Somalia

The Somali people, their History, Culture and Language

By
Abdiwahab Shiil
Somalia is a country located in eastern Africa, and forms the cap of the Horn of Africa, bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the west Kenya to the south, the Gulf of Aden to the north and the Indian Ocean to the east. Somalia has the longest coastline in African, connecting to both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean with a length of 3300 KM, which has been vital to its trade with the Middle East and the rest of East Africa.
• Official Name: The Federal Republic of Somalia
• Capital: Mogadishu
• Government Type: Republic
• President: Hassan Sheikh Mohamud
• Prime Minister: Abdiwali Sheikh Ahmed
• Official languages: Somali and Arabic
• Ethnic Groups: Somali
• Religion: Islam
• Population: 14-17M
• Currency: Somali Shilling
Origin

Somalia belongs to the Cushitic group one of the three African indigenous ethnic groups. The name Somali originally came from the two Somali words of SOO and MAAL which mean, “Go and milk it” an indication that the Somalis were traditional nomadic pastoral society, who kept camels, cattle, goats and sheep for both subsistence and commercial purpose.
History and Politics

Having the longest coastline in Africa, Somalia was an important center for commerce with the rest of the ancient world, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 stimulated European expansion into the region. By the end of the 18th century, the Somali people were living under the rule of three foreign powers: the British (in north central Somalia and in northeast Kenya), the Italians (in southern Somalia), and the French (in the northwest, in what is now Djibouti).
A Somali poet, Farrah Nuur, had this to say about Somalia's dismemberment:

The British, the French, and the Italians are squabbling, the country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger. The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge. And for me, all this is the Teeth of the Last Days!
And as Newton’s third law of motion states for every action there is equal and opposite reaction.

Toward the end of the 19th century, Somalia took part in a general Muslim reaction in North Africa against colonialism. In 1899, Mohammed ibn Abdullah Hassan, called the "Mad Mullah" by the British and known as "the Sayyid" by Somalis, launched a 20-year rebellion against colonial occupation.
History and Politics

His movement controlled large part of Somalia, and Somalia became the first African nation that was used for flying warplanes by the British. The sayid enjoyed strong support among Somalis. The Sayid's abilities as a poet and orator, highly valued skills among Somalis, won him many disciples, and much of his success was in commanding trans clan loyalty, and The sayid is nonetheless viewed as the founding father of Somalia and its national identity.
Finally, in July first 1960 Somalia gained its independent and United Republic of Somali and Aden Abdullah Osman became the first elected president and Abdirashid Ali Sharmake the first prime minister.
Independence
Somali had no written form until 1972, and until then English and Italian served as the languages of government and education. In 1972 decision to introduce a Somali script fundamentally changed the situation when the Somali government set up a panel of academic intellectuals to come up with a modern, polished Somali language that can be appreciated by knowledge-hungry Somalis.
The Somali Latin alphabet was developed which used all the letters of the English Latin alphabet except P, V and Z. Before the decade of 1970s was over, a beautiful curriculum was introduced and all academic subjects were being taught.
Somali alphabet


Short vowels (A, E, I, O, U)

Long vowels (AA, EE, II, OO, UU) are used in Somali and pronounced about twice as long as a single counterpart.
Greetings

- Subah wanaagsan (Good morning)
- Galab wanaagsan (Good afternoon)
- Habeen wanaagsan (Good night)
Maah Maah

- Shimbirba shimbirkiiisu la duulaa. birds of a feather flock together.
- Run iyo ilkaba waa la caddeeyaa: Truth and teeth should both be polished.
- Rag waa shaah, dumarna waa sheeko: Men for tea, women for talk (gossip).
- Intaadan fallin ka fiirso ～Look before you leap
- Gar iyo geeri loo siman ～Death and justice affect all men equally
Somalis do not have surnames in the Western sense. To identify a Somali, three names must be used: a given name followed by the father's given name and the grandfather's.

Women, therefore, do not change their names at marriage.

Unlike the west, Somalis have one pool for all three names. As a result, many names are similar. Most names have meaning, and certain names are given to denote time of birth, physical characteristics, birth order, and so on.
Children and elders share mutual respect. When addressing another family member or friend, words for “aunt,” “uncle,” “brother,” “sister,” and “cousin” are used depending on the person's age relative to the speaker.

Men are usually the head of the household. Women manage the finances and take care of the children. It is considered culturally unacceptable for a man to not be perceived as being in charge of his home.
Status, Roles, and Prestige
Somalis

- High respect for strength and often challenge others to test their limits
- Justice is based on the notion of "an eye for an eye"
- Somalis are a proud people
- Deep value on the family: The strength of family ties provides a safety net in times of need, and the protection of family honor is important.
- Loyalty is an important value and can extend beyond family and clan. Somalis value their friendships
Greetings and Displays of Respect

Many social norms are derived from Islamic tradition, and thus may be similar to other Islamic countries. The common way to greet someone is to say salaam aleykum (peace be on to you) and to shake their hand. Due to Islamic tradition, men and women do not touch each other. Thus men shake the hands of other men, and women shake each other's hands. When departing, the common phrase is nabad gelyo ("goodbye"). Respect is paid to the elders of the community. Elders are addressed as "aunt" or "uncle," even if they are strangers.
Marriages can either be arranged or be a result of personal choice.

Polygamy is not widely practiced but if a man is capable to do so may have up to 4 wives, as is customary in Islamic tradition. However, not all wealthy men exercise this option.
Marriage
Somalia is the only Islamic country in the world with 100% concentration of Sunni Muslims. Islam is the principal faith and is vitally important to the Somali sense of national identity.
Festivities in Somalia are associated with religious, social, or seasonal events. At the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, Muslims celebrate the Id-al-Fitir for three days.

Another religious festival, the Id-al-Adha, comes three months later and coincides with the Haj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Thursday and Friday are the official week ends.
Men wear two lengths of white cotton wrapped around them as a skirt and shawl or they wear a macaawiis, a brightly colored cloth, and cover their heads with kofia, a Somali cap. Somali women usually wear full-length dresses with headscarf. These come in a variety of styles.
• Cad iyo Caano.

• In Somalia, the location and livelihood influence diet, but on the whole, the Somali diet is low in caloric intake and high in protein consumption.

• As Muslims, Somalis are forbidden to eat pork and drink alcohol.

• All meat must be slaughtered in a special way so that it is xalaal, clean and pure. In the United States, kosher foods meet Muslim dietary requirements.

• Another health fact is Somalia has one of the lowest HIV infection rates in Africa.
Somalia has the longest coastal line in Africa, and two perennial rivers namely; Juba and Shebelle. Which provide water for both the people and their animal and also for irrigation, Somalia also mineral resources including but not limited to Uranium, Natural gas, Possibly Oil and extensive fish and marine life off the Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.
Questions?