



# THE ROUGH GUIDE to Kenya

EXPERT ADVICE • FULL COVERAGE • EASY TO USE



# INSIDE THIS BOOK

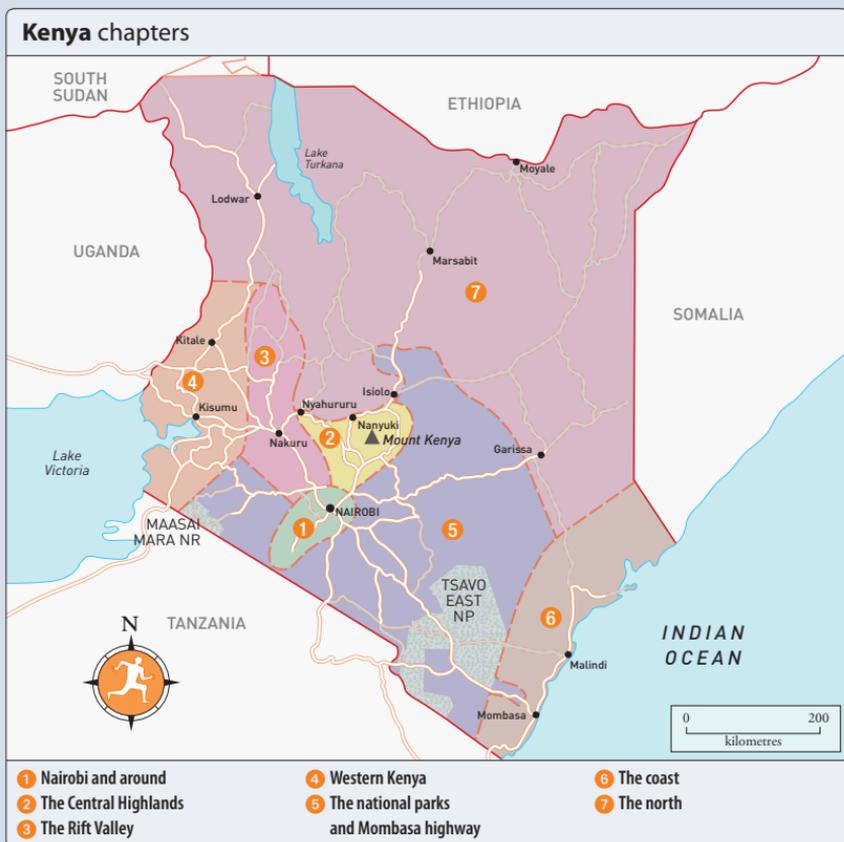
**INTRODUCTION** What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and a full-colour wildlife guide – everything you need to get started

**BASICS** Pre-departure tips and practical information

**THE GUIDE** Comprehensive, in-depth guide to Kenya, with area highlights and full-colour maps throughout

**CONTEXTS** History and music, plus recommended books and a useful Swahili language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide with the ★ symbol



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

# Kenya

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this eleventh edition updated by

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## Introduction to Kenya

Lapped by the Indian Ocean, straddling the equator, and with Mount Kenya rising above a magnificent landscape of forested hills, patchwork farms and wooded savanna, Kenya is a richly rewarding place to travel. The country's dramatic geography has resulted in a great range of natural habitats, harbouring a huge variety of wildlife, while its history of migration and conquest has brought about a fascinating social panorama, which includes the Swahili city-states of the coast and the Maasai of the Rift Valley.

Kenya's world-famous national parks, tribal peoples and superb beaches lend the country an exotic image with magnetic appeal. Treating it as a succession of tourist sights, however, is not the most stimulating way to experience Kenya. If you get off the beaten track, you can enter the world inhabited by most Kenyans: a ceaselessly active scene of muddy farm tracks, corrugated-iron huts, tea shops and lodging houses, crammed buses and streets wandered by goats and children. Both on and off the tourist routes, you'll find warmth and openness, and an abundance of superb scenery – rolling savanna dotted with Maasai herds and wild animals, high Kikuyu moorlands grazed by cattle and sheep, and dense forests full of monkeys and birdsong. Of course the country is not all postcard-perfect: Kenya's role in fighting Al-Shabaab terrorists in Somalia has resulted in reprisal attacks, while if you start a conversation with any local you'll soon find out about the country's deep economic and social tensions.

## Where to go

The **coast** and major **game parks** are the most obvious targets. If you come to Kenya on an organized tour, you're likely to have your time divided between these two attractions. Despite the impact of human population pressures, Kenya's **wildlife spectacle** remains a compelling experience. The million-odd annual visitors are easily absorbed in such a large

country, and there's nothing to prevent you escaping the predictable tourist bottlenecks: even on an organized trip, you should not feel tied down.

The major **national parks and reserves**, watered by seasonal streams, are mostly located in savanna on the fringes of the **highlands** that take up much of the southwest quarter of the country. The vast majority of Kenyans live in these rugged hills, where the ridges are a mix of smallholdings and plantations. Through the heart of the highlands sprawls the **Great Rift Valley**, an archetypal East African scene of dry, thorn-tree savanna, splashed with lakes and studded by volcanoes.

The hills and grasslands on either side of the valley – **Laikipia** and the **Mara conservancies**, for example – are great walking country, as are the high forests and moors of the **Central Highlands** and **Mount Kenya** itself – a major target and a feasible climb if you're reasonably fit and take your time.

**Nairobi**, at the southern edge of the highlands, is most often used just as a gateway, but the capital has plenty of diversions to occupy your time while arranging your travels and some very worthwhile natural and cultural attractions in its own right.

In the far west, towards **Lake Victoria**, lies gentler countryside, where you can travel for days without seeing another foreign visitor and immerse yourself in Kenyan life and culture. Beyond the rolling **tea plantations** of Kericho and the hot plains around the port of Kisumu lies the steep volcanic massif of **Mount Elgon**, astride the Ugandan







## FACT FILE

- With an area of 580,400 square kilometres, Kenya is about two and a half times the size of the UK and nearly one and a half times the size of California. The **population**, which for many years had a growth rate higher than that of any other country, is now beginning to stabilize and currently stands at around 44 million.
- Kenya regained **independence** in 1963 after nearly eighty years of British occupation and colonial rule. The Republic of Kenya is a multiparty democracy with more than fifty registered political parties.
- With few mineral resources (though potentially viable oil reserves were confirmed in 2012), most of the **foreign currency** Kenya needs for vital imports is earned from coffee and tea exports, and tourism. Most Kenyans scrape a living through subsistence agriculture and remittances from one or two family members in paid employment.
- Kenyan **society** consists of a huge, impoverished underclass, a small but growing middle class and a tiny elite whose success often owes much to nepotism and bribery. Unbridled **corruption** percolates every corner of the country and affects every aspect of the economy.
- More positively, more than 93 percent of Kenyans have a **mobile phone**, an exceptionally high figure for a developing country. The mobile money service M-Pesa, allowing anyone with a mobile phone to send money to another phone user, is one of the most advanced in the world, and has transformed the lives of many poor Kenyans working far away from their families.

border. The **Kakamega Forest**, with its unique wildlife, is nearby, and more than enough reason to strike out west.

In the north, the land is **desert** or semi-desert, broken only by the highlight of gigantic **Lake Turkana** in the northwest, almost unnaturally blue in the brown wilderness and one of the most spectacular and memorable of all African regions.

Kenya's "upcountry" interior is separated from the **Indian Ocean** by the arid plains around Tsavo East National Park. Historically, these have formed a barrier that accounts in part for the distinctive culture around **Mombasa** and the coastal region. Here, the historical record, preserved in mosques, tombs and the ruins of ancient towns cut from the jungle, marks out the area's **Swahili civilization**. An almost continuous **coral reef** runs along the length of the coast, beyond the white-sand beaches, protecting a shallow, safe lagoon from the Indian Ocean.

## When to go

Kenya has complicated and rather unpredictable weather patterns, and the impact of **climate change** is striking hard. Broadly, the seasons are: hot and dry from January to March; hot and wet from April to June (the "long rains"); warm and dry from July to October; and warm and wet for a few weeks in November and early December – a period called the "short rains". At high altitudes, it may rain at almost any time. Western Kenya, including the Maasai Mara, has a scattered rainfall pattern influenced by Lake Victoria, while the eastern half of the country, and especially the coast itself, are largely controlled by the Indian Ocean's **monsoon winds** – the dry northeast monsoon (*kaskazi*) blowing in from November to March or April and the moist southeast monsoon (*kusi*) blowing in from May to October. The *kusi* normally brings the heaviest rains to the coast in May and June.

## KENYA'S PEOPLES

For Kenya's forty-plus ethnic groups, the most important social marker is language and the best definition of a tribe (a term with no pejorative connotation) is people sharing a common first language. It's not uncommon for people to speak three languages – their own, Swahili and English – or even four if they have mixed parentage.

The largest tribe, the **Kikuyu**, based in the Central Highlands, make up about 20 percent of the population; the **Kalenjin** from the Rift Valley 15 percent; the **Luhya** of western Kenya 14 percent; the **Luo** from the Nyanza region around Kisumu 12 percent; and the **Kamba** from east of Nairobi 11 percent. Many people from these big ethnic groups have had a largely Westernized orientation for two or three generations and their economic and political influence is considerable. Which isn't to say you won't come across highly educated and articulate people from every tribal background. "Tribes" have never been closed units and families often include members of different ethnic background, nowadays more than ever. Politics still tends to have an ethnic dimension, however: people retain a strong sense of whether they are locals or newcomers. Inter-tribal prejudice, although often regarded as taboo, or at best an excuse for humour, is still quite commonplace and occasionally becomes violent.

Smaller ethnic groups include the closely related **Maasai** and **Samburu** peoples, who make up little more than two percent of the population. Well known for their distinctive and still commonly worn traditional dress and associated with the national reserves named after them, they herd their animals across vast reaches of savanna and, when access to water demands it, drive them onto private land and even into the big towns. Many **Turkana** and some of the other remote northern groups also retain their traditional garb and rather tooled-up appearance, with spears and other weapons much in evidence.

Kenya has a large and diverse **Asian** population (perhaps more than 100,000 people), predominantly Punjabi- and Gujarati-speakers from northwest India and Pakistan, mostly based in the cities and larger towns. Descendants in part of the labourers who came to build the Uganda railway, they also include many whose ancestors arrived in its wake, to trade and set up businesses. There's also a dispersed Christian Goan community, identified by their Portuguese surnames, and a diminishing **Arabic** community, largely on the coast.

Lastly, there are still an estimated 30,000 **European** residents – from British ex-servicemen to Italian aristocrats – and another 30,000 temporary expats. Some European Kenyans maintain a scaled-down version of the old farming and ranching life, and a few still hold senior civil service positions. Increasingly, however, the community is turning to the tourist industry for a more secure future.



## AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>NAIROBI (ALT 1660M)</b>												
Max/min (°C)	25/12	26/13	25/14	24/14	22/13	21/12	21/11	21/11	24/11	24/13	23/13	23/13
Rainfall (mm)	38	64	125	211	158	46	15	23	31	53	109	86
Days with rainfall	5	6	11	16	17	9	6	7	6	8	15	11
<b>MOMBASA (SEA LEVEL)</b>												
Max/min (°C)	31/24	31/24	31/25	30/24	28/24	28/23	27/22	27/22	28/22	29/23	29/24	30/24
Rainfall (mm)	25	18	64	196	320	119	89	66	63	86	97	61
Days with rainfall	6	3	7	15	20	15	14	16	14	10	10	9
<b>KISUMU (ALT 1135M)</b>												
Max/min (°C)	29/18	29/19	28/19	28/18	27/18	27/17	27/17	27/17	28/17	29/18	29/18	29/18
Rainfall (mm)	48	81	140	191	155	84	58	76	64	56	86	102
Days with rainfall	6	8	12	14	14	9	8	10	8	7	9	8

**Temperatures** are determined largely by altitude: you can reckon on a drop of 0.6°C for every 100m you climb from sea level. While the temperature at sea level in Mombasa rarely ever drops below 20°C, even just before dawn, Nairobi, up at 1660m, has a moderate climate, and in the cool season in July and August can drop to 5°C at night, even though daytime highs in the shade at that time of year easily exceed 21°C and the sun is scorching hot. Swimming pools around the country are rarely heated, and only those on the coast are guaranteed to be warm.

The main **tourist seasons** tie in with the rainfall patterns: the biggest influxes of visitors are in December–January and July–August. Dry-season travel has a number of advantages, not least of which is the greater visibility of wildlife as animals are concentrated along the diminishing watercourses. July to September is probably the best period, overall, for game-viewing, with early September almost certain to coincide with the annual wildebeest migration in the Maasai Mara. October, November and March are the months with the clearest seas for snorkelling and diving. In the long rains, the mountain parks are occasionally closed, as the muddy tracks are undrivable. But the rainy seasons shouldn't deter travel unduly: the rains usually come only in short afternoon or evening cloudbursts, and the landscape is strikingly green and fresh even if the skies may be cloudy. There are bonuses, too: fewer other tourists, reduced prices and often perfect light for photography.

# Author picks

Our authors have travelled the length and breadth of Kenya, squashing into countless matatus and buses in the preparation of this new edition. Here are some of their favourite experiences and encounters.

## Exploring the mountains of the north

Climbing from northern Kenya's arid plains into lush highland forests delivers you into a world of gushing streams and cool shade (p.530).

**Nairobi nightlife** Once a virtual no-go zone after dark, Nairobi's Central Business District has reignited at weekends, with dozens of clubs, bars and restaurants (p.136) shaking until the early hours.

**Umani Springs** Relax at this affordable and beautifully designed self-catering lodge in the idyllic Kibwezi Forest, just minutes from the rush of the Nairobi–Mombasa highway (p.324).

**Kaya Kinondo** The Mijikenda sacred groves (box, p.434) are ancient sites in the coastal forest, preserving wildlife as well as cultural traditions. This is the first to open its secrets to visitors.

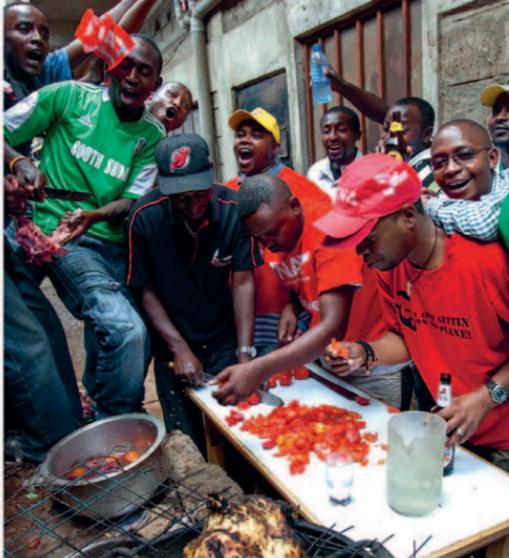
**Maralal International Camel Derby** This fun and unique event, a celebration for the local Samburu people, brings colour to this usually arid and dusty northern town over a weekend in August (box, p.525).

**Nyama choma** Tuck into a traditional Kenya meatfest, where scrumptious grilled goat is paired with piping hot *ugali* (solid cornmeal porridge), chopped *kachumbari* (tomato and onion relish) and a bottle or two of local brew (p.62).

**Kitengela Glass** The sheer creative energy that emerges from this community of artisans and an endless supply of old bottles has to be seen to be believed (p.141).

**Karura Forest** An astonishingly large sanctuary of highland forest, close to the heart of Nairobi, Karura's stands of giant trees, caves and waterfall – recently opened to visitors – are just a short walk from the busy traffic (p.115).

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.



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## things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Kenya has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective and subjective taste of some of the country's highlights, including standout experiences, spectacular sights and unexpected wildlife. All entries have a page reference taking you straight to the relevant place in the book, where you can find out more.





## 1 MOUNT KENYA

Page 169

Many climbers consider Africa's second-highest peak a tougher test than Kilimanjaro: it's certainly less of a highway to the top. You'll be glad of its *via ferrata* on the last morning.

## 2 MARA NABOISHO CONSERVANCY

Page 373

This conservancy in the greater Mara region combines wildlife conservation with community involvement and offers outstanding viewing of big cats, elephants and giraffes.

## 3 THIMLICH OHINGA

Page 267

Even most Kenyans have never heard of their most impressive upcountry ancient site – huge stone circles in a remote part of western Kenya.

## 4 GRACEFUL HIPPOS

Page 347

The chain of lakes at Mzima Springs, fed by subterranean meltwater from Kilimanjaro, is a magical location in an exceptionally beautiful park – Tsavo West.



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## 5 STARS AT BEDTIME

Page 510

Book a night out in the bush under the stars at *Il Ngwesi Eco-Lodge*, sleeping on a specially adapted "star-bed" atop a secure platform.

## 6 LAKE BARINGO

Page 237

The world record count of bird species seen in 24 hours – 342 – was made at this freshwater lake in the Rift Valley. There's budget accommodation on the shore and luxury lodges on the islands.

## 7 CHAMELEONS

Page 174

These curious, harmless reptiles can be found all over Kenya, but only the highlands are home to the impressive Jackson's three-horn species, like a miniature triceratops.

## 8 FRESH COCONUTS

Page 63

If you've never had a fresh coconut, you're in for a treat – try one at any coast hotel for the price of a tip to the intrepid tree climber.

## 9 LAKE TURKANA CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Page 533

Join more than a dozen local tribes for three days of traditional song and dance in a chilled, international atmosphere.



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13

**10 WARRIOR TRAINING**

Page 372

Head to a Maasai-run eco-camp and learn the ways of warriorhood – which you'll soon discover involves playfighting with sticks and much singing and jumping.

**11 LAKE NAIVASHA**

Page 205

The perfect getaway from Nairobi: excellent backpackers hostels, boating, a music festival, hippos, a rich array of birdlife and the secluded Crater Lake Game Sanctuary.

**12 LOLLING IN THE LAGOON**

Box, page 419

The Indian Ocean coast is sheltered by a coral reef for nearly its entire length: you can drift among shoals of fish or skim around on a kite- or surfboard.

**13 NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK**

Page 144

On the city's doorstep, the park is home to nearly all Kenya's big mammals, including the largest of Kenya's antelopes, the eland.

**14 DESERT LAKE**

Page 515

Venture to the shores of Lake Turkana in the barren lands close to the Ethiopian border where the climate is harsh, life precarious and the landscapes searingly beautiful.





