

# Versatility in Hospitality Industry around the Globe A Case Study on Cuisine and Culture of Kenya

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**Abstract:** *The republic of Kenya located in east Africa of the Indian ocean, is home to scenic landscape. Among these diverse relief features is Mt Kenya the highest point in the country at 17,058 feet, to which the country traces its name. Most Kenyans are bilingual speaking the mother tongues of their ethnic groups and one or both of the official language Kiswahili and English. Kenya's are considered to belong to three broad language families: - Bantu, Nilo-Saharan and afro Asiatic. Apart from its African population, Kenya has been home to Indians, Pakistan's and all the British. The constitution of Kenya grants freedom of religion. Among the Kenyans 183 percent identify as Christian, 11.2 percent identify as Muslims and 1.7 percent as traditionalist. The cuisine of Kenya shares a lot in common with that of some neighbours in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Tanzania and Nigeria, and also its colonial past such as India. There is no singular dish that represents all of Kenya's wide cuisine. Different communities have their own native foods. Staples are maize and other cereals depending on the region, including millet and sorghum eaten with various meats and vegetables. The emerging national culture of Kenya has several strong dimensions that include the rise of a national language, the full acceptance of Kenyan as an identity, the success of a postcolonial constitutional order, the ascendancy of ecumenical religions, the urban dominance of multi-ethnic cultural productions, and increased national cohesion...*

**Keywords:** Sukuma, Swahili, Biryani, Kente.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya has a very diverse population that includes most major ethnic, racial and linguistic groups found in Africa. Bantu and Nilotic populations together constitute around 92% of the nation's inhabitants. People from Asian or European heritage living in Kenya are estimated at around 200,000.

While Kenya embraces their individual difference and attributes the Kenyan ethos is to celebrate unity as strength. Their culture is known as 'Harambee' means "To pull together" and underlines the Kenyan's approach to life and living. The focus is on community and in working together other on individual well-being.

The rich ethnic in Kenya means that the cuisine among various ethnic groups is varied and represents the different lifestyle they lead. Popular staple cuisines are maize, potatoes, beans, rice, chicken, beef, tilapia fish and range of fresh traditional vegetables and fruits.

The Maasai, cattle-herding peoples who live in Kenya and Tanzania, eat simple foods, relying on cow and goat by-products, such as meat and milk. The Maasai traditionally do not eat wild game or fish, depending only on the livestock they raise for food.

The Kikuyu and Gikuyu grow corn, beans, potatoes, and greens. They mash all of these vegetables together to make irio. They roll irio into balls and dip them into meat or vegetable stews. In western Kenya, the people living near Lake Victoria mainly prepare fish stews, vegetable dishes and rice.

The staple of the Luo cuisine is ugali (a polenta-like corn meal) paired with Sukuma wiki (sautéed greens) or steamed cabbage and carrots. Special meals include fish, chicken, stewed lentils (green grams), rice and chapatti.

The Kenyan diet also includes tea, especially when served with milk and sugar. It is served for breakfast, at meal times and during Kenya's regular tea time.

Sukuma wiki, a Swahili phrase which literally means "to push the week", is a simple dish made with greens similar to kale or collards that can also be made with cassava leaves, sweet potato leaves, or pumpkin leaves. Its Swahili name comes from the fact that it is typically eaten to "get through the week" or "stretch the week".

Among the Luhya residing in the western region of the country, ingokho (chicken) with ugali is a favourite meal. Other than these, they also eat tsisaka, miroo, managu and other dishes.

## **II. SUMMARY**

The Kenyan culture is a unique blend of African traditions and modern 20th century influences. This multifarious culture is well represented in various ways, ranging from its language, people, festivals, food, ethical values and norms, art and artifacts. Indeed, all these forms of lifestyle and expression conspire in synergy to form a cultural identity that is specifically Kenyan.

The largest sub-Saharan ethnic groups are the Bantu, especially the Kikuyu, and the Nilotic peoples, especially the Kalenjin's, each with unique cultural traits. The other native sub-Saharan Africans, the Cushite's, may geopolitically self-identify as East African, but culture-wise increasingly also consider themselves as Horner's. In addition, the small minority of Kenyans with Eurasian heritage mainly hail from north-western parts of India, Oman and the British aristocracy.

