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# Africa



**phrasebooks**





SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN



- |   |           |   |            |   |         |   |        |
|---|-----------|---|------------|---|---------|---|--------|
|  | Afrikaans |  | Hausa      |  | Swahili |  | Yoruba |
|  | Amharic   |  | Malagasy   |  | Wolof   |  | Zulu   |
|  | Arabic    |  | Portuguese |  | Xhosa   |   |        |
|  | French    |  | Shona      |   |         |   |        |

*Note: Language areas are approximate only. For more detail see the relevant introduction.*

## africa – at a glance

In addition to its many other attractions, Africa offers incredible linguistic diversity. Most African languages belong to one of the following four language families: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo (with the Bantu languages as the major branch) and Khoisan. In addition, the languages of Madagascar belong to the Austronesian language family. Even though the number of languages spoken in Africa is huge (around 1000), most of them have less than a million speakers. On the other hand, more prominent languages usually also serve as regional lingua francas – such as Swahili in East Africa. Luckily for English speakers, most African languages use Roman script and there's a general correspondence between the pronunciation and the written form of words.

Arabic has a particularly important status in the north and northeast of the continent, due to its proximity to the Middle East and the Arab conquests of North Africa from the 7th century. Among the African languages, Amharic is linguistically closest to Arabic, as they both belong to the Semitic group of the Afro-Asiatic family. In addition, they're both script languages, but the two scripts are quite different.

Due to the 19th-century European colonisation of Africa, a few European languages (particularly English, French and Portuguese) are still influential in various African countries and even share official status with native African languages. English is predominantly represented in the east and the south, French in the north and the west, and Portuguese in the east and the west of the continent.

A unique linguistic feature of Africa is Afrikaans, which belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. It was created as a result of the 17th-century Dutch colonisation of the south of the continent. Although still very similar to Dutch, Afrikaans is now considered a language in its own right.

### did you know?

- The African Union (AU) was established in 2000 by the adoption of the Constitutive Act at the Lome Summit (Togo). It developed from the African Economic Community and the Organisation of African Unity. It has 53 member states, covering the entire continent except for Morocco. The AU is governed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government and the Pan-African Parliament.
- The home of the AU is Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The AU anthem is the song 'Let Us All Unite and Celebrate Together'. The AU flag combines green, yellow and gold colours, with the emblem showing the African continent in the middle.
- The official languages of the AU are all African languages, as well as Arabic, English, French and Portuguese. The African Academy of Languages (founded in 2001) strives to preserve African languages and promote their use among the African people.

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