

# Understand Tanzania

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In its sixth decade of independence, Tanzania is moving forward fast, but still facing challenges.

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Tanzania's history spans millennia, from 'cradle of humanity' to one of modern East Africa's most peaceful nations.

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From spear-carrying Maasai to the hunter-gatherer Hadzabe, Tanzania has a rich array of tribes and traditions and accessible local cultures.

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# Tanzania Today

Tanzania today is moving fast and looking forward. It is one of Africa's top tourist destinations, and seeking to capitalise on the fact that its national parks are at the peak of their popularity. It is also sitting on a potential goldmine in the form of newly discovered natural gas reserves. Politically, the country is inching towards a multiparty system. If corruption, a weak educational system and other hurdles can be overcome, Tanzania will celebrate its centennial on top of the pack.

## Best in Print & Film

**The Tree Where Man Was Born** (Peter Matthiessen, 1972) Lyrical account of northern Tanzania and Kenya's people, wildlife and landscapes.

**The Gunny Sack** (MG Vassanji, 1989) Memoir of family and growing up told through the contents of a gunny sack.

**Tumaini** (2005) The devastation of AIDS in a Tanzanian family.

**As Old as My Tongue** (2006) Story of legendary Zanzibari singer Bi Kidude.

**Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar** (Emily Ruete, 1888) Autobiography of a 19th-century Zanzibari princess.

**Paradise** (Abdulrazak Gurnah, 1994) An East African coming-of-age tale.

## Etiquette

**Greetings** Take time for greetings.

**Dining** Don't eat or pass things with the left hand.

**Dealing with authority** Respect authority, avoid impatience; let deference and good humour see you through.

**Visits** Before entering someone's house, call out *Hodi* (May I enter?), then wait for the inevitable *Karibu* (Welcome).

**Gifts** Receive gifts with both hands, or with the right hand while touching the left hand to your right elbow.

## Nyerere's Legacy

Just past its half-century mark, Tanzania is still indebted to Julius Nyerere, who was at the country's helm for the first 25 years of its existence. Impelled by an egalitarian social vision, Nyerere introduced Swahili as a unifying national language, instilled ideals of *ujamaa* (familyhood) and initiated a tradition of regional political engagement. Thanks to this vision, Tanzania today is one of East Africa's most stable countries, and religious and ethnic conflicts are minimal.

## Economic Challenges

On the economic front, the news is mostly good. Tanzania has been enjoying steady economic growth in recent years, and large natural gas reserves along the southeastern coast hold the potential for transforming its economy over the coming decades. However, major challenges remain. Tanzania is ranked near the bottom on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (152nd out of 186 countries in a recent listing), and daily life for many remains a struggle. Unemployment averages about 12% and underemployment is widespread.

## Shadow of Corruption

A major impediment to real progress is corruption. In an effort to combat it, there are signs in banks, immigration offices and elsewhere advertising that you're in a corruption-free zone. Yet its stench permeates every aspect of business and officialdom, stymieing investment and growth. If corruption can be reined in, and economic potential properly developed, Tanzania's future will be bright.

## Family Squabbles

In the political sphere, attention is focused on keeping family ties happy between the mainland and proudly