

East Africa Directory

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This chapter contains general regional travel information. For country-specific details, see the country chapter Directory sections.

ACCOMMODATION

East Africa has a wide range of accommodation, ranging from humble cinderblock rooms with a communal bucket bath to some of Africa's most luxurious safari lodges.

Sleeping listings in this book are divided into three categories: budget (approximately US\$50 and under per double room), midrange (US\$50 to US\$150) and top-end (US\$150 and up). All prices listed in this book are high-season, except as noted. In much of the region it's often possible to negotiate significant discounts during the low-season travel months

PRACTICALITIES

- Use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electricity is 220V to 250V AC, 50Hz. Most plugs are British-style three-square-pin or European-style two-round-pin.
- *The East African* is the main regional English-language weekly. For a pan-African focus check *New African*; BBC's *Focus on Africa*; *Business Africa*; and *Africa Today*. Try *Africa Geographic* for environmental issues, and *Africa – Birds & Birding* for ornithologists.
- Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have government-run national broadcasters with radio and TV transmissions in English. BBC's World Service and Deutsche Welle transmit in English and Swahili.

from March through May. Also except as noted, hotel prices in this book include private bathroom and continental breakfast (coffee/tea, bread, jam and occasionally an egg).

Camping

There are established campsites in most national parks, as well as in or near many major towns, and in some rural tourist areas local villagers maintain camping grounds. Facilities range from none at all to well-established full-service places with hot showers and cooking areas. Prices average US\$5 to US\$10 per person per night away from the national parks – shoestring hotel rooms may be cheaper in many areas. Camping prices in this book are per person except as noted. Camping away from established sites is not advisable; in rural areas, ask permission from the village head or elders before pitching your tent. The exceptions to all this are Rwanda and Burundi, where camping possibilities range from limited to nonexistent.

In coastal areas, bungalows or *bandas* – simple wooden or thatched huts, often with only a mattress and mosquito net – offer an alternative to camping.

Hostels, Guesthouses & Budget Hotels

True hostels are rare, but mission hostels and guesthouses are scattered throughout the region. While intended primarily for missionaries and aid-organisation staff, they're generally happy to accommodate travellers if space is available. Most are clean, safe, spartan and good value.

In budget guesthouses and hotels, you generally get what you pay for, though there's the occasional good deal. The cheapest ones – and every town will have one – are poorly ventilated cement-block rooms with reasonably clean sheets, shared toilets, cold showers or a bucket bath, sometimes a fan and mosquito net and often only a token lock on the door. Rates for this type of place average from US\$5 per room per night. A few dollars more will get you a somewhat more comfortable room, often with a bathroom (although not always with running or hot water).

Many budget places double as brothels, and at many of the cheapest ones, solo women travellers are likely to feel uncomfortable. For peace and quiet, guesthouses without bars are the best choice.

Backpackers and dormitory-style places aren't as common as in southern Africa, but there are a few, with prices similar to or slightly higher than you'd pay for a room in a basic guesthouse.

Hotels, Lodges & Luxury Safari Camps

Larger towns will have one or several mid-range hotels, most with private bathroom, hot water and a fan or an air-conditioner. Facilities range from faded to good value, and prices range from US\$25 to US\$75

per person. Major tourist areas also have a good selection of top-end accommodation, with prices ranging from about US\$100 to US\$300 or more per person per night. On the safari circuits, top-end prices are generally all-inclusive.

National parks often also have 'permanent tented camps' or 'luxury tented camps'. These offer comfortable beds in canvas tents – usually en suite – with screened windows and most of the comforts of a hotel room, but they are less architecturally intrusive and with a wilderness feel. 'Mobile' or 'fly' camps are temporary camps set up for several nights, or for one season, and used for walking safaris or a more intimate bush experience away from the main tented camp.

ACTIVITIES

Each of the countries covered in this book has its own range of activities – everything from caving and white-water rafting in Uganda to chimpanzee tracking and mountain trekking in Tanzania. Following is a general overview of some of the more common activities in the region. See the country chapter Directories for much more.

Bird Watching

With well over 1000 species, East Africa is an excellent destination for ornithologists, with Uganda a particular highlight.

Boating

Local dhow trips can be arranged from various places along the coast, although this isn't always a good idea. Instead, contact a coastal or island hotel to help you charter a reliable dhow for a cruise. For more, see p622.

DIVE OPERATORS & SAFETY

When choosing a dive operator, quality rather than cost should be the priority. Consider the operator's experience and qualifications; knowledgeability and competence of staff; and the condition of equipment and frequency of maintenance. Assess whether the overall attitude is serious and professional, and ask about safety precautions: radios, oxygen, boat reliability and back-up engines, emergency evacuation procedures, first-aid kits, safety flares and life jackets. On longer dives, do you get an energising meal, or just tea and biscuits?

There are decompression chambers in Matemwe on Zanzibar's east coast, in Mombasa (although this latter one is an army facility, and not always available to the general public) and in Johannesburg. Also check the **Divers Alert Network Southern Africa** (DAN; www.dansa.org) website, which includes Tanzania and Kenya, and has a list of Zanzibar- and Pemba-based operators that are part of DAN. If you dive with an operator that isn't affiliated with DAN, it's highly recommended to take out insurance coverage with DAN.