Archipelagos. This low-lying coastal belt stretches inland for between 15km and 65km before starting to rise, steeply at times, to a vast central plateau averaging between 1000m and 2000m above sea level and extending westwards beyond Rwanda and Burundi. The plateau is punctuated by escarpments, ravines, mountain ranges and lakes, and spliced by the East African rift system (see p74), which – in addition to accounting for most of the region's lakes – also gives rise to its highest mountains: glacier-capped Mt Kilimanjaro (5896m) and Mt Kenya (5199m). The Rwenzori Mountains on the Uganda–Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) border are also a result of rift-system geology, formed where uplift occurred between parallel geological fault lines. Other major mountain ranges include the Eastern Arc chain (in southern Kenya and northeastern Tanzania) and the Aberdare Range (Kenya).

It's estimated that Mt Kilimanjaro's glaciers will disappear completely by 2020.

Rimming East Africa's central plateau to the northeast, and extending from central Kenya to the borders of Somalia and Ethiopia, is a vast, trackless area of bushland, scrub and desert, where rainfall is sparse and the land is suitable only for cattle grazing.

East Africa boasts the continent's highest and lowest points (Mt Kilimanjaro and Lake Tanganyika's floor), and its largest and deepest lakes (Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika).

WILDLIFE

East Africa's primeval natural splendour and untamed rawness are among the region's major drawcards. Experiencing this magnificence – whether gazing across vast plains trammelled by thousands of wildebeest, or surrounded by moist, dripping rainforest echoing with the calls of mountain gorillas – is likely to be a highlight of any visit.

Animals

East Africa's plains, forests, rivers and lakes are home to an unparalleled number and diversity of wildlife, including an exceptionally high concentration of large animals. While it's the 'Big Five' (lions, buffaloes, elephants, leopards and rhinos) that get most of the attention, there are many more animals to be seen. Zebras, wildebeests, hippos, giraffes, antelopes, elands,

DON'T FEED THE ELEPHANTS!

One of East Africa's major attractions is the chance to get 'up close and personal' with the wildlife. Remember, however, that the region's animals are not tame and their actions are often unpredictable. Heed the warnings of guides and rangers when on safari, and seek the advice of knowledgeable locals before venturing off on your own. Never get between a mother and her calves or cubs, and if you want good photos, invest in a telephoto lens instead of approaching an animal at close range. Be particularly aware of the dangers posed by crocodiles and hippos – a quick dip in an isolated waterhole or a beckoning river can have more consequences than you'd bargained for.

THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY

The Great Rift Valley is part of the East African rift system – a massive geological fault slicing its way almost 6500km across the African continent, from the Dead Sea in the north to Beira (Mozambique) in the south. The rift system was formed more than 30 million years ago when the tectonic plates that comprise the African and Eurasian landmasses collided and then diverged again. As the plates moved apart, massive tablets of the earth's crust collapsed between them, resulting over the millennia in the escarpments, ravines, flatlands and lakes that mark much of East Africa today.

The rift system is especially famous for its calderas and volcanoes (including Mt Kilimanjaro, Mt Meru and the calderas of the Crater Highlands) and for its lakes. Some of these lakes – including Lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa – are very deep, with floors plunging well below sea level, although their surfaces may be several hundred metres above sea level.

The East African section of the Rift Valley consists of two branches formed where the main rift system divides north of Kenya's Lake Turkana. The western branch, or Western Rift Valley, makes its way past Lake Albert in Uganda through Rwanda and Burundi down to Lake Tanganyika, after which it meanders southeast to Lake Nyasa. Seismic and volcanic disturbances still occur throughout the western branch. The eastern branch, known as the Eastern or Gregory Rift, runs south from Lake Turkana past Lakes Natron and Manyara in Tanzania before joining again with the Western Rift in northern Malawi. The lakes of the Eastern Rift are smaller and shallower than those in the western branch, with some of them only waterless salt beds.