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### 15 LAKE VICTORIA

Page 250

Kenya's biggest lake packs in busy harbours, virtual plains of water hyacinth, pretty beaches and mountains.

### 16 DAVID SHELDRIK WILDLIFE TRUST

Page 147

Get on petting terms with tiny pachyderms at this highly regarded centre.

### 17 DRIVING WITH DRAGONS

Page 531

Travelling in Kenya's far northern deserts you never know what you'll meet around the next bend – like this fearsome-looking desert monitor.

### 18 LAMU

Page 478

There is nowhere in the world like the ancient seafaring town of Lamu, with a fort, a maze of alleys and cool lodgings on every corner.

### 19 CANINE RECEIVERS

Box, page 505

Endangered wild dogs range hundreds of kilometres: take part in research on a working conservancy in Laikipia by following radio-tagged dogs.



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# Itineraries

The following itineraries include the most important parks, lakes, highlands, deserts, beaches and towns; and the top spots for birdwatching, megafauna, rare mammals and appreciating Kenya's ethnic diversity. Join the itineraries together and you'd have an unforgettable three-month tour of the country.

NP: National Park; NR: National Reserve.

## NORTHERN FRONTIERS

From the capital's contrasts to the highs and lows of the highlands, this route is about extremes – nowhere more so than where the Jade Sea cuts through the desert. Allow two to four weeks for some or all of this loop.

❶ **Nairobi** Wildlife, parks and forests bring balance to East Africa's biggest city, where urban life – from museums and crafts workshops to cutting-edge restaurants and clubs – sets the agenda. **See p.98**

❷ **Mount Kenya NP** Scale Africa's second-highest peak on one of four different routes, but take time to enjoy the wildlife-rich forests and frenetically active towns on the lower slopes. **See p.169**

❸ **Laikipia** Challenging the Maasai Mara as Kenya's best wildlife destination, Laikipia offers rare rhinos and opulent conservancy stays as well as wild dog-tracking and budget camping. **See p.505**

❹ **Maralal** This semi-desert, alternately dusty and muddy cowboy outpost, the unofficial capital of the Samburu people, hosts an annual camel derby. **See p.524**

❺ **Samburu NR** Watered by the forest-fringed Ewaso Nyiro, this is a relaxing area to encounter northern wildlife – from reticulated giraffe to Somali ostrich. **See p.377**

❻ **Marsabit NP** A true desert oasis, this mountainous outburst of volcanic craters and rich soil stands thick with misty, creeper-swathed forest. **See p.548**

❼ **Lake Turkana** Getting to the fabled Jade Sea is half the fun, but the annual Lake Turkana Festival is a huge incentive. And at any time of year, expect colourful cultural adventures. **See p.515**

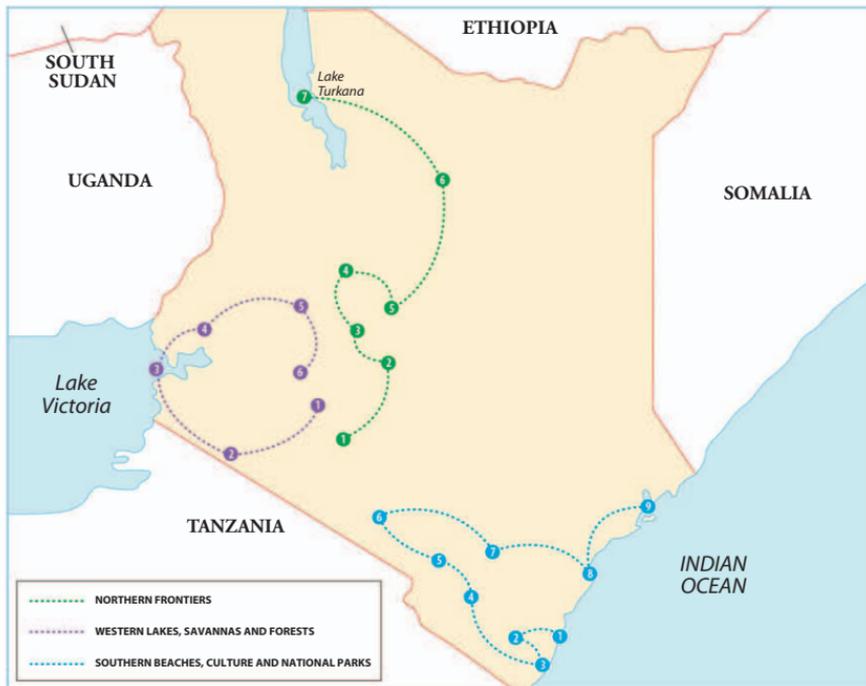
## WESTERN LAKES, SAVANNAS AND FORESTS

Strike out across the Great Rift Valley to freshwater and soda lakes, then climb to the Mara basin's rolling grasslands, one of the last rainforests in Kenya, and giant Lake Victoria. Some of this journey could be done in a fortnight, but allow three weeks to do it all.

❶ **Lake Naivasha** Head into the Rift Valley for a breezy escape from Nairobi, with country retreats and backpackers camps and walks in Hell's Gate and austere Mount Longonot. **See p.205**

❷ **Maasai Mara NR** Only in the Mara can you experience a wildlife panorama stretching from horizon to horizon. Stay on a community wildlife conservancy and see the herds without the crowds. **See p.356**

❸ **Lake Victoria** Spend a day or two in characterful Kisumu and catch musicians and markets. Then head for one of the islands to see rock paintings and watch fishermen. **See p.253**



➊ **Kakamega Forest NP** The bird and reptile hotspot of western Kenya, this stranded piece of central African rainforest is a joy for independent travellers. **See p.306**

➋ **Lake Baringo** On one side the changing lake colours, crocs and hippos and Njemps fishermen of the lake; on the other the green lawns, backpacker haunts and safari camps of the shores and islands. **See p.237**

➌ **Lake Nakuru NP** This Rift Valley soda lake is famous for black and white rhinos, leopards and (sometimes vast) flocks of flamingos. **See p.224**

## SOUTHERN BEACHES, CULTURE AND NATIONAL PARKS

Historic sites dot Kenya's coast behind the coral beaches, while inland, vast national parks offer the classic safari experience. Allow three weeks for this loop, and don't stint on days in Lamu.

➍ **Mombasa** This island city, dating back more than a thousand years, is best explored on foot. Don't miss Fort Jesus Museum and the narrow streets of the Old Town. **See p.392**

➎ **Shimba Hills** A park of forested hills – Shimba is the only place to see sable antelope in Kenya – is less than an hour's drive from shimmering Diani Beach. **See p.428**

➏ **Kaya Kinondo** The first Mijikenda sacred forest to be opened to visitors, this hidden jungle treat is packed with buttress-rooted trees and woodland wildlife. **See box, p.434**

➐ **Taita Hills** Off the tourist routes, the people of these fertile peaks have preserved some of their culture – including fascinating caves of ancestors' skulls. **See p.331**

➑ **Tsavo West NP** Prepare to be enchanted by Tsavo's landscapes, including lava flows and the magical Mzima Springs. **See p.346**

➒ **Amboseli NP** Magnificent Kilimanjaro rises behind plains and marshes roamed by huge herds of elephants and other wildlife. **See p.337**

➓ **Tsavo East NP** Kenya's biggest national park is home to brick-red elephants, lions and cheetahs, crocs, hippos and superb birdlife. **See p.351**

➔ **Malindi** Diving, kitesurfing, eating out and nightlife are all big here, and it's close to the small resort of Watamu and fascinating Gedi ruins. **See p.464**

➕ **Lamu** A cultural as well as a physical island, Lamu's unmissable combination of historic town and laidback beaches is the best place to finish a Kenya trip. **See p.478**

## BIRDWATCHING

Kenya has the second highest bird count in Africa after the Democratic Republic of Congo. From October to February native species are boosted by migrants from Europe and Russia. This itinerary of important bird areas could be covered in three weeks and might allow you to see more than half of Kenya's 1100 species.

**1 African crowned eagles** Along the Langata Road in suburban Nairobi, look out for the wheeling shapes of this huge raptor – and sometimes their nests in the Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary. **See p.116**

**2 Hinde's babbler** One of Kenya's rarest endemics, this species can be seen at Wajee Nature Park in Mount Kenya's southwestern foothills – also home to common and pretty white-eyed slaty flycatchers. **See p.166**

**3 Sunbirds** The forests of Kenya's Central Highlands – the Aberdare Range and Mount Kenya – harbour nine species of sunbird. The mountains are crowned by Afro-alpine moorlands where you'll see the striking scarlet-tufted sunbird. **See p.174**

**4 Goliath herons** Freshwater Lake Baringo is an oasis in the dry northern Rift. The new Ruko Conservancy includes a Ramsar wetlands area

where you punt through a water-bird wonderland. **See p.238**

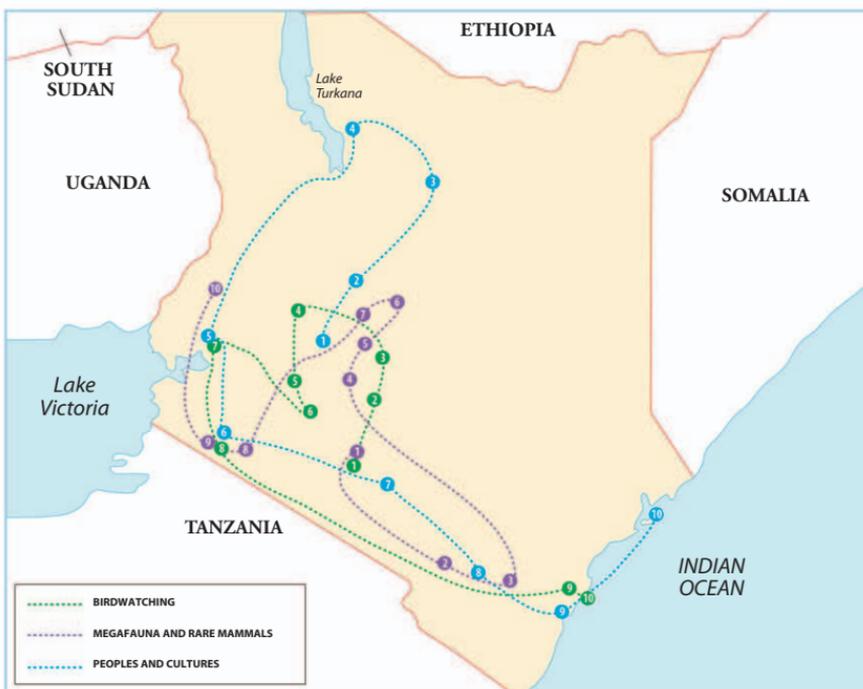
**5 Lesser flamingos** Finding the iconic scene of vast pink flocks can be tricky: the classic site of Lake Nakuru has ceded to lakes Bogoria, Oloiden, Magadi and Elmenteita. **See p.235**

**6 Fish eagles** Lake Naivasha has been transformed by horticulture, but there are still wooded spots around the shores where the thrilling sight – and cry – of fish eagles lends a haunting atmosphere. **See p.208**

**7 Great blue turacos** The Kakamega Forest bursts with birdlife. These handsome, noisy fruit-eaters are the stars of a canopy that is also the unique home in Kenya of the blue-headed bee-eater. **See box, p.307**

**8 Ground hornbills and secretary birds** In addition to these distinctive walking birds, the Maasai Mara ecosystem – the national reserve and neighbouring conservancies – is home to more than 400 other species. **See p.356**

**9 Sokoke scops owl** As well as this miniature owl, there are five other endangered and localized species in the sprawling coastal woods of the Arabuko Sokoke forest, plus the red-capped robin chat, companion of the golden-rumped elephant shrew. **See box, p.455**



10 **Crab plovers** Just a short way from the resorts of Watamu and Malindi, these unusual visitors from Somalia can often be seen from the community bird hide at Mida Creek. **See p.456**

## MEGAFUNA AND RARE MAMMALS

Kenya's parks, reserves and conservancies are home to some of the densest concentrations of the earth's remaining megafauna, including a number of species that are highly endangered. An itinerary like this could be done in a couple of weeks.

- 1 **Black rhinos in Nairobi** The city's sizeable national park is a surprising sanctuary for rare black rhinos as well as their less threatened white cousins. **See p.147**
- 2 **Eyeballing hippos** Enter the underwater hide at Mzima Springs, and watch graceful hippos tip-toeing over the lake bed. **See p.347**
- 3 **Big tuskers in Tsavo East** Strike out into the eastern parts of the park and track some of Africa's biggest remaining big tuskers. **See p.351**
- 4 **Mountain bongos** Drive or track on foot through the dense forests of the Aberdare range in search of this handsome giant antelope. **See p.192**
- 5 **Northern white rhinos** At Ol Pejeta Conservancy, the last of the world's rarest rhinos are easy to meet in their sanctuary within a sanctuary. **See p.507**
- 6 **Reticulated giraffes** Kenya's handsomest giraffes are abundant in the Samburu National Reserve and neighbouring conservancies. **See p.378**
- 7 **Wild dogs on the run** Watch a pack of multi-hued hunting dogs playing, hunting or lounging at Sosian Ranch – particularly entertaining when the pups are newly out of the den. **See p.514**
- 8 **Big cats in the Mara** As felines move out of the busy Maasai Mara reserve the neighbouring conservancies are getting a reputation for some of the best lion-, leopard- and cheetah-watching in Africa. **See p.359**
- 9 **Wildebeest on the move** Join many others witnessing thousands of wildebeest surging across the Mara River during migration time, or retreat to the quieter conservancy areas to see them massing on the plains. **See box, p.363**
- 10 **Sitatunga** One of Kenya's rarest and strangest antelopes can be easily spotted at the tiny Saiwa Swamp National Park. **See p.292**

## PEOPLES AND CULTURES

Kenya's mix of peoples is one of its greatest assets, but the tension between diversity and tribalism needs constant rebalancing. To fully experience this ethnic and linguistic variety, you should follow this three-week itinerary in a spirit of reaching out and one-to-one interaction.

- 1 **Kikuyu** You'll meet Kikuyu people everywhere, but their homeland is the Central Highlands. At the pretty Thomson's Falls, outside Nyahururu, traditionally dressed Kikuyu models pose for photos. **See box, p.161**
- 2 **Samburu herders** Maralal is one of the best places to meet Samburu people – close ethno-linguistic cousins of the Maasai – especially at the annual camel derby in August. **See p.524**
- 3 **Rendille** You may meet Rendille people in Marsabit, but you're more likely to encounter these traditional camel herders out in the desert when doing a camel trek yourself. **See p.547**
- 4 **Turkana** Travelling through the far northwest, you're always aware of the local Turkana, and their fearsome (happily exaggerated) reputation. Make for Loiyangalani, especially for the annual cultural festival. **See box, pp.520–521**
- 5 **Luo-land** The shores of Lake Victoria are the homeland of one of Kenya's largest and most cohesive peoples, the Luo – fishing and farming people who invented the fast-paced *benga* guitar music. **See box, p.255**
- 6 **Meeting the Maasai** You'll run into Maasai all over southern Kenya, often as driver-guides and safari camp staff, but Maji Moto Group Ranch provides some of the most rewarding encounters. **See p.372**
- 7 **Kamba** Security guards, soldiers, wood carvers and traditional poison-arrow hunters par excellence, Kamba folk these days are more likely to be running tech start-ups or coffee shops. Machakos is their buzzing capital. **See box, p.315**
- 8 **Taita** The people of the steep Taita Hills, between the coast and the highlands, maintain shrines of ancestors' skulls. Their capital, Wundanyi, is a pleasant detour. **See p.331**
- 9 **Giriama** Witchcraft and hooch aren't unique to the Giriama, but their millions of coconut trees make fine palm wine, while after-dark conversations will have you believing impossible things. **See p.425**
- 10 **Swahili roots** Many people on the coast regard themselves as Swahili and speak a rich and complex dialect of the language. The conservative culture of Pate island is particularly fascinating. **See p.494**

# Wildlife

Kenya has more than a hundred species of large native **mammals** and its plains are home to the world's last surviving community of megafauna: the giant animals – including elephant, rhino, lion and giraffe – that dominated the earth approximately one to two million years ago. The so-called “Big Five” (elephant, black rhino, buffalo, lion and leopard) were the hunter's trophies of the early twentieth century, and are still a fixation in the minds of many driver-guides and their clients. But don't ignore the less glamorous animals: there can be just as much satisfaction in spotting a serval or an uncommon antelope, or in noting rarely observed behaviour, as in ticking off one of the more obvious status symbols.

This field guide provides a quick reference to help you identify the larger mammals you're likely to encounter in Kenya – and despite huge losses since the early twentieth century, Kenya still teems with wildlife. While visiting some of the country's forty-odd parks and reserves (see box, pp.74–75) can almost guarantee sightings, if you travel fairly widely, even outside the parks, you're almost certain to see various gazelles and antelopes, zebra and giraffe – and even hippo, buffalo and elephant. Monkeys and baboons can be seen almost anywhere and are a regular menace.

Swahili names are given in brackets. NP: National Park; NR: National Reserve.

## BIG CATS

Kenya's **big cats** are some of the most exciting and easily recognizable animals you'll see. Although often portrayed as fearsome hunters, pulling down plains game after a chase, many species do a fair bit of scavenging and all are content to eat smaller fry when conditions dictate or the opportunity arises.

### LION (*Simba*) *Panthera leo*

Of the large cats, lions are the easiest species to find. Lazy, gregarious and very large – up to 1.8m in length, not counting the tail, and up to 1m high at the shoulder – they rarely make much effort to hide or to move away. They can be seen in nearly all the parks and reserves, and their presence is generally the main consideration in determining whether you're allowed out of your vehicle or not. “Man-eating” lions appear from time to time but seem to be one-off misfits. Normally, lions live in prides of three to forty (usually six to twelve) hunting cooperatively, in the day as well as at night, preferring to kill very young, old or sick animals, and making a kill roughly once in every two attacks. They will happily steal the kills of cheetahs or hyenas. Lions can manage in most habitats, except desert and thick forest, but habitat disturbance can cause them to move into pastoral areas where they often kill goats or cattle and are then killed in turn by herding communities. With fewer than 2000 lions left in Kenya, the problem of keeping *Panthera leo* and *Homo*

*sapiens* apart is a daily struggle for the Kenya Wildlife Service.

