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Kenya

Vital Statistics

- It is roughly the size of France, yet almost all of it is scenic
- A coral reef runs for almost the entire length of its coastline
- The country is bisected by the equator and split by the Great Rift Valley
- Over 70 tribes co-exist here, yet 70% of the population is Christian
- Africa's second-highest mountain takes its name from the country
- Its national parks & reserves occupy an area larger in size than Switzerland

Getting There And Around

By air: Kenya's principal airport is Nairobi, and there are plenty of direct and stopover service from the UK. Fares start at around £400. Expect to pay more for a direct flight on Kenya Airways and British Airways than a round-robin trip via the Middle East with an airline such as Emirates. However a stopover at somewhere like Dubai has the benefit of offering superb duty free prices. So if you're planning to buy a pair of binoculars or a video camera for your safari...

By land: Look on a map and it seems possible to enter Kenya from any one of several countries: Ethiopia, Tanzania, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. However border crossing points can be closed without notice. Contact the Foreign & Commonwealth Office for information on the stability of individual countries. A number of UK tour operators do run London - Africa overland trips, many of which include Kenya.

Once in Kenya road transport is the most popular (and cost effective) transport solution. Taxis, matatus (private vehicles, usually minibuses) and public buses ply both short and long-haul routes. Driving at night is dangerous, particularly in matatus where the drivers work extremely long hours. One of the few reliable railway services in operation is the popular Nairobi - Mombasa line with its 1st and 2nd class accommodation.

Check This Out: www.fco.gov.uk/. Ceefax p470+. tel: 020 7238 4503.

East Africa Handbook 2000. Footprint. ISBN 0844246301

East & Southern Africa. Bradt. ISBN 1898323607

When To Go

Many parts of Kenya experience two rainy seasons; the short rains and the long rains. Most visitors plan their trip around them.

Dec - Feb Hot and dry. The most popular season.

Mar - May The long rains.

June - Sept Mainly dry.

Oct - Nov The short rains.

What Gear To Take

If you're travelling in the dry seasons then it is going to be very hot, especially on safari. Long-sleeved cotton shirts and trousers, wide-brimmed sun hats and plenty of sun protection are vital. It's easy to forget how strong the sun is whilst driving along in an open-top Land Rover. In the mountains you'll want the same clobber as you would wear whilst walking in the UK in the Spring, with the addition of a sun hat for the day and perhaps a lightweight duvet jacket if you're venturing onto Mt Kenya. On safari, at the beach or at altitude, make sure you have large water bottles and means of purifying water.

Money

The currency is the Kenyan shilling. UK£ and US\$ can be exchanged on arrival, and if you have excess Shillings left over at the end of your trip they can be exchanged back for a western currency.

Language

Kenya has two official languages: English and Swahili. Whilst many Kenyans that you meet will speak English, it is polite (and will make a good impression) if you

make an attempt to speak a few words of the local dialect. Seb Mankelow, who has travelled around Kenya, gives us this brief guide to the language:

Getting Started

Hakuna Matata	No Problem (if you only learn two words, learn these!)
Jambo	Good day/Hello
Karibu	Welcome
Habari	How are you?
Habari gani?	What is your news?
Mzuri sana	Everything is fine/OK /very well thank you
Kwa heri	Goodbye
Tutaonana	Until we meet again
Asante	Thank you
Hapana	No
Ndiyo	Yes
Hodi?	(shout this at a front door before you enter) - May I come in?
Toka	Go away or get out of the way
Pole pole	Slowly slowly (you will walk this way!)
Epesi	Quick
Moto	Hot
Baridi	Cold
Iko wapi...	Where is the...
Chai	Tea
Mwizi!	Stop thief! (Shout this)
Polisi	Police
Pesa	Money

Conversations. A typical intro might be:

Local	"Jambo"
You	"Jambo"
local	"Habari"
You	"Mzuri sana"
Local	"(Some incomprehensible sentence because he thinks you speak fluent Swahili)"

You

“Unasema kingereza” (Do you speak English?!)

