



# Northern Kenya

## Includes »

Isiolo to Ethiopia .....	195
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy .....	199
Archer's Post.....	200
Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba National Reserves .....	201
Marsabit .....	205
Moyale .....	209
Maralal to Turkana's Eastern Shore.....	211
South Horr.....	215
Loyangalani .....	216
Marich to Turkana's Western Shore.....	218
Eliye Springs.....	220

## Best of Nature

- » Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (p199)
- » Samburu, Buffalo Springs & Shaba National Reserves (p201)
- » Matthews Range (p204)
- » Il Ngwesi (p200)

## Best of Culture

- » Loyangalani (p216)
- » Marsabit (p205)
- » South Horr (p215)
- » Moyale (p209)

## Why Go?

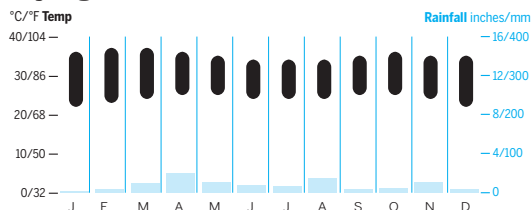
Calling all explorers! We dare you to challenge yourself against some of the most exciting wilderness in Africa. Step forward only if you're able to withstand appalling roads, searing heat, clouds of dust torn up by relentless winds, primitive food and accommodation, vast distances and more than a hint of danger (see p210).

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 to fall completely off the radar.

## When to Go

### Loyangalani



**Jun-Jul Work** up a sweat running from rhinos during the Lewa Safaricom Marathon.

**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 ETHIOPIA

For most people this route means 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 game 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 everyone whose heart sings with adventure.

### Isiolo

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Isiolo is where anticipation and excitement first start to send your heart a-flutter. This vital pit stop on the long road north is a true frontier town, a place on the edge, torn 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.

One of 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 midrange travellers, but desperately lacks decent top-end options.

### Range Land Hotel

COTTAGES \$\$

(0721434353; A2 Hwy; camping KSh500, tw cottages KSh2500; P) About 8km south of town, this is a nice option for those with their own set of wheels. The sunny campsite has bickering weaver birds in abundance, as well as neat and tidy stone bungalows with hot showers. Many people come to laze around in the gardens at weekends, but during the week it's quiet. Excellent meals are available and the house special is rabbit (KSh1200), a delicious rarity in Kenyan cuisine.

### Josera Guest House

HOTEL \$

(0725228482; r with breakfast KSh800-1500) 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.

### Gaddisa Lodge

LODGE \$\$

(0724201115; www.gaddisa.com; camping KSh400; s/tw with breakfast KSh3000/4000; P) Around 3km northeast of town is this spotlessly clean Dutch-run lodge, where peaceful cottages overlook the fringes of the northern savannah country. There's an occasionally full pool to wallow like a hippo in.

### Moti Peal Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(52400; s/d KSh2500/3500; P) This brand spanking new 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 its shockingly clean, well run and has friendly management. It's squat toilets only, though.

### Bomen Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(52389; www.bomenhotel.com; s/tw KSh2500/3500; P) The NGOs' favourite home, the Bomen Hotel has the town's most toe-curlingly frilly pink bed sheets! It also has TVs and shared terraces with views.

## 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 the protected areas are almost a given. The north contains a full hand of almost all of Kenya's animals, but many that you know and love from elsewhere take on slightly different forms up here, where the climate is harsher. Zebras become elegant Grevy's zebras, giraffes turn into beautifully blotchy versions of those down south and then there's all the creatures that occur only in Kenya's dry north. The gerenuk, a type of long-necked antelope, and the beisa oryx are only the most obvious. The bird life, with numerous species not found elsewhere in Kenya, is possibly even more impressive than the roll call of large mammals.