

# GUIDE TO CHOOSING A PHOTOGRAPHIC SAFARI IN KENYA

MAKING THE BEST CHOICE FOR YOUR  
WILDLIFE SAFARI IN EAST AFRICA



by Jake Grieves-Cook



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## Introduction

# *Greetings from Kenya!*

Thank you for requesting this **Guide to Choosing a Safari in Kenya**. It is intended to help people like yourself who may be overwhelmed by the masses of information available when it comes to planning a wildlife safari.

Have you found that there are just so many different places to go on safari and such a variety of itineraries available that it is hard to know where to start, what should be included, and how to make the right decision?

If so, then depending on considerations such as your budget, how long a trip you wish to take and what type of accommodation you prefer, this guide aims to narrow down the choice to show you the best options to choose from, the best way to travel on safari and what you can expect to see and experience when you make the right choice.



For over forty years I have been involved in arranging safaris to Africa for thousands of first-timers. In the past I have lived in the bush among the wild animals and I have visited very many of the leading parks and reserves in East, Central and Southern Africa.

My own favourite activity still is to go on safari to watch all the different wildlife species in their natural habitats. I hope that you will find this guide to be helpful in highlighting the questions you should ask when deciding on your own choice and I wish you an enjoyable and rewarding safari experience!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jake Grieves-Cook". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jake Grieves-Cook



## **QUESTION #1: Which country will give me the best experience as a first time safari-goer?**

### **CHOOSING YOUR AFRICAN SAFARI DESTINATION:**

**This is what my friend Brian Jackman, one of the UK's best-known travel writers on Africa, had to say, writing in the Daily Telegraph:**

*"So where should you go for your first taste of safari life? Africa is so vast, its horizons so wide. Some of its big-game strongholds are the size of small countries. Among the finest are Botswana's Okavango Delta, Zambia's Luangwa Valley and South Africa's Kruger National Park.*



***But if you are planning a once-in-a-lifetime sojourn in the bush it has to be East Africa.*** Nowhere are animals so visible as on the high plains of the Maasai Mara and Serengeti, and the land itself is quite something. Ease of access makes East Africa a natural favourite for first-timers.

*It takes only eight hours to fly from London to Nairobi. If you catch an overnight flight from Heathrow you can transfer to a light aircraft next morning and be in the bush in time for brunch. Such things are possible in Nairobi because Kenya's safari industry is backed up by an efficient tourist infrastructure with a dazzling choice of camps and lodges to suit all budgets. This is, after all, where modern safaris were invented back in the Twenties."*

**I agree with what Brian says and for people living in countries outside of Africa we recommend that for your very first safari you should choose Kenya, in East Africa, for these reasons:**

- Wide choice of International Airlines for daily flights to Nairobi with competitive fares and only 8 hours flying time from London.
- Good range of international hotels in Nairobi for first or last night before or after the safari.
- Excellent parks, reserves and wildlife conservancies with huge variety of wildlife and good choice of excellent safari camps and lodges.
- Easy access to the best-known wildlife parks in Africa by daily scheduled light aircraft flights from Nairobi.
- Friendly, hospitable people who speak English and who welcome visitors.
- Good standards of service in hotels and long tradition of looking after overseas visitors.
- Opportunity to have a beach holiday after safari at Kenya's coast or in Zanzibar.
- Add-ons available to Rwanda or Tanzania in combination with a Kenya safari.

**If you do choose a Kenya safari, then there are some more questions to ask to ensure you choose a safari that will be just right for you – please read on!**

## QUESTION #2:

### Which Parks & Reserves should I include in my trip?



Kenya is famous as the original safari country and has over 40 National Parks, Game Reserves and Wildlife Conservancies where visitors can see a huge variety of wild animals roaming free in their natural habitat.

Some of the best-known wildlife areas with the biggest variety of animal species are **Amboseli**, **Laikipia** and the **Maasai Mara**, while other famous parks & reserves are **Samburu**, **Lake Nakuru**, **Tsavo**, **Meru**, the **Aberdares** and **Mt Kenya**.

