

Kenya - Still at the Heart of the African Safari Experience

This report features Kenya as a safari destination. Find out why Kenya is considered to be the heart of the African safari experience. And why the experts advise all the faithful lovers of wildlife and nature to partake of a Kenyan safari, at least once in their lifetime.



Kenyan Masai

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1. Kenya- Still at the Heart of the African Safari Experience

The popular image of safari, especially in the west, is inseparable from Kenya. Earlier in the last century, gifted writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Karen Blixen brought to life the vivid images and uplifting life experience that constitutes a Kenyan safari. It is at this time that leading celebrities of the day such as Teddy Roosevelt and Prince Edward traveled to Kenya on safari. And so the safari gained a certain snob appeal. The famous went because it was expected of them. And those on the make because the safari was part of the certification they needed on the way up. If you want to take a peek into the mood and character of the players at that time, read Hemingway's intriguing short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber".

In our day however, the Kenyan safari is accessible to many more people. Despite competition from other destinations, Kenya remains the heart of the African safari experience. The magnificence and diversity of the wildlife and landscape is unsurpassed. You are guaranteed to tick off the full roster of the big five –lion, buffalo, leopard, rhino and elephant. Other less well-known but essential and chartered members of the savannah ecosystem are also abundant. The landscape kaleidoscope rolls out the magnificent rift valley, the central highlands, the savannah grasslands, snow capped Mount Kenya and the desolate moonscape of the north. This is perhaps why the experts advise all those faithful lovers of wildlife and nature that at least once in their lifetime they must partake of a Kenyan safari.

Kenya has over 50 national parks and game reserves where wildlife is protected. But as you already suspect, on the average safari you cannot hope to cover all of them. It is therefore a good thing that you get very good value by visiting only a few of them. This is unless of course you have a lot of time and can afford to take off the beaten track. The most popular and from which those with limited time and budget need to pick from are- Maasai Mara, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru, Aberdares, Samburu and Tsavo. Top in the off-the-beaten track category for either wildlife or back to nature activities are- Kakamega Forest, Marsabit, Meru, Mount Kenya, Mount Elgon and Shimba Hills.

Maasai Mara is the big one. This is where you must go even when all the time you can spare is two nights. This is mostly where all those wildlife videos on Kenya are filmed. The Mara, as the Maasai Mara Game Reserve is commonly known, is part of the ecosystem that includes the equally famous Serengeti of Tanzania. Covering 320 square kilometers, it is nested in the southwestern corner of the country. The Mara offers wildlife in such variety and abundance that it is difficult to believe. In a recent two-night visit, I saw lions, rhinos,

hippos, crocodiles, giraffe, wildebeests, zebras, buffalo, warthogs, hyenas, jackals, wild dogs, buffalo, leopard, nine kinds of antelopes and elephant. The birds are also in plenty –secretary birds, cranes, stork, vultures and ostriches.

It is in the Mara that perhaps the most spectacular event of the natural world takes place. I refer to the annual migration of millions of wildebeest and zebra from the Serengeti in search of water and pasture. The timing of the phenomena is conditional on the rains and occurs between June and August. The reverse journey is usually taken in October. With or without the migration the Mara has abundant numbers of resident animals and you are sure to have a good wildlife viewing experience whatever time of the year you visit. If you have sufficient funds, consider taking a balloon trip over the reserve. This popular and thoroughly memorable ride usually commences before dawn and includes a champagne breakfast. The Mara is 5 hours from Nairobi by road and 45 minutes by light aircraft.

Amboseli National Park sits on the lower slopes of mighty Kilimanjaro whose peak is across the border in Tanzania. It is quite an experience to see the Kilimanjaro hovering above the clouds in an early morning. As the keen photography enthusiast can already imagine, the mountain gives a dramatic backdrop for your animal pictures. Amboseli is renowned for its huge elephant herds. You will also see buffalo, black rhino, zebra, wildebeest and other plain animals. Lions and other cats can be seen but are less plentiful here than in the Mara. The park is 3 hours from Nairobi by road and can be approached through Namanga, the border post between Kenya and Tanzania.

Lake Nakuru's claim to fame is anchored on its flamingo's and the over 400 species of birds found here. The lake itself is a soda lake on the floor of the rift valley. The sight of the at times millions of flamingos is quite spectacular. From a distance the lake appears ringed in pink. Lake Nakuru is also host to a sanctuary for the endangered black and white rhino. Lions, Rothschild's giraffe, buffalo and baboons are all residents here. The park is the most accessible of Kenya's bigger parks and is only two hours from Nairobi by road.

