

Somali Culture Overview

Who are they?

Somalis are historically located in the hot, arid horn of Africa including Somalia and parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Eritrea. Somalis were primarily nomadic herders or farmers. The majority of Somalis are Muslims, which permeates most areas of their lives. Somalis have a clan-based society, which can be a source of strength to Somalis, but can also lead to conflict. Men traditionally have been the ones to work outside the home, while women have primary responsibility for the home and children (this may not always be the case in the U.S.). They have a high respect for strength and are a very proud people.

Why have they fled?

Since the civil war began in Somalia in 1991, millions of Somalis have been displaced. This complicated conflict continues today. Many Somali refugees have fled to Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and other surrounding nations. The Twin Cities has the biggest population of Somalis in the North America. Most Somalis initially came to Minnesota because they were assigned here. Yet as more and more families settled here, more refugees requested to come here. Since then the Somali culture has grown in Minneapolis especially, and there are many places where Somalis feel at home in the Twin Cities. There are also several organizations that help with the resettlement process and make the transition to Minnesota a little bit easier.

Main do's and don'ts when it comes to interacting with Somali refugees...

Do's

- Greet the family first. "*Setahaay*," How are you? (pronounced se-ta-HI) is a custom of greeting; usually the younger person greets the older person first. If you don't remember this greeting, "Hi" is also acceptable.
- Always be aware of respecting elders in the family. Stand if an elder stands and follow the cues of other Somalis.
- Dress modestly (example: no shorts for males or skin showing above the knee for females)
- Accept whatever food or drink is offered to you.
- Try to eat with your right hand.
- Be flexible about prayer schedules.
- Be aware that Somalis have a community view of raising children. They often reprimand the children of close friends/family as a sign of care.
- Listen to their story.
- Show sensitivity for where a Somali person is coming from historically, culturally, religiously, etc. Always be respectful.

Don'ts

- Don't cook or offer pork or alcohol.
- When sitting, don't face the bottom of your feet towards a Somali person.

- Don't shake hands or visit with opposite gender unless they initiate. Don't hug members of the opposite sex.
- Don't offer food or drink during Ramadan, fasting season (Look at calendar for exact date). If a Somali is eating, you may follow their lead and eat as well.
- Don't bring your dog close to Somalis because they are not familiar with dogs and, for religious reasons, avoid touching and being touched by dogs.
- Don't talk about politics outside the context of a trusting relationship, and keep a neutral position if a Somali acquaintance or stranger brings up the topic.

Some good Somali words/phrases to know...

English	Somali	How to Say it
Welcome!	Soo dhawow!	So-duh-whoa!
Hello!	Haye!	Hi-yay!
Goodbye!	Nabadeey!	Nuh-buh-day!
Check-In	Halkaan Sax	Hul-khan-she
What's your name?	Magacaa?	Mug-uh-ah?
Wait!	Sug!	Suke!
How are you?	Setahaay	se-ta-Hi
Apartment Number?	Nambarka Guriga?	Numbarka Goo-ree-gha?
Stop!	Joogso!	Joke-so!
Thank you!	Mahadsanid!	Mah-haad-sah-nid!
Yes	Haa	Hah
No	Maya	My-ah
Help?	Caawi?	Owie?
1	Hal	Hal
2	Labo	Lahbo
3	Saddax	Sud-dhey
4	Afar	Ah-fur
5	Shan	Shun

American versus Somali Culture

American Culture	Somali Culture
<i>Individualistic</i>	<i>Collectivistic</i>
<p>You are what you do. When meeting someone they do not know, Americans will ask, "What do you do?"</p> <p>Value is based on what you do.</p>	<p>You are who you belong to. When meeting someone they do not know, traditional Somalis will ask, "Who are you from [what clan are you from]?"</p> <p>Value is based on position in community.</p>
<p>A person's decisions are based on individual needs and desires (with some influence from others).</p>	<p>A person's decisions are based on community influence (with some influence from personal desires.)</p>
<p>Time and schedules are valued over relationships. Americans often focus on making the most of their time.</p>	<p>Relationships are valued over time and schedules.</p>

American Culture (continued)	Somali Culture (continued)
<p>Youth and beauty are esteemed. The young have new and fresh ideas that bring progress and change to society.</p>	<p>Elderly are honored and respected. Their opinions are highly valued, and they are given power by their community.</p>
<p>Entertainment-driven culture. Time with friends is often focused on entertainment.</p>	<p>Focus on relationships, rather than self-entertainment. Time with friends is focused on being together.</p>
<p>Prosperity gives wealth to self, and provides more possessions.</p>	<p>With prosperity comes obligation to care for others in family and community.</p>

Resources

<http://www.noloshacusub.com/>

“New Life” which is the website for the Somali Christian Radio broadcast “Codka Nolosha Cusub” or “Voice of New Life.” Resources in Somali, including radio broadcast series, links to Somali Christian hymns, videos, links to Somali Bible and more. Very helpful for seekers to listen in privacy of own home.

<http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/somali-cultural-backgrounder.PDF>

Helpful 5 page backgrounder on Somali culture.

<http://prayforsomalia.org/>

A helpful prayer guide to pray for Somali people once a week for a year.

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/refugee/globalbb0214.pdf>

Presentation on Somalia by the Minnesota Department of Health

Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam by Haile, Ahmed Ali, 2011

Available Henn. Co. Library, from Arrive Ministries or online
Autobiography of a key Somali Christian leader who passed to Glory on 26 April 2011. The testimony of a gifted Christian and a must read for anyone interested in the development of the Somali church and in witness.

Rain In A Dry Land : “is a verité feature documentary chronicling two years in the lives of two Somali Bantu families as they journey from Africa to America. It is a story of time travel, culture shock, a leap from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century as these subsistence farmers find themselves in a mysterious and confusing land. More importantly, it is an intimate, human story about two extraordinary families who somehow managed to keep their spirits intact through years of mayhem and deprivation, and whose astonishing, open-hearted resilience enables them to make a new life”. An excellent film to illustrate struggles of this Somali minority group in adjusting to modern American life. Order from: <http://www.makepeaceproductions.com/buydvds.html>

Welcome To Shelbyville: a film which gives a glimpse of America at a crossroads. In one town in the heart of America’s bible belt, a community grapples with rapidly changing demographics. Longtime African-American and White residents are challenged with how to integrate with a growing Latino population and the more recent arrival of hundreds of Somali refugees of Muslim faith. Set on the eve of the 2008 Presidential election, the film captures the interaction between these residents as they navigate new waters against the backdrop of a tumultuous year. The economy is in crisis, factories are closing, and jobs are hard to find. Order from: <http://welcometoshelbyvillefilm.com/dvd/>