

Tanzania

Culture

The 2002 census shows a total population of 34,443,603 of which 99% are native Africans. The African population is made up of more than 120 culturally diverse ethnic groups or tribes that each has its own language. The groups share a common official language of Swahili that used for intertribal communication and for official matters. Apart from this linguistic bond, each tribe is unique. Their manners of worship, local government, and rituals—even their systems of trade and wealth—vary greatly from tribe to tribe.

One of Tanzania's major tribes, the Masai, dominates the northern portion of Tanzania. Residing in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, tribe members constantly seek new grazing areas for their cattle. Cattle are of great importance to the Masai, providing not only a source of food, but also serving as a symbol of wealth and prestige for their owners. The Masai wear a single toga-like piece of clothing, usually a bright red or blue color, and cover their bodies in ochre.

Geography and Climate

The United Republic of Tanzania is a country on the east coast of Africa. At 364,875 square miles, Tanzania is the world's 31st-largest country and is about half the size of the state of Alaska.

Tanzania is primarily a plateau that slopes gently downward into the country's five hundred miles of Indian Ocean coastline. Nearly three-quarters of Tanzania is dry savannah, so much so that the Swahili word for the central plateau is nyika, meaning "wasteland." Winding through these flatlands is the Great Rift Valley, which forms narrow and shallow lakes in its long path. Several of these great lakes form a belt-like oasis of green vegetation. Contrasting with the severity of the plains are the coastal areas, which are lush with ample rainfall. In the north the plateau slopes dramatically into Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Some of Tanzania's most distinguishing geographical features are found in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The park is composed of many craters and gorges, as well as lakes, forest, and plains. Among these features is the area's namesake, the Ngorongoro Crater. The Crater is a huge expanse, covering more than one hundred square miles. On the Crater's floor, grasslands blend into swamps, lakes, rivers, and woodland. Also within the Conservation Area's perimeter is the Olduvai Gorge, commonly referred to as the "Cradle of Mankind," where in 1931 the stone tools of prehistoric man were found. This find subsequently led to the discovery of the remains of humans who lived 1.75 million years ago.

Serengeti Plain

Adjacent to the western edge of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area is the Serengeti Plain. Its area is approximately 5,700 square miles, and its central savanna supports many grazing animals with plentiful water and lush grasses. Its southern portion is dry, receiving an average of only twenty inches of rainfall annually. The north is wooded grassland with watercourses and tributaries to larger rivers. Only two seasons occur on the Serengeti: dry and wet. The dry season occurs between June and October and the wet season between November to May.

Animal Life

Africa is well known for its native wildlife, and there are few places it is more robust than in the great grass plains of the Tanzanian wilderness. Here you will find herds of zebra, wildebeest and gazelle, cheetahs, lions, leopards, elephants and ostriches. With such variety, Tanzania is indeed an “inventory from the ark”.

The Ngorongoro Crater is rich with wildlife, including the densest predator population in Africa. The crater is home to up to 25,000 large mammals, mainly grazers - gazelle, buffalo, eland, hartebeest, and warthog. Many of the world’s flamingos live in the alkaline lakes of the Crater’s floor.

The Serengeti contains an estimated 3 million large animals, making it one of the last great wildlife preserves in the world. These animals take part in a phenomenal seasonal migration, an incredible concentration of moving animals. As the dry season approaches, the herbivores—mainly wildebeest, zebra, and gazelle—gather and move together to seek out new grazing lands and water. Following closely are the animals of prey. The cycle of migration repeats endlessly each year as the wet season gives way to dry.

Peru

Culture

Historical Culture

Peru is where the Incas built their homes and cities. They lived in the southern portion of La Sierra until around 1300 CE, when they moved north to the fertile Cuzco Valley. From here they built their empire, overrunning and assimilating neighboring lands and cultures. They organized into a socialist-type theocracy under an emperor—the Inca—whom they worshipped as a deity. The Inca Empire reached its maximum size by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

In 1532 the Spanish explorer Francisco Pizarro landed in Peru. He saw great opportunity in seizing the empire because of the rich gold deposits in the Cuzco Valley, and did so with superior armament. This opened the door for masses of gold- and adventure-seeking conquistadors to join in the pursuit, who brought with them

both modern weaponry and smallpox, which ultimately led to the demise of most of the Inca government. Civil disorder and rioting followed in what remained of the empire, and the Spanish used this as leverage to seal their victory.

