

Kenya

Few destinations the world over can evoke such powerful and visceral images as Kenya, one of East Africa's premier safari destinations. Here, the acacia-dotted savannahs are inhabited by classic African animals, from towering elephants and prancing gazelles to prides of lions and stalking leopards. The country also plays host to the annual wildebeest migration, which is the largest single movement of herd animals on the entire planet.

However, what makes Kenya truly stand out as a traveller's destination is the vast palette of landscapes that comprise this visually stunning country. While the flaunted image of the savannahs of Masai Mara is perhaps the single key selling point for Kenya's tourist industry, intrepid travellers can also explore the barren expanses of the Rift Valley, the glacial ridges of Mt Kenya and the beaches of the Swahili Coast. This rich diversity of quintessential African environments presents opportunities for walking, hiking, diving, ballooning and so much more.

But, to simply focus on Kenya's wildlife and nature is to ignore the very people that make this country so dynamic. Kenya is a thriving multicultural country that presents a wide cross-section of everything that is classic and contemporary Africa. Everyday life brings together traditional tribes and urban families, ancient customs and modern sensibilities. While internal political life is at times tumultuous, it seems that Kenyans retain an innate self-confidence, a belief that things are improving, and a desire to see their homeland take a prominent place on the world stage.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 583,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Widely available in cities and large towns
- **Borders** Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
- **Budget** Varies; camping safaris will set you back less than US\$50 per day, while luxury tented camps can run hundreds of dollars a night
- **Capital** Nairobi
- **Languages** Swahili, English, tribal languages
- **Money** Kenyan shilling (KSh); US\$1 = KSh75, €1 = KSh108
- **Population** 38.5 million
- **Seasons** Wet (March to May, October to December), dry (January and February, June to September)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 254; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +3
- **Visa** Most visitors need a visa; the single East African tourist visa is expected to be introduced soon (see p737)



HOW MUCH?

- **Local matatu (minibus) ride** US\$0.40
- **Plate of stew/biryani/pilau** US\$1.80
- **Large juice** US\$0.90
- **Pair of kangas** US\$5
- **Taxi home** US\$6

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- **1L petrol** US\$1
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.80
- **Bottle of Tusker** US\$1.20
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$12
- **Sambusa** US\$0.15

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Masai Mara National Reserve** (p719) Expansive savannah, unmatched wildlife and the world's most fascinating traffic jam – the annual wildebeest migration.
- **Mt Kenya** (p715) Tremendous hikes and jagged peaks await on this sacred mountain, Kenya's tallest and Africa's second tallest.
- **Lamu** (p727) The ultimate Swahili cultural immersion experience that makes Tanzania's Zanzibar blush with envy.
- **Amboseli National Park** (p730) Elephants and Kilimanjaro, two big bulks combined in Kenya's most famous picture-postcard views.
- **Loyangalani** (p718) Home to harsh conditions, unforgettable tribes and the sublime Lake Turkana, the jade jewel at the end of a long quest.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The weather is generally considered to be best in January and February, when it's hot and dry, with high concentrations of wildlife. However, the parks get crowded and rates for accommodation go through the roof. Avoid Christmas and Easter (high season) unless you want to pay a fortune.

June to September (also considered high season) is generally still dry and during this period the annual wildebeest migration takes place.

During the long rains (from March to the end of May, the low season) things are much

quieter, and you can get some good deals; this is also true during the short rains from October to December.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Arrange things in advance so you can head out on safari straight after landing in Nairobi (p707). Take in the Masai Mara National Reserve (p719) for at least three days; most trips also include Lake Nakuru National Park (p715) en route. Spend half a day back in Nairobi then fly down to the coast. Spend the rest of the week soaking up the atmosphere in the crumbling Swahili ruins of Mombasa (p721), lying on tropical beaches and/or snorkelling at Watamu (p726) or Malindi (p725).
- **Two Weeks** To make the most of the beach and the bush, extend your stay in Masai Mara National Reserve (p719), then spend a few days hiking on mighty Mt Kenya (p715). Spend the remainder of your time working your way up the coast from Mombasa (p721) to Lamu (p727). Alternatively, spend the second week heading overland to the searing desert and colourful tribespeople at Lake Turkana (p718).
- **One Month** Any or all of the above trips can be combined in a month, allowing a bit of time to linger among, say, the Turkana people around Loyangalani (p718), the Samburu at Isiolo (p717) and, of course, the Maasai at Masai Mara. Other possibilities include Kakamega (p719) for a taste of Kenya's rainforests as they once were; Tsavo National Park (p731) for a real off-the-beaten-track safari; and scenic Amboseli National Park (p730) for dreamy sundowners under Mt Kilimanjaro.

HISTORY

The patchwork of ethnic groups, each with their own culture and language, which today exist side by side in modern Kenya are the result of the waves of migration, some from as early as 2000 BC, from every corner of Africa – Turkanas from Ethiopia; Kikuyu, Akamba and Meru from West Africa; and the Maasai, Luo and Samburu from the southern part of Sudan. Kenya, however, was occupied long before this: archaeological excavations around Lake Turkana in the 1970s revealed skulls thought to be around two million years