



# Nairobi

POP 3.5 MILLION

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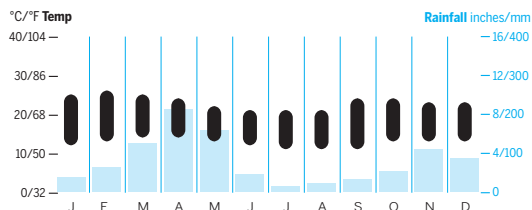
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## Why Go?

Nairobi's reputation for crime is well-known, but the horror stories obscure a vibrant and cosmopolitan city full of attractions. Primary among these is the world's only national park on the cusp of a capital city – a park packed with the free-roaming megafauna more associated with remote African plains. There's also an elephant orphanage and a brilliant park that has played a crucial role in saving the Rothschild's giraffe from extinction – a visit to both promise experiences that will rank alongside your favourite wildlife memories of your time in Kenya. Not far away, the former home of Karen Blixen (of *Out of Africa* fame), an outstanding museum and fantastic restaurants and hotels all add to the city's appeal. And those horror stories? Yes, many of them are true. But the majority of visitors to Kenya's capital never experience a problem. If you keep your wits about you, you're far more likely to leave with a lasting impression of Kenya's dynamism than tales of personal disaster.

## When to Go

### Nairobi



**Jan & Feb, Jun–Sep** The driest months; Nairobi National Park is at its best

**Oct & Nov** The rain cools things off without causing more than the usual traffic jams

**Mar–May** You don't want to be here when it rains, and rains, and rains...

## History

Nairobi is a completely modern creation, and almost everything here has been built in the last 100 years. In fact, until the 1890s the whole area was just an isolated swamp. But, as the tracks of the East African Railway were laid down between Mombasa and Kampala, a depot was established on the edge of a small stream known to the Maasai as *uaso nairobi* (cold water). The Maasai were quickly and forcibly removed from the land, as the British East Africa protectorate had ambitious plans to open up the interior to white colonial settlement.

In addition to its central position between the coast and British holdings in Uganda, Nairobi benefited from its extremely hospitable environment. Its proximity to a network of rivers meant that water was abundant, and its high elevation and cool temperatures were conducive to comfortable residential living without fear of malaria. Although Nairobi did struggle in its early years, with frequent fires and an outbreak of the plague, by 1907 the booming commercial centre had replaced Mombasa as the capital of British East Africa.

Even after the first permanent buildings were constructed, Nairobi remained a frontier town, with rhinos and lions freely roaming the outskirts. As a result, the colonial government built some grand hotels to accommodate the first tourists to Kenya – big-game hunters, lured by the attraction of

shooting the country's almost naively tame wildlife. In 1946, Nairobi National Park was established as the first national park in East Africa. It remains the only wildlife reserve in the world bordering a capital city.

After achieving independence in 1963, Nairobi grew too rapidly, by most accounts, putting a great deal of pressure on the city's infrastructure. Power cuts and water shortages became a common occurrence, and enormous shanty towns of tin-roofed settlements sprung up on the outskirts of the capital. In the name of modernisation, almost all of the colonial-era buildings were replaced by concrete office buildings, which today characterise much of the modern city.

However, Nairobi has been successful in establishing itself as East Africa's largest city and main transport hub. The capital is also situated firmly at the centre of national life and politics, though this position did the city no favours in 1998 when the US embassy on Moi Ave was bombed by militants with links to al-Qaeda. More than 200 Kenyans were killed in the attack, and although four suspects were convicted and sentenced to life without parole, many locals were angered by what they considered lenient sentences (they had wanted the death penalty) and meagre compensation.

In December 2007, the shanty towns of Nairobi were set ablaze as riots broke out following a disputed presidential election.

## NAIROBI IN...

### Two Days

Start by getting up close and personal with wildlife at the **Giraffe Centre** and the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**. A visit to the **Karen Blixen Museum** is recommended for *Out of Africa* fans, then go shopping at the **Kazuri Beads & Pottery Centre** and **Utamaduni**. In the evening, dine at **Carnivore** and dance at the **Simba Saloon**.

On day two, head downtown to visit the **National Museum**, view the city from the **Kenyatta Conference Centre**, and step back in colonial time at the **Railway Museum**. Have a drink at the legendary **Thorn Tree** or **Lord Delamere Terrace & Bar**. In the evening, eat posh at **Tamarind Restaurant** and have a whole lot of fun at **Simmers**.

### Four Days

Spend the best part of your third day in **Nairobi National Park**, but leave enough time for a tour of **Kibera** shanty town. For dinner, eat at either **Rusty Nail** or the **Karen Blixen Coffee Garden**.

For your final 24 hours, branch out into the **Ngong Hills** and the **grave of Denys Finch Hatton**, do a bit of shopping in the **curio markets**, eat at **Haandi**, Kenya's best Indian restaurant, then drink the night away at **Gypsy's Bar**.