



maasai

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MAASAI

According to their traditional stories, the Maasai left the lower Nile Valley in Egypt hundreds of years ago, traveling and expanding their range south through Kenya into the grasslands of central Tanzania. They brought their language with them, becoming the southernmost speakers of their language family. (The Nilo-Saharan language family is one of the four huge groups of related African languages.)

Although the Maasai resisted slavery under Arab and Swahili traders, the Kore Maasai were captured by Somali people in the 1870s. They now speak Somali instead of Maa, but still identify as Maasai. The many other groups of Maasai made their home in different sections of Maasailand, developing distinct cultural traditions and dialects of Maa.

The Maasai suffered huge losses of their people and livestock to smallpox, rinderpest (a terrible cattle disease), and drought during the *Emutai* in the late 1800s. *Emutai* means “to wipe out” in Maa, and that is what almost happened to the Maasai during this terrible time.

Regional governments broke up Maasailand in the early 1900s. They gave some of the land to white farmers and made other parts into parks and wildlife preserves, crowding the Maasai into smaller areas of their original territory.

Maasai Timeline

Prehistory Human beings and their ancestors have lived for millions of years in the Kenya and Tanzania regions, which anthropologists call the "The Cradle of Mankind." Our knowledge of the past only goes back as far as people can trace their stories, and what we can learn from fossils.

~1400s Maasai began to migrate south from the lower Nile Valley.

1525–1700s Portugal's navy controlled the coastline of Kenya and Tanzania, which would later become Zanzibar.

1600s–late 1700s The Maasai settled on land stretching from Kenya to central Tanzania.

Mid 1800s Maasailand grew to cover most of the Great Rift Valley in Kenya and Tanzania. Warriors went as far as Eastern Tanzania to raid cattle.

~1870s The Kore, a subgroup of the Maasai were captured by the Somali people. Today, they speak Somali instead of Maa, but they still identify as Maasai.

1880s The land that is now Tanzania became two territories: the mainland part called Tanganyika, and the coast with its string of islands, called Zanzibar. Tanganyika was controlled by Germany, and Zanzibar was controlled by Britain.

more on page 2

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Maasai Timeline continued

- 1883-1902** The *Emutai*, which means “to wipe out” in Maa was a very bad time for the Maasai. Rinderpest, an animal disease, killed almost all their cattle and many wild animals. Smallpox and starvation took a devastating toll on the people, killing between one-half and two-thirds of the population. Drought made matters even worse; in 1897 and 1898, it did not rain at all.
- 1904 and 1911** Treaties between the Maasai and the Kenyan government awarded more than half of Maasailand in Kenya to ranchers and wildlife preserves. The government of Kenya started pressuring the Maasai to live like “modern” people, making their homes in permanent places and farming instead of only herding cattle.
- 1940s** The Maasai lost their lands near Mount Kilimanjaro to white farmers and national parks; they still retain grazing rights in some of those areas.
- 1961** Tanganyika became an independent country.
- 1963** Zanzibar became its own country.
- 1963** Kenya won independence from Great Britain.
- 1964** Tanganyika and Zanzibar joined to become Tanzania. The name Tanzania is a combination of TANganyika and ZANzibar.