### **KENYAN PEOPLE**

Kenya is a heterogeneous country ethnicity wise. Of the 45 million people that live here, the majority come from the 42 ethnic groups, with each featuring their own native language. The three major groups that make up the native population include Bantu who make up the majority, Nilotic and Cushitic people. About 13% of the population is made up of people of non-African descent i.e., European, Indian and Arab people.

### **RELIGION**

Kenyan people practice different religions due to the fact that the Kenyan constitution allows for freedom of worship. About 80% of the population practices the Christian faith, 10% are Muslims, with a small minority of Sikh and Hindus. Additionally, there is a sizable number that practices animism, and traditional African beliefs within the population. Muslims tend to be concentrated in the eastern and coastal regions of the country while Christians are mostly concentrated in the central and western regions of the country.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY**

Like most Africans, Kenyans place great importance on the family with the extended family being the basis of the social structure. This consists of family members on both sides of the divide and close friends. It is also the norm to find parents of the husband coming to live with their nuclear family once they are old and can no longer take care of themselves.

### **KENYAN CUSTOMS & ETIQUETTE**

Kenyans are hospitable and friendly people regardless of their ethnic affiliation. Traditional customs and etiquette are very important when it comes to business and social interactions. Kenyan customs and etiquette are mainly manifested in how old people are treated with reverence and respect, during meals, communication style, meeting and greeting and gift giving.

### **Communication Style**

Kenyans are very conservative people who will rarely engage in direct or frank conversation. In an attempt to save face and preserve relationships Kenyans will always try to pass their message in a clever way so as not to offend the other party. In a culture whereby maintaining dignity and honour is of paramount importance, Kenyans would rather give an expected response rather than that which is sure to embarrass the other party. If you come from a culture that values direct talk and forwardness, you may wish to put your delivery style to moderation. It is also important to maintain eye contact during a conversation in order to build trust.

### **Gift Giving**

Gift giving is a normal practice among the Kenyan people. It is mainly practiced during important social and religious events. It is also customary for people to give gifts to servants, service workers, and tradespeople during Christmas. In case you are invited for supper in a Kenyan home, it is a good gesture to carry along sweets, pastries, and flowers for your hostess. In rural areas however it is common practice to carry along tea leaves, foodstuffs, and sugar. Gifts should however never be handed out using the left hand as this is considered rude for the host.

### **Meeting and Greetings**

The most common greeting among the Kenyan people is the handshake although it not uncommon to find close female friends hugging and kissing one another on the cheeks instead of shaking hands. The most common greeting is “Jambo or Mambo?” (“How are you?”) This is mostly said immediately before shaking hands. After the handshake, people typically inquire about the other party’s health, family, and business. Skipping this protocol is considered the height of bad manners among the Kenyan people.

### **KENYAN CUISINE**

The rich ethnic diversity in Kenya means that the cuisine among the various ethnic groups is varied and represents the different lifestyles they lead. Popular staple cuisine consists maize, potatoes, beans, rice, chicken, beef, tilapia fish and a range of fresh traditional vegetables and fruits. Although Kenya does not have a specific national Cuisine there exist three national dishes namely Ugali, Nyama Choma and Sukuma Wiki. The people from the coastal region of Kenya have however come up with a distinct cuisine that has Indian, African and Arabian influences. Coconuts and spices are used heavily in the myriad coastal dishes.

As you move towards the city, foods eaten by working families vary according to preference and ethnicity. Rice and stew are more common with working families, as are other dishes like chapati, which is a staple that originated from India (similar to the flatbread paratha), chicken stew, etc.

As we travel around the country, distinct differences are noted based on what foods are locally available in each area. Grains are a staple food for groups that grow grains (e.g., Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, Kisi, etc.). Other communities such as the Luo and the Coastal community have fish and seafood for their staple food as available in such areas. In semi-arid areas like Turkana, foods made from sorghum are more common staple foods.