The National Parks and Game Reserves have been set aside by the government for the protection of wildlife and are open to the public. One thing to be aware of is that the number of tour vehicles can be quite high within the most popular parks and in the high season there are often a large number of visitors every day.

It is not uncommon to share an animal sighting with many other tourist vehicles and it can be annoying to have hordes of minivans jostling to get close to animals that you are watching. There are also restrictions within some of the National Parks prohibiting open sided vehicles, walks and night game drives inside the park.

**You can avoid the over-crowding in the most popular parks and reserves such as the Mara, especially in the high season, by staying instead at smaller camps in exclusive WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES which have been set up in recent years adjacent to the parks.**

## Wildlife Conservancies

**Staying in the Conservancies provides a much more intimate and private game viewing experience, allowing you to watch the animals without the presence of masses of tourist vehicles.**

Gamewatchers Safaris & Porini Camps pioneered the setting up of Conservancies on community-owned land in the Amboseli and Mara eco-systems as a form of sustainable tourism. These Conservancies are on large tracts of land made up of individual plots leased from the community members and set aside exclusively for wildlife in the vast dispersal areas adjacent to the Parks.



The Wildlife Conservancies provide additional habitat and a safe haven for the animals. The communities receive a guaranteed monthly income offering an alternative to farming and animal husbandry and they also have opportunities for jobs and livelihoods, staffing the safari camps and as conservancy rangers. Each conservancy is managed by a warden and rangers to protect the animals and virtually no poaching occurs inside the conservancies as the community is committed to protecting the wild animals since they are a source of income for them from tourism.



[Click here](#) to view a video which explains more about the importance of Conservancies in Kenya.



A conservancy safari offers a private and more exclusive wildlife viewing experience. With a limit of only 1 tent per 700 acres, and 1 vehicle per 1400 acres, they have all the wildlife without the crowds.

**The conservancies in the Amboseli eco-system (Selenkay, Elerai and Tawi Conservancies) and in the Mara eco-system (Ol Kinyei, Naboisho, Olare Motorogi, and Mara North Conservancies) offer an alternative option to visitors who wish to avoid the crowds of tourists in the parks. By staying in the camps in these conservancies you will have a much more private wildlife experience.**

Usually you will still have the chance to visit the park on one day, taking a picnic lunch with you in the safari vehicle but the rest of the time you will have game drives in the conservancy without the presence of many other vehicles but with plenty of wildlife including the big cats and elephants as well as the other famous wildlife species.



*The highest concentration of free-roaming wild lions in Africa is found in the Mara Reserve and the adjoining Conservancies*



There are many images to be seen on the internet and on Facebook showing overcrowding of vehicles in some of the parks and reserves, as illustrated below! The situation is very different in a Conservancy:

1. In a park...



*Cheetah in the Mara Reserve surrounded by vans*

2. In a conservancy....



*Cheetah in Ol Kinyei Conservancy in the Mara*

**As well as the Conservancies in Amboseli and the Mara, another good area for wildlife viewing in Kenya is in Laikipia where there are also a number of Wildlife Conservancies.** These offer a high quality safari experience with excellent wildlife, low density tourism and a wide selection of tourism facilities including small lodges, tented camps, ranch houses, community lodges and resort hotels, many of which have won international tourism awards.

Laikipia is an area of Kenya to the north of Nairobi and close to the foothills of Mt Kenya which provides a spectacular backdrop. Laikipia stretches from the slopes of Mt Kenya to the edge of the Great Rift Valley and is larger than all of Kenya's national parks and reserves except Tsavo. The combination of abundant wildlife, spectacular scenery and extraordinary cultural diversity in a setting dominated by the iconic backdrop of Mount Kenya makes for an unforgettable experience.