### LEOPARD (*Chui*) *Panthera pardus*

Possibly the most feared animals in Kenya, and intensely secretive, alert and wary, leopards live – usually solitarily – all across the country except in the most treeless zones. Their unmistakable call, which sounds something like a big hand saw being pulled back and forth, is unforgettable. Although often diurnal in the parks, they are strictly nocturnal wherever there is human pressure: they sometimes survive on the outskirts of villages, carefully choosing their prey to avoid a routine. They tolerate nearby human habitation and rarely kill people unprovoked. For the most part, leopards live off any small animals that come their way, pouncing from an ambush and dragging the kill up into a tree where it may be consumed over several days – the so-called “leopard's larder”. Melanistic leopards are known as black panthers, and seem to be more common in highland areas, such as Mount Kenya and the Aberdare range.

## SMALLER CATS

### CHEETAH (*Duma*) *Acinonyx jubatus*

In the flesh, the cheetah is so different from the leopard, it's hard to see how there could ever be any confusion. Cheetahs are lightly built, finely spotted, with very long legs, small heads and a dark “tear mark” running from eye to jowl. Unlike leopards, which are highly arboreal, cheetahs rarely climb trees – though where accustomed to

vehicles, they climb on them to scan the horizon. They live alone, or sometimes briefly form a pair during mating. Hunting, too, is normally a solitary activity, dependent on eyesight and an incredible burst of speed that can take the animal up to 100kph (70mph) for a few seconds. Cheetahs can be seen in any of Kenya's large parks, and are usually out and about during the day.



**SERVAL** (*Mondo*) *Felis serval*

The beautiful part-spotted, part-striped serval is found in most of the parks, though it's uncommon and always a special sighting. They normally prefer reed beds or tall grassland near water, and while often nocturnal and solitary, they can sometimes be seen setting off on hunting forays on roadsides or at water margins at dawn or dusk.

**SMALLER PREDATORS****GENET** (*Kanu*) *Genetta genetta*

Once encountered, never forgotten, the beautifully marked, sinuous genet thrives in light bush country and even arid areas. It's a fairly common, slender, cat-sized, partly arboreal hunter, with short legs and a very long tail. Reminiscent of an elongated domestic cat, they were in fact once domesticated around the Mediterranean, but cats proved better mouse-hunters. You'll often see genets at game lodges, where they frequently become habituated to humans and can be found draped on a rafter above the bar, or minging along a deck rail.

**AFRICAN CIVET** (*Fungo*) *Civettictis civetta*

A curious, short-legged, terrestrial prowler, about the size of a small dog, the civet is not to be confused with the smaller genet. And while genets are most likely to be seen around lodges, the civet is a solitary nocturnal omnivore that prefers to keep close to woodland and dense vegetation. They're not often seen, but they are predictable creatures that wend their way along the same paths at the same time, night after night, so if there's one in the neighbourhood, you're likely to see it.

**HONEY BADGER** (*Nyegere*) *Mellivora capensis*

Also known as the ratel, this widespread, omnivorous, badger-sized animal is notoriously aggressive, even to

**CARACAL** (*Simba mangu*) *Caracal caracal*

The aggressive, tuft-eared caracal resembles a lynx, but is more closely related to the serval and the even rarer golden cat. They are seen quite rarely, and while occasionally arboreal, they tend to favour open bush and plains in dry-country zones like Tsavo East NP and Samburu NR. A night drive, however, is the most likely way of seeing one.

humans. They sometimes encounter people when raiding beehives or scavenging rubbish dumps – giving rise to one of the possible sources for the myth of the Nandi Bear (see box, p.286). Honey badgers tolerate a very broad range of habitats, are mainly nocturnal and are usually solitary, although they can also be found in pairs. Primarily omnivorous foragers they will tear open bees' nests (to which they are led by a small bird, the honey guide), their thick, loose hides rendering them impervious to the stings.

**DWARF MONGOOSE** (*Kitafe*) *Helogale parvula*

An unmistakable group of animals, made famous by their cutest member, the meerkat (which isn't found in Kenya), mongooses are often seen and always delightful to watch. The main Kenyan species, in order of size, are the dwarf, black-tipped or slender (*Galerella sanguinea*), banded (*Nguchiro*; *Mungos mungo*), large grey (*Herpestes ichneumon*) and white-tailed (*Kicheche*; *Ichneumia albicauda*), which is a good-sized, shaggy beast, with surprisingly long legs. Mongooses' snake-fighting reputation is greatly overplayed: in practice they are mostly social foragers, fanning out through the bush like beaters on a shoot, hunting out anything edible – mostly invertebrates, eggs, lizards and frogs.

**KENYA'S WILDLIFE WEBSITES**

**East African Wildlife Society** 🌐 [eawildlife.org](http://eawildlife.org). Influential Kenya-based group, centrally involved in the movement to ban the ivory trade. Publishes the excellent *Swara* magazine.

**Ecotourism Society of Kenya** 🌐 [ecotourismkenya.org](http://ecotourismkenya.org). This local organization promotes sustainable tourism by awarding ratings to lodges, tented camps and tour operators.

**Friends of Nairobi National Park** 🌐 [fonna.org](http://fonna.org). Works to keep open the migration route into the park, and raise awareness about the remarkable environment on Nairobi's doorstep.

**Green Belt Movement** 🌐 [greenbeltmovement.org](http://greenbeltmovement.org). Grassroots conservation and women's movement founded by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, who died in 2011.

**Kenya Forests Working Group** 🌐 [kenyaforests.org](http://kenyaforests.org). Promotes sound forest management and conservation.

**Nature Kenya** 🌐 [naturekenya.org](http://naturekenya.org). The website of the East African Natural History Society organizes regular activities and has a good online newsletter.

**Wildlife Direct** 🌐 [wildlifedirect.org](http://wildlifedirect.org). Chaired by Richard Leakey, this is where conservation fundraising meets a network of conservationists, including more than fifty bloggers from the field in Kenya.



## DOGS AND ALLIED SPECIES

### AFRICAN HUNTING DOG (*Mbwa mwitu*)

*Lycaon pictus*

The unusual and rather magnificent hunting dog is still extremely rare in Kenya, having been present in reasonable numbers fifty years ago. Its decline was partly due to canine distemper and partly because of human predation and habitat disruption. The good news is that hunting dogs, also known as wild dogs or painted dogs, seem to be on the increase. There are now quite a few packs around the country, and in recent years they have been spotted in the Maasai Mara NR and neighbouring conservancies, in Tsavo West NP and even in Lake Nakuru NP, as well as in the Laikipia range lands where they have held out for decades. They are diurnal, highly nomadic and can range hundreds of kilometres, but if the opportunity exists to see them you'll hear about it.

### BLACK-BACKED JACKAL (*Bweha*) *Canis mesomelas*

The commonest members of the dog family in Kenya are the black-backed and side-striped jackal. Both species can be seen just about anywhere, usually in pairs, in a broad range of habitats from moist mountain regions to desert, but drier areas are preferred. The black-backed jackal has a distinctive dark "saddle" flecked with white, so it's sometimes known as the silver-backed jackal. Although they usually live in pairs, you can often see family packs of these smartly coated canids playing in and around their dens, and even hunting – a much more common activity than the scavenging after lions with which they're normally associated. The shyer side-striped jackal (*C. adustus*) has smaller ears and a lateral stripe that can be more or less distinctive, while the unmarked golden or common jackal (*C. aureus*) is otherwise very similar, though in Kenya it is mostly restricted to the Maasai Mara and Laikipia.

### SPOTTED HYENA (*Fisi madoa*) *Crocuta crocuta*

Kenya's biggest carnivore after the lion and leopard is the spotted hyena; it is also, apart from the lion, the meat-eater you will most often see. Although considered a scavenger *par excellence*, the spotted hyena is a formidable hunter, most often found where antelopes and zebras are present. Highly social, usually living in extended family groups,

spotted hyenas are exceptionally efficient consumers, with immensely strong teeth and jaws, and they eat virtually every part of their prey, including hide and bones (which explains their distinctive, white droppings). Where habituated to humans, they sometimes steal leather shoes, unwashed pans and trash from tents and villages. Although they can be seen by day, they are most often active at night – when they issue their unnerving, whooping cries. Clans of twenty or so animals are dominated by females, which are larger than the males and compete with each other for rank. Curiously, female hyenas' genitalia are hard to distinguish from males', leading to a popular misconception that they are hermaphroditic. Not surprisingly, in view of all their attributes, the hyena is a key figure in local mythology and folklore.

### STRIPED HYENA (*Fisi miraba*) *Hyaena hyaena*

Shy, solitary, largely silent and infrequently seen, the striped hyena is a shyer and less common animal than its spotted cousin, although apparently widespread in dry country and occasionally glimpsed very early in the morning trotting along park roads. The stripes can be a good identification guide, but the most obvious identifier is the pointed ears and erect mane of hair or crest along the shoulders.

### AARDWOLF (*Fisi ndogo*) *Proteles cristata*

This is a much smaller hyena cousin, though it's easily mistaken for a small striped hyena. Widespread but shy and largely nocturnal, it lives all over Kenya, wherever it can find its unusual food supply – harvester termites and other insects, for which it forages solitarily while usually pairing for life.

### BAT-EARED FOX (*Mbweha masikio*) *Otocyon megalotis*

Bat-eared foxes aren't uncommon, and they're unmistakable in appearance. Their distribution coincides with that of termites – their favoured diet. Monogamous pairs spend many hours every night foraging, using their sensitive hearing to pinpoint their underground prey. In the cooler months they can also be seen out and about during the day.



## ELEPHANTS AND HIPPOS

### AFRICAN ELEPHANT (*Ndovu*) *Loxodonta africana*

Elephants are found throughout Kenya: almost all the big mountain and plains parks have populations. These are the most engaging of animals to watch – their interactions, behaviour patterns and even individual personalities have so many human parallels. Babies are born after a 22-month gestation, with other cows in close attendance. A calf will suckle for up to three years, from the mother's two breasts between her front legs, and grows from helpless infancy, through self-conscious adolescence, to adulthood. The basic family unit is a group of related females, tightly protecting their babies and young, and led by a venerable matriarch. It's the matriarch that is most likely to bluff a charge, and occasionally she may get carried away and actually tusk a vehicle or person. Seen in the flesh, elephants seem even bigger than you would imagine – you'll need little persuasion from those flapping, warning ears to back off if you're too close – but they are at the same time surprisingly graceful, silent animals on their padded, carefully placed feet. In a matter of moments, a large herd can merge into the trees and disappear, their presence betrayed only by the noisy cracking of branches as they strip trees and uproot saplings. Old animals die in their seventies or eighties, when their last set of teeth wears out and they can no longer feed. Grieving elephants pay much attention to the disposal of their dead relatives, often dispersing the bones and spending time near the remains.

### HIPPOPOTAMUS (*Kiboko*) *Hippopotamus amphibius*

Hippopotamuses are highly adaptable and found wherever rivers or lakes are deep enough for them to submerge and have a surrounding of suitable grazing grass – from the humid estuary of the Tana River to the chilly mountain district of Nyahururu, including briny Lake Nakuru in the central Rift Valley and saline Lake Turkana in the semi-desert of the northwest. They spend most of the day in water to protect their thin, hairless skin from dehydration. After dark, they move onto land and spend the whole night grazing, often walking up to 10km in one session. In the Maasai Mara, they wander across the savanna; at Lake Naivasha they plod through farms and gardens; and everywhere they are rightly feared. Hippos are reckoned to be responsible for more human deaths in Africa than any other large animal (mosquitoes being by far the most deadly). Deaths occur mostly on water, when boats accidentally steer into hippo pods, but they can be aggressive on land, too, charging and slashing with their fearsomely long incisors. Hippos can run at 30km/h if necessary and have a small turning circle. Although uncertain on land (hence their aggression when cornered), they are supremely adapted to long periods in water. Their nostrils, eyes and ears are in exactly the right places and their clumsy feet become supple paddles – as can be seen, if you're lucky, from the underwater observatory at Mzima Springs in Tsavo West National Park.

## ELEPHANTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Local overpopulation of **elephants** is usually the result of old migration routes being cut off, forcing the elephants into reserves – like the Maasai Mara and its neighbouring conservancies – where their massive appetites can appear destructive. Adults may consume up to 170kg of plant material daily, so it's estimated that several thousand tonnes of foliage pass through the Maasai Mara elephant population's collective gut each month. This foliage destruction puts new life into the soil, however, as acacia seeds dunged by elephants are released when dung beetles tackle the football-sized droppings, breaking them into pellets and pulling them into their burrows where the seeds germinate. Elephants also dig up dried-out waterholes with their tusks, providing moisture for other animals. Elephants are **architects of their environment**, setting the inter-species agenda by knocking over trees, creating deadwood habitats for invertebrates and causing hundreds of other impacts, all of which are natural functions in a dynamic ecosystem. The jury is still out on how it works when the wildlife corridors are closed, or the parks fenced in. What is not in doubt is that their **ivory** is increasingly valuable and poaching is on the rise again (see p.353). And when they are closely managed and secured in safe sanctuaries, the elephant populations quickly reach unsustainable levels. The Kenya Wildlife Service is getting proficient at translocating elephants, moving them around to balance the numbers.



1



2

## RHINOS

There are two, highly endangered species of rhinoceros in Africa, the hook-lipped or **black rhino**, and the much heavier wide-lipped or **white rhino**, which has two distinct subspecies, southern and northern white rhinos. The shape of their lips is far more significant than any colour difference, as it indicates their respective diets (browsing for the black rhino, grazing for the white) and favoured habitats (thick bush and open grassland respectively). Both species give birth to a single calf, after a gestation period of fifteen to eighteen months, and the baby is not weaned until it is at least a year or sometimes two years old. With a calf only every three to four years, their population growth rate is slow compared with most animals – another factor contributing to their rarity. In fact, for their own protection, the exact number and whereabouts of each species of rhino in all parks and reserves is now a closely guarded secret by all KWS employees.

### BLACK RHINOCEROS (*Faru or kifaru*) *Diceros bicornis*

Black rhinos, which are slightly smaller than white, were a fairly common sight in most of Kenya's parks until the early 1970s. Amboseli had hundreds of magnificent black rhinos, some with graceful horns more than 1m in length. But poaching decimated the population (see p.353), and today there are around 600 black rhinos in Kenya, distributed between Nairobi, Lake Nakuru, Aberdare, Meru and Tsavo West national parks, Maasai Mara NR and, increasingly, the Laikipia conservancies. Black rhinos prefer thick bush, at altitudes up to 3500m. They are solitary and active day and night, taking rests between periods of activity. Notoriously bad-tempered, they have good hearing and sensitive smell, but bad eyesight, making them dangerous at close quarters.

## ZEBRAS

### PLAINS OR BURCHELL'S ZEBRA (*Punda milia*)

*Equus burchelli granti*

The plains zebra (the Kenya subspecies is called Grant's) has thick stripes and small ears and is found in savanna in most parts of Kenya up to about 4000m. In the far north, they tend to have a very short mane. In Tsavo West and other parts of southern Kenya, they often exhibit the "shadow striping" typical of the species in southern Africa, with fawn stripes alternating between the black ones. Their usual social set-up is a harem of several mares and foals led by a dominant stallion, active day and night, resting

## PIGS

### WARTHOG (*Ngiri or gwasi*) *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*

The commonest wild pig in Kenya is the warthog, seen all over the country at altitudes up to 2000m. Flighty and nervous, warthogs are notoriously hard to photograph as they're generally on the run through the bush, tails erect, often with their young in single file. They shelter in tunnels (often using old aardvark burrows), and live in family groups, usually of a mother and her litter of two to four piglets. They're diurnal, and principally grazers of grass and herbs, though they also root for tubers. Boars join the group to mate, and are easily distinguished from sows by their big warts, which protect their heads during fights.

### WHITE RHINOCEROS (*Faru or kifaru*)

*Ceratotherium simum*

Native northern white rhinos ("white" from the Afrikaans *wijd* for the wide mouth) have been extinct for several hundred years in Kenya, but reintroduced southern white rhinos, mostly from South Africa, can be seen in several parks and wildlife sanctuaries. At Ol Pejeta in Laikipia, Kenya also has the last remaining northern white rhinos, brought here from a Czech zoo in 2009, but it's feared the subspecies is doomed as all attempts at breeding have failed. Docile grazers, white rhinos are a savanna species, active day and night like black rhinos. Males tend to be solitary, but females often cluster in small same-sex herds or nursery groups.

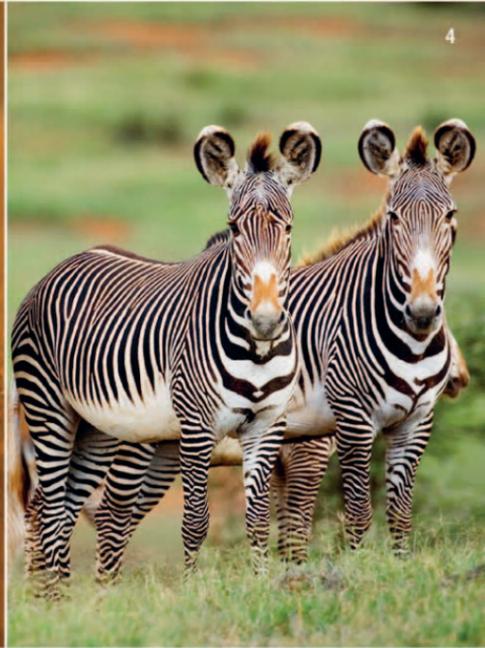
intermittently. In Amboseli and Maasai Mara, they gather in migrating herds several thousand strong, along with wildebeest and other grazers.

### GREVY'S ZEBRA (*Punda milia*) *Equus grevyi*

Grevy's zebra is a large, fairly rare equid with very fine stripes and big, saucer-like ears, restricted to arid regions in Tsavo East and, especially Laikipia. These zebras are largely diurnal and live in small territorial herds. Mares with foals and stallions generally keep to separate troops.

### BUSH PIG (*Nguruwe mwitu*) *Potamochoerus porcus*

Two nocturnal pigs, both much rarer than the warthog, are also found in Kenya. The red river hog or bush pig, which resembles a long-haired domestic pig with tasselled hair on its ears and a white-crested back, is found in dense forest, close to agriculture and river margins, and lives in groups of up to twenty. The huge, dark-coloured giant forest hog (*Hydrochoerus meinertzhageni*), is a bristly, big-tusked pig that lives in the highlands and is very occasionally seen from tree hotels on Mount Kenya or the Aberdare range.