### **Nyama Choma**

Nyama Choma refers to charcoal grilled or roasted beef or goat meat. The fact that the meat is however not softened and the only seasoning includes lemon juice, salt, and pepper help to give it a distinctively dry and chewy texture. Nyama Choma is roasted plain and brought to the table sliced into bite-sized chunks. It is also mainly accompanied with a side dish of mashed vegetables or Kachumbari which is a mixture of raw tomatoes, onions and green or red pepper.

### **Ugali**

Ugali refers to dough made from a mixture of maize (corn) flour and boiled water. Most Kenyans eat this meal on a daily basis together with various accompanying dishes such as stews, chopped kales and spinach, and meat.

### **Sukuma Wiki**

This is a simple and inexpensive Kenyan dish that is mostly taken together with ugali. It comprises or kales and spinach chopped into small bits and pieces that are fried with tomatoes, onions, green pepper, and meat.

### **Irio (Mashed Peas and Potato Mix)**

Irio is one of the most famous dishes in Kenya, a food that originated as a Kikuyu staple and spread throughout the country.

Green peas and potatoes are boiled and then mashed up before whole kernels of maize (corn) are added to give the mash some extra starch and texture. This hearty and heavy Kenyan food is famous to eat with roasted nyama choma meat (nyama na irio) or just some Kenyan style stew.

### **Githeri (Beans and Corn)**

It's not too complicated, a Kenyan dish that consists of boiled beans, corn kernels, and possibly mixed in with a little bit of vegetables.

The combination of Githeri is a filling, highly nutritious, and can be quite good when complimented with salt, pepper, chilies, and even a chapati!

### **Kenyan Pilau (Spiced Rice)**

Pilau is a glorified combination of rice cooked with flavour bursting spices like cumin, cardamon, cinnamon, and cloves. The fragrant rice is fantastic to eat with a form of meat stew and a few slices of fresh tomato and onions.

Biriyani is another form of spiced rice that is a popular Kenyan food on the coast.

### **Wali wa Nazi (Coconut Rice)**

Coconut rice is a popular Kenyan food mostly along the Indian Ocean coast. White rice is cooked with grated coconut meat to create a fragrant twist on plain boiled rice. Wali wa Nazi is best enjoyed with a serving of fish or chicken curry, some vegetables, or even bean stew.

### **Kenyan Stew**

Kenyan stew can include a number of different meats: beef stew, goat stew, chicken stew or any other animal stew. Kenyan stew dishes might also include a few other base vegetable ingredients such as carrots, peppers, peas, or potatoes. The sauce is usually formed from a light tomato base and accented with onion, salt and pepper, and that essential mchuzi mix!

### **Matoke (Plantain Banana Stew)**

Matoke is originally a dish from Uganda, though it is widely available and popular in Kenya as well. Plantain bananas are cooked up in a pot with some oil, tomatoes, onions, garlic, chilies, meat (optional), and lemon juice.

The bananas are cooked until they become soft and begin to form a thick sauce with the other ingredients. The result is a delicious dish that is reminiscent of boiled potatoes in sauce and excellent to eat with rice, ugali, or a chapati.

### **Chapati (Flatbread)**

Chapatis in Kenya can trace their origin from the influence of the Indian population. Kenyan style chapatis are made with a flour dough that is wound into a coil before being rolled into a flat round circle. The dough is then fried on a skillet accompanied by plenty of oil so it becomes crispy on the edges but remains moist and doughy on the interior.

Chapatis can be considered more of a special form of Kenyan food, a treat to eat. Chapatis go well with fried cabbage, beans, or even just rolled up with a cup of tea!

### **Kachumbari (Tomatoes and Onions)**

The simple formula of diced tomatoes, onions, chili peppers, cilantro, and sometimes avocado, is a natural power combination of vegetables that cultures all the way from Mexico to Kenya have discovered. Kenyans enjoy kachumbari as a garnish, a side salad that accompanies things like nyama choma or beans.

### **Kenyan Bajas**

There are multiple forms of what is commonly known as bajas. The Kenyan variety (sort of borrowed from India) is normally what can be described as glorious spruced-up plate of awesome French fries (chips).

Potatoes are sliced up and battered with seasoning, deep fried, and served with a Kenyan tomato salsa that is worth boasting about.

