



| CULTURE &
HERITAGE



Strategically positioned at the hub of the East African coast – a key trade route established over 300 years – Kenya is a cultural melting pot, enjoying a rich and diverse heritage. Boasting a rich ethnic mix comprising more than 44 ethnic groups with genealogies emanating from Bantu, Nilotic, Cushite, Arabic and Asian origins the nation is home to humanity.

Mirroring the ethnic make-up, Kenya's landscape covers a diversity unseen in many parts of the world. From the second largest freshwater lake on the West to the salty waters of the Indian ocean in the East; the lowlands on the floor of the Great Rift Valley to the second highest peak on the continent on Mt. Kenya; the undulating ranges of the Aberdares and the flat lands of the Yatta and Nyika plateaus.

Kenyan culture, which has evolved over the centuries, is rich and very much alive. It can be seen in the visual arts, applied arts, Kenya food, music, dance, sports, fashion, literature, theatre, and its people.









FASHION

Although Kenya doesn't have a national dress, there are a lot of fashionable products produced in Kenya. Popular textiles include Kangas – women's wraparound skirts with beautiful patterns, and often with Kenyan proverbs imprinted on them and kikois – type of men's sarong that comes in many different colors and textiles.

Matching form and function, Kiondos – woven handbags made from sisal with leather trimmings are popular locally and internationally; Akalas – a sturdy sandal made from recycled tyres; kitenges – formal cotton fabrics, are just a few fashionable trends that transcend tribes and regions.

URBAN CULTURE

If you are an enthusiast of city life, Kenyan cities are the place to be, starting with the capital Nairobi. Besides its amazing skyscrapers, fun nightlife and an admirable urban culture, the city's vibrancy can also be demonstrated by the fact that it is the only capital city in the world that boasts of a national park within it. A short drive out of the central business district and you find yourself at the Nairobi National Park. Wide open grass plains and backdrop of the city's skyscrapers, play host to a wide variety of wildlife including the endangered black rhino, lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, buffaloes, giraffes, and diverse birdlife with over 400 species recorded. Visitors can also enjoy the park's picnic sites, three campsites and walking trails for hikers. A trip down to the Coast will not disappoint as Mombasa City's diverse coastal cultural experience blended with urban culture offers a memorable experience.

Public transport minibuses are known as Matatus which dominate the public transport system of Kenya's capital Nairobi. The youths call it "Club on wheels" while others "Museum on wheels" which fill the streets of Nairobi, Kenya, blaring music as they bounce and weave through traffic. When you see the Matatus and the art, you really understand Nairobi, because Nairobi is a city that is run by the youth. In Nairobi, Matatu minibuses add a colorful flair to the city's streets, whilst providing locals with a fast, alternative means of transport. Each Matatu is louder than the next, complete with graffiti-style artwork, custom designs, flashy lights, and onboard entertainment to pull the youthful passengers' attention. The Matatus are cheap, convenient, and sometimes a tad chaotic although they are the choice mode of transport for most Kenyans.



ART & CRAFT

The culture of Kenya can be seen through the arts and crafts designed by different communities. They are made of locally available materials and include woodcarvings, beaded necklaces, bracelets, masks, baskets, figurines etc. At the Nairobi National Museum, you can experience Kenya's rich cultural heritage through artifacts. There are also prints and paintings done by local artists. Kenya's constantly evolving art scene revolves around a few emerging and world-acclaimed artists predominantly from Kenya and the surrounding East African region, with art spaces clustered around Nairobi and Mombasa.

MUSEUMS

The richness of Kenya's cultural diversity can be observed within the various museums across the nation.

Nairobi Gallery

In the heart of the buzzy capital, Nairobi Gallery features contemporary art from Kenya and wider Africa. It's set in a historic building constructed in 1913, where people once came to register births, marriages, and deaths, which earned it the nickname Hatches, Matches, and Dispatches. The Nairobi gallery is therefore strongly connected to the city's history and continues to contribute to its cultural development. Since 2013, the Nairobi Gallery has become the official home to the Murumbi African Heritage Collections - the outstanding private collection amassed by the late vice-president, Joseph Murumbi.