## GIRAFFES

The tallest mammals on earth, **giraffes** are relatively common and unmistakable and found widely across Kenya in wooded savanna and thorn country. Mild-mannered and non-territorial, they gather in loose, leaderless herds and spend the day browsing on the leaves of trees too high for other species (acacias are favourites), while at night they lie down and ruminate. Bulls test their strength while in bachelor herds by “necking” – using their powerful necks like broadswords. When a female is in heat, which can happen at any time of year, the dominant male mates with her. She gives birth after a gestation of around fourteen months. More than half of all young fall prey to lions or hyenas in their early years.

### GIRAFFE (*Twiga*) *Giraffa camelopardalis*

Kenya has three types of giraffe, differentiated from each other by their pattern and the configuration of their short horns. Most often seen is the Maasai giraffe (*G. c. tippelskirchi*), with two horns and a very broken pattern of dark blotches on a buff or fawn background. This is the giraffe you will see in Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Tsavo West. In northern Kenya, and eastern Kenya roughly northeast of the Tana River, lives the dramatically patterned reticulated giraffe (*G. c. reticulata*), which normally has three or five horns and boldly defined chestnut patches on a very pale background. The reticulated subspecies is seen in the Samburu reserves,

Meru NP and Lewa and Ol Pejeta in Laikipia. The more solidly built Rothschild's giraffe (*G. c. rothschildi*) which has a pattern more like crazy paving (also with well-defined blotches), plain white lower legs, like socks, and usually two horns, is largely restricted in Kenya to Lake Nakuru NP and the Nairobi Giraffe Centre. They all appear able to interbreed, but because they are geographically separated, they very rarely do. There is disagreement among zoologists over whether any of the giraffe's subspecies should be accorded the status of separate species – particularly concerning the reticulated giraffe – but some, like the Rothschild's are extremely rare and in need of protection.

## WILDEBEEST AND RELATIVES

The rather ungainly **hartebeest** family includes one of Kenya's rarest antelopes, the hirola or Hunter's hartebeest (*Damaliscus hunteri*) of the lower Tana River. The Coke's hartebeest, however, is found widely in southern Kenya, and topi are practically emblematic of the Maasai Mara, their main habitat. The **wildebeest** is also particularly associated with the Mara.

### COKE'S HARTEBEEST (*Kongoni*) *Alcelaphus*

*Buselaphus cokii*

Hard to confuse with any other antelope except the topi, the Hartebeest has several subspecies, distinguishable by horn shape, two of which live in Kenya – Coke's and Jackson's (*A.b. jacksoni*), which is darker and lives only in western Kenya. Coke's hartebeests live in a wide range of grassy habitats. They're diurnal and the females and calves live in small, wandering herds, while the territorial males are solitary.

### TOPI (*Nyamera*) *Damaliscus lunatus*

An extremely fast runner, (once it accelerates out of bouncy, hartebeest gear), the topi is largely restricted in Kenya to the Maasai Mara, where the subspecies (one of four found across the continent) is *D. l. jimela*. They show a marked preference for moist savanna grasslands, near water, and the females and young form herds with an old male. These male topis are very characteristic of the Mara landscape: often seen standing sentry on abandoned termite hills, they're actually marking their territories against rival males, rather than nobly defending the herd against predators.

### BLUE WILDEBEEST OR BRINDLED GNU

*(Nyumbu) Connochaetes taurinus*

With its long tail, mane and beard, the blue wildebeest is an unmistakable, nomadic grazer. An intensely gregarious animal, it lives in a variety of associations within “mega-herds” that can number more than a million animals. During the breeding season, the territorial bulls gather cows into their areas and defend their harems against rivals. Strictly grazers, dependent on pasture and preferring short grass, they are always found near water. It is that dependence that drives their continuous migration, forming mega-herds that shape into columns of animals to follow each other on the scent of new grass, only to dissolve and spread out again when good grazing is reached. With the East African climate changing rapidly, their movements are less and less regular, and hundreds of thousands of wildebeest can be months “early” or “late” in locations along the route that was typical of the mid-twentieth century.



## GAZELLES AND ALLIED SPECIES

**THOMSON'S GAZELLE** (*Swala tomi*) *Gazella thomsoni*

The most obvious of the gazelles, the Thomson's gazelle is smaller than the similar Grant's, and distinguished by the black band on its flank. The female has tiny horns. This gregarious, diurnal grazer prefers flat, short-grass savanna near water, and is quite often seen at the roadside in southern Kenya. Thomson's gazelles live in a wide variety of social structures, often massing in the hundreds with other grazers.

**GRANT'S GAZELLE** (*Swala granti*) *Gazella granti*

Larger than the very similar Thomson's gazelle, Grant's is distinguished from it by the white rump patch which extends onto the back. The female's horns are smaller than the male's but not the tiny spikes of female "Thommies". Grant's gazelles thrive on wide grassy plains with good visibility, where they live in small, territorial harems. They can range much further from water than Thomson's, and their geographic range extends further north to encompass the northern parks of Samburu and Meru where Thommies are absent.

## GRAZING ANTELOPES

**ORYX** (*Choroa*) *Oryx gazella callotis*

Ranging from open grasslands into waterless wastelands, and tolerant of prolonged drought, this distinctive, rapier-horned antelope is nocturnal as well as diurnal. They live in highly hierarchical mixed herds of up to fifteen, led by a dominant bull. The *O. g. callotis* subspecies, which lives in Tsavo and Amboseli, is easily distinguished by its luxuriantly tufted ears from the Beisa oryx (*O. g. beisa*), found in northern Kenya.

**SABLE ANTELOPE** (*Palahala*) *Hippotragus niger*

This very large, handsome antelope lives only in Shimba Hills NP, inland from the south coast. Here it finds its preferred mix of open woodland and tall grassland near water. Sables are hard to confuse with any other antelope:

## WATERBUCKS AND REEDBUCKS

**COMMON OR BOHOR REEDBUCK** (*Tohe*)

*Redunca arundinum*

Reedbucks and waterbucks are related, and both spend much time in or near water. The medium-sized common reedbuck has a patchy distribution in southern Kenya, living in monogamous pairs or family groups in territories defended by the (horned) male. They subsist on a specialist plant diet that is generally unpalatable to other herbivores.

**WATERBUCK** (*Kuro*) *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*

The rather deer-like waterbuck is relatively common in many

**GERENUK** (*Swala twiga*) *Litocranius walleri*

The unmistakable gerenuk is an unusual browsing gazelle able to nibble from bushes standing on its hind legs (its name means "giraffe-necked" in Somali). Although considered an arid-land specialist, its range encompasses most of Kenya east of the Rift Valley and it's not uncommon. Gerenuks are usually solitary or live in small, territorial harems. Females are homeless.

**IMPALA** (*Swala pala*) *Aepyceros melampus*

The impala, although technically not one of the gazelles, is closely related to them and common in many parts of Kenya. The only antelope with a black tuft above the hooves, the males have long, lyre-shaped horns and the females are hornless. Usually found in open savanna with light woodland cover, impalas are diurnal and make distinctive, high, graceful leaps when fleeing danger. Females live grouped together in large herds that overlap with several male territories. During the breeding season, the males become territorial and separate out breeding harems of up to twenty females, which they vigorously defend from rivals.

the females are tan-coloured while the males are glossy black, and both have white bellies and facial markings, stiff manes and huge curved horns that reach 1m or more in length in the males. Active by day and night, sable antelopes live in territorial herds of females and young, dominated in breeding season by the bulls.

**ROAN ANTELOPE** (*Kirongo*) *Hippotragus equinus*

The massive roan antelope, a close relative of the sable but with much shorter horns, is fairly common in much of west and south-central Africa, but restricted in Kenya to Ruma NP south of Kisumu – a sanctuary of tall grassland with plenty of water. Small herds are usually led by a dominant bull, but immature bachelor herds and seasonal pairs are also common.

parts of central and southern Kenya, living in open woodland and savanna, near water. There are two subspecies in Kenya: the ringed waterbuck, east of the Rift Valley, which has a white circle on its rump, and the Defassa waterbuck of western Kenya, whose rump is solid white. This is a large antelope, with a tendency to look a bit shaggy and unkempt, and like the reedbuck, its plant diet is unpalatable to other grazers (and can give it a distinctive smell, according to some authorities). Only the males have horns, and they either lead a territorial herd of females and young or maintain a territory that is visited by wandering female herds.



## DWARF ANTELOPES

### KIRK'S DIK-DIK (*Digidigi* or *Dika*) *Madoqua kirkii*

Found all over Kenya, Kirk's dik-dik measures no more than 40cm at the shoulder, and usually pairs for life. You frequently see pairs of this hare-sized antelope, named after its alarm cry, at the roadside in national parks and reserves, and all over Laikipia and northern Kenya. They have quite a distinctive, swollen snout that looks like the beginning of a short trunk. Adults are sometimes accompanied by a single youngster, and occasionally by an older sibling too. If you do a bush walk, you'll come across their territorial boundaries, marked by piles of droppings and black secretions from their facial glands, deposited on grass stems like tiny drops of engine oil.

### SUNI (*Suni*) *Neotragus moschatus*

The suni is much less common than the dik-dik, and frequently mistaken for it, though it is even smaller, at just 35cm, and doesn't have the dik-dik's proboscis. Like the dik-dik, they live in monogamous pairs, sometimes with additional non-breeding females forming a small group. They can be encountered almost anywhere there's good, dry forest cover, but their distribution is extremely patchy: forested coastal hills have the largest populations. Sunis tend to be nocturnal and crepuscular, hiding in shade by day, and will habitually freeze when threatened or surprised, before darting into the undergrowth.

### SHARPE'S GRYSBOK (*Dondoo* or *Dondoro*) *Raphicerus sharpei*

This is a rarely seen antelope, around 50cm high at the shoulder. It's distinguished from the slenderer steenbok by its light underparts. Only the males have short horns, using them to defend their territories. They pair loosely, not monogamously or for life, and are most likely to be seen in dense thicket adjacent to open grassland where they rest during the day and feed by night.

## DUIKERS

The **duikers** (from the Dutch for "diver", referring to their plunging into the bush) are larger than the dwarf antelopes though they appear smaller because of their hunched posture. Uniquely among antelopes and allied species, duikers are omnivorous, feeding not just on leaves, fruit and fungi but also on a range of insects and other invertebrates – and even catching frogs and lizards and snatching birds when the opportunity arises.

### COMMON DUIKER (*Nysa*) *Sylvicapra grimmia*

The 60cm-high common duiker is found throughout the country in many habitats, but most species are choosier and prefer plenty of dense cover and thicket. The red duiker and

### ORIBI (*Kasia*) *Ourebia ourebia*

This small antelope (the biggest of this group at about 60cm at the shoulder) is patchily distributed in Kenya, mostly in the southwest and the coast north of the Tana, but it's not hard to see where common as it's diurnal and favours open grassland. The oribi is distinguished from the smaller grysbok and steenbok by a black tail and dark skin patch, like a stain, below the eye. Their territorial harems consist of one to four females led by a horned male. Males are noted for their charming foreplay: when the female is in heat, the male pushes his head under her hindquarters and shoves her along on her forelegs like a wheelbarrow.

### KLIPSPRINGER (*Mbuzi mawe*) *Oreotragus oreotragus*

With their raised hooves wonderfully adapted for scaling near-vertical rock faces ("rock goat" is the translation of their Swahili name), klipspringers are a distinctive sight in many rockier parts of the country, or wherever there are cliffs and *kopjes*. Being browsers, and not dependent on pasture, they can often be seen far from water in remote, desolate districts, out and about in the heat of the day. A territorial male (with horns; though occasionally females are also horned) lives with his mate or a small family group, and they often have quite restricted, long-term territories.

### STEENBOK (*Dondoo* or *Dondoro*) *Raphicerus campestris*

Despite a height of only 50cm at the shoulder, the surprisingly aggressive steenbok – an inhabitant of dry savanna – defends itself furiously against attackers or, *in extremis*, dashes down any available hole. Male steenboks have horns, but the species is normally solitary, waking and feeding intermittently by day and night, using its huge ears to warn of the first sign of danger.

blue duiker are quite widespread, but the tiny Zanzibar duiker is restricted in Kenya to the Arabuko Sokoke Forest near Malindi, the black-fronted duiker to Mount Kenya and Mount Elgon and the yellow-backed duiker to the Mau forest.



## BUFFALO AND SPIRAL-HORNED ANTELOPES

Kenya's **big antelopes** are the twisted-horn bushbuck types (*Tragelaphinae*; after the Greek for "billy goat"), though they are all related, surprisingly perhaps, not to goats or the smaller antelopes, but to cattle and **buffaloes**.

### AFRICAN OR CAPE BUFFALO (*Nyati* or *mbogo*)

*Syncerus caffer*

The buffalo itself is very common and closely related to the domestic cow. Buffalos tolerate a wide range of habitats, up to altitudes of 4000m, but always near water. Their sense of smell is much more acute than other senses. Active day and night, they rest up during the heat of the day. They live in large herds of cows and calves that can number up to three hundred and rarely make much effort to move when vehicles approach. Young bulls often form small bachelor herds, whereas older bulls are usually solitary and can sometimes be dangerous. Although usually ambivalent to the presence of humans, they are often destructive: you don't have to read the papers long before finding an example of buffalos trampling crops or goring a farmer trying to protect his harvest.

### COMMON ELAND (*Mpofu* or *mbungu*) *Taurotragus oryx*

Spotted almost as easily as the buffalo, and present in most parks and reserves, is the huge, cow-like eland, with its distinctive dewlap. This highly adaptable mega-antelope – the biggest in Africa – is happy from semi-desert to mountains, but it prefers scrubby plains for its 24-hour lifestyle punctuated intermittently with brief periods of sleep. Non-territorial herds of up to sixty eland is the norm, but temporary gatherings of as many as a thousand aren't unheard of. Despite being so huge, and relatively common, it's still a shy animal, and usually turns and moves away when you stop to say hello. Indeed, elands can be quite skittish, and they're surprisingly good jumpers for a half-tonne beast. Both sexes have straight horns with a slight spiral.

### GREATER KUDU (*Tandala mkubwa*) *Tragelaphus*

*strepsiceros*

This is another impressively big antelope (up to 1.5m at the shoulder) with very long, spiral horns in the male. Strikingly handsome and extremely localized, it is shy of humans, tends to be nocturnal and is not often seen in the daytime unless its territory is secure, as on some of the Laikipia conservancies. Your best bet for seeing them is Lake Bogoria NR and semi-arid, hilly or undulating bush country in northern Kenya, sometimes far from water. Male greater kudus are usually solitary; females live in small troops with the young.

### LESSER KUDU (*Tandala mdogo*) *Tragelaphus imberbis*

The lesser kudu isn't infrequently seen, where it exists at all, but, like its greater cousin, it's localized and a threatened species. You're most likely to see lesser kudu in Tsavo West NP or Tsavo East NP, where they inhabit dense scrub. Like the greater kudu, lesser kudu females clump together with the young, while the adult males are more solitary. Like the eland, both species are startlingly good jumpers – which somehow ties in neatly with their spring-like horns.

### BUSHBUCK (*Kulungu* or *mbawala*) *Tragelaphus scriptus*

This is another notoriously shy antelope – the only usual evidence of a bushbuck in the area is its noisy crashing through the undergrowth and a flash of a chestnut rump as it takes off. With their very variable appearance, even in the same close locality (there are as many as 29 subspecies, and some zoologists consider that the bushbuck is actually at least two different species), they can sometimes be hard to identify: look out for randomly white-spotted or sometimes white-broken-striped flanks. Thick bush and woodland close to water is their principal habitat, and even with this protection they are mostly nocturnal. They tend to be solitary. The male has fairly short, straight, spiralled horns.

### SITATUNGA (*Nzohe*) *Tragelaphus spekei*

This large, hirsute, semi-aquatic relative of the bushbuck is found only in one or two remote corners of western Kenya (including Saiwa Swamp NP, where they are easy to see). They are very localized and are not likely to be mistaken for anything else. Usually seen half submerged, it's a challenge to spot their remarkable hooves, up to 18cm long and widely splayed – exactly as if a marsh-dwelling antelope were taking on the characteristics of a lily-trotter. As usual in this genus, only the males have horns.

### BONGO (*Bongo* or *ndongoro*) *Tragelaphus eurycerus*

The bongo is a particularly impressive member of this group, now confined to the highlands of Mount Kenya, the Aberdare range and possibly the Cherangani Hills and Mau Escarpment. Your best chance of seeing these stocky, robust, splendidly marked creatures is at Mount Kenya Safari Club, at Nanyuki, which has successfully bred and reintroduced them on the mountain.



## PRIMATES

Excluding *Homo sapiens*, there are twelve species of primates in Kenya, most of them diurnal. They range from the pint-sized, slow-motion, lemur-like potto (*Perodicticus potto*), found in Kakamega Forest, to the baboon. Other rare or more localized monkeys include the stocky but distinguished-looking De Brazza's monkey (*Cercopithecus neglectus*), with its white goatee, found almost exclusively in Saiwa Swamp National Park; the Tana River crested mangabey (*Cercocebus galeritus galeritus*), a partly ground-dwelling monkey with a characteristic Mohican-style crest of hair; and the terrestrial Patas monkey (*ngedere*; *Erythrocebus patas*), a moustachioed plains runner of Laikipia and the dry northwest. Kenya no longer has any great apes (the family to which the gorilla and the chimpanzee belong), although they probably only became extinct in the western forests, of which Kakamega is a relic, in the last 500 years, during the period when the region was being widely settled by humans. There's a large chimpanzee welfare sanctuary in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, but it isn't engaged in breeding.

### VERVET MONKEY (*Tumbili*) *Chlorocebus pygerythrus*

Widespread, common and occasionally a nuisance where used to humans (they will steal food and anything else that looks interesting), the primate you are certain to see almost anywhere in Kenya, given a few trees, is the vervet monkey. This small monkey lives in troops led by a dominant male (easily identified by his sky-blue scrotum), and they have no difficulty adjusting to the presence of humans and their food. The vervet is one of the guenons – typical African monkeys – every species of which has distinctive facial markings and hairstyles.

### BLUE OR SYKES' MONKEY (*Nyabu, kima or nchima*) *Cercopithecus mitis*

Almost as common as the vervet in certain areas, notably on the coast, is Sykes' monkey, also known as the blue monkey. Naturally a monkey of the forests, a number of Sykes' troops at Diani Beach have become notoriously accustomed to stealing food from hotel dining tables, and large males will even raid bedrooms. Upcountry populations of Sykes' monkey seem to be more timid.