At the same distance from Nairobi as Lake Nakuru is the Aberdares National Park. The park has a diverse topography that includes waterfalls, rain forests and the rivers that supply water to Nairobi's millions. The flora and fauna is quite unique and is not found elsewhere in the country, except on Mount Kenya. Leopard, elephant, rhino and the rare bongo can all be found here. But dense vegetation and inclement weather makes it difficult to spot animals. You are however guaranteed to see some animals especially elephants and buffalos at the floodlit waterholes of the two famous tree hotels, The Ark and Treetops.

Students of the history of the British royal family will recall that it was at the Treetops in 1952, where the then Princess Elizabeth was staying on honeymoon when her father, King George V, died. She descended from Treetops to assume the backbreaking role of presiding over the far-flung dominions and colonies of the empire. If you stay at the Treetops you are bound to meet with some of her fans.

Though not as famous as the Mara, Samburu National Park is another wildlife haven. Here you will spot lions, elephants, cheetahs and the elusive leopard. Some animals are unique to this northern park: Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, kudu and gerenuk. You will find the semiarid landscape quite dramatic. On your trip to Samburu, you may also want to take in the nearby Shaba and Buffalo Springs game reserves. In addition, this is the place to take a camel safari. Samburu is three hours from Nairobi by road.

Tsavo is so huge, all of 20,000 sq km, that it is administered as two units: Tsavo West and Tsavo East. This is the park that is closest to Mombasa at the coast. The park is three and a half hours away from Nairobi by road. You will find large herds of elephant, especially in Tsavo East. Tsavo West is filled with crocodiles, vervet monkeys, antelope, baboons, giraffes and hippos. It is in Tsavo that poachers were most successful in their bloody racket and this saw a dramatic fall in elephant population. The good guys have in recent years gained the upper hand and numbers are recovering.

But Kenyan authorities are still extremely wary of the future of the elephant in Tsavo. The country is very active in seeking a permanent ban on the international ivory trade. I wish at this point to declare to all that I am a great fan of the African elephant. I believe this to be the true king of the jungle and not that overrated pretender, the lion. You may recall from the movie "The Man-eaters of Tsavo" how cowardly lions disrupted the building of the railway in the Tsavo area by feeding on the workforce. Would true royalty be involved in such a disgraceful affair?

Kenya is a year round safari destination. The rains come around April - May and November-December. This does not however, much affect the travelers' ability to get around. This is except for the heavily forested Aberdares. In the wet season the roads in the Aberdares are extremely slippery and the park is at times actually closed down. Generally the best time to go on safari is over the drier months when the grass is short and sighting animals is so much easier. But in areas such as the Mara, the animals are so plentiful that you are going to see lots of them regardless of the season. The peak tourist season falls around January to February and July to August. April to June is the low season and prices for accommodation in the lodges can be as much as 40% lower than in the high season.

Accommodation on safari varies from basic camping to luxury lodges and tented camps. Out there in the bush, you will be pleasantly surprised that all the trimmings of 5 star accommodations are available. But if you want to rough it out, you will find campsites in almost all the game reserves and national parks. See our [Kenya hotels, lodges & resorts](#) page to view info and book accommodation for your safari.

It is generally recommended to take an escorted tour package that includes transport, park fees and accommodation. The reason for this is that the tour guides are usually well versed about the animals, where to find them and how to get there and have other such useful local knowledge. Have a look at our very good value [Kenya Safari](#) offers of various durations and budgets.

But if you have a lot of time and need more freedom as you get around, then hire a vehicle in either Nairobi or Mombasa. See our [Kenya car rental](#) page to do your reservation for a self-drive or chauffeur driven vehicle. On safari, wear light cottons and linen. Warmer clothing is needed for the evenings and for your early morning game drive. Some rainwear is advisable between March and June and October and December.

You should bring along a decent pair of sunglasses. The glare you experience in bright tropical light is a new and uncomfortable experience for most. It is also a good idea to carry a pair of binoculars. They are very useful for spotting animals and will earn you the envy of your less knowledgeable traveling companions.