Banana Hill Art Gallery

A leading exhibition space for contemporary African art in Nairobi, the Banana Hill Art Gallery has exhibited the work of over 70 artists and sculptors, principally from Kenya and East Africa. Founded by Shine Tani, a talented local artist, together with 12 other artists, the gallery was officially opened in 2006. Dedicated to opening the continent's incredible art source and promoting local art appreciation, the gallery holds exhibitions every two weeks. It showcases many striking colorful paintings and remarkable sculptures which reflect a range of subjects related to the African context and landscape. Situated on the outskirts of Nairobi, north of the famous Village Market, the Banana Hill Art Gallery is worth the drive.







The GoDown Arts Centre

A key art institution nurturing East Africa's artistic talents, the GoDown Arts Centre is a multi-disciplinary creative hub for contemporary art. Housed in a large, renovated warehouse with a wall dedicated to evocative graffiti tags, the center consists of a main performance space, visual arts studio, an art gallery for major exhibitions, and discussion rooms. The center also runs a residency program providing an open studio, and several workshops and seminars to assist artistic development. Throughout the year, GoDown hosts a variety of captivating and insightful events such as the Kenya Burning photo series, which displays images of Kenya's contested election results in 2007 and the resulting civil war in 2008, and the Nairobi Province Visual Arts Exhibition featuring works exploring the theme of Perceptions of Nairobi.

The Kuona Trust

Established in 1995 with the aim of addressing the lack of visibility for visual art in Kenya and the desperate need for additional workspaces and exhibition centers, the Trust has become more than just a gallery. It provides much-needed support and resources to visual artists in Kenya, as well as being a platform for art lovers to enjoy and engage with the unbridled creativity that exists as a result. The center is home to more than 20 resident artists from Africa and beyond and hosts a series of exhibitions and events throughout the year, as well as community outreach programs, workshops, and mentoring schemes. Formerly attached to the GoDown center, the trust has been in its new location in the Kilimani area of Nairobi since 2008.

One Off Contemporary Art Gallery

One of the oldest and best-loved contemporary art galleries in Nairobi, it is committed to exhibiting only the very best art from Kenya and the region. One Off works with and promotes East Africa's most established names. The gallery has represented many local talents such as Peterson Kamwathi, Beatrice Wanjiku and Jackson Wanju. Apart from its large permanent stock of paintings and sculptures, every month the gallery showcases a revolving exhibition featuring the artwork of a renowned artist. Recent exhibitions include the Gorilla's on





my mind painting series by Kenyan artist Chelenge Van Rampelbergen, plus alluring exhibitions from Ethiopian artist Zerihun Seyoum and Sudanese painter Salah Ammar.

Matbronze Wildlife Art Gallery and Foundry

Founded by acclaimed sculpture artist Denis Matthews in 1987, the Matbronze Wildlife Art Gallery and Foundry was the first bronze foundry in East Africa. A haven for contemporary African sculptures, the gallery exhibits and sells everything from elephant statues and lion paw-shaped ashtrays to bronze starfish and coconuts, capturing the diversity of Africa's rich fauna and flora. Guests can witness craftsmanship at its best by watching some of these creative processes, including bronze smelting and lost wax casting. The gallery also holds photographic art exhibitions and showcases several compelling wildlife and landscape paintings in various mediums. After strolling through the gallery, visit the coffee shop and relax in the lush garden to appreciate Kenya's wildlife through another lens.

Artz Gallery

Visitors to the Artz Gallery are immediately engulfed by the busy interior overflowing with stacks of original African paintings. Located at the Village Market, the gallery showcases an impressive range of art from some of East Africa's rising and most celebrated artists. The gallery also has a noteworthy online presence and actively shuttles paintings to the USA. Tanzanian Hendrick Lilanga, Kenyan Jane Wanjeri, and sought-after Kenyan artist Daniel Njoroge are just a few of the many talents represented by the gallery. Stop by the Artz Gallery and have a chat with the knowledgeable staff about any of the displayed pieces.

MUSIC & DANCES

Every community in Kenya has their own music and dance and all you have to do to get a glimpse of the country's musical diversity is tune into any of the more than 20 vernacular radio stations. Various restaurants in the towns have theme nights when music from a particular community is exclusively played, for example, the Carnivore Restaurant's Ohangla and Mugithi nights. Since the early 1990s, Kenya's contemporary music started to grow and today it is among the most vibrant in Africa. Currently the most popular genre is Kenyan hip-hop.