### EASTERN BLACK-AND-WHITE COLOBUS MONKEY OR GUEREZA (*Mbega*) *Colobus guereza*

You are most likely to see the beautiful, leaf-eating black-and-white colobus monkey in the Kenya highlands, where the Eastern species lives. Strictly diurnal, and almost entirely arboreal (their missing thumb is a distinctive characteristic that aids swinging; "kolobos" means "mutilated" in Greek), they live in small troops and are dependent on thick forest habitat, but also live along water courses and around lake margins in otherwise arid savanna districts. You can see them in the Aberdare and Mount Kenya national parks, in patches of forest among the tea hills northwest of Nairobi, at lakes Naivasha and Nakuru and around Maasai Mara NR. A second, smaller species, the Angolan black-and-white colobus (*C. angolensis*), can also be spotted in the Diani forest on the coast south of

Mombasa. Both species are usually seen high in the tree canopy; look out for the pure-white babies. The Tana River red colobus (*Procolobus rufomitatus rufomitatus*) is only found in the remote Tana River National Primate Reserve north of Malindi.

### GREATER BUSHBABY OR THICK-TAILED GALAGO (*Komba*) *Galago crassicaudatus*

In some Kenyan coastal lodges, where there's enough nearby forest, you're quite likely to see this appealing, cat-sized primate – the largest of Kenya's three species of bushbabies – as they sometimes visit dining rooms and verandas. They're strictly nocturnal, roosting in small family groups during the day, and very active hunters and foragers after dark, when their wailing "baby" cries are such a distinctive sound. The tiny Senegal bushbaby (also *komba*; *G. senegalensis*) is a shy, tree-leaping sap- and insect-eater: it's the big species that want your bread roll or fruit.

### YELLOW BABOON (*Nyani*) *Papio cynocephalus*

On safari you'll have plenty of opportunities to watch baboon troops up close. Large males can be intimidating – disconcertingly so towards women, whom they identify as less physically threatening than men. Troops, averaging forty to fifty individuals, spend their lives, like all monkeys, in clear but mutable social relationships. Rank and precedence, physical strength and kin ties all determine an individual's position in this mini-society led by a dominant male. They favour open country with trees and cliffs, always near water, and their days revolve around foraging and hunting for food (baboons will consume almost anything, from a fig tree's entire crop to a baby antelope found in the grass). There are two species, whose distributions overlap in Kenya: the slenderer yellow baboon in the east and south, and the stockier, heavily maned olive baboon (also *nyani*; *P. anubis*) in the west and north. Both adapt quickly to humans, are frequently a nuisance and occasionally dangerous.



## OTHER MAMMALS

It's unlikely **rodents** will make a strong impression on safari, unless you do a night game drive. In that case you may see the frenzied leaps of a spring hare, dazzled by headlights or a torch. In rural areas off the beaten track you may occasionally see hunters taking home giant rats or cane rats – shy, vegetarian animals, which make good eating.

Kenya has several species of **squirrel**, of which the most widespread are the two species of ground squirrel – striped and unstriped – which are often seen, dashing along the track in front of the vehicle on game drives. The most spectacular squirrel, however, is the giant forest squirrel, with its splendid bush of a tail, and the nocturnal flying squirrel – which glides from tree to tree on membranes between its outstretched limbs. Both are most likely to be seen in Kakamega Forest. Kenya's true flying mammals will usually be a mere flicker over a waterhole at twilight, or sometimes a flash across your headlights. The only **bats** you can normally observe in any meaningful way are fruit bats hanging from their daytime roosting sites. The hammer-headed fruit bat, sometimes seen in Kakamega Forest, has a huge head and a wingspan of more than 1m.

### ROCK HYRAX (*Pimbi*) *Procavia capensis*

Rock hyraxes, which you are certain to see at Hell's Gate NP, on Mount Kenya and in Nairobi NP, look as if they should be rodents. But one of the most memorable bits of safari knowledge imparted by guides is the fact that they share the same prehistoric ancestor as the elephant. Present-day hyraxes are pygmies compared with some of their prehistoric ancestors, which were as big as a bear in some cases. Rock hyraxes live in busy, vocal colonies of twenty or thirty females and young, plus a territorial male. Some areas swarm with the adults and the playful and very independent young. The tree hyrax (*pembere*; *Heterohyrax brucei*) is quite similar, but largely nocturnal: this is the hyrax making the painfully wheezing cry that you sometimes hear at night.

### AARDVARK (*Mhanga*) *Orycteropus afer*

The aardvark is one of Africa's – indeed the world's – strangest mammals, a solitary termite-eater weighing up to 70kg. Its name, Afrikaans for "earth pig", is an apt description, as it holes up during the day in large burrows – excavated with remarkable speed and energy – and emerges at night to visit termite mounds within a radius of up to 5km, to dig for its main diet. It is most likely to be seen when you're out on a night drive in bush country that is well scattered with tall termite spires.

### PANGOLIN (*Kakakuona*) *Manis temminckii*

Pangolins are also very unusual – nocturnal, scale-covered mammals, resembling armadillos and feeding on ants and termites. When frightened, they secrete a noxious liquid from anal glands and roll into a ball with their scales erect (*pangolin* is Malay for "rolling over"). The ground pangolin, the only species found in Kenya (most pangolins are arboreal), lives mainly in savanna and woodland districts.

### CRESTED PORCUPINE (*Nungu* or *nungunungu*)

*Hystrix cristata*

This is a really large rodent (up to 90cm in length), rarely seen, but common away from croplands, where it's hunted as a pest, or for its quills. Porcupines are adaptable to a wide range of habitats and often hide in caves during the day, where several may gather, coming out only at night to forage for roots and tubers along their routine pathways.

### GOLDEN RUMPED ELEPHANT SHREW

(*Sengi*) *Rhynchocyon chrysopygus*

The insectivorous elephant shrews are worth looking out for, simply because they are so weird. Your best chance of a sighting is of the golden-rumped elephant shrew, at Gedi ruins on the coast, near Watamu, or in the nearby Arabuko Sokoke Forest NP. This fascinating insect-eater is a creature of many parts: the size of a small cat, but built like a giant mouse running on stilts, it has a soft, elongated snout, like a short trunk. "Elephant shrew" captures the look fairly well.

### DUGONG (*Nguva*) *Dugong dugon*

The rarest of all of Kenya's "other mammals" is the dugong, the mermaid-prototype, of which there are believed to be a handful of individuals remaining in Kenyan waters, drifting in the shallows around the Lamu archipelago. They're part of a much depleted population – threatened by deliberate hunting and accidental trawling – that lives all along the Indian Ocean coast, feeding on seagrass (also vulnerable to habitat destruction) and coming up for air every few minutes. Adults usually weigh around half a tonne and reach about 3m in length, and the females give birth, in very shallow water, to metre-long, 30kg calves that suckle for eighteen months.





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## Getting there

**Flying is the only straightforward way of getting to Kenya, unless you're travelling overland from southern Africa. Flights to Kenya are generally most expensive from early July to late October and from mid-December to mid-January. Make reservations as far in advance as possible, especially if you want to travel at these popular times.**

**Nairobi** is the major hub for East Africa and is served by many airlines so there's a competitively priced choice of flights, but the cheaper tickets generally have fixed dates that you won't be able to change without paying an extra fee.

With the exception of the package-holiday **charter airlines** from Britain and Europe, there are no direct flights to **Mombasa** without going to Nairobi first. However, an inclusive package trip can make a lot of sense. Some packages, based around mid-range coast hotels, are relatively inexpensive and, if you choose carefully, you shouldn't feel too constrained. Based on your flight, plus a week of half-board accommodation (dinner, bed and breakfast) they cost from around £700 from the UK. It's worth remembering that you aren't obliged to stay at your hotel all the time: you could use it as a base to make independent trips around the country.

Adding some **safari** travel to a beach package holiday will increase the price by at least £250 per person per day of safari. If you have more time and flexibility, book a safari in Kenya – recommended companies are listed in the relevant sections of the book (see p.79, p.123 & p.404). Alternatively, any of the beach hotels can recommend a safari operator to take you to the closest parks, and reasonable deals are possible.

### Flights from the UK and Ireland

London Heathrow is the only British airport with **direct flights to Nairobi**, operated by Kenya Airways (✉kenya-airways.com) and British Airways (✉britishairways.com), and taking around nine

hours. **Fares** for flights on fixed dates start from around £500 return in low season and rise to above £1000 on key dates in high season. It may well be cheaper, particularly if coming from other UK cities such as Edinburgh or Manchester to take an **indirect flight**, changing planes in mainland Europe (see below) or the Middle East (see p.48).

There are also several **charter operators** with whom you can sometimes get "seat-only" deals to Mombasa out of London (and sometimes one or two UK regional airports) from around £400. Any online or high-street agent can give you a quote.

**Flying from Ireland**, the choice is to fly to Heathrow or to one of the mainland European cities with direct flights to Kenya (see below). Flights should cost between €850 and €1200, depending on the season.

### Flights from the US and Canada

There are no direct flights from the US or Canada to East Africa. The fastest routes to Nairobi are usually two nonstop legs via **London** or another European city such as Amsterdam, Frankfurt or Paris (see below). Other possible but longer connections are available with the Middle Eastern airlines (see p.48), or by going via Johannesburg with South African Airways (see p.48). **Fares** start from around \$1400 for a low-season round-trip ticket out of New York, and from \$2000 in high season, and from Toronto around Can\$1700 in low season and Can\$2400 in high season. Shortest journey times via Europe are 17hr from New York and 18hr from Toronto.

Travellers from the **west coast** might want to consider flying via East or Southeast Asia. Kenya Airways has flights between Nairobi and Bangkok, Hanoi, Hong Kong and Guangzhou in China.

### Flights via mainland Europe, the Middle East and Africa

Kenya Airways offers direct flights to Nairobi from Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris, while European carriers with direct services include Air France (✉airfrance.com), KLM (✉klm.com), Lufthansa

#### A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course **tourism** is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and **climate change** is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

([lufthansa.com](http://lufthansa.com)), Swiss ([swiss.com](http://swiss.com)) and Turkish Airlines ([turkishairlines.com](http://turkishairlines.com)).

You can also route to Nairobi with Emirates via Dubai ([emirates.com](http://emirates.com)), Ethiopian Airlines via Addis Ababa ([ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com)), Etihad Airways via Abu Dhabi ([etihad.com](http://etihad.com)), Qatar Airways via Doha ([qatarairways.com](http://qatarairways.com)) and South African Airways via Johannesburg ([flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com)).

## Flights from Australia and New Zealand

There are no direct flights to Kenya from Australia or New Zealand. From **Australia**, South African Airways has some good connections to Nairobi via Johannesburg, while Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways also offer decent connections. Another option, with a potential bonus stopover, is from Perth to Mauritius and then direct to Nairobi with Air Mauritius ([airmauritius.com](http://airmauritius.com)). From **New Zealand**, Emirates via Dubai is your most obvious bet, but Air New Zealand ([airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)) and Qantas ([qantas.com](http://qantas.com)) can get you to Kenya in combination with other airlines, such as Kenya Airways or South African Airways from Johannesburg.

Except for the Christmas period, when you will have to pay more, **fares** to Kenya from Australia and New Zealand are generally not seasonal. The lowest-priced return tickets bought from a discount agent or direct from the airline cost around Aus\$2000–3500 from Australia or NZ\$2400–4000 from New Zealand.

## Flights from South Africa

There are several daily **direct flights** to Nairobi from Johannesburg (taking just over 4hr) on South African Airways ([flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com)) and Kenya Airways ([kenya-airways.com](http://kenya-airways.com)). Round-trip fares start at around R4000.

## DISCOUNT FLIGHT AGENTS

**Africa Travel UK** ([africatravel.co.uk](http://africatravel.co.uk)). Experienced and resourceful.

**Airfares Flights Aus** ([airfaresflights.com.au](http://airfaresflights.com.au)). Fare-comparison site.

**AirTreds US** ([airtreds.com](http://airtreds.com)). Specialist in round-the-world and multi-sector tickets.

**CheapOair US** ([cheapoair.com](http://cheapoair.com)). Airline consolidator fares and standby-seat broker.

**Flight Centre Worldwide** ([flightcentre.com](http://flightcentre.com)). Flights and safari packages and some of the best Nairobi fare deals.

**helloworld** ([helloworld.com.au](http://helloworld.com.au)). Well-priced and user-friendly agent.

**North South Travel UK** ([nouthsouthtravel.co.uk](http://nouthsouthtravel.co.uk)). Excellent personal service and discounted fares, with all profits going to grassroots development charities.

**Spector Travel of Boston US** ([spectortravel.com](http://spectortravel.com)). African

specialist for flights and tours with competitive prices.

**STA Travel Worldwide** ([statravel.com](http://statravel.com)). Specialists in multi-sector flights and tours for gap-year travellers and under-26s, though others are catered for.

**Trailfinders UK and Ireland** ([trailfinders.com](http://trailfinders.com)). Long-established, reputable agent, with good-value flights and Kenya safaris.

**Travel Bag UK** ([travelbag.co.uk](http://travelbag.co.uk)). Discount flight and holiday agent.

**Travel Cuts Canada/US** ([travelcuts.com](http://travelcuts.com)). Popular, long-established student and youth travel organization.

**Travelstart South Africa** ([travelstart.co.za](http://travelstart.co.za)). Comprehensive South African site for comparing flight options and prices.

**USIT Ireland** ([usit.ie](http://usit.ie)). Irish and Northern Irish student and youth specialists.

**World Travel Centre Ireland** ([worldtravel.ie](http://worldtravel.ie)). Flight deals including round-the-world.

## KENYA AND AFRICA SPECIALISTS

The international agents and operators listed below will be able to assist you regardless of your home country. Overland tours of East Africa are covered under "Overlanding to/from Kenya" (see p.50); "voluntourism" trips are covered under "Work and volunteering" (see p.95). You can also book an itinerary through companies in Nairobi (see p.123) and elsewhere in Kenya, though if making arrangements through a Kenyan agent, bear in mind that international flights will generally have to be booked separately.

### Australia

**The Africa Safari Co.** ([africasafarico.com.au](http://africasafarico.com.au)). Good, knowledgeable agents for East Africa with personal experience of lodges and tented camps and scheduled and tailor-made safaris.

**African Travel Specialists** ([africantravel.com.au](http://africantravel.com.au)).

Well-established agent with an excellent reputation and a team of experienced staff, many of whom know Kenya well.

**African Wildlife Safaris** ([africanwildlifesafaris.com.au](http://africanwildlifesafaris.com.au)).

Upmarket and mid-range safaris, either with set departures or tailor-made, and a good selection of online brochures.

**Classic Safari Company** ([classicsafaricompany.com.au](http://classicsafaricompany.com.au)).

Tailor-made safaris ranging from comfortable to luxurious including mobile camping, riding and walking options.

### South Africa

**African Budget Safaris** ([africanbudgetsafaris.com](http://africanbudgetsafaris.com)). Very knowledgeable and helpful operator with a huge range of overland tours, budget safaris, cheaper accommodation and camping. Frequently advertises discounts and specials.

**Go2Africa** ([go2africa.com](http://go2africa.com)). A large consultancy team with good service, offering all manner of trips in Kenya and East Africa from mid-range packages to luxury lodges.

### UK

**Aardvark Safaris** ([aardvarksafaris.co.uk](http://aardvarksafaris.co.uk)). Committed and enthusiastic tailor-made Africa specialists who spend a lot of time getting to know the high-end camps and lodges they work with.

**Adventure Alternative** ([adventurealternative.com](http://adventurealternative.com)). Small,

personal operator, with a strong sense of responsibility and reciprocity, specializing in walking and treks, mountain expeditions, adventure holidays and volunteering trips.

**Africa Odyssey** 🌐 [africoadyssey.com](http://africoadyssey.com). Tailor-made tours in East and southern Africa featuring safaris, beach holidays and small lodges off the beaten track.

**Birdfinders** 🌐 [birdfinders.co.uk](http://birdfinders.co.uk). Expertly guided birdwatching tours. Runs an annual 18-day Kenya extravaganza from the UK in Nov/Dec.

**Cazenove & Loyd** 🌐 [cazloyd.com](http://cazloyd.com). Intelligently designed, entirely tailor-made private safaris, relying on clients who know what they're looking for.

**Exodus** 🌐 [exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk). Long-established East African overland and adventure company, with an interesting selection of Kenya escorted tours, including a photographic trip to the Mara and a Mount Kenya climb.

**Expert Africa** 🌐 [expertafrica.com](http://expertafrica.com). Specialists in tailor-made trips, with very strong local knowledge. The Kenya programme is run by Richard Trillo, author of *The Rough Guide to Kenya* since 1987, and the team includes other guidebook writers.

**Footloose Adventure Travel** 🌐 [footlooseadventure.co.uk](http://footlooseadventure.co.uk). Enthusiastic independent outfit offering a selection of treks and safaris; they'll tailor-make a safari to fit your budget and interests, offer advice and track down flights.

**Freeman Safaris** 🌐 [freemansafaris.com](http://freemansafaris.com). Personal, specialist photographic safari operator, using a raft of experience to deliver exceptional trips.

**Gane & Marshall** 🌐 [ganeandmarshall.com](http://ganeandmarshall.com). Africa specialists, with responsible travel credentials and a good Kenya programme, including Mount Kenya and Laikipia.

**Hartley's Safaris** 🌐 [hartleys-safaris.co.uk](http://hartleys-safaris.co.uk). Highly rated safari specialists creating bespoke tours.

**Imagine Africa** 🌐 [imagineafrica.co.uk](http://imagineafrica.co.uk). Well-established and reliable outfit with a good reputation for organizing mid- to high-end safaris.

**IntoAfrica** 🌐 [intoafrica.co.uk](http://intoafrica.co.uk). Small, good, eco-minded tour operator, whose trips give a genuine insight into the country while having minimum negative impact on people and environment.

**Natural High Safaris** 🌐 [naturalhighsafaris.com](http://naturalhighsafaris.com). Very cool, contemporary consultancy, safari-planner and booking agent, with a focus on experiences rather than mainstream holidays.

**On The Go Tours** 🌐 [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com). Lively and competitively priced range of Kenya tours from no-frills overland camping trips to small group or family safaris.

**Original Travel** 🌐 [originaltravel.co.uk](http://originaltravel.co.uk). Luxury eco-holiday company with a great reputation for delivering off-the-beaten-track arrangements.