Places where the escarpments of the Rift Valley are particularly impressive include Kenya's Rift Valley Province, the Nkuruman Escarpment east of Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve, and the terrain around Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Lake Manyara National Park in Tanzania.

kudus, gazelles and dik-diks are all commonly seen, and there are many predatory animals prowling around in addition to those already mentioned, including hyenas and wild dogs. East Africa is also renowned for its primates, including chimpanzees (especially in Tanzania's Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains National Parks) and gorillas (in southwestern Uganda and in Rwanda). See the Wildlife Guide (p57) and the Mountain Gorillas chapter (p97) for more details.

Despite all the attention East Africa's wildlife has received over the decades, new species are still being discovered. See www.kipunji.org for the story behind the discovery of the region's newest monkey.

Keeping all of these company are over 60,000 insect species, including the malaria-carrying anopheles mosquito and the bothersome tsetse fly; several dozen types of reptiles and amphibians; and many species of snake.

In addition to the rich coastal marine life found in East Africa's Indian Ocean waters, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasa are notable for having among the highest fish diversities of any lakes in the world, with an exceptionally large number of colourful cichlid species.

Fluttering around and above all this terrestrial wealth are close to 1500 different types of birds, including colourful kingfishers, raucous hornbills, stately fish eagles, ostriches and enough flamingos to turn many lakes into a haze of pink. There are also many rare birds, including the elusive shoebill stork. Uganda alone – which many ornithologists consider to be one of the continent's premier bird-watching destinations – hosts over 1000 bird species within its 236,000 sq km.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Black rhinos have gained one of the highest profiles among East Africa's endangered species, as they struggle against the ravages of poaching, trying to keep their horns from being used for traditional medicines in Asia and for dagger handles in Yemen. Thanks to major conservation efforts, black rhino numbers are again on the rise, although there are still very few in the wild. Rhino sanctuaries and breeding areas include those in Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tsavo and Lake Nakuru National Parks. Otherwise, Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater is one of the best places for trying to spot one.

For more on endangered sea turtles, and how they're being helped in parts of East Africa, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4371363.stm.

Other species fighting for survival include East Africa's famed mountain gorillas (see p97); wild dogs (most likely spotted in Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve); hawksbill, green, olive ridley and leatherback turtles; dugongs; red colobus monkeys (best seen in Zanzibar's Jozani Forest, p150); and Pemba flying fox bats.

Rare or endangered bird species include Uganda's shoebill stork; Uluguru bush shrikes; Usambara weavers; Amani sunbirds; and roseate terns.

Plants

East Africa is bursting with plant life that is just as diverse and intriguing as its wildlife. This ranges from cool, dark patches of moist tropical forest to the dusty, acacia-studded bushlands and thickets so typical of the East African savanna. While much of the region's original forest cover has been cleared for agriculture, small but significant areas remain. The rainforests of southwestern Uganda and in bordering areas of Rwanda are the most extensive. There are also small but highly biodiverse areas of tropical rainforest in northeastern Tanzania. Montane forests exist throughout the highlands of Kenya and in western Uganda, and high-altitude heather and moorlands are found above the tree line in these areas. Along the coast are stands of coconut palms and extensive mangrove forests.

Gorillas in the Mist by Dian Fossey offers an intriguing look at the complexities of halting poaching while recounting the author's life among Rwanda's mountain gorillas.

Another tree that you're likely to see is the baobab, the rootlike branches of which make it look as if it were standing on its head. You'll also undoubtedly see various species of acacia, including the distinctive flat-topped acacia trees that are among the first impressions of East Africa for many visitors.

NATIONAL PARKS

East Africa has one of the world's most impressive collections of national parks, all of which are worth as much time as you are able to spare.

Parks (the term is used loosely here to refer to national parks, wildlife reserves and conservation areas) notable for their high concentrations of wildlife include Serengeti National Park (p193) and Ngorongoro Conservation Area (p197) in Tanzania, and Masai Mara National Reserve (p393) and Amboseli National Park (p300) in Kenya. Other parks are famous

THE DOS & DON'TS OF PARK VISITING

Whichever of East Africa's parks you visit, help out the animals and the environment by following these guidelines:

- Don't camp away from official sites.
- Don't drive off the tracks.
- Don't honk your car horn.
- Don't drive within park borders outside the officially permitted hours.
- Don't litter, and be especially careful about discarding burning cigarette butts and matches.
- Don't pick flowers or remove or destroy any vegetation.
- Don't exceed the speed limits (in most parks, between 30km/h and 50km/h).