Check This Out: Lonely Planet Swahili Phrasebook, ISBN 0864425090

Medical Matters

It's a tragic fact that malaria and HIV claim millions of lives in Africa every year, and Kenya is no exception. Both can be avoided by taking the correct malarial prophylaxis and - to put it bluntly - avoiding sexual encounters. In addition heat-related illnesses, bilharzia, meningitis and for those going to altitude, hypothermia and acute mountain sickness all pose problems for the visitor. A wide number of inoculations are recommended for Kenya including Hepatitis A & B, Yellow Fever and Typhoid. Consult your GP for advice regarding inoculations and preventative treatments.

Check This Out: Altitude illness, Prevention & Treatment. Bezruchka. ISBN 1871890578.

Email

The internet is just beginning to make an impact in Kenya. Telephone connections are notoriously fickle and slow, but it is possible to access international email accounts such as yahoo (www.yahoo.com) at internet offices.

Safety

Scams and robberies are commonplace in parts of Kenya that are regularly visited by tourists. In Nairobi you'll be tested by a variety of con-artists, from individuals who are 'escaping persecution' to up-front muggings. The best advice is not to walk the streets showing any visible signs of wealth, not to walk anywhere at night and to avoid eye contact with strangers who approach you. Giving money could result in you being 'arrested' by a 'policeman' (complete with fake I.D. card). Another payment will of course make all your problems go away. The sad reality is that you may end up refusing help to people whose stories are genuine, but for your own safety it is perhaps better to give a donation to a reputable African aid organisation either in the UK or in-country. The good news is that the overwhelming majority of Kenyans are honest and friendly people who dislike the

criminals as much as you do! If you are in trouble enter a shop or other establishment and ask for assistance. You will almost certainly receive it.

Nairobi

Nairobi is not the world's most attractive capital city and most people use the place to transit through. Because of its reputation for muggings and theft (the city is often referred to as 'Nairobbery') most tourists travel around by taxi. There are comfortable and expensive hotels to stay in as well as cheaper hotels downtown, and plenty of European-style restaurants and fast-food joints. You can catch up with the latest films in one of several excellent and comfortable cinemas. The jewel in Nairobi's crown is its national park. No-where else in the world can you spot giraffe and lion in their natural habitat within sight of a capital city (see 'Safari Parks').

The Coast

Mombasa is Kenya's second-largest city. Accessible by train or plane from Nairobi, this is the place to head for in order to 'chill out'. Beautiful beaches can be found to the south and north of Mombasa. Water-skiing, windsurfing, snorkelling and scuba diving are all possible here. Further north is Kenya's oldest town, Lamu. Oft-described as the 'Kathmandu of Africa', Lamu is renowned for its dhow cruises.

Safari

Kenya's biggest attraction is its safari parks. Since the death of George Adamson in 1989 Kenya has made a real effort to curb poaching, and is the only African country taking an unwavering stand against the lifting of the ivory trading ban. Kenya has nearly 50 parks and reserves as well as a handful of marine parks which have been established to protect fish and coral reefs. For the tourist, there are no noticeable differences between 'parks' and 'reserves'. Two of the most famous are:

Nairobi National Park

An incredible park within sight of the capital city. See rhino, lion and giraffe set against the distant backdrop of a cityscape. For people on a tight timetable, take a

half-day tour before your flight home. Within its 117 square kilometres are more bird species than can be found in the whole of the UK.

Masai Mara National Reserve

The king of all the parks and reserves, the Masai Mara is teeming with wildlife. However, two things make the Masai Mara stand out above all others. Firstly there are the Maasai people themselves who now live in the so-called 'dispersal area' on the fringes of the reserve. The Maasai have over centuries developed a symbiotic relationship with the land, resulting in a place where man and animal live in harmony with one another. The reserve is also famous for the annual wildebeest migration which moves through the reserve in the summer months. Over half a million wildebeest make the annual trek, but thousands are caught by predators including crocodiles, hyenas and lions.

Why are 'Masai' and 'Maasai' spelt differently?

Well, Maasai is orthographically correct but the Kenya Government's Standing Committee on Geographical Names has decided that "incorrect spelling established by usage will be accepted" - hence the spelling of Masai when referring to the reserve. Just thought you'd like to know!