Taking a trip to the Kenyan coast is a melodious dive into the world of Taarab and Bongo – both blends of Swahili, local culture, and Arabic influences. In Nairobi, music festivals like The Safaricom Jazz Festival, African Nouveau, Thrift Social, Blankets and Wine and the monthly Koroga Festival will immerse you into a world of cultural Nairobi and contemporary Kenya.

LITERATURE & THEATRE

There are many books about Kenya that portray the country's rich culture. Some of the notable titles include *Facing Mount Kenya* by Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, *Wizard of the Crow* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen (also known by the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen), which inspired the Oscar-winning movie of the same name and *Unbowed* by Wangari Maathai, the winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize.

Every year the Kenya National Drama Festival is held across the country. The co-curricular activity, which is run by the Ministry of Education, aims to tap, and nurture creative talent among the Kenyan youth.

On a day-to-day basis, one can appreciate, and experience Kenyan literary works hosted across cities like Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa. In Nairobi, The Kenya National Theatre, managed in part by the Kenya Cultural Centre, is the home of all things performance; from farces, original works, comedy shows. Other venues that pay homage and celebrate Kenyan drama are The Alliance Francaise, The Goethe Institute, Goan Centre among others.

HEROES OF KENYA

Freedom Fighters

For more than a half-century, many Kenyans stood against British colonization and rule (1895-1963). The Kenyans in the stories that follow were courageous individuals who fought, bled, and died as free men and women, so that today all Kenyans could live as free citizens of a self-ruled nation. In the mid 1940s a group of Kenyan freedom fighters.



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ARCHEOLOGY & PREHISTORY OF KENYA

The Cradle of Mankind

Helping to unravel this history are the numerous archaeological sites in Kenya where hominids are found, and others where stone tools abound, as do butchery sites where animal bones show clearly where meat was cut from the carcass. On the edge of the Serengeti Plain at Laetoli, archaeologists have even found 3.5-million-year-old footprints preserved in what was once mud. Yet these are not ordinary footprints: the three sets suggest three different individuals who may well have been a man, a woman, and a teenage child—a family

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Kenya is known for its spectacular beauty and a visit offers the experience of a lifetime. Besides the chance to see the big five game animals, the country holds seven UNESCO World Heritage sites. The natural sites are designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites because of their importance in cultural, historical, natural, and archaeological value. The cultural sites include: the Lamu Old Town, Fort Jesus, The Sacred Kayas of Mijikenda, and Thimlich Ohinga Archeological Site. The natural sites are Kenya's Lake System in the Great Rift Valley (Lake Bogoria, Lake Nakuru and Lake Elementaita), Lake Turkana National Parks and Mt. Kenya National Park/Natural Forest.

Lake Turkana

Being the most saline of East Africa's large lakes, Turkana is an outstanding laboratory for the study of plant and animal families. The three National Parks serve as a stopover for migrant waterfowl and are major breeding grounds for the Nile crocodile, hippopotamus, and a variety of venomous snakes. The Koobi Fora deposits, rich in mammalian, molluscan and other fossil remains, have contributed more to the understanding of paleo-environments than any other site on the continent. The Lake Turkana National Parks were inscribed onto the World Heritage List in 1997.

Lake Turkana National Parks consist of Sibiloi, the South and Central Islands, covering a total area of 161,485 hectares, all



located within the Lake Turkana basin whose total surface area is 7 million hectares. The Lake is the largest desert lake in the world, surrounded by an arid, seemingly extraterrestrial landscape that is often devoid of life.

The long body of Lake Turkana drops down along the Rift Valley from the Ethiopian border, extending 249 kilometers from north to south and 44 km at its widest point, with an average depth of 30 meters. It is Africa's fourth largest lake, fondly called the Jade Sea because of its breathtaking color.

At Koobi Fora, extensive paleontological finds have been made, starting in 1969 with the discovery of *Paranthropus boisei*. The discovery of *Homo habilis* thereafter is evidence of the existence of a relatively intelligent hominid two million years ago and reflects the change in climate from moist forest grassland to the present hot desert.

