

# **Kenyan Safaris: You Go To The Animals Or The Animals Come To You**

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**Kenya is a land of national parks - 51 in total. The possibilities for safaris are endless: either you go to the animals or the animals come to you.**

Traditionally going on safari has meant taking a four wheel drive with a friendly driver cum guide, watching the animals from a safe distance and 'shooting' them with a camera. But there is another kind of safari: watching the animals from a special building as they come to drink at the waterhole.

For those who like their creature comforts the safaris can be a comfortable ride ending with breakfast at a luxurious lodge. For the more adventurous there are horseback safaris and bush dinners booked through the reserve lodges and camps. Guided

walking tours and safaris are conducted by a Masai warrior. Pitching a tent and sleeping in the wild at camp-sites located outside the reserve is another option.

It is even possible to gaze at the animals from on high from a hot air balloon. The balloon rides last approximately an hour and a half and often take place at dawn. Breakfast is prepared on the balloon burner upon landing.

The Masai Mara is one of Kenya's most famous reserves situated within the Great Rift Valley in the southern part of the country. Measuring approximately 1510sq. kilometres (approx. 938sq. miles)





in size, this unfenced savannah grassland is roughly 150 miles south-east of Nairobi. It derives its name from the indigenous people of Kenya - the Masai tribe - and the Mara River that cuts through the park.

There are four main types of topography in the Mara: the Ngama Hills to the east with sandy soil and leafy bushes liked by black rhino; the Loololo Escarpment forming the western boundary and rising to a magnificent plateau; the Mara Triangle bordering the Mara River with lush grassland and acacia

woodlands supporting masses of game especially migrating wildebeest; the Central Plains forming the largest part of the reserve, with scattered bushes and boulders on rolling grasslands favoured by the plains game.

It's definitely the place to see the big five (elephants, lions, leopards, rhinos and buffalo) together. There are plenty of zebras, antelopes, hyenas, giraffes and gazelles. The park has the largest concentration of African lions, including the black-maned lion. Leopards and cheetahs are not guaranteed.

The famous wildebeest migration

also takes place at the Mara. Over 1.5 million wildebeest, zebras and several species of antelope make an annual circular tour between the Serengeti in Tanzania and Masai Mara in Kenya in search of greener pastures. The trek happens with a fair share of animal drama as the migrating herds attract the attention of hungry predators - hyenas and lions that prey on the lame and sick animals along the way.

The animals trek for four months

(July-October) towards the Mara. The months of July and August are the best times to see the world's most spectacular wildebeest migration and the dramatic sights that occur during the mass crossing of the swollen Mara River.

The Masai Mara is also a bird watcher's paradise with more than 400 bird species, including birds of prey. There are vultures, ostriches, long-crested eagles, pygmy falcons, secretary birds, marabous,





red-winged Schalow's turacos, white-tipped crests, ross turacos, orange buffs, Pel's fishing owls, wary guinea fowl, Jackson's bustards, black-bellied hartlaubs bustards and many others.

The lodges in the reserve are luxurious homes away from home. The David Livingstone Safari Resort (formerly Voyager Safari Lodge) is situated to the north-east of the reserve in the Koiyaki Lemek Conservancy on a broad bend with hippo pools on the Mara

River. It is set in 40 acres of tropical gardens with indigenous plants and botanical gardens. The plants in the gardens are clearly labelled with a short history of each specimen.

A 'friendly' giant crocodile sleeps by the waterhole which a family of hippos have made their home. The hippos spend a lot of time lying in the water but when they decide to move they are a fantastic, sight ideal for prize winning photographs. An electric fence ensures the

animals don't get to close to the visitors but the baboons are masters at slipping under the wire or jumping over it.

A visit to the Mara is not just about animals. It is possible to visit a traditional Masai village, meet the people and experience their culture. Often the Masai morans (young Masai warriors) will perform their traditional dance: the higher they jump depends on the size of the tip. There is no shortage of traditional Masai souvenirs, art

and collectibles which make excellent presents for the folks back home.

The David Livingstone Safari Resort offers 75 double and twin rooms of which seven are interconnecting with 24 hrs electricity and hot and cold running water. The rooms face the Mara River and monkeys sometimes greet visitors as they make their way to the dining room for breakfast. Bush babies look down on the diners. They may be cute

Genet cat



Magical flowers



but the hotel staff do not encourage them and have a catapult on hand to dislodge them from the beams on the wooden ceiling. Complimentary canapés are served after evening game drives, the restaurant offers five course lunches and seven course dinners with a vegetarian option.

While in the Masai Mara visitors go to the animals at the Ark Game Lodge set in the heart of the Aberdares National Park, the animals come to the visitors.

Inspired by and named after Noah's Ark, the unique building comprises of three decks from which numerous balconies and lounges provide superb advantages for game viewing.

A floodlit waterhole and salt lick attracts a host of awesome wildlife such as elephants, rhinos, leopards, bush bucks and occasionally an elusive bongo or giant forest hog. In the evening the gnet cats lap up the milk from plates left on the steps and visitors

can get a close up view of the unique creatures through the window.

There are four game viewing areas from which to observe the ever-present wildlife. On the ground level visitors literally come face to face with animals. A ground level bunker provides excellent photographic opportunities. A lounge on one of the viewing decks remains open all night for a view of the animals, and bats.

The Ark is reached via the Aberdare Country Club 180km north of Nairobi on a road that passes through the pineapple fields of Delmont at Thika. There are 60 cabin-styled rooms, comprising of 6 singles, 37 twins,

10 doubles and 7 triple-bed cabins. All the comfortably furnished rooms have private bathrooms with a shower.

A picture is worth a thousand words and seeing the animals through the windows of the ARK or from a four-wheel drive is worth a thousand pictures. Kenya welcomes visitors eager to see the big five. The message from the majestic lion, king of all he surveys as he sits in the Mara is loud and clear: here the animals are supreme and human beings must adapt their schedules and activities to the cycles of nature and the timetable of the wildlife.

Captions:  
The ARK

The ARK







The author with  
a Masai tribesman



The Mara River