Over 80 different mammal species are found in the conservancies of Laikipia including black rhino, elephant, lion, leopard, Grevy's Zebra, reticulated giraffe, aardwolf, wild dog and a wealth of other species of African wildlife. Half of all the Black Rhinos found in Kenya today are in Laikipia.



In addition to elephant, rhino and lion, Laikipia is an important sanctuary for other endangered mammals, including Grevy's zebra and Reticulated giraffe, the only remaining viable population of Jackson's hartebeest, as well as an expanding population of the globally endangered African wild dog.

**Some of the recommended conservancies in Laikipia are Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Borana Conservancy, Laikipia Wilderness and Loisaba Conservancy.**



Like the conservancies adjacent to Amboseli National Park and the Mara Reserve, the Laikipia conservancies are not subject to the restrictions in the National Parks and night game drives, escorted nature walks, bike tours,

horse-riding and camel treks are available for visitors. Interactions with the local communities allow visitors to Laikipia to experience the cultures and customs of the region's Mukogodo Maasai, Samburu, Pokot and other peoples.

**For the best first-time safari experience in Kenya I would recommend combining conservancies in Amboseli, Laikipia and Mara.**

For a safari of 4 to 6 days, you could combine either **Amboseli and Mara** OR **Laikipia and Mara** and for 7 to 9 days you can combine all three areas for the ideal first safari and the perfect introduction. The scheduled flight service available out of Wilson Airport in Nairobi makes it possible to link up these areas and the short flights avoid lengthy overland journeys on rough roads.

**Ideally you should spend at least three days in each camp on your safari and certainly never less than two.** If you have more than 9 or 10 days available for your safari then it is possible to add some of the other wildlife reserves in Kenya to your itinerary or to include a visit to Tanzania or Rwanda, both of which are easily accessible from Nairobi.

For longer safari itineraries, in addition to **Amboseli, Laikipia** and **Mara**, you could include **Lake Nakuru or Lake Bogoria** to see the flamingos (but check first before you book as they move away much of the time when lake water levels increase) or add a visit to **Tsavo, Samburu, or Meru National Park**.

You can also consider the option of adding on a visit to some of the parks in **Northern Tanzania such as Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Ngorongoro and Serengeti** while a visit to **Rwanda** for a gorilla safari is another option which can be easily added to follow your safari in Kenya. (However splitting your safari between 2 or 3 countries adds to the cost and it is less expensive to add extra days in Kenya instead of travel to Tanzania as well).

If you are arriving in Nairobi after an overnight flight, instead of travelling further on your first day you could also consider starting off in Nairobi National Park staying overnight in the safari camp inside the park, Nairobi Tented Camp, or at a lodge set right beside the park like Emakoko. This means you can be on safari within a short time of arriving at the airport without having to travel far on your first day. Within Nairobi National Park you have a good chance of seeing rhino and a wide range of other African wildlife is present in the park including lion and leopard.



*Nairobi Tented Camp, the only camp within Nairobi National Park*



### QUESTION #3: Which animals can I expect to see in the different wildlife parks?



*Lions in front of the Porini Lion Camp in Olare Motorogi Conservancy, Mara*

As mentioned, my recommendation for the ideal first-time safari of up to ten days is to combine some or all of these three wildlife areas: conservancies in **Amboseli, Laikipia** and **Mara**. If you are spending a night in Nairobi then a stay in Nairobi National Park can also be added as an alternative to staying in the city itself.

These are the animals which you are likely to see on a safari to the conservancies in Amboseli, Laikipia and Mara:

#### **Amboseli National Park & Selenkay Conservancy:**



Amboseli is one of the best places to see large numbers of Elephant, while less common animals like the long-necked Gerenuk gazelle and the Lesser Kudu can be seen in Selenkay. You will also have a good chance of seeing lion, cheetah

and a wide range of plains game. The views of snow-capped Kilimanjaro provide a spectacular backdrop behind the animals!

