

DESTINATIONS

The best safari holidays in Kenya

'I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up that I was not happy,' said Ernest Hemingway. He must have planned his safaris well – follow his lead with our guide to a safari in Kenya

BY GEORDIE GREIG

20 May 2022



Getty Images

The good news is that the lion you hear grunting outside your tent on the plains of **Kenya's** Maasai Mara means there are plenty of animals to see. Even better, as long as

you stay inside your tent at night you are completely safe.

Welcome to the wonders and worries of life on **safari** in this animal idyll in East Africa. Where to go? What to wear? Will I be safe? All key questions for a safari in Kenya, one of the most beautiful and thrilling places to see animals in the wild.



Three giraffes under acacia tree in the african savannah Getty Images

Nothing beats a heart-stopping moment of seeing a lioness feed her six cubs or a leopard snooze in the top branches of an acacia tree. You get shockingly close to elephants and their young crossing a river and witness thousands of wildebeest stampede a river in the Great Migration. The Maasai Mara, Kenya's best-known savannah, is safari heaven: a vast tribal area with conservation areas and public parks that mean wonderful wildlife is guaranteed. But a safari in Kenya can also be somewhat intimidating for the first time traveller.

Essential is a good camp guide who can be like having your own private David Attenborough, recognising fork-tailed drongos and showing you why a hippo has four toe marks in the sand while a rhino has three. They zip you in jeeps from your camp

across plains, over rivers and under dramatic ridges with proper anthropological knowledge and charm.



White rhino with baby in Laikipia savanna, Kenya Getty Images

Also key to any trip is advance planning. First, get jabbed a month in advance – Yellow Fever is mandatory, a **number of other vaccines are advised by the NHS**, and malaria pills are essential (start a day in advance and for 10 days after). Tourist visas can be **obtained online in advance**.

Below, we cover everything the would-be safari explorer needs to know when planning a trip to Kenya. Take these key tips so as to avoid having to make an SOS call to your travel agent.

What do I need for a safari in Kenya?

Layers are key – you can always take items off. Hot as Africa can be, early morning game drives can be cold. Avoid bright colours and stick to basic T-shirts or shirts

(preferably khaki or grey) and light trousers. Tough trainers are fine. Bring a jersey and warm(ish) jacket that zips or buttons up. Tan leather bomber jackets – easily found second-hand on eBay – are perfect.

You are likely to be flying to your camp in a small plane with less than 15kg of soft luggage. So be ruthless – three shirts are plenty as most camps do overnight laundry, for example. The key essentials are as follows: **sunglasses**, sun protection, and a hat. Less is more.

Kenya conveniently uses UK three-pin plugs for charging phones and laptops. A torch, Kindle, camera and binoculars are the only hardware needed. Don't forget to bring dollars in small notes to tip – there are no ATMs in the wild.



Millions of pink flamingos in Nakuru Lake Reserve, Kenya. Getty Images

Which safari is best in Kenya?

The area around Nairobi has attractive conservation areas, the most popular being Nairobi National Park, Lakes Nakuru and Naivasha as well as the Aberdare Mountains. The biggest name is the Maasai Mara National Reserve, home to some of Africa's best year-round game viewing as well as the annual Wildebeest Migration.

The further north you travel, the drier and hillier the landscape becomes. But there are still superb safari options here, including Samburu National Park, Lewa Wildlife

Conservancy and Laikipia. The more arid conditions suit species like gerenuk, the Somali ostrich and Grevy's zebra. Lewa is also the best place to see rhinos. On a clear day, Mounts Kenya and Meru are visible. This is the best place to see snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa and the tallest free-standing mountain in the world. Kili actually lies in Tanzania, but Kenya's Amboseli National Park is so close to the border that it has incredible vantage points.

This part of Kenya is wetter and the terrain more varied: Amboseli, for example, is a beautiful mix of open savannah, wetlands, woodlands and hills, ideal for a wide variety of species, from bat-eared foxes to elephants. Nearby are the Chyulu Hills and Tsavo East and West National Parks.

Way down on the south-eastern coast is some of Kenya's best [beaches](#). Hit Diani and nearby Galu for top beach lodges and water sports like kitesurfing. Head to Funzi Island for snorkelling and diving. I was asked for a bit of Indiana Jones with a side of luxury for my [honeymoon](#). Kenya is exactly that.

Where to stay on safari in Kenya

The many different camps vary from maharajah-grand to plain and unadorned. These are two of our favourites.



Great Plains Mara Expedition Camp

The sound outside our tent was a zebra's yappy bark. Amid a grove of 7,000 trees, this could pass as the inspiration for *Out of Africa*. Just a 50-minute hop in a small plane from Nairobi, comfort and wilderness magically combine here – a camp that is truly in the wild, with just six tents in the Maasai Mara. They are a throwback to Edwardian glamour. Campaign desks with leather-covered chairs, cotton sheets, an en-suite bathroom with copper fans and brass showers, and WiFi, all under canvas – it's all more country house than camping discomfort. Hot water 24-hours a day is solar powered. Vegetables are grown on-site and prepared by an exceptional chef who whips up fruit roulade, fennel and garlic soup and mint-scented lamb kofta. At this camp, the Big Five (except rhinos) are likely to be seen on game drives in open-sided Land Cruisers with a free-loan long-lens digital camera. Great game-viewing takes place with guides by balloon, foot or jeep. This is a camp that majors on authenticity and charm.

[BOOK YOUR STAY](#)



Andrew Howard

Mara Plains Camp

Not far from our tent, a leopard sat on the fork of a desert date tree. There is a Moroccan feel to this camp on wooden stilts and roped walkways in the Maasai Mara. It is a tented temple to camping comfort: a copper bath, leather luggage trunks as tables, a king-sized bedroom and a vast room for children. The early morning game drive from Mara Plains Camp includes a hot water bottle to ease the early morning chill. All is as eco as possible with solar power and not an inch of plastic. Your own metal water flask ice is -filled every day. The spa room opens onto acacia dotted plains. The game drive guides know their stuff, down to the gestation period of a warthog. This is nature in tooth and claw on your doorstep. A leopard scuttles away from a Topi antelope it has caught, as 16 hyenas snarl and fight for a bite. A dazzle of 1,000 zebras dots the veld. The camp's reception area for its six tents is lit by candles and lanterns. Guards with torches escort you to your tent and cheerily warn that the noises heard in the night are likely to be hippos or a lion – so enjoy the sounds, but stay inside.

BOOK YOUR STAY

When is the best time to go on a safari in Kenya?

Avoid the rainy season in April and May. The high season runs from June to October when the massive wildebeest and zebra herds are on the move in their hundreds of thousands from about August to November.

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