These and many more discoveries have been made by NMK researchers in partnership with external parties. Today, all research collections are housed in NMK and are available for further research.

Mount Kenya National Park and Forest

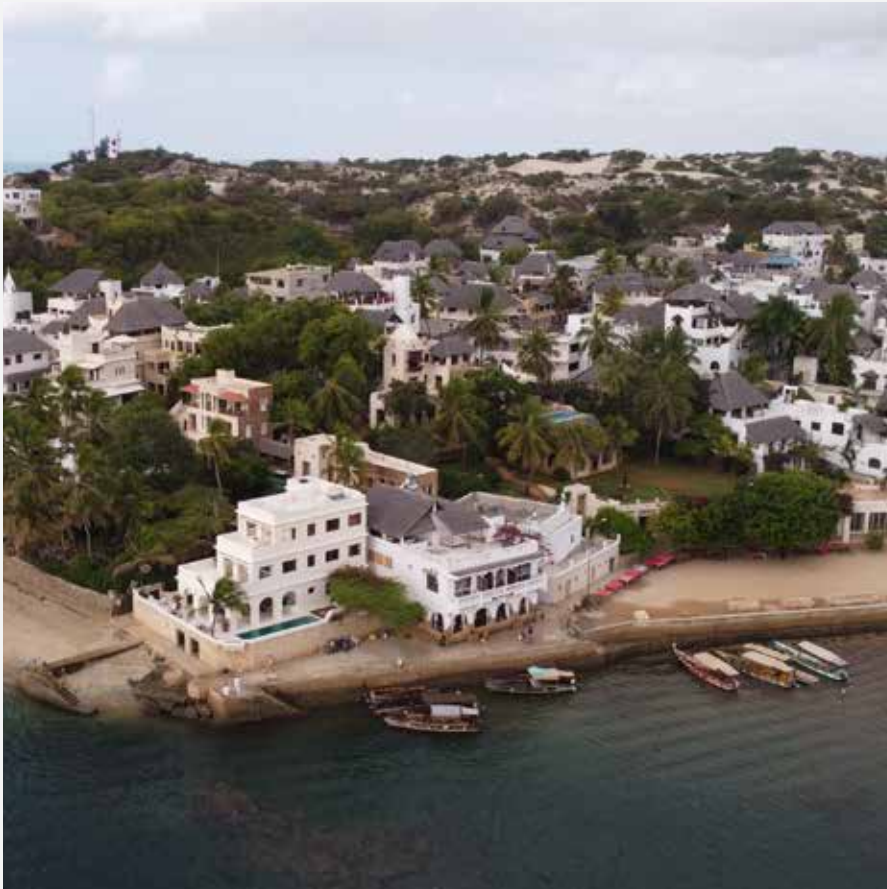
With its rugged glacier-clad summits and forested middle slopes, Mount Kenya is one of the most impressive landscapes in East Africa. The National Park and Forest, founded in 1949, was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1997, and is under the joint management of KWS and the Museum (NMK). The aim was to protect Mount Kenya, along with its wildlife and environment. The natural environment is crucial as a natural habitat for the animal species that live in the area. It also acts as a water catchment area that provides water to Kenya and is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Mount Kenya straddles the equator about 193 km north-east of Nairobi and about 480 km from the Kenyan coast. At 5,199 m, Mount Kenya is the second highest mountain in Africa and is an ancient extinct volcano.

Lamu Old Town

This is the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa, retaining its traditional functions. Built in coral stone and mangrove timber, the town is characterized by the simplicity of





structural forms, enriched by such features as inner courtyards, verandas, and elaborately carved wooden doors. Lamu has hosted major Muslim religious festivals since the 19th century and has become a significant centre for the study of Islamic and Swahili cultures. Lamu old town was gazetted on 20/6/1986 and added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2001.

The town is characterized by narrow streets and alleyways that only allow for movement by foot or donkey. The town's architecture and stone buildings are influenced by a fusion of Swahili, Arabic, Persian, Indian and European building styles.