EAST AFRICA'S TOP PARKS & RESERVES

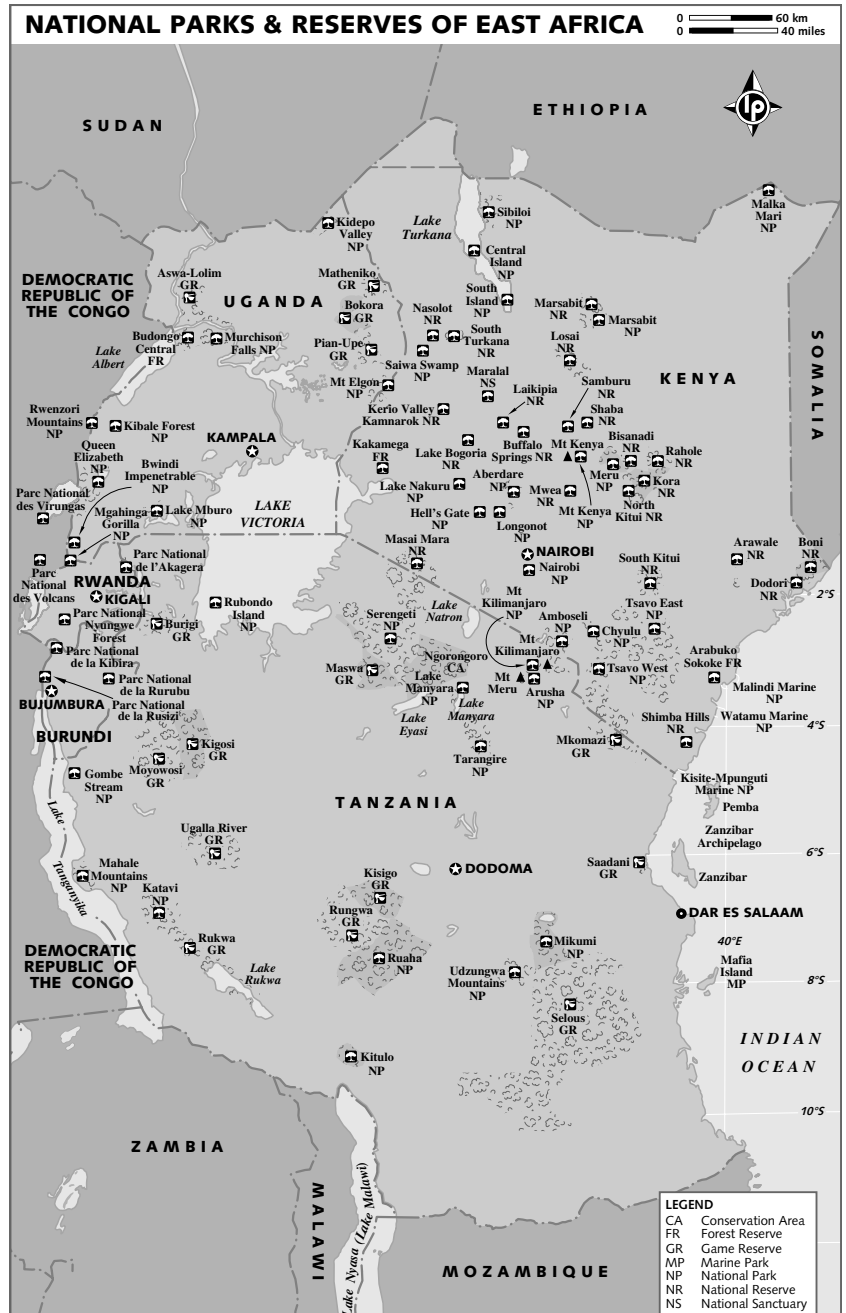
Park	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit	Page
Burundi				
PN de la Rusizi	wetlands	hippo viewing	year-round	p607
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)				
PN des Virungas	chain of volcanoes; mountain gorillas	gorilla tracking	May-Sep	p561
Kenya				
Aberdare NP	dramatic highlands, waterfalls & rainforest; elephants, black rhinos, bongo antelopes, black leopards	trekking, fishing, gliding	year-round	p373
Amboseli NP	dry plains & scrub forest; elephants, buffaloes, lions, antelopes	wildlife drives	Jun-Oct	p300
Arabuko Sokoke FR	coastal forest; Sokoke scops owls, Clarke's weavers, elephant shrews, butterflies, elephants	bird tours, walking, running, cycling	year-round	p334
Hell's Gate NP	dramatic rocky outcrops & gorges; lammergeyers, eland, giraffes, lions	cycling, walking	year-round	p360
Kakamega FR	virgin tropical rainforest; red-tailed monkeys, flying squirrels, 330 bird species	walking, bird-watching	year-round	p406
Lake Bogoria NR	scenic soda lake; flamingos, greater kudu, leopards	bird-watching, walking, hot springs	year-round	p366
Lake Nakuru NP	hilly grassland & alkaline lakeland; flamingos, black rhinos, lions, warthogs, birds	wildlife drives	year-round	p364
Malindi MNP & Watamu MNP	clear waters & coral reefs; tropical fish, turtles	diving, snorkelling	Oct-Mar	p338/ p332
Masai Mara NR	savanna & grassland; Big Five, antelopes, cheetahs, hyenas	wildlife drives, ballooning	wildebeest migration, Jul-Oct	p393
Meru NP	rainforest, swamplands & grasslands; white rhinos, elephants, lions, cheetahs, lesser kudu	wildlife drives, fishing	year-round	p387
