



Northern Kenya

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Why Go?

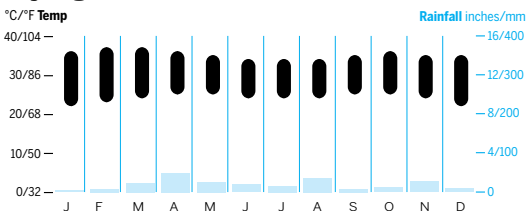
Calling all explorers! We dare you to challenge yourself against some of the most exciting wilderness in Africa. Step forward only if you're able to withstand appalling roads, searing heat, clouds of dust torn by relentless winds, primitive food and accommodation, vast distances and more than a hint of danger.

The rewards include memories of vast, shattered lava deserts, camel herders walking their animals to lost oases, fog-shrouded mountains full of mysterious creatures, prehistoric islands crawling with massive reptiles and jokes shared with traditionally dressed warriors. Additional perks include camel trekking through piles of peachy dunes, elephant encounters in scrubby acacia woodlands and the chance to walk barefoot along the fabled shores of a sea of jade.

In our 21st-century world of wireless internet and dumbed-down TV, northern Kenya is an opportunity to leave behind all that is familiar and fall completely off the radar.

When to Go

Loyangalani



Jun Head to Loyangalani for the Lake Turkana Festival.

Aug Saddle up a camel and race through the Maralal International Camel Derby.

Nov-Dec It's marginally cooler in the northern deserts.

ISIOLO TO MOYALE

For most people this route means one of two things: the wildlife riches of the Samburu ecosystem, or the road to the cultural riches of Ethiopia. But in between and beyond, this area has much more to offer. You can drink tea and track wildlife with the Samburu people, climb mist-shrouded volcanoes in the desert, blaze trails in untrammelled mountains and get so far off the beaten track you'll start to wonder whether you're still on the same planet. All told, this massive wilderness offers something to anyone whose heart sings with adventure.

Isiolo

Isiolo is where anticipation and excitement start to send your heart aflutter. This vital pit stop on the long road north is a true frontier town, a place on the edge between the cool, verdant highlands just to the south and the scorching badlands – home of nomads and explorers – to the north. On a more practical note, it's also the last place with decent facilities until Maralal or Marsabit.

Among the first things you'll undoubtedly notice is the large Somali population (descendants of WWI veterans who settled here) and the striking faces of Boran, Samburu and Turkana people walking the streets. It's this mix of people, cultures and religions that is the most interesting thing about Isiolo. Nowhere is this mixture better illustrated than in the hectic **market**.

Sleeping

Isiolo has happy homes for budget and mid-range travellers, but desperately lacks decent top-end options.

★ Range Land Hotel

COTTAGES \$

(☎) 0710114030; www.rangelandhotels.com; A2 Hwy; campsite per person KSh1000, s/d cottages KSh3000/4000; (P) (☎) About 4km south of town, this is a nice option for those with their own set of wheels. The sunny camping ground has bickering weaver birds and busy rock hyraxes in abundance, as well as neat-and-tidy stone bungalows with hot showers. Many people come to laze around in the gardens at the weekend, but during the week it's quiet.

Excellent meals are available and the house special is rabbit (KSh1200), a delicious rarity in Kenyan cuisine.

Moti Peal Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎) 064-52400; s/d KSh2500/3500; (☎) This smart place markets itself as the 'Pearl of Isiolo'. This actually says more about the state of Isiolo than the quality of the hotel, but even so it's shockingly clean, well run and has friendly management.

Bomen Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎) 064-52389; near the Mansile Hospital; s/tw KSh2500/3500; (P) (☎) The NGOs' favourite home, the Bomen Hotel has the town's most toe-curlingly frilly pink bedsheets! It also has TVs, shared terraces with views and unfailingly polite staff.

Josera Guest House

HOTEL \$

(☎) 0728059274; r KSh800-1200) Excellent-value sky blue rooms that range from tiny cubes to those large enough to swing a backpack. All have hot showers and there's a decent in-house restaurant.

Eating

There are numerous cheap eating establishments throughout the town, but hotel restaurants tend to offer more variety, as well as a more salubrious environment.

Bomen Hotel

KENYAN \$

(meals KSh400-650; ☎ 7am-11pm) A rare place serving more than the local usuals, with fried tilapia, pepper steak, goulash and curries up for grabs.

WILDLIFE IN NORTHERN KENYA

Northern Kenya is one vast wilderness and one of the few areas in East Africa where close encounters with large mammals outside protected areas are almost a given. The area contains almost a full hand of Kenya's iconic animals, but many that you know and love from the south are here in different forms. Grevy's zebras, elegant thin-striped animals, patrol the plains, as do the beautifully blotchy subspecies of giraffe known as the reticulated giraffe. Then there are all the creatures that don't tend to occur elsewhere: the gerenuk, a type of long-necked antelope, and the beisa oryx are the most obvious. The birdlife, with numerous species not found elsewhere in Kenya, is possibly even more impressive than the roll call of large mammals.