**Ornitholidays** 🌐 [ornitholidays.co.uk](http://ornitholidays.co.uk). Offers an annual guided birdwatching trip to Kenya – Tsavo and the coast – to coincide with the arrival of many species of migrants.

**Rainbow Tours** 🌐 [rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk). Small operator with long-standing links with Africa, some unusual Kenyan properties and keen and experienced staff.

**Safari Consultants** 🌐 [safari-consultants.com](http://safari-consultants.com). Long-established and very personal Africa specialists in tailor-made travel to East and southern Africa.

**Steppes Travel** 🌐 [steppestravel.co.uk](http://steppestravel.co.uk). Innovative company with a

personal approach, specializing in tailor-made trips based in luxury lodges.

**Theobald Barber** 🌐 [theobaldbarber.com](http://theobaldbarber.com). Experienced, bespoke safari planners, offering a very personalized service.

**To Escape To** 🌐 [toescape.to](http://toescape.to). Hand-picked property rental, hotels, lodges and camps in Kenya, including mid-priced and family options.

**Tourduist** 🌐 [tourduist.com](http://tourduist.com). Out-of-the-ordinary and competitively priced trekking and Mount Kenya climbs as well as safaris and good-value beach extensions.

**Tribes Travel** 🌐 [tribes.co.uk](http://tribes.co.uk). Highly recommended small company in the vanguard of responsibly operated tourism offering tailor-made arrangements in Kenya using individually reviewed and rated properties.

**Wild Frontiers** 🌐 [wildfrontierstravel.com](http://wildfrontierstravel.com). Adventure travel specialist highlighting the travel as much as the destination, with some excellent Kenya tours.

**Wildlife Worldwide** 🌐 [wildlifeworldwide.com](http://wildlifeworldwide.com). Tailor-made Kenya safaris, often escorted by well-known guides or conservationists, plus family, adventure camping and walking trips.

## US and Canada

**The African Adventure Company** 🌐 [africa-adventure.com](http://africa-adventure.com). One of the best agencies in the business with a customized approach, giving first-hand reviews of places to stay and safaris. Has an exceptional knowledge of African wildlife and where and when to see it.

**African Horizons** 🌐 [africanhorizons.com](http://africanhorizons.com). Decent range of well-priced mid-range Kenya safaris with flexible departures.

**Bicycle Africa** 🌐 [ibike.org/bikeafrica](http://ibike.org/bikeafrica). Easy-going small-group cycling tours visiting many parts of Africa, including Kenya.

**Born Free Safaris & Tours** 🌐 [safaris2africa.com](http://safaris2africa.com). Long-established operator, with good-value safaris on offer including "Best of Kenya" options.

**Good Earth Tours & Safaris** 🌐 [goodearthtours.com](http://goodearthtours.com). An ethically responsible operator that can organize good-value camping or mid-range lodge safaris plus beach extensions.

**Journeys International** 🌐 [journeysinternational.com](http://journeysinternational.com). Award-winning ecotourism operator with a handful of Kenya trips, including a mainstream nine-day safari and a Mount Kenya trek.

**Ker & Downey** 🌐 [kerdowney.com](http://kerdowney.com). Renowned and much-commended upmarket travel company, working closely with top Kenya property groups Cheli & Peacock and Bush & Beyond.

**Micato Safaris** 🌐 [micato.com](http://micato.com). Kenyan-American family-run tour operator with a variety of bespoke Kenya offerings, mostly utilizing top-end and remote properties.

**Mountain Madness** 🌐 [mountainmadness.com](http://mountainmadness.com). Seattle-based adventure travel firm, offering really good-value, well-planned, well-paced Mount Kenya climbs.

**Nature Expeditions International** 🌐 [naturexp.com](http://naturexp.com). Good-value, flexible educational tours – one just in Kenya, one including Tanzania – with optional lectures on wildlife, natural history and culture. Good for older kids and teens.

**Premier Travel & Tours** 🌐 [premiertours.com](http://premiertours.com). A good choice of upmarket safaris and escorted tours in East and southern Africa.

**Uncharted Outposts** 🌐 [unchartedoutposts.com](http://unchartedoutposts.com). Highly recommended operator, with many Kenya options, particularly focusing on boutique camps and small lodges.

## Overlanding to/from Kenya

With plenty of time and a sense of adventure, **travelling overland** can be a rewarding way of getting to or from Kenya. Central African conflicts have effectively closed routes from West Africa for the time being, and while adventurous **self-drive** overlanders are heading to Kenya from Egypt, taking a boat from Aswan to Wadi Halfa in Sudan, crossing into Ethiopia at Metema and entering Kenya at Moyale or at the northern end of Lake Turkana, this route is not an easy one.

Currently the only advisable route is from **southern Africa**. You can drive by various routes, take the train up through Zambia and Tanzania, go overland by local transport or hook up with an overland operator – any number of which run multi-week tours between Cape Town and Nairobi.

Scrutinizing the operators' websites gives an indication of what to expect from a trip, and given that prices vary widely (anything between \$50 and \$120 per day, including the local kitty), be sure to research what is included in the price and what is not (many activities cost extra). Also be aware that overlanding is group "participatory" travel (putting your own tent up and down, helping with cooking

etc), which can be lots of fun for the adventure, camaraderie and company, or may be your worst nightmare: think carefully whether it will suit you before booking a long tour. While overlanding has traditionally involved camping, thanks to ever-increasing improvement of tourist facilities in Africa, many companies also offer "accommodated" trips – although sometimes this may mean not much more than a bed in a *banda* at a campsite.

Most of our **recommended operators** (see opposite) offer more or less the same classic Nairobi–Cape Town tour, taking eight to ten weeks – the southbound trip starts in Nairobi and does a loop into Uganda and Rwanda to see the mountain gorillas, heads back through Kenya for the parks and then down through Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. The northbound itinerary from Cape Town is exactly the same in reverse. Alternative options that deviate from this route loop through more of Zimbabwe (than just Victoria Falls), travel through Mozambique and into South Africa via Kruger National Park to start and finish in Johannesburg. You don't have to book the entire trip and can do sections to/from Nairobi.

### TAKING YOUR OWN VEHICLE INTO KENYA

If you're taking a foreign-registered vehicle into Kenya you'll need to have the following with you at customs:

**Vehicle Registration Certificate** in the name of the driver (or a certified copy). If it's not in the driver's name, a letter of authorization is required from the registered owner.

**Carnet de Passage en Douanes** A customs document issued by a driving association in your home country (the RAC in the UK, for example; [rac.co.uk](http://rac.co.uk)) that is internationally recognized as entitling the holder to temporarily import a vehicle duty-free.

**Foreign Vehicle Permit** (also known as a Temporary Import Permit or TIP). Acquired at the border and valid for up to three months (expect to pay \$25–40). If you've hired a Tanzanian- or Ugandan-registered vehicle (or you've rented a car in Kenya and are taking it over the border into Tanzania or Uganda) you normally just have to sign a logbook at the border and there's no fee, but ensure that the car rental company gives you the appropriate paperwork.

**Third-party insurance** is compulsory and the police will ask to see it, both at the border and (if they stop you) in Kenya itself. A short-term policy can be obtained from kiosks at the border posts, or you may already have COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; [ycmis.comesa.int](http://ycmis.comesa.int)) insurance, commonly known as the "Yellow Card", which covers numerous African countries including Kenya. In South Africa this can be purchased from the AA ([aa.co.za](http://aa.co.za)), in other countries from private insurance companies.

**Driver's licence** This doesn't have to be an international one (unless you are staying for more than three months, after which foreign licences are no longer valid in Kenya) but it does have to have a photo.

**Oval sticker** It's compulsory to have a sticker showing the origin country of the vehicle (GB, ZA and so on).

**Red warning triangle** By law in Kenya you must carry one and the police may ask to see it.

For more information contact AA Kenya (see p.52).

## OVERLAND COMPANIES

**Absolute Africa** UK [🌐 absoluteafrica.com](http://www.absoluteafrica.com).

**Acacia Africa** UK and South Africa [🌐 acacia-africa.com](http://www.acacia-africa.com).

**African Trails** UK [🌐 africantrails.co.uk](http://www.africantrails.co.uk).

**Dragoman** UK [🌐 dragoman.com](http://www.dragoman.com).

**G Adventures** Canada and UK [🌐 gadventures.com](http://www.gadventures.com).

**Gecko's Adventures** Australia [🌐 geckosadventures.com](http://www.geckosadventures.com).

**Intrepid** Australia [🌐 intrepidtravel.com](http://www.intrepidtravel.com).

**Oasis Overland** UK [🌐 oasisoverland.co.uk](http://www.oasisoverland.co.uk).

## Getting around

**There's a wide range of travel options in Kenya. If you want to be looked after throughout your trip, you can travel on a shared or exclusive road safari where you sign up to an off-the-shelf or tailor-made itinerary; alternatively you can take an air safari, via scheduled domestic airlines (often in small planes with great visibility), or charter a light plane for your own use. If you want more independence, you can easily rent a vehicle for self-drive or with a driver.**

If you're on a budget, you'll find a wide range of **public transport** – though, to be clear, it is all privately operated – from air-conditioned **buses** run by large operators to smaller companies and “saccos” (cooperatives) with a single battered minibus. In towns of any size, crowds of minibuses, operating as shared taxis and referred to as **matatus**, hustle for business constantly. Kenya's **railway** “network” appears to be in terminal decline, but the Nairobi–Mombasa line still runs a couple of services a week.

### Flying

**Domestic flights** in Kenya are thoroughly enjoyable, especially to the national parks, with animals clearly visible below as you approach each airstrip.

The **main operators** are SafariLink ([🌐 flysafarilink.com](http://www.flysafarilink.com)), Kenya Airways ([🌐 kenya-airways.com](http://www.kenya-airways.com)) and its no-frills subsidiary Jambojet ([🌐 jambojet.com](http://www.jambojet.com)), Airkenya ([🌐 airkenya.com](http://www.airkenya.com)), Mombasa Air Safari ([🌐 mombasaairsafari.com](http://www.mombasaairsafari.com)) and 540 Aviation ([🌐 fly540.com](http://www.fly540.com)). Destinations served include the main **towns and cities** (Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Lodwar and Nanyuki), **coastal resorts** (Diani Beach, Malindi, Lamu and Kiwayu) and airfields serving safari clients in the main **parks and reserves** of Amboseli, Maasai Mara, Meru, Tsavo West and Samburu-Shaba, and at Lewa Downs and Loisaba north of Mount Kenya.

Most services are daily and in some cases there are several flights a day, though **frequencies** on certain routes are reduced in low season. Same-day connections can be a problem, too, as flights are routinely cancelled if there are not enough passengers to make them worthwhile, and you will be “bumped” onto the next one. Be aware, too, that flights to the parks and reserves run on circuits, meaning that not all passengers are necessarily going to alight at the same airstrip: the plane might touch down at a few on the route, so flight times and the order of arrival may vary. Nevertheless, flying around Kenya (especially to the parks) saves on long bumpy road trips and each airline endeavours to get you to your destination on time.

**Baggage allowance** on the smaller planes (those going to safari destinations) is limited to 15kg per person (in soft bags only – rigid suitcases are often not accepted), though this isn't strictly adhered to unless the flight is full. In any event you will be able to make arrangements to store excess baggage while you are on safari.

For some ballpark return **fares** (in high season), reckon on Nairobi–Maasai Mara costing \$345, Nairobi–Lamu \$375 and Nairobi–Diani Beach (Ukunda) \$275. City to city fares with Fly 540, Kenya Airways and Jambojet are much cheaper and are not affected by season, so, for example, the cheapest fare with Fly 540 from Nairobi to Eldoret starts at \$82 one-way, while a Jambojet flight from Nairobi to Mombasa costs from only \$55 one-way.

**Chartering** a small plane for trips to safari parks and remote airstrips is worth considering if money is less important to you than time, and is an especially good option for groups or large families. Costs vary depending on the size of the aircraft needed to accommodate the number of passengers, the amount of fuel required and other incidentals such as airport landing fees. Remember also that the plane has to make a round trip, even if you don't. SafariLink and Mombasa Air Safari (see above) will quote for charters; two other excellent charter companies are Tropic Air ([🌐 tropicairenkenya.com](http://www.tropicairenkenya.com)), based at Nanyuki airfield, and Yellow Wings ([🌐 yellowwings.com](http://www.yellowwings.com)), based at Wilson Airport in Nairobi.

### Car rental and driving

All the parks and reserves are open to private vehicles, and there's a lot to be said for the freedom of choice that **renting a car** gives you. Unless there are more than two of you, though, it won't save you money over one of the cheaper camping safaris.

Before renting, shop around for the best deals and try to negotiate, bearing in mind how long you'll

need and the season. July, August and Christmas are busy, so you might want to book ahead. **Rates** vary greatly: some are quoted in Kenyan shillings and others in dollars or euros; some include unlimited mileage while others don't. The minimum age to rent a car is usually 23, sometimes 25.

You can often rent a vehicle with a **driver or driver-guide** supplied by the rental company, which can be more relaxing and a great introduction to the country. This adds around Ksh3000/day to your bill for the driver's salary and daily expenses (plus tip). Obviously fuel is still extra. Be clear precisely what the arrangements are before you set off: it's best to have things in writing.

Check the insurance details and always pay the daily **collision damage waiver (CDW)** premium, sometimes included in the price; even a small bump could be very costly otherwise. **Theft protection waiver (TPW)** should also be taken. Even with these, however, you'll still be liable for an **excess**, usually \$500–1000, which you will have to pay if there is any claim. You're also required to leave a hefty deposit, roughly equivalent to the anticipated bill, though normally credit card details will suffice. Assuming you return the vehicle, nothing will be debited from your account. Additionally if in a rental car, you may be asked to produce evidence that the rental car has a **PSV** (passenger service vehicle) licence. You should have a windscreen sticker for this as well as the letters "PSV" written somewhere on the body; if in doubt, check this out with the rental company before you leave.

Being stopped by the **police** is a fairly frequent occurrence; for advice on how to deal with this, see the "Crime and safety" section (see p.85). If you have a **breakdown**, before seeking assistance it is customary to pile bundles of sticks or foliage 50m or so behind and in front of the car. These are the universally recognized "red warning triangles" of Africa – their placing is always scrupulously observed, and you should put them out even if your vehicle is equipped with a real red triangle. Wedging a stone behind at least one wheel to stop the vehicle rolling away is also a good idea.

You might consider joining **AA Kenya** (aaakenyaco.ke), which offers temporary membership for up to six months for Ksh2000, which includes the usual breakdown and rescue services, where available.

### Choosing and running a vehicle

A normal saloon (sedan) car is sufficient if you are driving around Nairobi, up and down the main coastal road or sticking to the major tarred highways

between cities. However a high-clearance **four-wheel drive** (4WD) vehicle is recommended for anywhere else. Most car rental companies will not rent out non-4WD vehicles for use in the parks, and rangers will often turn away such cars at the gates, especially in wet weather. Maasai Mara and the mountain parks (Mount Elgon, Mount Kenya and the Aberdare range) are the most safety-minded.

Four-wheel drive **Suzuki jeeps** are the most widely available vehicles, but ensure you get a long wheel-base model with rear seats, room for four people (or five at a pinch) and luggage space at the back. These are more stable than the stumpy short-wheelbase versions. Other good options, also commonly rented out, are the Nissan X-Trail and Mitsubishi Pajero. All three models are dependable, capable of great feats in negotiating rough terrain and can nearly always be fixed by a local repair workshop.

You shouldn't assume that the vehicle is roadworthy before you set off. Have a good look at the engine and tyres, and don't set off without checking the spare wheel (preferably two spare wheels) and making sure that you have a few essential tools, including a tow rope. You should also always carry spare water, and if you are going off the beaten track, also consider spare fuel in a jerrican, a spare fan belt and brake fluid. You are responsible for any **repair and maintenance work** that needs doing while you're renting the vehicle, but good car rental companies will reimburse you for spare parts and labour, and expect you to call them if you have a breakdown, in which case they will often send out a mechanic to help.

When you get a **flat tyre**, as you will, get it mended straight away: it costs very little (Ksh100–200) and can be done almost anywhere. Local mechanics are usually very good and can apply ingenuity to the most disastrous situations. But spare parts, tools and proper equipment are rare off the main routes. Always settle on a price before work begins.

At the time of writing, the **price of petrol** (gasoline, always unleaded) ranges from roughly Ksh100–120/litre (£0.65–1/litre), depending on the retailer, the remoteness of the town and Kenya's latest oil imports. There is occasionally a choice of regular or premium, but the latter is the norm. **Diesel** is ten to fifteen percent cheaper. When filling, which is always done by an attendant, check the pump is set to zero. In city petrol stations you can sometimes pay by credit card, but don't count on it as their card reader may be out of action. However in Nairobi, and increasingly at big highway petrol stations, there are ATMs if you need to get cash.

## Driving on the roads

You can drive in Kenya with either a valid **driving licence** from your home country, or an international one. A **GPS** SatNav device or smart phone is useful, as road signs tend to be sporadic and there are few detailed, accurate road maps.

Be cautious of abrupt changes in road surface. On busy **tarmac roads**, “tramlines” often develop, parallel with the direction of travel. Caused by heavy trucks ploughing over hot blacktop, these can be deep and treacherous, making steering difficult. Slow down.

Beware of animals, people, rocks, branches, ditches and potholes – any combination of which may appear at any time. It is accepted practice to honk your horn stridently to warn pedestrians and cyclists.

**Other vehicles** are probably the biggest menace, especially in busy areas close to towns where matatus are constantly pulling over to drop and pick up passengers. It’s common practice to flash oncoming vehicles, especially if they’re leaving you little room to pass. Try to **avoid driving at night**, and be extra careful when passing heavy vehicles – the diesel fumes can cut off your visibility without warning.

Officially Kenya **drives on the left**, though in reality vehicles keep to the best part of the road until they have to pass each other.

You should recognize the supplementary meanings of **left and right** signals particularly common among truck drivers. A right signal by the driver ahead of you means “Don’t try to pass me”, while the left signal which usually follows means “Feel free to pass me now”. Do not, however, automatically assume the driver can really see that it is safe for you to pass. In fact, never assume anything about other drivers.

Beware of **speed bumps**, found wherever a busy road has been built through a village, and on the roads in and out of nearly every town. Try to look out for small bollards or painted rocks at the roadside, but usually the first you’ll know of speed bumps is when your head hits the roof.