## **Laikipia: in Ol Pejeta Conservancy or Lewa**

**Conservancy** you are likely to see lion, cheetah, leopard, hyena, Black rhino and White rhino, elephant and all the well known plains game found on the open savannah plains. Wild dogs are also seen occasionally in the Laikipia conservancies.



## **Maasai Mara & the Mara Conservancies:**



This is the best place in Africa to see large numbers of big cats and you should see several prides of lions as well as having a good chance of sighting cheetah and leopard in addition to elephant herds and many giraffe, zebra, eland, topi, gazelles and other plains animals.

During the months of July to early October, the annual wildebeest migration from the Serengeti arrives in the Mara and provides a memorable spectacle.



**Nairobi National Park:** Rhino (both the Black and the White species) are frequently seen, together with a wide variety of plains game including Cape Buffalo, Burchell's Zebra, Maasai Giraffe, Eland, Impala, other herbivores and there is always a possibility of seeing lion. From Nairobi National Park you can also visit the Sheldrick Elephant Orphans.

The full list of mammals (excluding smaller creatures like bats and mice) which I have recorded between **Selenkay Conservancy & Amboseli National Park**, Ol Pejeta Conservancy in **Laikipia**, Ol Kinyei Conservancy in the **Mara** and **Nairobi National Park** includes 71 species, all of which have seen by visitors while staying in the Porini Camps in these conservancies:

*Giraffidae*

**Maasai Giraffe**  
**Reticulated Giraffe**

*Bovidae*

**Bohor Reedbuck**  
**Chandlers Mountain Reedbuck**  
**Bushbuck**  
**Cape Buffalo**  
**Kirk's Dik Dik**  
**Common Duiker**  
**Eland**  
**Gerenuk**  
**Grant's Gazelle**  
**Thomson's Gazelle**  
**Coke's Hartebeest**  
**Jackson's Hartebeest**  
**Impala**  
**Lesser Kudu**  
**Klipspringer**  
**Oribi**  
**Beisa Oryx**  
**Fringe-eared Oryx**  
**Suni**  
**Steenbok**  
**Topi**  
**Common Waterbuck**  
**Defassa Waterbuck**  
**White-bearded Wildebeest**

*Equidae*

**Burchell's Zebra**  
**Grevy's Zebra**

*Suidae*

**Warthog**

*Elephantidae*

**Elephant**

*Hippopotamidae*

**Hippopotamus**

*Rhinocerotidae*

**Black Rhino**  
**White Rhino**

*Canidae*

**Bat-eared Fox**  
**Black-backed Jackal**  
**Golden Jackal**  
**Side-Striped Jackal**  
**African Wild Dog**

*Mustelidae*

**Honey Badger**  
**Zorilla**

*Felidae*

**Caracal**  
**Cheetah**  
**Genet Cat**  
**Leopard**  
**Lion**  
**Serval Cat**  
**African Wild Cat**

*Hyaenidae*

**Aardwolf**  
**Spotted Hyena**  
**Striped Hyena**

*Viverridae*

**African Civet**  
**Banded Mongoose**  
**Dwarf Mongoose**  
**Marsh Mongoose**  
**Slender Mongoose**  
**White-tailed Mongoose**

*Hyracoidae*

**Rock Hyrax**  
**Tree Hyrax**

*Leporidae*

**African Hare**

*Primates*

**Greater Galago**  
**Lesser Galago**  
**Olive Baboon**  
**Yellow Baboon**  
**Patas Monkey**  
**Sykes' Monkey**  
**Vervet Monkey**

*Rodentia*

**Porcupine**  
**Spring Hare**

*Sciuridae*

**Ochre Bush Squirrel**  
**Ground Squirrel**

*Tubulidentata*

**Aardvark**

**Kenya is also one of the richest countries in the world for birds, with over 1,000 different species recorded.**

**QUESTION #4: What are the different sorts of accommodation available on safari, which should I choose and what will it cost?**

Making the right choice of safari accommodation is essential if you are to have the most enjoyable safari experience. Options include mobile tented camping, large safari lodges (similar to hotels) and the bigger tented lodges, intimate small eco-camps and upmarket exclusive boutique camps / lodges with luxurious accommodation.

