

Understand Africa

AFRICA TODAY1030

Conflict and poverty continue, but there's good news, too, with economic growth for some countries.

HISTORY1032

From the birth of humankind to the Arab Spring, the African historical experience is quite an epic.

CULTURE1038

The African family, one billion strong, is the most culturally and ethnically diverse on the planet.

AFRICAN MUSIC1046

In Africa music is the lifeblood of communities, a vital storytelling tool and art form.

ENVIRONMENT1049

Despite threats such as poaching and global warming, Africa's natural environment remains simply breathtaking.

WILDLIFE1056

Welcome to the greatest wildlife show on earth. Learn where to best spot elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, rhinos and more.

Africa Today

Plus ça change. The problems of modern Africa are, in many ways, the same problems that have stalked the continent for much of the past half-century – stubbornly high levels of disease, poverty, corruption and conflict continue in many corners of the continent. Such is the view from afar. But it is only partly true. Look a little closer and a more nuanced take is that things are changing, and very often for the better.

Best on Film

Half of a Yellow Sun (2013) Stirring love story and evocation of Nigeria's Biafra civil war in the late 1960s.

Moolaadé (2005) An important film by Ousmane Sembène, one of West Africa's finest directors.

A United Kingdom (2016) Based on the love story of Botswana's first president and his British bride.

Invictus (2009) Covers the historic 1995 Rugby World Cup; stars Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon. Clint Eastwood directs.

The Constant Gardener (2005) Based on John le Carré's thriller set in Kenya.

Best in Print

Shadow of the Sun (Ryszard Kapuściński; 1998) Illuminating stories from a veteran foreign correspondent.

The Tree Where Man Was Born (Peter Matthiessen; 1972) Lyrical account of East Africa's people, wildlife and landscapes.

Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe; 1958) Timeless dramatisation of the collision between traditional culture and Europeans in 19th-century Nigeria.

Disgrace (JM Coetzee; 1999) Harrowing Booker Prize winner about post-apartheid South Africa.

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight – An African Childhood (Alexandra Fuller; 2001) A stunning memoir of life and loss, and a family's bond with Africa.

Democracy's March

Not that long ago, the Big Man – the all-powerful ruler, the president for life, the untouchable overlord with friends in Western capitals – was a peculiarly African phenomenon. A few relics remain, it is true, and the world's four longest ruling (non-royal) leaders are in Africa. But Paul Biya (in power in Cameroon since 1975) is facing increasing protests at home, Teodoro Obiang Nguema (Equatorial Guinea, 1979) has retreated to a new capital deep in the rainforest, and Angola's José Eduardo dos Santos (1979) has announced plans to step down in 2018. Even Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe, 1980) seems a spent force with most discussion centring on who will succeed him. The new reality is perhaps better summed up by what happened in The Gambia in early 2017. When Yahya Jammeh, who once promised to rule for a billion years, tried to cling to power after his unexpected election loss, he was forced from power when Senegalese troops organised by the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) moved in. That it was other African states that made sure he went confirms just how much the world has changed.

Conservation Fights Back

The environmental issues facing Africa make for pretty grim reading. Deserts are on the march, water scarcity is a problem almost everywhere, and habitat destruction and growing human populations are sending numerous signature African species – lions, cheetahs, elephants and mountain gorillas – hurtling towards extinction. But conservationists (and some governments) are fighting back. In Gabon, the setting aside of more than 10% of the country for national parks more than a decade ago has transformed the outlook for a whole raft of species. In East and Southern Africa, conservationists have teamed up with local communities and large landowners to build a future in which growing num-