Unlike other Swahili settlements which have been abandoned along the East African coast, Lamu has continuously been inhabited for over 700 years. Lamu was once an important trading center in Islamic coastal East Africa, dating back to the twelfth century. It is a major reservoir of Swahili culture, whose inhabitants have managed to sustain their traditional values as demonstrated by their sense of social unity and cohesion.

Lamu boasts of several historic sites, including the German Post Office, the Lamu Museum, and the Lamu Fort.

Mijikenda kaya forest

Consisting of 11 separate forest sites, spread over some 200 km along the coast, they contain the remains of numerous fortified villages, known as kayas, of the Mijikenda people. The kayas, created in the 16th century but abandoned by the 1940s, are now regarded as the abodes of ancestors, revered as sacred sites and, as such, are maintained by councils of elders. These sites were inscribed to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2008. The Coastal Forest Conservation unit (CFCu) was constituted by NMK to oversee the conservation efforts of these sacred forests.

Spread out along around 200km of the coastal region of Kenya are ten separate forested sites, mostly on low hills, ranging in size from 30 to around 300 hectares, in which are the remains of fortified villages, Kayas, of the Mijikenda people. They represent more than thirty surviving Kayas.

The Kayas began to fall out of use in the early 20th century. They are now revered as the repositories of spiritual beliefs of the Mijikenda people and seen as the sacred abode of their ancestors.



The Kenya Lake System in the Great Rift Valley

This system was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2011. It is a natural property of outstanding beauty, comprising of three inter-linked, relatively shallow lakes (Lake Bogoria, Lake Nakuru and Lake Elementaita), and covers a total area of 32,034 hectares. Some of the world's greatest diversities and concentrations of bird species are recorded within these relatively small lake systems.

Major tectonic and volcanic events have shaped the distinctive landscape, which is a place for discovery.

The lakes have large mammal populations and are recognised as a valuable place for the study of ecological processes of major importance. It's possible to spot black rhinos, Rothschild's giraffes, greater kudus, lions, cheetahs, and wild dogs

For most of the year, up to 4 million lesser flamingos move between the three shallow lakes in an outstanding wildlife spectacle. Surrounded by hot springs, geysers, and the steep escarpment of the Rift Valley with its volcanic outcrops, the natural setting of the lakes provides an exceptional experience of nature. The lakes are home to 13 globally threatened bird species and some of the highest bird diversities in the world. It is the single most important foraging site for the lesser flamingo anywhere, and a major nesting and breeding ground for great white pelicans.

Fort Jesus, Mombasa: An Architectural Masterpiece

Built by the Portuguese at the end of the 16th century, Fort Jesus stands at the southern edge of Mombasa, over a spur of coral rock. It was kept under Portuguese control for one century and is testimony to the first successful attempt by Western civilization to rule the Indian ocean trade routes - which, until then, had remained under Eastern influence. This historical site was gazetted on 12/6/1970 and inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2011

The Fort - built by the Portuguese in 1593-1596, to Giovanni Battista Cairati's designs, to protect the port of Mombasa - is one of the most outstanding and well-preserved examples of 16th century Portuguese military fortification, and a landmark in the history of this type of construction.





The Fort's layout and form reflected the Renaissance ideal that perfect proportions and geometric harmony are to be found in the human body. The property covers an area of 2.36 hectares and includes the fort's moat and immediate surroundings.

Fort Jesus, Mombasa, bears physical witness, in its structures and subsequent transformations, to the interchange of cultural values and influences between and among peoples of African, Arab, Turkish, Persian, and European origin, who fought to gain and maintain their control over this strategic port.

