

of *Out* Africa

DRAMATIC LANDSCAPES,
WILDLIFE GALORE, BEACHES
TO DIE FOR AND A CERTAIN
WILD CHARM... KENYA IS
THE DARK CONTINENT
AT ITS FINEST
By Nick Dall



Clockwise from left
Cheetahs stand sentinel over the grassy plains; mile upon mile of pristine beaches; flight of the fish eagle; whale sharks off Mombasa; a storm brews over the savannah; the Maasai have a fascinating culture



You haven't been to Africa proper until you've visited Kenya. It is the grassy plain with the lone acacia and the cheetah on the termite mound. It's the palm-fringed beach and the centuries-old trading port. The snow-capped equatorial mountain and the Great Rift Valley lakes. The proud Maasai warrior and the perfect gin and tonic. It is Africa, super-sized.

It's got game

South Africans may be tempted not to bother with Kenya's game reserves, but this would be an egregious error. The iconic Maasai Mara National Reserve's (maasaimara.com) vast, rolling grassland supports an enormous population of herbivores, and has more big cats than it does trees ... which makes spotting game ridiculously easy. If at all possible, you should try to visit the Mara between July and October, when around a million migrating wildebeest and

thousands of topis, zebras and other animals pour into the reserve from Tanzania. Prices for lodges skyrocket during this time – but you won't hear anyone who's witnessed the greatest show on Earth complaining.

The Amboseli National Park (amboseli.com) is another must-see. Nestled up against the Tanzanian border, it offers the unique experience of viewing the big five in front of the iconic backdrop of Mt Kilimanjaro. Amboseli is particularly well known for its vast population of elephants, and, like the Maasai Mara, its sparse vegetation makes for epic game viewing. It's also one of the best places to immerse yourself in the incredible warrior culture of the enigmatic Maasai people, and visits to traditional Maasai villages can easily be arranged.

Lake Nakuru National Park (kws.go.ke/lake-nakuru-national-park) is famous for its great flocks of flamingos, which total 1.5 million birds in a good year. The flamingos are drawn to the lake by a special type of algae, which





KNOW
THIS

FLIGHTS
SAA and Kenya Airlines fly direct to Nairobi from Joburg.

GETTING AROUND
Although there is an extensive network of local buses, you're probably best off hiring a car with a driver. It's also quite easy (but expensive) to charter planes in Kenya.

VISAS
South Africans don't need a visa for trips shorter than 30 days.

MONEY
R1 gets you about 6 Kenyan shillings. US dollars are also widely accepted.

LANGUAGE
Being a former British colony, most people can speak English.

WEATHER
Kenya is always hot. The driest season is between January and March.

MEDICAL
Kenya is in a malaria zone and you'll need some vaccinations. Visit a travel clinic in SA before you go.

thrives in its alkaline waters, but they are not the only creatures attracted to it: the park also boasts one of Kenya's biggest populations of rhinos, and is home to lions and leopards too.

A city, a mountain and two lakes

Kenya's capital Nairobi is so much more than a stopover on the way to the game reserves or the beaches. Sip on a G&T on the oh-so-colonial Lord Delamere Terrace before feasting on far too much *nyama choma* (braaied meat) at the aptly named Carnivore. Go back in



time at the farmhouse that Karen Blixen, author of *Out of Africa*, called home, and feed a giraffe at Giraffe Manor. Did we mention that there is a game reserve right alongside the city centre? The Nairobi National Park (kws.go.ke/parks/nairobi-national-park) proudly boasts four of the big five, and is an excellent way to turn a standard business trip into an adventure-filled safari experience.

Mt Kenya may not be quite as high as Mt Kilimanjaro in neighbouring Tanzania, but this only means that it sees far fewer tourists, and remains virtually untouched. If you are feeling rather intrepid, you can climb one of the three summits (these vary in difficulty, but all three are tougher than Kilimanjaro), but there's plenty to do at the base of the mountain too. With forests, lakes, glaciers and caves, the scenery is quite unlike anything else in Kenya, and there is incredible bird and plant life too, not to mention elephants, monkeys and the occasional leopard. The increased altitude means cooler temperatures, and some of Kenya's most sumptuous hotels are located in the area.

The western regions of Kenya are the epicentre of the Great Rift Valley – one of the most incredible geographical phenomena, and most likely the birthplace of *Homo sapiens*.

The Great Rift Valley is characterised by mighty lakes and dramatic escarpments. Lake Victoria is the largest in Africa and second largest

in the world, and for sheer size, it is impossible to beat. But if it's adventure you're after, there's nowhere better than Lake Turkana, which is the most incredible and inhospitable place I have ever been. Its rocky shores are devoid of any plant life. Its waters teem with some 22 000 crocodiles, and gale-force winds are a constant companion. But the fishing is great, the Turkana tribesmen are fascinating and the sunsets are out of this world.

A rich and colourful coastline

Many people don't realise that Kenya is also a beach-lover's paradise. Its 500 km of palm-fringed coastline is lapped by the lukewarm waters of the Indian Ocean. Diani Beach offers perfect powder-white sand, and wonderful snorkelling and fishing in a very sophisticated, colonial setting. It's only 30 km from Mombasa, a mix of Arabian, Indian and African influences, which is also East Africa's largest port.

Further up the coastline is Malindi, the archetypal holiday town and a magnet for European tourists – especially Italians. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's got some of the best pizza in Africa and great nightlife too, but it is its proximity to the amazing Watamu Marine National Park (watamu.net) that sets it apart as a snorkelling and scuba-diving destination par excellence.

A few kilometres off the most northerly extreme of the coastline lies Lamu – Kenya's pristine answer to Zanzibar. Lamu is all about cobbled alleyways and intricately carved doors. About the eerie call of the muezzin at dawn and the ever-present aroma of a thousand spices. 700-year-old Lamu is so in touch with its roots that there are only two cars on the island ... and 3 000 donkeys.

Kenya will exhaust your stock of adjectives and drain your camera batteries. Be warned: once the bug has bitten, it's terminal. 📷

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