

Mount Kenya – Up High at God's Mountain

Mount Kenya is an awe-inspiring spectacle that was believed by the Kikuyu people who reside on its lower slopes to be Gods' abode. The park that surrounds the mountain is simultaneously a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve.

Find out why the well-traveled author and mountaineer, Rick Ridgeway, has declared this be his favorite, of all the worlds' mountains.



Mt. Kenya

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1. Mombasa & The Kenyan Coast Vacation

Mount Kenya is Africa's second highest mountain, after Kilimanjaro. It is estimated to be 2.5 million years old, and Kilimanjaro at 750,000 years of age is really an upstart. Time has really taken its toll, and the peak is thought to have dropped from 6,500 m those millions of years ago to 5,199 m today. The mountain is an extinct volcano, whose plug forms what is today the peak area. The crater was long ago, done to death, by nature's untiring erosion agents.

Mount Kenya is an awe-inspiring spectacle that dominates the central Kenyan highlands. It is perhaps understandable that the Kikuyu people who reside on its lower slopes thought it fit for Gods' abode. And it inspires people in strange ways. In 1943, Felice Benuzzi, an Italian prisoner of war held at Nanyuki at the base of the mountain, and two companions, escaped and attempted to scale the summit. With just a few handmade climbing tools, he managed reach Point Lenana, the mountain's third highest peak.

But Benuzzi was at least an accomplished mountaineer. In 1988, the Mount Kenya Rescue Team discovered and retrieved an elder of the Meru people way up at the chilly heights of Peak Nelion (5,188 m). Only experts, with proper equipment and guides reach Nelion. He appeared unaware of the feat he had accomplished and was perturbed by the fuss his rescuers raised. He explained his mission was "going to God". He was kitted in a manner you will not see recommended in any guide book- in a single blanket and open sandals. The animals do weird things too: a few years ago, the frozen bodies of a leopard and colobus monkey were discovered at Nelion.

Mount Kenya is located 180 km to the north of Nairobi. The mountain falls within Mount Kenya National Park. The park is made up of a protected area above 3,200 m altitude, together with two small salients reaching to 2,450 m along the Naro Moru and Sirimon trails. It was set up in 1949 and covers an area of 715 sq km. It is further surrounded by the Mount Kenya National Reserve, which extends over 2,075 sq km. The park has the distinction of being simultaneously a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve

The mountain is made up of three main zones: the rocky peak region, the afro-alpine moorland with its scattering of giant vegetation, and the extensive lower slopes covered in mountain forest and bamboo. The astonishing ecological diversity is one of the attractions of this giant. The ecological processes that have brought about the afro-alpine flora in particular intrigue scientists. There are 81 species of plants here that are found nowhere else in the world.

In the lower forest zone, there is plenty of wildlife including buffalo, elephant, sykes monkey and bushbuck. The animals are however generally difficult to see. Further up, the animals are even scarcer though hyena, leopard, buffalo and civet cats have been sighted. The only animal you are likely to see in the upper alpine zones is the rock hyrax. Though it is the size of a domestic cat, it resembles a rat more. The seemingly humble rock hyrax has some powerful relatives in the animal kingdom and it counts the elephant as its biological kin.

The mountain attracts over 30,000 enthusiasts every year. Point Lenana (4,985 m), the so-called trekkers peak, can be reached by any reasonably fit and suitably prepared person. The summit has the twin peaks of Batian (5,199 m) and Nelion (5,188 m), and is accessible to only those with technical mountaineering and rock climbing experience. This mountain is not an easy one to conquer and each year not more than 100 climbers make it to the twin summit peaks. Mount Kenya is in fact considered to be more technically challenging than the higher Kilimanjaro (5,894 m). But those who make it to the top experience some of Africa's finest rock and ice climbing.

The mountain has very many fans and especially fascinates technical climbers. The author and mountaineer, Rick Ridgeway – author of the Seven Summits, declares that of all the worlds' mountains this is his favourite. Halford Mackinder planned and led the first expedition on record to reach the summit in 1899. But if the Meru elder mentioned above is anything to go by, the locals must have long ago been to the mountaintop. The Mackinder trip was a great success and his party discovered many species of animal and plant life then unknown in Europe. A new species of eagle owl, for example, was first recorded by this expedition and subsequently named after Mackinder.

Though Mount Kenya is practically on the equator, you will find snow and ice and even glaciers. However, in the one hundred years since Mackinder conquered the mountain, the number of glaciers has dropped from 18 to only 7 that remain today. The culprit for this is the global climate change that has accelerated in recent years. Scientists tell us that during the ice ages large glaciers reached below 3,000 m. Today the largest glacier is the Lewis Glacier at 4,600 m. The continuing retreat of glaciers is expected to have a negative impact on downstream eco-systems, not to mention the scenic appeal of the mountain.

Mount Kenya is the source of Tana River- Kenya's biggest river- and was for many years seen as an inexhaustible water fountain. Not any more- the loss of glaciers and forest cover has brought this assumption into disrepute. The loss of forest cover is particularly worrying, because it is avoidable. How to save the forests of Mount Kenya has long engaged environmentalist Wangari Maathai -the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner. She was born on the lower slopes of the mountain and has in her lifetime witnessed the changes up at the mountain.