**Your Choice of Safari Accommodation can include:**

*(\$ - cheapest to \$\$\$\$ - most expensive)*

**\$ Adventure Camps & Mobile Camping**

These are usually small camps with 2-man dome tents. It is "real camping" with sleeping bags on a mattress on the floor, but many will have their own adjoining bathroom cubicle with safari shower and flush toilet.



Some of the Adventure Camps actually offer the same high quality wildlife viewing experience provided by the top-end safari camps, with 4×4 game viewing escorted by top class guides and in exclusive wildlife conservancies away from the tourist minibuses, but at a hugely reduced price.

These camps are for those for whom the wildlife safari experience is more important than the accommodation and who don't mind an element of "roughing it" if this brings down the price!



## **\$\$ Large Tourist Safari Lodges and Larger Permanent Tented Lodges**

These are popular with the mass-market tour companies operating minibus tours by road and have the type of facilities expected of hotels, with bars, dining rooms, swimming pools. The biggest may accommodate over 200 guests and so they can be a little impersonal and crowded but offer a lower-priced option for those on a more limited budget. Many have good standards of professional management such as those of the **Sarova** and **Serena** groups or **Heritage Hotels**.



## **\$\$\$ Eco-camps**

These camps are small and exclusive, often with just 6 to 10 guest tents. They have minimal impact on the environment through eco-friendly design and operating systems while still offering comfortable accommodation and high standards of hospitality.



The guest tents have proper beds and ensuite bathrooms with safari showers and flush toilets. They are ideal for guests who wish to get close to nature and to enjoy an authentic safari experience with excellent guides.

The **Porini Safari Camps** located in exclusive wildlife conservancies are a good example of eco-camps and others are the **Kicheche** camps or **Elephant Pepper** Camp. The advantage of staying in a conservancy is that you have all the wildlife but few other tourist vehicles.

## \$\$\$\$ Boutique Lodges & Small Luxury Camps

These are more exclusive, usually catering for less than 30 guests and offer impressive accommodation with high standards of décor, service and cuisine. Facilities may include swimming pools, private plunge pools and spas with in-house beauticians and massage therapists. Higher prices, of course, reflect this luxury.



Examples are Galdessa Camp, Elsa's Kopje, Cottar's Camp, Angama Camp, Sir Richard Branson's Mahali Mzuri, Lewa House, Mara Plains and there are many others as these up-market and often personally hosted small luxury properties have become established in Kenya in recent years. They offer a high quality luxury experience but often at a high price especially in the July-September peak season.

Like the Eco-camps, most guests arrive by air, flying in on light aircraft to avoid long journeys over bumpy roads. Guests are taken on game drives in the property's own 4×4 safari vehicles by driver-guides who know the area well.



*Galdessa Camp, Tsavo National Park*

**My recommendation for the best safari experience is to choose the smaller camps located in the conservancies, to avoid the crowds and to have the best quality guiding and game drives. The big mass market lodges and game drives in minibuses may be cheaper and suit some people but they just do not give the same memorable safari experience.**

The Eco-camps, such as the Porini Camps, tend to be less luxurious but they offer a great wildlife safari experience at a lower cost than the luxury boutique properties.



*Porini Rhino Camp: guest tents*

For those on a more restricted budget and who don't mind some element of roughing it and getting close to nature, then the Adventure Camps could be a good alternative.

And if price is a major consideration then consider travel outside the peak months of July to September when rates are considerably lower but wildlife viewing is good, such as in January to March, October or early December.

The "Green Season" in April to June and November is when there is most likely to be rain but this is when the vegetation re-generates and the animals have their young. Prices during the green season are much lower than in the Peak Season of July to September.