### **Mutura**

Mutura is the real Kenyan sausage, a protein rich meaty snack that could be the envy of every beer drinker. Goat intestine wrappers are stuffed full of the alluring combination of ground meat parts and goat blood. The sausage is boiled until it is almost cooked through and then thrown on the grill to dehydrate the meat and give it that sensational smoky taste.

### **KENYAN FESTIVALS**

Kenya features many festivals and celebrations all over the country with some more famous than others. Below is a list of three major festivals that are famous and big enough to steal the limelight today:

#### **Lake Turkana Festival**

Started in 2008 the Lake Turkana Festival is a 3-day festival that brings together the different communities that live around Lake Turkana or Jade Sea which happens to be the largest desert lake in the world. The eight communities include the Turkana, Gabbra, Rendille, Samburu, El Molo, Watta, and Dasannach. The various communities display their unique cultural dances, dressing, and food that highlight their rich cultures. The festival is located in small town of Loiyangalani which is a Turkana word that means "Place of many trees."

#### **Lamu Cultural Festival**

Located on the north coast of Kenya, Lamu is an island that is one of the major abodes of the Swahili people. Considered the most famous cultural festival, this annual week-long festival involves the culmination of various captivating races and competitions. Above all the Lamu festival is a celebration of the culture and beliefs that make up the soul and heart of the Lamu community. Events devised to foster local practices and skills include Swahili poetry, Bao competition, and Henna painting. Other notable competitions include dhow racing, swimming competition, and donkey racing. Most people will fall in love with the cool, laidback and peaceful atmosphere of Lamu. Above all, they get to experience the joyous and exuberant life of the people and their sumptuous cuisine of Kenyan Coastal region.[1]Krapf, Johann Ludwig.

#### **Maralal Camel Derby**

Maralal a dusty and sleepy town located in the North Rift region of Kenya roars alive every once a year during the iconic Maralal Camel Derby. The Maralal Camel Derby is Kenya's most prestigious and famous camel race that attracts both international and local camel jockeys. It is an eccentric and electrifying race that sees some of the finest and fastest camels in the region paraded on the touchline. The race begins at the centre of the town where competitors are flagged off by local dignitaries. It is often a time often highlighted by funny experiences as excited camels often decide to go in the opposite direction when the green light is given as others take the course at a breakneck speed. The Maralal camel derby is not just a competition but also an exciting social festival that brings the desert town of Maralal to life.[3]Glynn Llywelyn Isaac, Barbara Isaac (1977).

### **NATIONAL DRESS**

Apart from its national flag, Kenya does not have national dress that transcends its diverse ethnic divisions. With more than 42 ethnic communities having their own traditional practices and symbols unique to them, this is a task that has proved elusive. However, several attempts have been made to design an outfit that can be worn as a national dress, much like the Kente cloth of Ghana.

### **MUSIC**

Kenya is home to a diverse range of music styles, ranging from imported popular music, afro-fusion and benga music to traditional folk songs. The guitar is the most popular instrument in Kenyan music, and songs often feature intricate guitar rhythms.

The Kisima Music Awards, which recognise musical talent across East Africa, were founded and are currently based in Kenya. Every year numerous Kenyan artists take out categories in the scheme.

### LITERATURE

Kenya National Theatre contributes a lot when it comes to Literature by building most of the local media personalities. Spoken words and stage acting being the most prominent. People like "Kennet B" and his group at National Theatre have done marvelous work from High schools and in the local Radio and Television. Much wax painting and colour printing is done within the Villages like Kibra and Railway Museum do describe much Kenyan literature.

### ART

Around Lake Turkana exist ancient petroglyphs depicting human figures and animals. Bantu tribes build funeral posts, carvings of human heads atop geometric designs are still created. Though the original posts no longer exist, these more recent creations are thought to be a continuation of the practice. The Kikuyu people also continue the designs of ancient tradition in the designs painted on their shields

### III. CONCLUSION

Kenya is highly rich in culture, tradition, they have vast variety in cuisines, Kenya is also a country which follows their family values till now, they value family and relations. Though Kenya is slow in development but it is getting advanced. There are many food dishes which are similar to Indian cuisine. Kenyan people have been preserving and practicing their ancient tradition till now.

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