



# Kenyan Paragliding History

The sport traces its roots back to the late 1960s in the French Alps. Mountaineers, weary of the long and painful descents after summing peaks, began using parachutes to glide down more efficiently. This marked the beginning of paragliding as we know it.

Since then, the sport has grown into a global community of 100,000–150,000 active pilots. International competitions attract hundreds of pilots, with the most prestigious being the Paragliding World Cup Super Finals, held in top destinations such as the Swiss Alps.

Because the sport is young and equipment is expensive (a full flying kit can cost around USD 4,000), paragliding only made its way to East Africa in the early 1990s.

## Early 1990s – First Flights

Kenya's paragliding potential was first discovered by general aviation pilots—who were also paragliding enthusiasts—while flying over Kijabe Hill, Katelembu, and the Kerio Valley.

For the next two decades, only a handful of foreign pilots flew in Kenya, mainly in the Kerio Valley. The valley, part of the western escarpment of the Great Rift Valley, offers one of the world's longest free-standing ridges, stretching over 100 km with cliffs dropping nearly a kilometer to the valley floor. Its unique geography turned the sleepy town of Iten, famous for Olympic marathon training camps, into a seasonal hub for paragliding tourism. By the 2000s, hundreds of foreign pilots flocked there every winter to chase distance records and enjoy Kenya's unmatched flying conditions.

## 2018 – A Turning Point

Tragedy struck in 2018, when two pilots and a tandem passenger lost their lives in separate accidents during the Kerio Valley flying season. With many foreign witnesses present, the incidents received international media coverage.

The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA), previously unaware of the sport's scale in Kenya, considered banning paragliding outright.



To protect the sport, local and foreign pilots came together to form the Paragliding Association of Kenya (PAK). Its mission was to self-regulate safety standards, register pilots, and liaise with the authorities. PAK quickly introduced annual competitions, licensing systems, and standardized safety practices, ensuring the sport could continue in Kenya.

### **2020 – Growth Through Tandems**

In 2020, commercial tandem paragliding took off north of Nairobi. Initially led by foreign pilots, it soon created opportunities for trained Kenyan pilots to fly tandem passengers professionally. With PAK's safety framework in place, this development made paragliding more accessible to the public and fueled demand for pilot training.

### **Today – A Growing Community**

Today, paragliding thrives in Kenya. Kijabe Hill, only an hour from Nairobi, has become the home site for both training and leisure flights, often attracting visitors even during short stopovers in the capital.

- PAK now has over 60 registered members, with 20–30 active pilots flying regularly.
- Membership is diverse, including Kenyans, Germans, British, Americans, Swiss, French, Spanish, South Africans, Nepalese, Zimbabweans, Iraqis, and more.
- Kenya hosts annual competitions, bespoke adventure tours, and training programs that continue to grow the community.

The Paragliding Association of Kenya (PAK) now serves as the governing body for the sport under the Recreational Aviation Association of Kenya (RAAK), which liaises directly with the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA).

[www.paraglidingassociationkenya.com](http://www.paraglidingassociationkenya.com)