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2. Destination Facts: Kenya

Full Country Name: Republic of Kenya

Area: 583,000 sq km

Population: 30 million (2001)

Capital City: Nairobi

Other Major Towns: Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, Eldoret

Peoples: Kikuyu (21%), Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), Kamba (11%), Kalenjin (11%), Gusii (6%), Meru (5%) plus Asian, Arab and European minorities

Language: English, Swahili & indigenous languages

Religion: Christian (54%), Muslim (6%) and traditional religions

Government: Republic

Time: GMT + 3 hours

Currency: Kenya Shilling (Ksh)

Electricity: 220/240 V, 50 Hz

Weights and Measures: Metric

Economy: Textiles, tea, horticultural produce, agricultural processing, oil refining, cement, tourism

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3. Travel Basics: Kenya

Health

Visitors over 1 year of age entering Kenya from yellow fever infected areas require yellow fever international certificate of vaccination. Exemptions are made for visitors arriving from non-endemic areas such as Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Cholera is a health risk in the country and precautions are essential. Malaria is a serious risk in most of the country. The risk level is however lower in the highlands above 2500m, of the Central, Rift Valley, Eastern and Western Provinces. Visitors are strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication commencing two weeks before travel.

It is recommended, especially for longer staying visitors, to take vaccinations against hepatitis A, polio and typhoid. HIV-AIDS is prevalent in the country and prudent measures are called for. Some fresh water lakes and rivers carry the risk of Bilharzia and you are advised not to swim or paddle in such areas. There are good hospitals in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. Chemists can be found in all the major towns.

Visas

Passports valid for 3 months from date of entry are required of all visitors. All visitors require a visa except for citizens of some commonwealth countries. There are also exceptions with varying conditions for citizens of Ethiopia, Turkey, Malaysia, and Uruguay and a few other countries. Airport visas are available although this may result in delays upon arrival. It is advisable to obtain visa's in advance from Kenyan Embassies and High Commissions as some airlines may require it before allowing you to board. Visa requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

Peoples & Culture

Kenya is made up of more than 70 or so tribal groups. There are also small but influential minorities of Asian, Arab and European origin. More than 90% of the African population falls within the broad categories of Bantu and Nilotic speakers. The main Bantu speakers are Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba, Gusii, Mijikenda, Embu and Meru. Nilitoc speakers are Maasai, Samburu, Pokot, Turkana, Luo and Kalenjin. At the coast, the interaction of Arabs, Persians and Bantu Africans has resulted in the Swahili people. The Swahili language is now widely spoken in Kenya and throughout Eastern and Central Africa. It is quite useful to have a working knowledge of Swahili if you intend to travel outside the main urban and tourist routes. English is widely understood in urban centers.

The de facto national dish is Nyama Choma, barbecued goat meat. But the guy in the street survives on that stodgy filler called Ugali, prepared using maize meal accompanied with some greens. At the coast however the traditional food

of the Swahili is a good experience. This is usually based on seafood and rice dishes. Beer lovers will have a good time in Kenya. There are several international standard lagers produced locally. The most popular is named after the elephant, thus Tusker. While on safari, remember to celebrate the African elephant by taking a little Tusker.

In the last few years there has been some kind of revival in local music. This revival is led by younger urban artists who sing in Swahili and Sheng, a kind of Creole mix of Swahili and English. The music is a local blend of hip-hop and rap.

Communications

Telephone, fax, telegram, post and Internet services are available in urban centers and locations popular with tourists. International direct dialing to many countries is available in most urban centres. In rural areas international calling is through the operator. The country code for Kenya is 254.

Mobile phones are based on GSM 900 network. Coverage extends to the principal urban centres, major highways and parts of popular game reserves such as the Mara. You are however advised to check beforehand whether your GSM phone is usable if you are traveling outside the main urban centres. You can obtain a GSM card that will allow you to make international calls to any country. Currently the country is served by two network operators: KenCell (www.kencell.co.ke) and Safaricom (www.safaricom.co.ke). There are Internet cafes in urban centres and hotels around the country.

Accommodation

You will find good quality accommodation within the main routes popular with tourists and business travelers. This includes Nairobi, Mombasa, Lamu, Malindi, Lake Naivasha, Kisumu and the popular game reserves and national parks such as Maasai Mara, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru, Tsavo, Aberdares, Samburu and the Mount Kenya area. In the parks, accommodation varies from 5 star lodges and tented camps at the upper end, to basic camping at the lower end. Outside the main urban centres and tourist routes, it is difficult to get rated accommodation. See our [Kenya Hotels, Lodges & Resorts](#) page to view info and book accommodation for your stay in Kenya.

