



# Western Kenya

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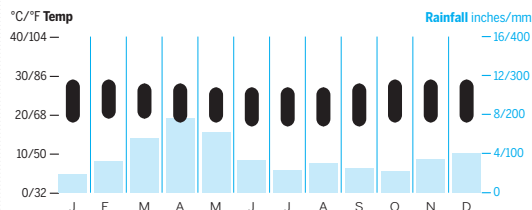
## Why Go?

For most people, the magic of western Kenya is summed up in two poetic words: Masai Mara. Few places on earth support such high concentrations of animals, and the Mara's wildebeest-spotted savannahs are undeniably the region's star attraction. Drama unfolds here on a daily basis, be it a stealthy trap coordinated by a pride of lions, the infectious panic of a thousand wildebeest crossing a river or the playful pounce of a cheetah kitten on its sibling.

But there is much more to western Kenya than these plains of herbivores and carnivores. The dense forests of Kakamega are buzzing with weird and wonderful creatures, the rain-soaked hills of Kericho and their verdant tea gardens bring new meaning to the word 'green', and amid the boat-speckled waters of Lake Victoria lie a smattering of seldom-visited islands crying out for exploration.

## When to Go

### Kisumu



**March–May** The 'heavy rains' fall at this time, particularly in the cooler Western Highlands.

**July–October** With the arrival of the wildebeest migration, the Masai Mara groans with herbivores.

**November & December** The 'lesser rains' appear briefly before things really dry out in January.

## MASAI MARA

Dream of Africa and you dream of the Masai Mara. This huge expanse of gently rolling grassland – specked with flat-top acacia trees and trampled by thousands-strong herds of zebra and wildebeest – is the ultimate African cliché. But for once the reality lives up to the image, and for many people this reserve is not just the highlight of their Kenyan adventure but the very reason they came in the first place.

### Narok

☎ 050 / POP 24,000


Three hours west of Nairobi, this ramshackle provincial town is civilisation's last stand before the vast savannahs of the Masai Mara and the region's largest town. It's a friendly and surprisingly hassle-free place, but few travellers have reason to stop. Most people roll on in, browse the curio shops while their driver refuels, then roll on out again.

The town's only attraction is the small **Narok Museum** (adult/child KSh500/250; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sun) and its displays on traditional and contemporary Maasai culture, as well as that of other Maa-speaking people.

### Sleeping & Eating



#### Chambai Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎ 22591; s/d from KSh1050/1250; ) The standard rooms out the back are simple, spotless and sport mosquito nets. The newer and pricier 'super' rooms in the main building have inviting beds, balconies, large TVs and huge bathrooms. The waiters here see enough tourists to know you'll want your soda served cold.

#### Seasons Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 020-2220572; reservationseasonsnarok@gmail.com; B3 Hwy; camping KSh700, s/d from KSh3000/4000;  ) While undeniably nicer than anything else around, the Seasons isn't that much better than the Chambai to warrant paying triple. Locally it is regarded as having the best restaurant in town although its buffet (KSh700, lunch and dinner) has seen better days – possibly some time ago.

### Information

**Barclays Bank** (B3 Hwy) With a temperamental ATM.

**Info Point Cyberdome** (B3 Hwy; per hr KSh60) The last reasonably priced connection before entering the Mara.

### Getting There & Away

**Narok Line** matatus run between Narok and Nairobi (KSh400, three hours) from the Shell petrol station on the B6 Hwy. All other matatus leave from the main matatu stand just around the corner in the centre of town. Destinations include Naivasha (KSh350, 2½ hours), Kisii (KSh400, three hours), Kericho (KSh400, 2½ hours) and Nakuru (KSh400, two hours).

Public trucks also leave from the matatu stand to Sekenani and Talek gates for between KSh300 to KSh400, depending on the condition of the road.

Several petrol stations pump the elixir of vehicular life – fill up, it's much cheaper here than in the reserve.

## Masai Mara National Reserve

The world-renowned Masai Mara needs little in the way of introduction; its tawny, wildlife-stuffed savannahs are familiar to everyone who owns a TV set and the scene for umpteen documentaries and movies (most recently Disney's *African Cats*).

The Masai Mara (or Mara as locals affectionately refer to it) is the northern extension of Tanzania's equally famous Serengeti Plains and is jointly managed by the Narok County Council and the Mara Conservancy (on behalf of Trans-Mara County Council). The whole ecosystem is greatly extended by the numerous privately and community owned conservancies and group ranches that surround the reserve.

Reliable rains and plentiful vegetation underpin this extraordinary ecosystem and the millions of herbivores it supports. Wildebeest, zebra, impala, eland, reedbeek, waterbuck, black rhino, elephant, Masai giraffe and several species of gazelle all call the short-grass plains and acacia woodlands of the Mara home. This vast concentration of game accounts for high predator numbers including cheetah, leopard, spotted hyena, black-backed jackal, bat-eared fox, caracal and the highest lion densities in the world.

### Sights & Activities

#### Wildlife Drives

DRIVING TOUR

Whether you're bouncing over the plains in pursuit of elusive elephant silhouettes or parked next to a pride of lions and listening to their bellowed breaths, wildlife drives are the highlight of a trip to the Mara.