

SOMALIA



Geography of Somalia

- Located on the Horn of Africa and bordered by the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya.
- This East African country is the home to approximately 9.5 million people and is roughly the size of Texas.

The Flag of Somalia

- The five points of the star represent the land that was once divided into northern and southern territories by the British and Italian; the Ogaden region of Ethiopia; the North Frontier District of Kenya; and Djibouti.
- The blue field was influenced by the United Nations' blue flag. The country is hopeful that one day, all of these territories will be united as the nation of Somalia.



History and Ethnic Relations

- In the 19th Century the Ogaden Desert, which is ethnically part of Somalia, was seized by Ethiopia.
- In 1888, the country was further divided by European powers, namely Italian and British, and remained this way until 1960, when Somaliland, Puntland, and Southern Somalia were united to form the United Republic of Somalia.
- In 1991, General Muhammad Aideed proclaimed himself president and took over Mogadishu, the Somali National Movement declared independence for Somaliland, and Puntland broke away as an autonomous state.
- The US and UN then stepped in and led a peacekeeping mission.
- The UN pulled out in 1995 after failing to achieve their mission. Somaliland continued to remain stable and peaceful. The Transitional National Government (TNG) was then formed in 2000 to establish control across the country.
- Then in 2004, Kenya mediated peace talks to further restore a central government. This movement led to the formation of a new parliament, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the former president of Puntland, was elected president.
- Two years later the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) overthrew warlords in Mogadishu, and instated fundamental Islamic Sharia Law. The UIC then threatened to seize Ogaden, Ethiopia's Somali speaking region, which resulted in the entrance of Ethiopian forces into southern Somalia.
- Two years since Ethiopia entered Somalia, the fighting has only worsened.

Migration patterns

- Estimates suggest there are between 1 to 3 million living abroad and 400,000 are refugees. The immigration of Somalis to the US began in the mid-1980s and surged on through the 1990s. Most Somali immigrants are refugees who fled their country's civil war, which began in 1991.
- Minnesota has the largest Somali population in western hemisphere approx 20,000. Lewiston, Maine is another Somalian community.
 - Many Somalis were attracted to Minnesota and Maine because of employment and educational opportunities. Others moved there because of the growing Somali community or to join relatives.

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Health Concerns Carried Over from Home Country

- Anemia
- Malnutrition (Women and children under 5 years)
- Iodine Deficiency - limited access to Iodized salt
- Poor Dental Health



Health Concerns Specific to Somali Immigrants

- Low levels of physical activity
- Diets high in red meat, milk, ghee (clarified butter)
- Childhood and Postpartum Obesity - often viewed as “healthy”
- Lipid Abnormalities
- Diabetes - Sugar access limited in homeland; new found access often results in overuse.
- Feeding Mismanagement - Somali parents associate fat with health; a common practice is to give children highly caloric supplements to boost weight gain.
- Inadequate access to “Halal” foods

Food Management Principles

- Family meals are considered the norm.
- It is customary for the women to serve the man of the house first, and then eat with the children after the men have finished.
- Frying is a common method of preparation.

Common Food and Beverages

- Almost all Somalis are Sunni Muslim and their religion influences their dietary practices.
- “Halal” - these are acceptable foods that includes most plant foods and animal foods (lamb, goat, chicken, cow, & camel) that have been slaughtered in adherence to the Islamic method:
 - Mentioning the name of Allah before beginning the slaughter
 - Severing of the throat, wind pipe and the jugular veins in the neck, without cutting the spinal cord.
- “Haram” - these are forbidden foods that include:
 - Pork
 - Alcohol
 - Animals not slaughtered properly
- Many Somalis avoid foods with additives.
- Specific Foods
 - Tea sweetened with ample amounts of sugar (4-6 cups/day is common)
 - *Malawa* - looks like a pancake and is made with flour, sugar, oil and eggs; often served with honey
 - *Muufo* - traditional bread made with spices, sugar, semolina, and wheat flour.
 - *Anjira* - self-rising bread made with teff, sorghum, corn or wheat flour
 - *Sambosa* - curry puffs stuffed with meat and vegetables and then fried
 - *Maqhumri* - dough made with flour, sugar, eggs, it’s then rolled into balls and deep fried
 - *Sukhar* - beef or vegetables & tomato sauce
 - *Fool* - a dish of Pinto beans, tomatoes, and fried onions
 - Boiled millet and rice are staples

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Specific food practices related to lifecycle

- Women believe tea enhances milk production and will increase their consumption.
- Breastfeeding is advised for up to two years (Qur'an 2:233) but exclusive breastfeeding is generally not practiced.
- Cow's milk is often given to infants immediately after birth.
- Breastfeeding infants are often given high calorie supplements such as Pediasure, homemade mixtures of ghee and honey.
- General belief that baby will grow faster if given food or supplements during first 6 months of life.
- Some pregnant women fast during Ramadan even though they are permitted to eat during the day.
- A Somali folktale includes a mermaid who contains the devil. 'Chicken-of-the-Sea' brand tuna should not be used in food demonstrations.

Major Celebrations

- Weddings, births, circumcisions, and Islamic holidays call for celebrations with food.
- Ramadan - Holy Month of fasting; a fast will ensue everyday from dawn until dusk.
- *Eid el-Fitr* - this marks the end of Ramadan and is a three-day celebration.
- Food served during *Eid el-Fitr*
 - Spicy rice dishes mixed with meat and vegetables
 - Pasta served with *anjira*.
 - *Halva*; a sweet, cumin flavored custard
 - special fried biscuits are served as dessert



Communication Style

- There are traditional gender roles in the Somali culture. Eye or physical contact between men or women is avoided in public.
- Greetings - Somalis warmly greet each other with handshakes; shaking hands with the opposite sex is avoided. Women may greet each other with hugs or kissing one another on the cheek. Common verbal greetings include:
 - *Assalam Alaikum* (Peace be upon you)
 - *Subah wanaagsan* (Good morning)
 - *Maalin wanaagsan* (Good day)
 - *Galab wanaagsan* (Good afternoon)
- Gestures - Somali use dynamic hand and arm gestures to dramatize speech. Various Arabic hand gestures used to communicate are:
 - A swift twist of the open hand means "nothing" or "no".
 - Snapping fingers may mean "long ago" or "so-on"
 - It is impolite to point the sole of one's foot or shoe at another person.
 - It is impolite to use the index finger to call somebody; this gesture is used for calling dogs.
 - The American "thumbs up" is considered obscene.

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