Machu Picchu

Though the Incas are no more, their culture can still be seen in the ruins of their great cities and architecture. Rising from the Sacred Valley of the Incas, Machu Picchu is the Incas' stunning hilltop citadel, a complex of vine-shrouded temples, baths and stairways. Machu Picchu constitutes the end of the Inca Trail, connecting it to Cuzco, the former Inca capital. The trail sprawls across three mountain passes and dense tropic jungle. Machu Picchu is enshrouded in mystery, which attracts much speculation on its cultural significance. It is not believed to be a city itself, but rather a religious retreat or royal estate. Its inaccessibility further supports this belief. For the same reason, Machu Picchu has fortunately survived in all its former magnificence. When the conquistadors invaded other Incan cities, they typically destroyed them, using their stone bricks to build cathedrals and marketplaces for the Spaniards. The conquistadors never discovered Machu Picchu, however. It was forgotten for 400 years, an unblemished icon of Incan innovation and culture.

Current Culture

Today Peru consists largely of Native Americans who account for approximately 45 percent of the population. The remaining population consists of 37 percent Mestizo (mixed Native American and European ancestry), 15 percent white, and 3 percent other (primarily Black and Asian). The official language is Spanish, and the predominant religion is Roman Catholic.

Geography and Climate

Peru, located in South America, borders the Pacific Ocean on its west and shares common borders with the countries of Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, and Bolivia. Peru is subdivided into three regions—La Costa, La Sierra, and La Selva—based on differing climate and geographical features. Though entirely within the tropics, Peru's climate varies from region to region, ranging from tropical to arctic. Its varied climate corresponds to the sharply contrasting geographical features of seafront, mountains, and rainforests.

La Costa

Occupying the slender area along Peru's western coastline, La Costa, provides a division between the mountains and sea. Although some of this area is fertile, mostly it is extremely dry and arid. This region's temperature averages approximately 68°F, and it receives almost 2 inches of rainfall annually. The Andes Mountains prevent greater annual precipitation coming from the east. Some areas in the south are considered drier than the Sahara. Conversely, there are a few areas in this region where mountain rivers meet the ocean that are green with life and do not give the impression of being in a desert at all.

La Selva

La Selva, a region of tropical rainforest, is the easternmost region in Peru. This region, with the eastern foot of the Andes Mountains, forms the Amazon Basin, into which numerous rivers flow. The Amazon River begins at the meeting point of the two dominant rivers, the Ucayali and Marañón. La Selva is extremely wet, with some areas exceeding an annual precipitation of 137 inches. Its wettest season occurs from November to April. The weather here is humid and extremely hot.

La Sierra

Inland and to the east is the mountainous region called La Sierra, encompassing Peru's share of the Andes mountain range. The southern portion of this region is prone to volcanic activity, and some volcanoes are active today. La Sierra is subject to a dry season from May to September, which is winter in that part of the world. Temperatures are moderate by day, and can be freezing in some areas during the night. The weather is typically sunny, with moderate annual precipitation. The former Incan capital Cuzco is in this region, as well as the Sacred Valley of the Incas. This region also contains Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake.

Animal Life

Peru is home to many exotic animals, but is particularly known for its large population of birds. More than 1,700 species can be found, including parakeets, toucans, and Amazon parrots. Many extremely rare families of birds also live here. Each geographical region of Peru boasts its own distinct habitat, and some types of birds cannot be seen anywhere else.

The popular Manu National Park spanning over 4.5 million acres of unbroken Peruvian rain forest is alive with several species of monkeys, the ocelot, alligators, boars, iguana, and the anaconda. It is also considered one of the best places in the world to spot the elusive jaguar. Both the squirrel monkey, named for its relatively small size, and the howler monkey, which is quite loud vocally, can be spotted throughout the rainforests. Piranhas populate many of the Amazon River basins and lakes. Though they are known to be vicious feeders, it is a common misconception that they are man-eaters; in fact, they will graciously share their waters with human swimmers. Also found in the remote Yarapa and Amazon Rivers is the mysterious pink dolphin, so named because of its striking pink hue.