## **Kenya Safari Camps and Lodges: Prices**

Prices differ according to the type of accommodation and can vary greatly from the peak season months of July, August and September and the other months when they may be much lower, with special deals and free night offers. Kenya is a year round destination and travel outside the peak season can be worthwhile as a way of making your budget stretch further.

As a guide to prices, here are the total costs **per person per night** to stay at the different categories of camps in a double tent, **inclusive of accommodation and all meals, with daily game drives and the park fees or conservancy fees as well as taxes.** Low Season months are typically, April to June and November with Peak Season from July to September.

### **Adventure Camps and Mobile Camping:**

From \$200 to \$300 per person per night

### **Large Tourist Lodges & the bigger Tented Lodges:**

From \$200 to \$300 in the Low Season and from \$350 to \$550 in peak season.

### **Eco-camps**

From \$300 to \$450 in Low Season and from \$500 to \$700 in peak season

### **Boutique Lodges and Small Luxury Camps:**

From \$600 to \$900 in Low Season and from \$800 to over \$1300 in Peak Season

In addition to the inclusive costs per person per night to stay at the camps, you should budget for the flights from Nairobi to the different parks and reserves which are from \$240 to \$370 per person return, depending on the dates and routes.



## **QUESTION #5: How do I travel between the parks and what is the best form of transport?**

The type of transport which you choose for your travel between the parks and when you go out from the camps on “game drives” to see the wildlife has an important effect on your overall safari experience.

You can choose between a road safari, driving from Nairobi to the parks which you are visiting, or flying in for an air safari or a mix of both. The type of vehicle used on game drives is also important and open-sided 4x4s are always a better choice than a mini-van.

### **Road safaris**

Many of the mainstream overseas tour operators with tours to Kenya feature road safaris with transport in minivans which drive overland between the parks.



A minibus tour can involve lengthy drives of over 6 hours in duration to get to the park. Having arrived at you camp or lodge you will then go on your game drives in the same vehicle and with the same driver who drove you there. As he is not normally based in the park, he does not have the same local knowledge as the guides actually based at the camps who go on game drives every day. These are the type of safaris offered by the mass-market tour companies and are what many visitors to Kenya will be doing.

These itineraries usually include stays at the bigger tourist lodges and are an option for people looking for the cheapest tours available.

Often such itineraries by road in minivans will cram in too many places in too short a time and involve a lot of driving on the public highways from place to place. This means there is not enough time available for viewing wildlife and we recommend against trying to do this.

While minibuses are fine for city transfers and for driving on the main roads they are not ideal for game-viewing on bush tracks in the parks. Therefore, for road safaris I recommend that you upgrade to a 4x4 safari vehicle instead of a minivan or better still, avoid lengthy road journeys and opt for a Fly-In safari.



The 4x4 vehicle most often used for overland road safaris in East Africa is a Toyota Land Cruiser. These are specially-adapted for touring and game-viewing with roof hatches that either fold over or pop up.

The extra space, increased passenger visibility and more rugged suspension of a 4x4 vehicle ensures a much more comfortable journey and superior game viewing.

### **Fly-in Safaris**

There are several high quality air charter companies in Kenya operating daily scheduled flights by light aircraft to the parks and reserves, such as Safarilink and Airkenya. This is a better alternative to driving.



When you fly in to the parks you will be met at the airstrip by a vehicle from the camp or lodge where you are staying and you will go on game drives in their safari vehicles with an experienced driver-guide (preferably with KPSGA certification) who knows the area far better than any visiting drivers and is familiar with the latest wildlife movements.

On the Fly-in safaris, most of the camps and lodges will have 4x4 safari vehicles adapted to enhance game-viewing with open-sides and raised seating behind the driver. These may be shared with other guests or can usually be booked on a private basis for an extra fee.