Mt Elgon NP	extinct volcano & rainforest; elephants	walking, trekking, fishing	Dec-Feb	p413
Mt Kenya NP	rainforest, moorland & glacial mountain; elephants, buffaloes, mountain flora	trekking, climbing	Jan-Feb, Aug-Sep	p376
Nairobi NP	open plains with urban backdrop; black rhinos, birdlife, rare antelopes	wildlife drives, walking	year-round	p294
Saiwa Swamp NP	swamplands & riverine forest; sitatunga antelopes, crown cranes, otters, colobus monkeys	walking, bird-watching	year-round	p412
Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba NRs	semiarid open savanna; elephants, leopards, crocodiles	wildlife drives	year-round	p421
Shimba Hills NR	densely forested hills; elephants, sable antelopes, leopards	walking, forest tours	year-round	p321
Tsavo NP	sweeping plains & ancient volcanic cones; Big Five	wildlife drives, rock climbing, walking	year-round	p303
Rwanda				
PN des Volcans	towering volcanoes; mountain gorillas	gorilla tracking, volcano climbing	May-Sep	p583
PN Nyungwe Forest	dense tropical forest; chimpanzees & huge troops of Angolan colobus monkeys	chimp tracking, waterfalls	May-Sep	p591
Tanzania				
Arusha NP	Mt Meru, lakes & crater; zebras, giraffes, elephants	trekking & vehicle safaris, walking	year-round	p188
Gombe Stream NP	lakeshore, forest; chimpanzees	chimp tracking	year-round	p216
Katavi NP	floodplains, lakes & woodland; buffaloes, hippos, antelopes	vehicle & walking safaris	Jun-Oct	p218
Lake Manyara NP	Lake Manyara; hippos, water birds, elephants	canoe & vehicle safaris	Jun-Feb	p191
Mikumi NP	Mkata floodplains; lions, giraffes, elephants	vehicle safaris	year-round	p225
Ngorongoro CA	Ngorongoro Crater; black rhinos, lions, elephants, zebras, flamingos	vehicle safaris	Jun-Feb	p197