**Driving in towns and cities**, and especially in Nairobi, you may need to adopt a more robust approach than you would use at home, or risk waiting indefinitely at the first busy junction you come to. There is no concept of yielding or giving way in Kenya: most drivers occupy the road forcefully and only concede when physically blocked by another vehicle or someone in uniform with a weapon. Although it sounds highly confrontational, incidents of “road rage” seem few and far between.

Finding somewhere to **park** is rarely a problem, even in Nairobi or Mombasa. There are council

traffic wardens in most large towns from Monday to Saturday, from whom you can buy a 24-hour ticket (the only option) for Ksh50–150. If you don’t, your car may be clamped or towed away. Be careful not to park inadvertently on yellow lines, which are often faded to near-invisibility.

## Off-road driving

Although there are few parts of Kenya where 4WD vehicles are mandatory, you would be well advised not to go far off tarmac in a two-wheel-drive vehicle. A short cloudburst can transform an otherwise good dirt road into a soft-mud vehicle trap, and even unsurfaced entrance roads and access tracks can become quagmires in the wet. Take local advice if attempting unsurfaced roads in the rainy season.

If you have to go through a large muddy puddle, first kick off your shoes and wade the entire length to check it out (better to get muddy than bogged down). If it’s less than 30cm deep, and the base is relatively firm (ie your feet don’t sink far), you should be able to drive through. Engage 4WD, get into first gear, and drive slowly straight across, or, if there’s a sufficiently firm area to one side, drive across at speed with one wheel in the water and one out. For smaller puddles, gathering up speed on the approach and then charging across in second gear usually works.

It’s harder to offer advice about approaching **deep mud**. Drive as fast as you dare, never oversteer when skidding – and pray.

On a mushy surface of “**black cotton soil**”, especially during or after rain, you’ll need all your wits about you, as even the sturdiest 4WDs have little or no grip on this. It’s best to keep your speed down and stay in second gear as much as possible. Try to keep at least one wheel on vegetation-covered ground or in a well-defined rut.

If you do **get stuck**, stop immediately, as spinning the wheels will only make it worse. Try reversing, just once, by rewinding the engine as far as you can before engaging reverse gear. If it doesn’t work, you’ll just have to wait for another vehicle to pull you out.

## Buses, matatus and taxis

Safety should be your first concern when travelling by public transport: matatus, and to a lesser extent buses, have a bad **safety record**. The most dangerous matatus are those billed as “express” (they mean it). Don’t hesitate to ask to get out of the vehicle if you feel unsafe, and to demand a partial refund, which will usually be forthcoming.

Whatever you’re travelling on, it’s worth considering your general **direction** through the trip and

**DISTANCE CHART**

Distances are given in kilometres

	Busia	Eldoret	Embu	Garissa	Isebania	Isiolo	Kakamega	Kericho	Kisii	Kisumu	Kitale	Lamu (Mokowe)	Lodwar	Loiyangalani	Malaba
<b>Busia</b>	–	157	537	794	305	534	87	195	223	110	149	1120	445	692	33
<b>Eldoret</b>	157	–	393	650	275	390	97	161	193	117	72	975	365	536	128
<b>Embu</b>	537	393	–	329	460	194	476	344	442	428	463	654	687	566	520
<b>Garissa</b>	794	650	329	–	720	461	710	608	661	699	733	355	966	895	794
<b>Isebania</b>	305	275	460	720	–	526	242	186	87	193	350	1077	649	747	328
<b>Isiolo</b>	534	390	194	461	526	–	437	339	438	423	534	787	711	428	517
<b>Kakamega</b>	87	97	476	710	242	437	–	133	161	49	110	1074	406	640	85
<b>Kericho</b>	195	161	344	608	186	339	133	–	101	82	229	926	530	554	216
<b>Kisii</b>	223	193	442	661	87	438	161	101	–	111	269	984	566	649	246
<b>Kisumu</b>	110	117	428	699	193	423	49	82	111	–	157	1029	455	639	135
<b>Kitale</b>	149	72	463	733	350	534	110	229	269	157	–	1047	299	600	119
<b>Lamu (Mokowe)</b>	1120	975	654	355	1077	787	1074	926	984	1029	1047	–	1313	1223	1100
<b>Lodwar</b>	445	365	687	966	649	711	406	530	566	455	299	1313	–	720	417
<b>Loiyangalani</b>	692	536	566	895	747	428	640	554	649	639	600	1223	720	–	662
<b>Malaba</b>	33	128	520	794	328	517	85	216	246	135	119	1100	417	662	–
<b>Malindi</b>	1032	910	726	345	940	874	992	861	905	945	956	218	1207	1169	1037
<b>Maralal</b>	460	299	338	665	517	198	405	331	426	409	371	970	495	230	428
<b>Marsabit</b>	798	646	406	668	784	256	729	597	696	680	716	1045	797	228	772
<b>Meru</b>	522	385	98	409	524	51	469	337	437	421	457	740	704	413	514
<b>Mombasa</b>	931	794	607	463	874	755	877	745	785	826	863	334	1112	1051	920
<b>Moyale</b>	1125	898	653	969	1035	505	977	845	946	928	965	1297	1054	477	1021
<b>Nairobi</b>	478	313	130	366	343	279	395	264	306	345	380	695	630	569	437
<b>Naivasha</b>	391	224	205	443	325	301	308	177	275	260	305	767	545	484	353
<b>Nakuru</b>	302	157	272	507	296	231	240	108	210	192	227	834	475	453	284
<b>Namanga</b>	619	474	287	523	505	436	650	424	465	510	541	926	794	731	600
<b>Nanyuki</b>	456	311	117	447	449	78	394	263	360	344	382	775	631	431	439
<b>Narok</b>	324	261	259	499	203	365	262	157	164	212	319	823	584	580	347
<b>Nyahururu</b>	362	218	176	505	356	173	299	169	311	250	286	833	536	396	345
<b>Nyeri</b>	464	315	74	405	456	137	403	269	368	353	387	730	637	480	447
<b>Sekenani Gate</b>	338	346	345	584	173	453	279	175	181	231	388	908	680	664	364
<b>Shimoni</b>	1018	874	686	543	899	834	956	824	867	908	945	414	1194	1141	999
<b>Taveta</b>	763	619	431	728	645	580	701	569	611	652	684	575	936	883	742
<b>Voi</b>	784	640	452	622	715	599	722	592	632	672	711	469	959	901	768

Malindi	Maralal	Marsabit	Meru	Mombasa	Moyale	Nairobi	Naivasha	Nakuru	Namanga	Nanyuki	Narok	Nyahururu	Nyeri	Sekenani Gate	Shimoni	Taveta	Voi
1032	460	798	522	931	1125	478	391	302	619	456	324	362	464	338	1018	763	784
910	299	646	385	794	898	313	224	157	474	311	261	218	315	346	874	619	640
726	338	406	98	607	653	130	205	272	287	117	259	176	74	345	686	431	452
345	665	668	409	463	969	366	443	507	523	447	499	505	405	584	543	728	622
940	517	784	524	874	1035	343	325	296	505	449	203	356	456	173	899	645	715
874	198	256	51	755	505	279	301	231	436	78	365	173	137	453	834	580	599
992	405	729	469	877	977	395	308	240	650	394	262	299	403	279	956	701	722
861	331	597	337	745	845	264	177	108	424	263	157	169	269	175	824	569	592
905	426	696	437	785	946	306	275	210	465	360	164	311	368	181	867	611	632
945	409	680	421	826	928	345	260	192	510	344	212	250	353	231	908	652	672
956	371	716	457	863	965	380	305	227	541	382	319	286	387	388	945	684	711
218	970	1045	740	334	1297	695	767	834	926	775	823	833	730	908	414	575	469
1207	495	797	704	1112	1054	630	545	475	794	631	584	536	637	680	1194	936	959
1169	230	228	413	1051	477	569	484	453	731	431	580	396	480	664	1141	883	901
1037	428	772	514	920	1021	437	353	284	600	439	347	345	447	364	999	742	768
–	939	1035	725	118	1292	600	687	756	708	805	742	784	756	827	195	382	249
939	–	345	250	821	577	340	251	212	505	196	345	154	253	429	900	653	663
1035	345	–	309	1010	247	535	620	495	696	335	621	429	394	705	1091	835	858
725	250	309	–	702	557	225	302	372	381	76	357	168	133	442	782	525	548
118	821	1010	702	–	1269	481	568	637	597	692	625	668	640	711	80	265	157
1292	577	247	557	1269	–	783	845	739	939	583	869	679	642	953	1337	1082	1103
600	340	535	225	481	783	–	85	155	161	205	143	185	164	227	560	305	328
687	251	620	302	568	845	85	–	70	252	193	126	98	238	210	651	395	418
756	212	495	372	637	739	155	70	–	322	158	132	64	162	217	720	465	486
708	505	696	381	597	939	161	252	322	–	368	301	348	100	387	672	417	439
805	196	335	76	692	583	205	193	158	368	–	286	94	58	370	763	508	528
742	345	621	357	625	869	143	126	132	301	286	–	191	287	86	234	109	469
784	154	429	168	668	679	185	98	64	348	94	191	–	102	277	747	490	514
756	253	394	133	640	642	164	238	162	100	58	287	102	–	372	712	448	467
827	429	705	442	711	953	227	210	217	387	370	86	277	372	–	788	533	554
195	900	1091	782	80	1337	560	651	720	672	763	234	747	712	788	–	343	235
382	653	835	525	265	1082	305	395	465	417	508	109	490	448	533	343	–	109
249	663	858	548	157	1103	328	418	486	439	528	469	514	467	554	235	109	–

which side of the vehicle will be shadier. This is especially important on dirt roads when the combination of dust, a slow, bumpy ride and fierce sun through closed windows can be unbearable.

Inter-city bus and matatu **fares** are typically around Ksh3–5/km (or if the vehicle is “deluxe” in some way, up to Ksh7/km). Even the longest journey by matatu, the 345km, six-hour journey from Nairobi to Kisumu, should cost no more than Ksh1400 (or Ksh2400 by “deluxe” vehicle). Fares go up and down depending on the price of fuel, and rarely does anyone attempt to charge more than the approved rate. Baggage charges should not normally be levied unless you’re transporting a huge load. If you think you’re being overcharged, check with other passengers.

## Buses

**Buses** cover almost the whole country. Some, on the main runs between Nairobi and Mombasa, and to a lesser extent the centre and west, are fast, comfortable and keep to schedules; you generally need to **reserve** seats in advance. The easiest procedure is to mention your destination to a few people at the bus park (known as “stage” or “stand” in Kenya) and then check out the torrent of offers, though the large companies have proper ticket offices at or near the bus stations where they list their routes and prices. Once you’ve acquired a seat on the bus, the wait can be almost a pleasure if you’re in no hurry, as you watch the throng outside and field a continuous stream of vendors proffering wares through the window.

## Matatus

Along most routes the matatus these days are Nissan or Toyota **minibuses** (in rural areas one or two old-style **pick-up vans**, fitted with wooden benches and a canvas roof, still ply their trade). Matatus can be fast and are sometimes dangerous: try to sit at the back, to avoid too graphic a view of blind overtaking. And, at the risk of being repetitious, always ask to get out if you’re unhappy with the driving.

**Regulations** introduced by the Kibaki government in 2003 state that all seats are supposed to be fitted with seat belts (they are often broken); loud music is banned (it is often still played, and is the one saving grace for some passengers); and electronic speed governors are supposed to prevent speeds above 80km/h (they are often broken or deliberately disabled). Passenger numbers are, in theory, strictly limited, but on many routes, especially off the main roads, the old maxim of “room for one more” still applies. *Kitu kidogo*, a “little something” for police officers at roadblocks,

ensures blind eyes are turned towards many infringements. There’s more on bribery elsewhere (see p.85), but it’s worth pointing out that passengers are never expected to contribute directly.

Matatus can be an enjoyable way of getting about, giving you close contact, literally, with local people, and some hilarious encounters. They are also often the most convenient and sometimes the only means of transport to smaller places off the main roads.

When it comes to making a **choice of matatu**, always choose one that is close to full or you’ll have to wait inside until they’re ready to go, sometimes for hours. Beware of being used as bait by the driver to encourage passengers to choose his vehicle, and equally of a driver filling his car with young touts pretending to be passengers (spot them by the newspapers and lack of luggage). Competition is intense and people will tell brazen lies to persuade you the vehicle is going “just now”. Try not to hand over any money before you’ve left town. This isn’t a question of being ripped off, but too often the first departure is just a soft launch, cruising around town rounding up more passengers – and buying petrol with the fare you’ve just paid – and then going back to square one.

If your destination isn’t on a main matatu route, or if you don’t want to wait for a vehicle to fill up (or, indeed, if you just want to travel in style), drivers will happily negotiate a price for the **charter** or rental of the whole car. The sum will normally be equivalent to the amount they would receive from all the passengers in a full vehicle over the same distance.

## Taxis and other vehicles

Transport in towns often comes down to **private taxis**. You’ll need to discuss the fare in advance: most drivers will want to be earning something like Ksh500/hour (even if stuck in traffic or waiting) plus at least Ksh200/km, and would balk at driving anywhere for less than Ksh300–400. In some towns, there’s also the option of using a **tuk-tuk** (three-wheeled vehicles imported from Asia, on which fares are around half the price of an ordinary taxi). Alternatively, many areas have motorcycle taxis that can carry one or two people without luggage (known as a **piki-piki**), or a bicycle with a padded passenger seat for one (known as a **boda-boda**). Most drivers/cyclists will be straight with you (if surprised to be taking a fare from a foreigner), but if you’re in doubt about the correct fare, which is generally around Ksh40/km, asking passers-by will invariably get you a quick sense of the proper price to pay.

**MATATU TERMS**

The following terms are worth knowing: a **stage or stand** is the matatu yard; a **manamba or turn boy** is the tout who takes the fares and hangs on dramatically; and **dropping** is what you do when you disembark, as in "I'm dropping here".

**Trains**

Rift Valley Railways runs Kenya's few passenger train services. The overnight **Nairobi–Mombasa** train ran twice a week in each direction at the time of writing, departing Nairobi Mon and Fri at 7pm, and scheduled to arrive in Mombasa around 10am; leaving Mombasa Tues and Sun at 7pm, it is scheduled to arrive in Nairobi around 10am. While this timetable indicates the journey takes around thirteen hours, in reality it usually takes at least up to seventeen hours, and on occasion, the train can pull in anything up to eight hours late. Do not plan any tight connections at either end. The delays are in fact not necessarily caused by the passenger train itself, but by freight trains holding it up on the line. Frustrating as the almost routine delays are, they at least mean you are likely to have a few hours of daylight to watch the passing scene: approaching Nairobi from Mombasa, the animals on the Athi Plains, or approaching Mombasa, the sultry crawl down to the ocean.

Construction of the original line began in Mombasa in 1895 and the railway reached Nairobi in 1899. The China Road & Bridge Corporation (CRBC) is currently building a **new standard-gauge railway** alongside the old narrow-gauge line, which is set for completion in early 2018 (see box, p.322). When rail services are functioning on the new line, passenger trains will travel at a top speed of 120km/h, reducing journey time to an estimated four hours. For that reason those who want to experience the Nairobi–Mombasa sleeper service will need to do it soon.

There used to be a (sporadic) overnight Nairobi–Kisumu service, though this has not been operational since 2012. In the future, however, the new Chinese-built railway is expected to extend from Nairobi to Malaba on the Ugandan border and eventually all the way to Kigali in Rwanda.

The present Nairobi–Mombasa train has three **seat classes**, but only first and second offer any kind of comfort. In first class, you get a private, two-berth compartment; second class has four-berth compartments, which are usually single-sex,

though this may be disregarded if, for example, all four people are travelling as a party; third class has hard seats only and is packed with local passengers because it's half the price of the cheapest bus (even though it takes considerably longer).

The trains are old, the carriages and compartments are far from luxurious, and the toilets are not all European-style, but they begin the journey freshly cleaned, and in a reasonably good state of repair. **Meals and bedding**, available in first and second class only, cost a little extra, and must be paid for when you buy your ticket, though it's normally assumed you will take them: they are included in the fare. The linen is always clean, washing water usually flows from the compartment basins, meals are freshly prepared and service is good. On the Mombasa train, dinner is served in two sittings (7.15pm & 8.45pm). You should go for the first sitting for the best food and service, and the second if you'd rather take your time. Breakfast is served from 6am. Singles and couples will usually have to share their tables with other diners.

You can usually rely on getting **drinks** – bottled water, cold beers and sodas, and sometimes wine, all at fairly standard prices. It's a good idea to **take some snacks** with you – you'll be glad of them if the train rolls in several hours late, which it usually does.

The Rift Valley Railways website ([www.riftvalleyrail.com](http://www.riftvalleyrail.com)) includes **schedules** and fares, but is not always entirely accurate. The Man in Seat Sixty-One ([www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)) is a much more reliable and up-to-date source of information.

Nairobi–Mombasa **fares**, including bedding, dinner and breakfast are as follows: first class Ksh4405, second class Ksh3385, third class (seat only) Ksh680. You need to purchase tickets at the stations, ideally the day before so you can check that the train is running. Tickets can also be **booked** in advance with most travel agents and tour operators in Nairobi and Mombasa: you pay extra as a booking fee, but it's much easier and most can arrange delivery of train tickets to hotels. If you do it this way, expect to pay around \$65 for first class and \$54 for second class (you can't pre-book third class). Try East Africa Shuttles & Safaris ([www.eastafrica.shuttles.com](http://www.eastafrica.shuttles.com)) or Go Kenya Safari Tours & Safaris ([www.kenyatraintravel.com](http://www.kenyatraintravel.com)) or ask the tour operator you may already have arrangements with.

**Boats and ferries**

There's no passenger **shipping** along the Kenya coast apart from small vessels connecting the islands of the Lamu archipelago, and the Likoni car and foot

passenger ferry across Kilindini Creek between Mombasa island and the south coast. It's illegal for foreigners to ride on ocean-going **dhow**s – and there are few working dhows left – but there are plenty of opportunities to go on short dhow trips from the resorts for fishing, snorkelling or sightseeing.

## Hitchhiking

**Hitchhiking** is how the majority of rural people get around, in the sense that they wait by the roadside for whatever comes, and will pay for a ride in a passing lorry or a private vehicle, the cost being close to what it would be in a matatu. Private vehicles with spare seats are comparatively rare, but Kenyans are happy enough to give lifts, if often bemused by the idea of a tourist without a vehicle.