Money

The local currency is the Kenya Shilling (Ksh). There are no restrictions on the import and export of local or foreign currency. But for amounts exceeding US dollars 5,000 or equivalent you will need to declare the source and purpose of the funds. Major currencies such as US dollars and now the Euro and travelers cheques can be converted at major hotels, banks and forex bureaus in the main towns and tourist areas. You will get best exchange rates for cash or travelers cheques if you are dealing in US dollars or Pound Sterling. For this your best deal

will be at forex bureaus. Avoid changing money in the streets however favourable the exchange rate may appear.

Visa and Mastercard have wide acceptance. But American Express, Diners and other cards have more limited acceptance. Your Visa card can access your bank or credit card account through any Standard Chartered Bank dispenser, 24 hours a day.

Climate

Kenya has such diverse geography, that, temperatures, rainfall and humidity vary widely. The country can be divided into four main regions: the arid north, the savanna lands in the south, the central highlands and the lowlands along the coast and the Lake Victoria region. The coastal areas are hot and humid though tempered by some much welcome sea breezes. Average temperatures vary little year round and range from 22°C minimum to 33°C maximum.

The central highlands and rift valley enjoy a pleasant temperate climate. Average temperatures vary from a minimum of 10 to 14°C to a maximum of 22 to 26°C. The Lake Victoria lowlands are hot and dry and temperatures can reach 34°C. Rainfall is also heavy. The semi arid north experiences the most extreme variations in temperatures. This ranges from a maximum of 40°C in the day to 20°C at night. There are two rainy seasons: March to May ("long rains") and October to December ("short rains").

International Travel

Kenya is a regional travel hub and has connections by a large number of airlines from all over the world particularly those from Europe, Asia and other parts of Africa. The country has three international airports at Nairobi, Mombasa and Eldoret. The national airline is Kenya Airways, a major player in African air travel. British Airways and Kenya Airways fly to Nairobi direct from London. A few European airlines also have direct flights from their hubs in Europe. Gulf Air and Emirates fly to Nairobi using mid eastern connections.

In addition to flying, you can travel by bus between Kenya and Tanzania. The main connections are from Nairobi and Mombasa to Dar es Salaam and from Nairobi to Moshi and Arusha. Occasional ferries leave Mombasa for Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. Uganda can be reached from Kenya by air, rail and bus. There is a border crossing at Moyale on the Kenya-Ethiopia border and which trucks mainly use. Overland travel to Sudan and Somalia is exceedingly difficult at present.

Local Travel

There are scheduled flights to a number of local destinations from Nairobi to Mombasa, Nanyuki, Kisumu, Malindi, Lamu, Lokichogio and the national parks

and game reserves of Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Samburu. See our web page for info and booking of [local flights in Kenya](#). You can also travel to a few urban centers in the country by train though this has not been reliable in recent years. Regular bus service links the main urban centers.

Around urban areas and shorter links between towns, the popular way to get around is by means of matatu (shared taxi). Rental cars are reliably available from Mombasa, Kisumu and Nairobi. Review our [rental cars in Kenya](#) web page and do your booking here. Remember that driving is on the left. Generally, between urban centers the road links are good. The quality deteriorates when you get off the main routes and into more remote locations.

Travel Insurance

Health and the usual travel insurance are recommended. Ensure your travel insurance includes emergency evacuation.

What to Wear

Light clothing is generally recommended in Kenya. The highlands are however temperate and you need a sweater and jacket year round. This is necessary for the evenings and early mornings. If you plan to climb Mount Kenya be ready with special clothing not only for the climb, but to protect yourself from sub zero temperatures.

On safari, bright coloured clothing may get you in trouble with the wild animals. Colours of the earth are generally favoured, thus brown, beige and khaki clothing. Short sleeve shirts, shorts and trousers for men are sufficient. For ladies, short sleeve blouses and skirts are ideal in the national parks and touristy places. This is except at the predominantly Muslim coastal areas, where more conservative dressing is called for. But even at the coast, swimwear is perfectly acceptable at beaches and hotel premises. It is advisable to travel light and some safari and air charters have a baggage limit of 10-15 kilograms.

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4. About Africa Point

Africapoint.com is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya.

The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

What services do we offer?

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.
- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of " Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.

I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

What is the experience of other travelers with us?

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

5. Forward This Report

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!