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Maasai jumping dance

## [Maasai, The Lion Killers!](#)

### *The jumpers of the savanna*

The Maasai are semi-nomad people inhabiting southwestern Kenya and northwestern Tanzania. The Maasai people practice cattle herding based on transhumance. The settlements of the Maasai are usually placed near a source of water and close to woodland. During the night, the livestock are kept in an enclosure made in the center of the settlement. The enclosure is surrounded by a thorny fence, protecting the animals against the attack of the predators (lions, hyenas, leopards, cheetahs or wild dogs). The huts are placed in a circle around this enclosure; they are oval, being built by the women. The walls and the roof are made of a branch frame, covered by layers of long grasses. This structure is covered by a mix of mud and cattle dung. These huts are devoid of windows; the only opening is the door, covered by a cow skin. Most of the daily life takes place outside; the hut is used just for sleeping and storing the goods of the family. Over the night, some domestic animals, like newborn kids and calves, can be hosted in the huts. The Maasai use, as the only cloth, a type of calf or zebra skin cloak, about 1 m (3.3 ft) long and 0.6 m (2 ft) wide, with the hair untouched. The cloak is folded longitudinally and sewed at a corner, so that it can be worn over the left shoulder. The garment is completed by a short skirt and thick sandals (worn by both men and women). Women wear short skin skirts secured with a belt and a skin cloak crossed under the chest and held on a shoulder. But the adornments are extremely varied in both men and women. Warriors wear lion manes and tails (these are displayed with pride during great festivities and war expeditions). Women prefer glass beads and metal or fiber pieces. Successes are celebrated through ritual dances of magic nature, when the men, holding the legs together, jump rhythmically. The Maasai are a Nilotic ethnic group. They migrated in the area inhabited by them several centuries ago, coming from southern Sudan (the Upper Nile area). They are related to ancient Nubians, a highly developed Black African ancient civilization. Other better known Nilotic tribes are Turkana, Samburu and Dinka, and the main occupation of all is animal husbandry. The Nilotic tribes belong to the Sudanese type of Black Africans. They are tall (average height significantly over 1.7 m or 5.6 ft). The body is thin, with very large and fine limbs. The skin hue is extremely dark; the head is tall and narrow, while the face is elongated, with relatively refined traits, long and straight nose, and moderately thick lips. The hair, worn long by men, is dense and curly, but not so much like in the case of the Bantu or Guinea type of Black Africans. The warriors twist their hair in long and thin ringlets, which they weave into thick ponytails on the upper head. During ceremonies, dances and war expeditions, men display complicated feather headdresses, inserted into a wood or leather framework fixed with a jab. In other times, these were made of lion manes. Often, a thick collar made of eagle feathers is worn around the neck. The collar is adorned with a large number of bead strings and metal rings. Maasai men practiced polygamy; the women had to milk the cows and process the milk (for making butter). The women of the Maasai had their heads completely shaved, but use many adornments, like multicolored bead diadems, on which they hang adornments over the forehead, many collars of glass beads, seeds and cowries, spectacular earrings, like figurines, large osier rings, fibers and beads, leather strips and others. The arms and forearms were adorned, too, with metal bands made of spiraled copper wires, which, on one arm, went from the wrist to the elbow and, on the other, from the elbow to the shoulder. This type of armband is used by girls starting with the age of 14 and they are never removed. Beside the adornments, the Maasai women color their faces with ocher and white paints. The Maasai are warlike people that combine guerrilla with nomad animal husbandry. The Maasai society is characterized by its division in groups of warriors according to age criteria.

Towards the age of 14, boys are integrated in the first of these groups. In this moment, the boy abandons the house of his mother, where his infancy was passed, for living with the boys of the same age, learning from the older warriors the war craft and the traditions of the tribe: 5 years later the boy pass in the next group and takes part in the war expeditions. Warring young men cannot marry and must live together; by the age of 30, they leave the warrior class, marry and start caring the herds. The connection with the other men of the same age, whom he has lived with for over 15 years, keeps being very tight and the collaboration between men lasts for all their life. Surprise attacks of the Maasai warriors are their main occupation; their preparation is accompanied by various taboos and prohibitions and implies performing certain magic rites. The warriors preparing to fight must abstain from drinking millet beer and eating meat and their relatives must follow complicated taboos, like avoiding pronouncing the name of the missing son, while he is in expedition; generally, they speak about him as "the bird found out of its nest". [img=2]The main aim of an attack is to obtain the livestock of an enemy settlement. The attacks occur at the sunset, when those dwelling the other camp are sleeping. The attack is rapid and violent; all adult men are killed, all the livestock are stolen and the children and women are brought to the settlement of the winners as slaves or secondary wives. The achieved cattle are divided between the warriors that participated in the attack. The weapons are made by the smiths. Maasai smiths form a caste separated from the other members of the tribe. They do not mix with individuals from different castes. They are at the same time feared and despised by the other Maasai, and their work is surrounded by magic and mystery, as they are considered impure beings. In fact, the blood causes impurity and warriors handle tools that cause bleeding and death. The smith sons do not enter the warrior classes, but learn the office of their fathers and help their fathers. [img=3]The smiths collect the iron ore, melt it and process it: they produce spears with large and sharp blades, swords, daggers, knives, cow bells, adzes for cutting wood, and iron and copper wires of the heavy armbands. The Maasai warriors use large shields made of bull skin; each Maasai clan has a distinct type of shields, which are carefully painted by the smiths. The cattle herds are cared by men older than 30, who are helped by children under 15. Most of the bulls are sacrificed for meat, but the cows are better priced, as milk mixed with cattle blood, achieved from bleeding periodically the oxen, is the main food item of the Maasai. Each man has his favorite animals, which are especially cared, washed, and their horns are rubbed with grease for making them bright. These cattle receive affective names. The marabu storks are allowed in the Maasai settlements for cleaning them of wastes. Occasionally, the Maasai hunt some game, like zebra, for meat. The Maasai warriors were experts in hunting lions just using buffalo skin shields and spears. Killing a lion was the supreme reason for pride for a warrior.