Highway hitching **techniques** need to be fairly exuberant: beckon the driver to stop with a palm-down action, then quickly establish how much the ride will cost. And be sure to choose a safe spot with room to pull over. Alternatively, use a busy petrol station and ask every driver – the most likely way to get a ride. In terms of **safety**, it's highly unlikely you would run into any unsavoury characters, but do not get in if you think the vehicle is unroadworthy, or the driver unfit to drive.

Hitching rides at the gates of **national parks and reserves** is rarely successful, simply because the passing vehicles will probably be safari vehicles with paying clients on board and they are very unlikely to give someone a free ride. You will have better luck by asking the Kenya Wildlife Services staff at the gates (if it's a KWS park) who may be able to offer you a lift to the park headquarters within the park, which in some cases is close to the KWS accommodation and campsites.

## Cycling

If you have enough time and determination, you'll find Kenya's climate and varied terrain make it an interesting – if challenging – country in which to **cycle**. However on main roads be cautious of trucks and matatus, and be very wary about cycling in the cities, especially Nairobi, which is congested with traffic most of the time. It's also not permitted to cycle in the parks and the reserves (for obvious reasons), although some of the smaller game parks that do not have predators allow bikes, including Hell's Gate at Naivasha, Kakamega Forest, Saiwa Swamp and some of the private conservancies such as those on the Laikipia plateau. You also need to consider the **season** – you won't make much progress on dirt

roads during the rains – and the **altitude**. Even if you are in good shape at sea level, don't be surprised if you feel lethargic and your legs feel like lead weights for the first couple of days up in the hills.

As well as renting, you can take a bike with you to Kenya, or buy one locally. Most towns have **bicycle shops** selling basic mountain bikes and trusty Indian three-speed roadsters, starting from around Ksh7000. We've mentioned some outlets in Mombasa (see p.404) and Nairobi (see p.123). Whatever you take, and a mountain bike is certainly best, it will need low gears and strongly built wheels, and you should have some essential spare parts and a secure lock.

Buses and matatus with **roof racks** will always carry bicycles for about half the regular fare, even if flagged down at the roadside. Trucks will often give you a lift, too. The Nairobi–Mombasa train also take bikes at a low fixed fare.

# Accommodation

**There's a huge diversity of accommodation in Kenya, ranging from campsites and local lodging houses for a few hundred shillings a night to luxury lodges and boutique tented camps that can easily cost many hundreds of dollars a night.**

All coastal resorts, safari camps and lodges operate **seasonal rates**, approximately divided into high-, mid- and low-season (sometimes called "green season"; see box opposite). Some of the smaller safari camps and lodges close for a couple of months over the March–June period (shutting up shop as soon as Easter has passed), not just due to lack of demand or weather conditions, but to allow for maintenance and refurbishment. Listings throughout the guide show the latest details on months of closure, though these can vary from year to year. All cheap lodgings and standard hotels, however, are non-seasonal and their rates stay the same throughout the year.

## Hotels, lodges and tented camps

The term **hotel** covers a very broad spectrum in Kenya (the word *hoteli* means a cheap café-restaurant, not a place to sleep). At the top end are the big tourist and business-class establishments. In the game parks, they're known as lodges. Some establishments are very good value, but others are shabby and overpriced, so check carefully before

splurging. Try to reserve the more popular places in advance, especially for the peak season.

At the mid-price level, some hotels are old settlers' haunts that were once slightly grand and no longer quite fit in modern Kenya, while others are newer and cater for the Kenyan middle class. A few are fine – charmingly decrepit or fairly smart and semi-efficient – but a fair few are just boozy and uninteresting.

As a rule, expect to pay anything from Ksh3000–10,000 for a decent double or twin room, with bathroom en suite, known in Kenya as “self-contained” (and abbreviated throughout this book to s/c). Most rooms, even at lower price points, are s/c; if not, this is indicated in our review. Breakfast is usually included, but if you want to have breakfast elsewhere, the price will be deducted. Features such as TV – often with DSTV (satellite) service – floor or ceiling fans and air conditioning will all put the price up, and are sometimes optional, allowing you to make significant savings at cheaper hotels.

Older **safari lodges** may show their age with rather unimaginative design and boring little rooms (those that date back to the 1960s were built when just having a hotel in the bush was considered an achievement). Today, the best of the big lodges have public areas offering spectacular panoramas and game-viewing decks, while the rooms are often comfortable chalets or **bandas**. The most expensive, boutique lodges may have as few as just half a dozen rooms, constructed entirely of local materials, ingeniously open-fronted yet secure, with stunning views, and invigorating open-air showers.

If you want to experience the fun of camping without the hassle, opt for a **tented camp**. These consist of large, custom-made tents erected over hard floors. The walls flap in the breeze and large areas of mosquito screening can be uncovered to allow maximum ventilation (at night, they zip up tight to keep the insects out). All the usual lodge amenities, including electricity (generated by solar panels), are installed, and the furniture is what you'd expect to find in a comfortable hotel, though often with a nod to bush life, such as canvas chairs on the deck and beds made from reclaimed branches of dead wood. At the back, the bathroom

is usually more of a solid-walled structure, with a flush toilet – though the “safari shower” or “bucket shower”, using hot water delivered on request by staff to a pulley system outside the bathroom, is a popular anachronism that works very well and saves water. In the centre of the camp, the usual public areas will include a dining room and bar, or in smaller camps a luxurious “mess tent” with sofas and waiters proffering drinks, where you'll eat together with your hosts and the other guests and share the day's experiences in an atmosphere that always has a little *Out of Africa* in it.

Some lodges and camps are surrounded by a discreet, or not so discreet, **electric fence**. This gives you the freedom to wander at will, and is better if you have children in tow, but detracts from the sense of being in the wild. Places that don't have such security may ask you to sign a disclaimer to limit their liability in the event that a large mammalian intruder should abruptly terminate your holiday. In practice, although elephants, buffaloes and other big animals do sometimes wander into camps, serious incidents are exceptionally rare and you have nothing to worry about. After dark, unfenced camps employ escorts – usually traditionally dressed, spear-carrying *askaris* (see box, p.61) – to see you safely to and from your tent.

**Meals** in the safari lodges and camps are generally good, although in the large places the buffets can be a little mediocre. The best lodges have their own organic vegetable gardens and prepare gourmet dinners, fresh bread and excellent pastries in the middle of nowhere.

Almost all of Kenya's upmarket and midrange hotels and beach resorts provide **wi-fi**: it's either free or you pay for a voucher (with a password) at reception. Whether wi-fi is charged or not largely depends on the room rate – the more expensive places usually include it as part of the service. The larger safari lodges and tented camps will also offer wi-fi, though if you need to pay extra be cautious of the cost – it usually uses a remote server and may be expensive, even if just hooking up for an hour or two. Places in remote areas (mountain lodges, small tented camps, out-of-the-way parks and reserves) won't be able to offer wi-fi, and of course neither will establishments at the very cheap end of the scale such as B&Ls.

## SEASONS (APPROXIMATE)

**Peak** Dec 21 to Jan 2.

**High** July 1 to Oct 31.

**Mid** Jan 3 to Easter, Nov 1 to Dec 20.

**Low/Green/Closed** After Easter to June 30.

## Boarding and lodgings

In any town you'll find basic guesthouses called **Boarding and lodgings** (for which we've coined the abbreviation “B&L”). These can vary from a mud

shack with water from the well to a multistorey building of en-suite rooms, complete with a bar and restaurant, and usually built around a lock-in courtyard/parking area. Most B&L bathrooms include rather alarmingly wired “instant showers”, giving a meagre spray of hot water 24 hours a day.

While you can find a room for under Ksh1500 – and sometimes much less – in any town, **prices** are not a good indication of quality. If the bathrooms don't have instant showers, then check the water supply and find out when the boiler will be on. The very cheapest places (as little as Ksh500 or less) will not usually have self-contained rooms, so you should check the state of the shared showers and toilets. You won't cause offence by saying no thanks.

The better B&Ls are clean and comfortable, but they tend to be airless and often double as informal brothels, especially if they have a bar. If the place seems noisy in the afternoon, it will become cacophonous during the night, so you may want to ask for a room away from the source of the din. Moreover, if it relies on its bar for income, security becomes an important deciding factor. Well-run B&Ls, even noisy, sleazy ones, have uniformed security staff and gated access to the room floors. You can leave valuables with the manager in reception, though use your judgement.

## Cottages and homestays

Increasingly, it's possible to book **self-catering** apartments, villas or cottages, especially on the coast. Try Langata Link Holiday Homes (🌐holidayhomeskenya.com), Kenya Beach Rentals (🌐kenya-beachrentals.com) and Kenya Holiday House (🌐kenyaholidayhouse.com). Uniglobe Let's Go Travel (🌐uniglobeletsgotravel.com) is a highly recommended agent for accommodation across the spectrum. Also, try **Airbnb**, mostly for Nairobi and the coast.

## Camping

If you're on a budget and have a flexible itinerary, there are organized **campsites** (campgrounds) in Kenya, but bear in mind that, away from the parks and reserves, they are few and far between and almost non-existent on the coast. There are exceptions, however, such as around the lakes in the Rift Valley, and many hotels in the Central Highlands and Western Kenya allow campers to set up tents on their lawns and will provide bathroom facilities. If you do decide to carry a tent, bring the lightest one you can afford and remember its main purpose is to keep insects out,

### ACCOMMODATION PRICES

The **accommodation rates** given in this guide are for double- or twin-bed occupancy during the high season (see box, p.59). For peak season (Christmas and New Year) expect to pay another 10–20 percent on top of high season rates.

All cheap lodgings, all Nairobi hotels and most town hotels (unless they're on the coast) are non-seasonal. All coastal resort hotels, safari camps and lodges operate seasonal rates.

The rates have been provided directly by the property and are the non-resident “rack rates” – in other words the regular walk-in rates that you will pay for the night, including taxes (16 percent VAT and 2 percent training levy). If there is more than one class of room, the standard or cheapest option is the one quoted.

For **dorm beds** and **campsites**, the price per person has been given, while for **self-catering** cottages, houses and *bandas*, the price given is for the whole unit.

**Children's** rates are usually 50 percent of the adult rate when they are sharing with adults, and 75 percent when sharing their own room, and generally apply to kids between 2 and 11 years old; some places have reduced rates for teenagers. However, this does not apply to all venues and there may be different age brackets and costs depending on the establishment.

Agents, online **booking** services and the property's own reservations desk or website may offer cheaper deals for advance bookings. And you can, of course, always ask if they can offer you a discount – for paying by cash; because you're a first-time visitor; because you're a repeat visitor; or for any other plausible reason you care to approach with. Cheap hotels quote their rates in Kenyan shillings, while hotels aimed at the tourist market tend to quote in US dollars or sometimes in euros and occasionally UK pound sterling. You can always settle your bill in Kenyan shillings, but check the exchange rate is fair.

**Residents' rates** for Kenyan citizens and residents, including expat workers (typically around 30–40 percent discount), are offered at most establishments above the budget bracket. There's no hard-and-fast rule, but most places charging above \$80–100 a room have two-tier pricing.

**ACCOMMODATION TERMS****a/c** air-conditioned**AI** all-inclusive**askari** or **soja** guard, security officer**banda** cottage or chalet**BB** bed & breakfast**B&L** boarding and lodging, a cheap guesthouse**FB** full board (lunch, dinner, bed and breakfast)**fly camp** mobile camp**HB** half board (dinner, bed and breakfast)**hoteli** cheap restaurant or café, *not* a hotel**lodge** safari hotel in the bush**long-drop** non-flushing toilet – a hole over a deep pit**mabati** corrugated-iron roof**package** the usual full-board arrangement in high-end safari camps and lodges, with all drinks and activities included**rondavel** small, round hut, containing beds but no bathroom**safari shower** also known as a bucket shower, a refillable reservoir of hot water above the shower area**s/c** “self-contained” room, with en-suite bathroom**star-bed** four-poster bed mounted on vehicle wheels, pulled onto a deck at night and guarded by *askaris***tented camp** a camp in the bush, or in a game park, consisting of large, walk-in safari tents with solid bathrooms (see p.59)**tree-hotel** animal-viewing lodge on stilts, after the style of *Treetops* (see p.193)

so one made largely of mosquito netting could be ideal.

Kenya's few **privately owned campsites** have toilets and showers with hot water and possibly a restaurant, bar and sometimes a swimming pool. *Askaris* are usually provided to guard tents and vehicles. Some also offer the option of renting a tent, and there may be other accommodation such as dorms and simple twin/double/triples, where bathroom facilities are usually shared with campers. These are often in basic *bandas* but they nearly always have adequate bedding and lighting.

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS; [kws.org](http://kws.org)) manages all the campsites in national parks. Each has one or two very basic “**public campsites**”, often located near the gates or the KWS park headquarters further into the park. These generally do not have to be pre-booked – you simply pay for camping on arrival at the gate along with your park entry fees. Current daily per-person rates are \$20 (\$30 in Amboseli and Lake Nakuru). For that hefty price, you often get little more than a place to pitch your tent and park your vehicle, and showers and toilets that are often rudimentary.

KWS's so-called “**special campsites**”, are in reality simply sites which have to be reserved on an exclusive basis for private use, and are often used by

tour operators on camping safaris. Some of them are in particularly attractive locations, but unlike public campsites they have no facilities whatsoever: you need to be entirely self-sufficient to use them. Special campsites attract a flat reservation fee of Ksh7500 (around \$75) plus the daily per-person rates (\$35, or \$50 in Amboseli and Lake Nakuru). To reserve them, contact KWS in Nairobi (☎ 020 6000800), or visit the KWS headquarters at Nairobi National Park Main Gate (see p.144). Camping fees in the major national parks (Aberdare, Amboseli, Nairobi, Lake Nakuru, Tsavo East and Tsavo West) are normally deducted from your pre-paid Safari Card (see p.71).

Opportunities for **wild camping** depend on whether you can find a suitable, safe site. In the more heavily populated and farmed highland districts, you should always ask someone before pitching in an empty spot, and never leave your tent unattended. Far out in the wilds, hard or thorny ground is likely to be the only obstacle. During the dry seasons, you'll rarely have trouble finding dead wood for a fire, so a stove is optional. You can buy camping gas cartridges in a few places in Nairobi (see box, p.129). Camping near roads, in dry river beds or on trails used by animals going to water is highly inadvisable (see p.86). Camping on the beach is illegal unless it's on private property such as in the compound of a beach resort.

# Food and drink

**For the vast majority of Kenyans, meals are plain and filling. Most people's living standards don't allow for frills, and there are no great national dishes. For culinary culture, it's only on the coast, with its long association with Indian Ocean trade, that a distinctive regional cuisine has developed, with rice and fish, flavoured with coconut, tamarind and exotic spices, the major ingredients. For visitors, and more affluent Kenyans, the cities and tourist areas have no shortage of restaurants, with roast meat, seafood and Italian restaurants the most common options among a range of cuisines that runs the gamut from Argentine to Thai. The "Language" section contains a list of useful food terms (see p.603).**

As for **cost**, in the most basic local restaurant, a decent plate of food can be had for less than Ksh300. Fancier meals in touristy places rarely cost more than Ksh2000 a head, though there are a number of establishments where you could easily spend Ksh5000 or more. When checking your bill, remember there's a 16 percent value-added tax (VAT) on food and drink and a 2 percent government training levy in all but the smallest establishments. In most establishments, taxes are included in the prices on the menu, but in some they are extra, basically adding nearly one-fifth to the bill. An "optional" service charge can be added, too, and of course you may want to add a tip (see p.93).

Many restaurants on the coast serve halal food, and elsewhere in the country you'll usually be able to find a Somali-run *hoteli* that has halal meat.

## Home-style fare and nyama choma

In any *hoteli* (cheap local café-restaurant) there is always a list of predictable dishes intended to fill customers' stomachs. Potatoes, rice and especially **ugali** (a stiff cornmeal porridge) are the national staples, eaten with chicken, goat, beef or vegetable stew, various kinds of spinach, beans and sometimes fish. Portions are usually gigantic; half-portions (ask for *nusu*) aren't much smaller. But if this is not to your taste, even in small towns, you'll find cafés with a menu of mostly fried food – eggs, sausages, chips, fish, chicken and burgers.

The standard blow-out feast for most Kenyans is a huge pile of **nyama choma** (roast meat, usually

goat, beef or mutton). *Nyama choma* is usually eaten at a purpose-built *choma* bar, with beer and music the standard accompaniments, and *ugali* and greens optional. You order by weight (half a kilo is plenty), direct from the butcher's hook or out of the fridge. After being roasted, the meat is brought to your table on a wooden platter, chopped to bite-size with a sharp knife, and served with crunchy salt and *kachumbari* – tomato and onion relish.

## Snacks and breakfast

**Snacks**, which can easily become meals, include samosas, chapattis and miniature kebabs (*mishkaki*). Also look out for *mandaaazi* (sweet, puffy, deep-fried dough cakes), and *mkate mayai* ("bread of eggs") in Swahili), a light wheat-flour pancake wrapped around fried eggs and minced meat, usually cooked on a huge griddle. Snacks sold on the street include cassava chips, roasted corncobs, and, in country areas, at the right time of year, if you're lucky, roasted termites (which go well as a bar snack with beer).

**Breakfast** varies widely. Standard fare in a *hoteli*, or in the dining room of a B&L, consists of sweet tea and a chapatti or a doorstep of white bread thickly spread with margarine. Modest hotels offer a "full breakfast" of cereal, eggs and sausage, bread and jam and a banana, with instant coffee or tea. If you're staying in an upmarket hotel or safari lodge, breakfast is usually a lavish acreage of hot and cold buffets that you can't possibly do justice to.

## Restaurant meals

Kenya's seafood, beef and lamb are renowned, and they are the basis of most restaurant meals. **Game meat** used to be something of a Kenyan speciality, most of it farmed on ranches. Giraffe, zebra, impala and warthog all regularly appeared at various restaurants. These days, only captive-farmed ostrich (excellent, like lean beef) and crocodile (disappointingly like gristly fish-tasting chicken) are legal.

**Indian restaurants** in the larger towns, notably Nairobi and Mombasa, are generally excellent, with *dhal* lunches a good standby and much fancier regional dishes widely available too. When you splurge, apart from eating Indian, it will usually be in **hotel restaurants**, with food often very similar to what you might be served in a restaurant in Europe or North America. The **lodges** usually have buffet lunches at about Ksh1200–2000, which can be great value, with table-loads of salads and cold meat.