

Africa



phrasebooks

Africa phrasebook

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Lonely Planet Language Products

Publishing Manager: Chris Rennie

Commissioning Editors: Karin Vidstrup Monk (assisted by Branislava Vladislavjevic) & Rachel Williams

Editor: Vanessa Battersby

Assisting Editors: Branislava Vladislavjevic & Francesca Coles

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Layout Designer: Margie Jung, Jacqueline Mcleod & Pablo Gastar

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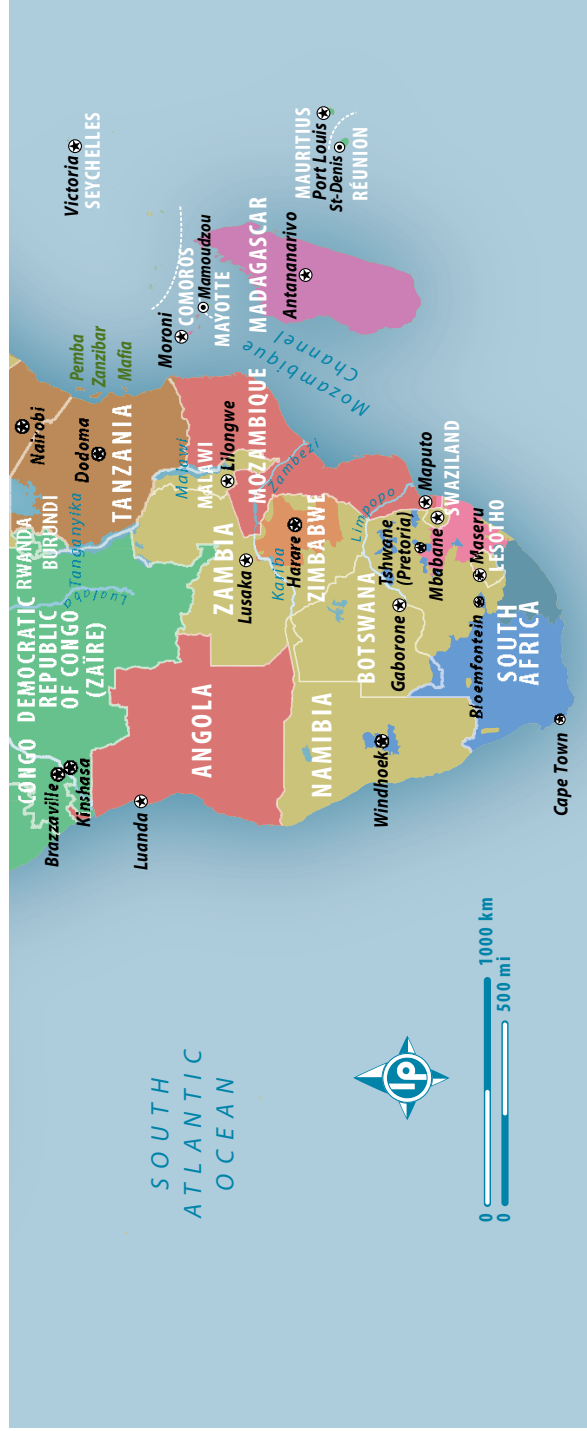
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contents

Afk	Amh	Arb	Fre	Hsa	Mgy	Por	Sho	Swa	Wol	Xho	Yor	Zul
pronunciation												
10	28	46	64	78	96	114	128	146	164	182	200	218
introduction												
11	29	47	65	79	97	115	129	147	165	183	201	219
language difficulties												
12	30	48	65	80	98	115	130	148	166	184	202	220
time, dates & numbers												
12	30	48	65	80	98	115	130	148	166	184	202	220
border crossing												
13	31	49	66	81	99	116	131	149	167	185	203	221
tickets												
14	32	50	67	82	100	117	132	150	168	186	204	222
transport												
14	32	50	67	82	100	117	133	150	168	186	204	222
directions												
15	33	51	68	83	101	118	133	151	169	187	205	223
accommodation												
16	34	52	68	84	102	118	134	152	170	188	206	223
banking & communications												
17	35	53	69	85	103	119	135	153	171	189	207	225
tours												
17	36	54	70	86	103	119	136	154	172	190	207	226
shopping												
18	36	54	69	86	104	119	136	154	172	190	208	226
making conversation												
19	37	55	69	87	105	119	137	155	173	191	209	227

Afk	Amh	Arb	Fre	Hsa	Mgy	Por	Sho	Swa	Wol	Xho	Yor	Zul
eating out												
20	38	57	71	88	106	121	139	157	174	192	210	228
emergencies												
21	39	57	71	89	107	121	139	157	175	193	211	229
medical needs												
22	40	58	72	90	108	122	140	158	176	194	212	230
dictionary												
23	41	59	73	91	109	123	141	159	177	195	213	231
culture section												235
history timeline												236–239
food												240–241
festivals												242–245
sustainable travel (including safari)												246–250
index												251

LANGUAGE MAP



- Afrikaans
 - Swahili
 - Yoruba
 - Amharic
 - Wolof
 - Zulu
 - Arabic
 - Xhosa
 - French
 - Shona
- Note: Language areas are approximate only. For more detail see the relevant introduction.*

LANGUAGE MAP

africa – at a glance

In addition to its many other attractions, Africa offers incredible linguistic diversity. Most African languages belong to one of the following four language families: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo (with the Bantu languages as the major branch) and Khoisan. In addition, the languages of Madagascar belong to the Austronesian language family. Even though the number of languages spoken in Africa is huge (around 1000), most of them have less than a million speakers. On the other hand, more prominent languages usually also serve as regional lingua francas – such as Swahili in East Africa. Luckily for English speakers, most African languages use Roman script and there's a general correspondence between the pronunciation and the written form of words.

Arabic has a particularly important status in the north and northeast of the continent, due to its proximity to the Middle East and the Arab conquests of North Africa from the 7th century. Among the African languages, Amharic is linguistically closest to Arabic, as they both belong to the Semitic group of the Afro-Asiatic family. In addition, they're both script languages, but the two scripts are quite different.

Due to the 19th-century European colonisation of Africa, a few European languages (particularly English, French and Portuguese) are still influential in various African countries and even share official status with native African languages. English is predominantly represented in the east and the south, French in the north and the west, and Portuguese in the east and the west of the continent.

A unique linguistic feature of Africa is Afrikaans, which belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. It was created as a result of the 17th-century Dutch colonisation of the south of the continent. Although still very similar to Dutch, Afrikaans is now considered a language in its own right.

did you know?

- The African Union (AU) was established in 2000 by the adoption of the Constitutive Act at the Lome Summit (Togo). It developed from the African Economic Community and the Organisation of African Unity. It has 53 member states, covering the entire continent except for Morocco. The AU is governed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government and the Pan-African Parliament.
- The home of the AU is Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The AU anthem is the song 'Let Us All Unite and Celebrate Together'. The AU flag combines green, yellow and gold colours, with the emblem showing the African continent in the middle.
- The official languages of the AU are all African languages, as well as Arabic, English, French and Portuguese. The African Academy of Languages (founded in 2001) strives to preserve African languages and promote their use among the African people.

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