I Did It! Susan Rawling's first experience of Kenyan wildlife was in the Masai Mara. "There was a real concentration of animals. Over a period of two days I saw lion, elephant, giraffe, antelope, wildebeest and zebra. One day I spotted about 150 vultures feasting on the leftovers of a recent kill. The local boys came around to our camp in the evening and performed several dances, whilst an elder explained what each dance meant. I visited other parks afterwards including Hell's Gate National Park that had even more wildlife, but the Masai Mara left the greatest impression."

The Kenya Wildlife Service website has a superb description of every park and reserve, including details of how to reach them and where to stay: www.kenya-wildlife-service.org.

Check This Out: Lonely Planet, Watching Wildlife: East Africa. ISBN 1864500336

Trekking & Mountaineering

One of Kenya's most famous attraction is Mt Kenya. At 5199m it is Africa's second highest mountain. Unlike its higher but technically easier neighbour, Kilimanjaro, Mt Kenya attracts world-class mountaineers as well as trekkers. The mountain has three principal summits. Batian and Nelion can only be reached by climbers using ropes and harnesses. Point Lenana (4895m) can be reached in walking boots. The biggest danger for walkers on Mt Kenya is the fast rate of ascent. It is technically possible to reach the summit in two days. However, unless you are fully acclimatised such an attempt would only end in failure and a large dose of potentially fatal Acute Mountain Sickness. So – go easy! A round-trip of at least five days will maximise your enjoyment and your chance of summit success. Mt Kenya is a beautiful mountain and has much to recommend it. There are many routes to the final campsite next to Austrian Hut. The standard route is the Naro Moru route. It's possible to stay in huts all the way to the summit but the route is not as attractive as some of the more remote routes such as the Chogoria. Other mountain regions attract far less attention than Mt Kenya. The extinct volcano of Mt Elgon, the 3000m Cherangani Hills and the Aberdare Range can all be enjoyed without encountering the often large trekking parties associated with Mt Kenya.

Check This Out

Lonely Planet, Trekking In East Africa. ISBN 0-86442-541-4.

Kilimanjaro & Mt Kenya - A Climbing & Trekking Guide. Burns. Cordee. ISBN 1871890-98-5.

The Mountain Club Of Kenya Guide To Mount Kenya And Kilimanjaro (ISBN 9966-986-0-3) is available in bookstores in Nairobi.

Kenya's Fragile Environment

The large numbers of tourists who visit honey pots such as the Masai Mara and Mt Kenya inevitably have a detrimental effect on the environment. You can do your bit by using tour operators that have a responsible and realistic environmental policy. For example, leaving established safari trails to chase an animal not only shows a total lack of respect for the wildlife but also leads to

scarring of the landscape. Avoid using wood for fires, and do not leave any rubbish behind. The Kenya Wildlife Service is insisting that every new safari lodge is built on ecologically-sound principles. By spending your money on lodges that conform to their standards you will encourage other lodge owners to change.

‘Been there, Done That’

If you’ve already climbed Mount Kenya and enjoyed a safari around the Masai Mara, where do you go on your next visit? We asked James Grey who runs Natural Action, a specialist East African tour company with its centre of operations in Nairobi, to give us his suggestions.

“Something like four national parks get over 60% of visitors, so be different. Don’t just go to tick things off. My personal favourite is the Chyulu Hills which can be found between Nairobi and Mombasa. They are very green at the right time of year. It’s a beautiful spot and off the beaten track. You’ll need a map and must go with someone who knows the area. Another great place is near Lake Turkana towards the Ethiopian border. It is huge uncharted territory. Leakey made many of his discoveries of ancient man there. The Loita Hills is big Maasai country, as are the Rift Valley Lakes. The Lake Naivasha area is now economically driven by the cut flowers industry. Every man and his dog are growing flowers in the soil around Naivasha. To relax afterwards the coast is fabulous, particularly Tiwi Beach and Shimoni. Oh, and lions have just been introduced into the Lake Nikuru National Park.”

Natural Action can be contacted on 020 8265 5619.

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