



# Rift Valley

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## Why Go?

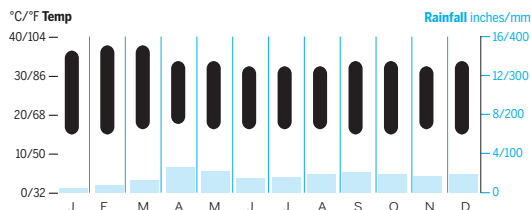
Africa's Great Rift Valley is one of the continent's grand epics. Here in Kenya, the battle of geological forces that almost rent Africa in two has left the Rift Valley looking as if it were created by giants: the ribbon of steaming and bubbling soda lakes (inscribed on Unesco's World Heritage list in 2011) scars the valley like the footprints of a massive hippopotamus, and numerous dried-out volcanic cones stand to attention like amplified termite mounds.

The Rift Valley's dramatic landscapes are lent personality by some of central Kenya's most charismatic wildlife. Here, the massed colonies of flamingos turn the earth to pink, endangered rhinos snuffle by the lakeshore and Rothschild's giraffes stride gracefully across lacustrine plains. Lions laze under trees, and leopards lurk in the undergrowth.

It's this combination of stunning natural forms and soulful wildlife that gives the region its charm. And in this sense the Rift Valley is all that's good about Kenya in microcosm.

## When to Go

### Nakuru



### Nov–Mar

Migratory bird species abound; weather clear, dry and hot after November rains.

### Jun–Oct

Generally fine weather, no rains until October; good for climbing Mt Longonot.

### April & May

Avoid as rains drench the valley, mosquitoes proliferate and some roads are impassable.

## Longonot National Park

One of the shapeliest peaks in all the Rift Valley, Mt Longonot (2776m) and its serrated crater rim offer fabulous views. The dormant volcano rises 1000m above the baking hot valley floor and was formed 400,000 years ago; it last erupted in the 1860s. The park itself covers only 52 sq km, and was set up to protect the volcano's ecosystem and little else.

### Sights & Activities

#### Mt Longonot

HIKING

(Map p110; adult/child US\$20/10; guide to crater rim/summit & back KSh1500/2500) Pull on your hiking boots and enjoy the rare treat of hiking through the Kenyan bush. But this isn't just any hike. The one- to 1½-hour hike from the park gate up to the crater rim (2545m) is strenuous but, without question, worth the considerable effort. There are two steep stretches that will challenge those not used to hiking. On the lower slopes you may spot impala, zebra and occasionally buffalo. Your reward is to emerge at the lip of the crater rim for superb views of the 2km- to 3km-wide crater – a little lost world hosting an entirely different forest ecosystem. The Rift Valley views are also marvellous, but your eyes will be drawn inward to the crater, inhabited only by rarely spotted baboons and klipspringer.

It takes between 1½ and 2½ hours to circumnavigate the crater; watch for occasional steam vents rising from the crater floor. The name 'Longonot' comes from the Maasai name *olo nongot*, which means 'mountain of many summits'; and the rim is anything but a flat-level walk; the final push up to Mt Longonot's summit is particularly steep. The prize is fine westerly views towards Hell's Gate National Park.

Including time for pausing to take in the views, this 21km trek from the park gate and back should take about five to six hours.

The trail is clear and easy to follow and taking along a KWS (Kenya Wildlife Service) ranger is not necessary, although a good one will certainly enhance your trek; rangers can be arranged at the main gate as you enter.

### Sleeping

Most people stay in Lake Naivasha, a 30-minute drive away.

#### Oloongonot Campsite

CAMPGROUND \$

(camping US\$15) This campsite sits just beyond the gate on the way up to the crater. There's space to pitch a tent and a toilet and shower block but no firewood; you'll need to bring all your own food and cooking supplies.

### Information

**Kenya Wildlife Service** (☎050-50407; [www.kws.org/parks/parks\\_reserves/MLNP.html](http://www.kws.org/parks/parks_reserves/MLNP.html); park admission adult/child US\$20/10, safari card not valid)

### Getting There & Away

If you're driving, Mt Longonot is 75km northwest of Nairobi on the Old Naivasha Rd. If you're without a vehicle, take a matatu from Naivasha to Longonot village, from where there's a path (ask locals) to the park's access road.

## Naivasha

☎050

Bypassed by the new A104 Hwy to Nairobi, Naivasha is the gateway town for both Longonot and Hell's Gate National Parks. It's a pleasant enough workaday Kenyan town that now exists primarily to service the area's blossoming flower industry, but it's hard to see why you would choose to stay the night here rather than at the lake shore. If nothing else, it's a good place to change money (banks line Moi Ave), stock up on supplies and check your email.

### WILDLIFE OF THE RIFT VALLEY

Kenya's Rift Valley is one of the country's premier birdwatching regions, with an astonishing congregation of species year-round, but especially during the November to March migration period. Flamingos are generally present year-round, but can move from lake to lake.

Lake Nakuru National Park is one of Kenya's finest parks, with both black and white rhinos in residence, as well as lions, leopards, reintroduced Rothschild's giraffes, zebras, buffaloes, olive baboons and black-and-white colobus monkeys.