Key

CA – Conservation Area
FR – Forest Reserve
GR – Game Reserve
MNP – Marine National Park
NP – National Park
NR – National Reserve
PN – Parc National

EAST AFRICA'S TOP PARKS & RESERVES (CONTINUED)

Park	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit	Page
Rubondo Island NP	Lake Victoria; birdlife, sitatungas, chimpanzees	walks, chimp tracking, boating, fishing	Jun-Nov	p206
Saadani GR	Wami River, beach; birds, hippos, crocodiles	boat trips,wildlife drives & walks	Jun-Feb	p160
Selous GR	Rufiji River, lakes, woodland; elephants, hippos, wild dogs, black rhinos, birds	boat, walking & vehicle safaris	Jun-Oct, Jan-Feb	p236
Serengeti NP	plains & grasslands, Grumeti River; wildebeests, zebras, lions, cheetahs, giraffes	vehicle & balloon safaris	year-round	p193
Tarangire NP	Tarangire River, woodland, baobabs; elephants, zebras, wildebeests, birds	vehicle safaris	Jun-Oct	p192
Uganda				
Budongo Central FR	dense tropical forest; packed full of primates	chimp tracking, forest walks, bird viewing	May-Aug	p545
Bwindi Impenetrable NP	primeval tropical forest; mountain gorillas	gorilla tracking, bird-watching	May-Sep	p523
Kibale Forest NP	lush forest; highest density of primates in Africa	chimp tracking, forest elephant viewing	May-Aug	p511
Lake Mburo NP	savanna & lakes; zebra, impalas, eland & topi	wildlife walks, boat trips	year-round	p535
Mgahinga Gorilla NP	volcanoes; mountain gorillas	gorilla tracking, pygmy villages, bird-watching	Jun-Sep	p531
Mt Elgon NP	extinct volcano; duikers, buffalos, lammergier vultures	trekking	Dec-Feb & Jun-Aug	p502
Murchison Falls NP	thundering falls & the Victoria Nile; elephants, hippos, crocodiles, shoebill storks	launch trip, wildlife drives	year-round	p541
Queen Elizabeth NP	lakes, gorges & savanna; hippos, birds, chimpanzees	launch trip, chimp tracking	year-round	p520
Rwenzori Mountains NP	Africa's highest mountain range; blue monkeys, chimpanzees, hyraxes	rugged trekking, mountain climbing	Jun-Aug	p516



PARK HOPPING ON A BUDGET

Visiting East Africa's parks can be a challenge if you're on a budget. Park fees, transport and accommodation costs, and the costs of getting around once you're in the park, quickly add up, and before you know it, your daily budget will be in shreds. Following are a few things to consider.

- For maximum savings, visit parks with lower entry fees. While daily fees at most parks are between US$15 and US$50 per day, there are a few – notably Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains in Tanzania – where fees have been set higher to moderate visitor use.
- Fees at many parks in the region cover a 24-hour period. This means you can get the best value for your money by entering about noon and getting in good evening and morning wildlife-watching hours before leaving or having to pay again at noon the next day. A few parks – Ngorongoro Conservation Area is the main one here – regulate entry times, which means you'll have to pay significantly more for the same amount of time watching the wildlife.
- Camping is possible in or near most parks, and can save considerably on costs compared with staying in a lodge or luxury tented camp. Remember, though, to stick to public or 'ordinary' campsites, since 'special' campsites cost much more. Most parks have a mixture of both, but in Tanzania's Kilimanjaro, for example, all camping is charged at 'special' campsite rates.
- Parks located near a convenient access town are usually a good bet, as there will be public transport, or transport organised with a tour operator will be relatively inexpensive. However, once at the park you'll then have the costs of getting around. Parks where you can take public transport to the gate, and then get around on your own steam – eg by hiking or organising a walking safari – will be the cheapest.

for a particular type of animal, such as Parc National des Volcans (p583) in Rwanda and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (p523) in Uganda (both set aside for the protection of the endangered mountain gorillas). At Gombe Stream (p216) and Mahale Mountains (p216) National Parks in Tanzania, and at Uganda's Kibale Forest National Park (p511), chimpanzees are the main attraction.

Mangroves play an essential role in coastal ecosystems by controlling erosion, enriching surrounding waters with nutrients and providing local communities with insect-resistant wood.

Places where trekking is a highlight include Kenya's Mt Kenya National Park (p376), Mt Elgon National Park (Kenya and Uganda, p502 and p503), and Tanzania's Kilimanjaro (p175), Arusha (p188) and Udzungwa Mountains (p226) National Parks and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (p197).