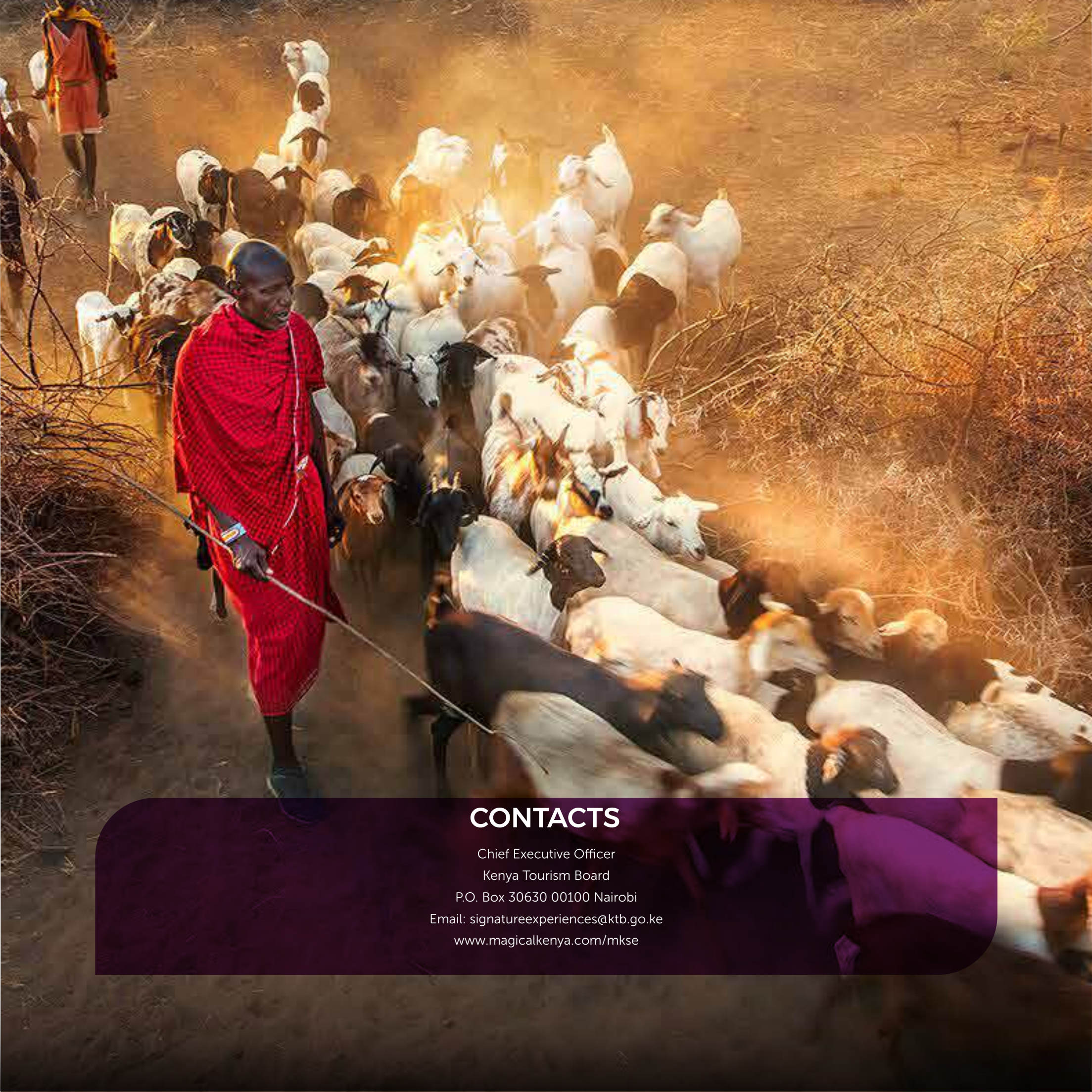
Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological site

This cultural site was gazetted as a national monument on June 4th 1982 and added to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2018. Thimlich Ohinga refers to a "frightening dense forest" in Dholuo language, a Nilotic group who occupy the region. The stone structure enclosure has walls ranging from 1.0 to 4.2 meters in height, which were built of loose stones and blocks without any dressing or mortar.

Archaeological records of materials found within the site go beyond 500 years ago. Since the present inhabitants of the area arrived probably some three centuries ago, it seems most likely that Bantus - who initially occupied this region prior to the arrival of Luos - first built the stone structures. Abundant rocks on the hilly areas provided them with building materials to meet their security requirements.

Subsequently, communities that moved into this region in the period between the 15th and 19th centuries carried out repair work and modification on the structures. However, all these episodes of occupation and repair did not interfere with the architecture and preservation of the structures.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the abandonment of Ohingni started en masse. No more stone structures were constructed, and consequently some stone structures were reduced to mere traces of circumferences or disappeared altogether. Thimlich Ohinga is one of the few stone structures that survived.



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