You can reach the peak area by taking one of three routes: Naro Moru, Sirimon and Chogoria. Good roads will get you from Nairobi to Naro Moru, Nanyuki and Chogoria - the base towns for each of the trails. There are alternative routes but most have fallen into disuse and you need superior navigation skills and stamina to attempt them. This includes: Burguret, Meru, Kamweti, and Timau. It is highly recommended that you stick to the three popular routes. But if you have a good reason for doing otherwise, or indeed for pioneering your own route, you are required to register with the park authorities.

The Naro Moru route approaches the mountain from the west and is easily the most popular. The trail is well serviced with rest huts and is the fastest way to the peaks. It is however the steepest and climbers vulnerable to AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) may experience difficulties. The hike will take 4 days, though you may opt for an additional day at the summit. You start with a fairly steep 5-hour walk from Park Gate to Met Station (3,050 m). This is where you spend the first night and acclimatize to the thinning mountain air.

The next day is the longest and you will walk, under varying terrain, for anywhere between 8 and 10 hours. You spend the night at Mackinders Camp (4,200 m), in the vicinity of the peak area. You really should have an early night on this day. Very early the next morning -2.00 a.m is the usual time- you set out to attempt Point Lenana. The mountain is generally clear in the morning and stormy in the afternoon- so, the idea is for you to ascend and descend the peak when you have good traction. This is the part of the hike where some experience symptoms of altitude related ailments.

It will take you about 5 hours to reach Lenana. Here you must take some photos, to show the folks back home how you fared at the top of God's Mountain. Afterwards, you descend in 3 hours to Mackinders Camp for breakfast. Then ascending back to Teleki Valley via Camel Rocks, you reach Met Station in about 4 hours. The night rest is at Met Station, before the final descent to Park Gate.

The Sirimon route has its base at Nanyuki to the north of the mountain. The route offers easier climbing than the Naro Moru trail and is also more scenic. It normally takes 5 days up and down the mountain. You start with a 3-4 hours walk through rain forest to overnight at Old Moses camp (3,300 m). Next day after breakfast you hike through the moorland and the Liki and Mackinder valleys. You reach Shipton's camp (4,200 m) after a 6-7 hour hike. You spend the night here before setting out very early the next morning to attempt Point Lenana.

The Chogoria route begins at the town of the same name to the west of the mountain. This is the by far most beautiful and scenic of the popular routes. You will enjoy dramatic views of waterfalls, valleys, tarns and rugged rock formations. But the trail is not so popular because it is also the longest and therefore toughest. It will take you 6 days to ascend and descend the mountain. There are no usable service huts along the route and you must carry a tent along. Whichever route you use, you can prolong your enjoyment of these heights by taking a day to do the Summit Circuit Path.

It is important that you take enough water – about 4 to 6 litres daily- to keep dehydration at bay. Dehydration makes you more vulnerable to altitude sickness and hypothermia. Hypothermia is lowering of body temperature and symptoms include clumsiness and disorientation. Victims of the condition need to be quickly provided with a warm and dry environment. At heights above 3,000 m, oxygen levels reduce and altitude sickness stalks the trekker. That is why a fast climb is not advised, as you have no opportunity to acclimatize. The symptoms for Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) are nausea, headache, fatigue and general malaise. You should always descend to lower altitude with the onset of symptoms.

Other more severe medical conditions that can arise are High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE). The coming of HAPE is betrayed by a dry cough and difficulty in breathing. HACE is marked by slurred speech, severe headache and disoriented behaviour. HACE and HAPE are both potentially fatal and you should always descend to lower altitude and seek treatment. To reduce chances of mountain sickness, it is advisable to acclimatize by spending an extra night near Park Gate or at the mountain huts above 4,000 m. If you temper your zeal for the peaks and take a slow sensible hike you will enjoy the adventure and will be all right.

You will generally need a guide and porters so that you can concentrate on the hike. Always go for those who have high altitude experience and are accredited by the park authorities. They will know the routes, and a good one is worth his weight in gold, in event of sickness and other contingencies. The porters shoulder the heavy stuff while you carry a daypack with essentials such warm clothing, fire making capability, some food and drinks, a flashlight and first aid kit.

The stuff you must bring along includes: warm clothing, waterproof hiking boots, rain suit, sleeping bags, flashlights, sunglasses and hand gloves. Many climbers find it expedient to buy a [Mount Kenya climbing package](#) in order to take advantage of those with local knowledge. Such a package will include transport, accommodation in the mountain huts, meals while on the climb, park entry fees, services of an experienced mountain guide and porters and cooks.

The main rainy season in the Mount Kenya region falls from late March to June, with secondary rains appearing from late October to December. You can climb the mountain at any time of year but the most comfortable climb is achieved in the dry months of January and February and from July to October.

After your climb, you can relax at some of the excellent [hotels and resorts in the Mount Kenya area](#). Before you leave the country, take to heart the sentiments of the Italian climber Carlo Spinelli, who said: "I consider myself a nature lover more than a mountaineer, and for this reason Kenya has the best of both mountain and wilderness". Take time to see wildlife on a [Kenya safari](#) in this region or in other parts of the country.

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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. Nilotoc 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!