There are also several marine national parks where you can go diving or snorkelling on an underwater safari. The main ones are Malindi (p338) and Watamu (p332) Marine National Parks in Kenya. There's also Mafia Island Marine Park (p241) in Tanzania, although most diving here is top end. The following table gives an overview of major parks. For more information on these, and on others not listed here, see the country chapters.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Despite its abundance of national parks and other protected areas, East Africa suffers from several major environmental scourges. One of the most notorious is poaching, which occurs throughout the region. In one sense, it's not difficult to see why: 1kg of ivory is worth about US$300 wholesale, and rhino horn is valued at US$2000 per kilogram. This amounts to as much as US$30,000 for a single horn, or about 100 times what the average East African earns in a year. Poaching is also difficult to control due to resource and personnel shortages and the vastness

and inaccessibility of many areas. Entrenched interests are also a major contributing factor, with everyone from the poachers themselves (often local villagers struggling to earn some money) to ivory dealers, embassies and government officials at the highest levels trying to get a piece of the pie.

In *Battle for the Elephants*, Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton describe with harsh clarity the ongoing political battles over elephants and the ivory trade in Africa.

In 1990, following a vigorous campaign by conservation groups, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) implemented a ban on ivory import and export. Although this worldwide ban was subsequently downgraded in some areas to permit limited trade in ivory, it allowed dwindling elephant populations in East and southern Africa to make marked recoveries. Whether these gains will be lasting remains to be seen. The now partially reopened ivory trade seems to have resulted in an increase in poaching across the continent, although this connection is disputed by those who note that funds from legal ivory sales can be used towards conservation.

Just as worrisome as poaching is deforestation, with East Africa's forest areas today representing only a fraction of the region's original forest cover. On the Zanzibar Archipelago, for example, only about 5% of the dense tropical forest that once blanketed the islands still remains. In sections of the long Eastern Arc mountain chain, which sweeps in an arc from southern Kenya down towards central Tanzania, forest depletion has caused such serious erosion that entire villages have had to be shifted to lower areas. In densely populated Rwanda and Burundi, many previously forested areas have been completely cleared to make way for agriculture.

No Man's Land by George Monbiot is a fascinating albeit controversial account of how the Maasai were forced from their traditional grazing lands in the name of conservation.

Deforestation brings with it soil erosion, shrinking water catchment and cultivable areas, and decreased availability of traditional building materials, foodstuffs and medicines. It also means that many birds and animals lose their habitats, and that local human populations risk losing their lifeblood. While the creation of forest reserves, especially in Kenya and Tanzania, has been a start in addressing the problem, tree-felling prohibitions are often not enforced.

Unregulated tourism and development also pose serious threats to East Africa's ecosystems. On the northern tip of Zanzibar, for example, new hotels are being built at a rapid rate, without sufficient provision for waste disposal and maintenance of environmental equilibrium. Inappropriate visitor use is another aspect of the issue: the tyre tracks crisscrossing off-road areas of Kenya's Masai Mara, the litter found along some popular trekking routes on Mt Kilimanjaro, and the often rampant use of firewood by visitors and tour operators alike are prime examples.

The Solutions?

For years, the conservation 'establishment' regarded human populations as a negative factor in environmental protection, and local inhabitants were often excluded from national parks or other protected areas because it was assumed that they damaged natural resources. A classic example is that of the Maasai, who were forced from parts of their traditional grazing lands around Serengeti National Park for the sake of conservation and tourism.

The Green Belt Movement by Wangari Maathai makes for dry reading, but the story is inspiring – chronicling East Africa's first female Nobel Peace Prize winner as she launches a highly successful grass-roots initiative.

Fortunately, the tide has begun to turn, and it's now recognised that steps taken in the name of conservation will ultimately backfire if not done with the cooperation and involvement of local communities. Community-based conservation has become a critical concept as tour operators, funding organisations and others recognise that East Africa's protected areas are unlikely to succeed in the long term unless local

people can obtain real benefits. If there are tangible benefits for local inhabitants – benefits such as increased local income from visitors to wilderness areas – then natural environments have a much better chance of evading destruction.

See www.esok.org for an introduction to regional ecotourism initiatives.

Much of this new awareness is taking place at the grass-roots level, with a sprouting of activities such as Kenya's Green Belt Movement and community-level erosion control projects. It also helps when visitors become more aware of the issues; see p19 for some tips on what you can do.