**Whether choosing a Road Safari or a Fly-In Safari, always ensure that you check at the time of booking exactly which type of vehicle is used for your game drives to ensure you are in a 4x4 and not a van as this can make or break any safari experience!**

## **QUESTION #6:**

### **What recommendations do the experts give?**

#### **No need to rush round too many places**

When you plan your safari do make sure that you allow enough time to stay at each of the lodges or camps so that you can go on several game drives to see the area and its wildlife. Avoid the temptation to try to cram in too many different parks or camps staying just one or two nights in each place as this will mean you end up spending too much time travelling between the parks and do not have the chance to fully enjoy any of the wildlife areas on game drives from the camp or lodge.

#### **Take to the air between the parks and avoid the roads**

Safari experts usually recommend flying in to the camps rather than travelling across country. The long road journeys between the parks can be exhausting and some of the routes have very bad stretches of road especially Nairobi to Mara. Spending half a day or even longer travelling on the pot-holed Kenyan roads, trying to overtake all the overloaded lorries and buses, is more stressful than a short flight straight to the camp.

Another reason to avoid long overland journeys is that the vehicles licensed to carry tourists are all fitted with "Speed Governors" restricting the maximum speed to 80kph (50mph). This means that overland road journeys even on the best roads can take up to 6 hours, and some longer journeys can take all day. Of course, flying in to your chosen camp or lodge also allows you to enjoy aerial views of the landscape.



## **Book 4x4 game drives**

Book a safari which has game drives in a proper 4x4 safari vehicle in preference to a minibus (van). The vans are not ideal for driving on the rough tracks in the parks and reserves and can get stuck when roads are muddy. In the rainy season it is common to see the 4x4s rescuing stuck minibuses by pulling them out of the mud!

Particularly seek out the camps where game drives are taken in the specially-adapted 4x4 safari vehicles with open sides, perfect for viewing wildlife and taking photos.



These have 3 rows of seats behind the driver / tracker and usually take a maximum of six guests, two abreast, so everyone is guaranteed a “window” seat.

## **Choose to stay in Kenya's wildlife conservancies**

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of Conservancies in Kenya. These game-filled wildlife reserves have been established on vast tracts of wilderness adjacent to the National Parks / Reserves and they have strictly-controlled numbers of tents and limits on visitor numbers to ensure a low-density form of tourism. This means guests staying in the small camps in the Conservancies find that on game drives the animal sightings and photo opportunities are enhanced by having few - if any - other vehicles present.

The conservancies also allow night game drives and walking safaris which are not permitted in the National Parks / Reserves, and most of the conservancies are generating incomes for local communities through land

rental and employment, so your stay will be positively supporting people as well as wildlife. So, for the best of both worlds, look out for the camps that can offer game drives in their own Conservancies as well as in the main Parks.

### **Be prepared**

If you hope to capture every moment of your trip on camera, then there's nothing worse than running out of battery or memory space halfway through the day! Ensure you travel with spare memory cards and a spare battery, and fully recharge everything each night. The camps will normally have charging facilities for cameras, laptops and phones. Some game drive safari vehicles such as those at the Porini Camps have been fitted with chargers so that cameras can be charged while you drive.

Make sure each member of your party has their own pair of binoculars so that you can enjoy the best viewing of the wildlife and birds – you don't want to miss the action whilst passing around a shared pair!



Before you travel, read up on the parks / reserves and wildlife that you may encounter before you travel to get a better appreciation of what is in store and invest in a Field Guide to the Wildlife to take with you on safari.

### **Don't choose the cheapest – set a target budget**

Safaris can be relatively expensive and the old adage "you get what you pay for" applies. You may save a little by choosing to travel in a van overland, or staying in less expensive lodges, but could end up spending much of

your time driving for hours on rough roads and then staying in a large impersonal lodge located next to a settlement with the sound of dogs barking, music from local bars and noisy vehicles and motorbikes to disturb the tranquillity of what was supposed to be a safari in the wilderness.

Paying a little more can secure you a memorable safari experience that will make you wish to return! Decide what budget you can afford and then see what the options are. There may be a big difference in cost between some of the different camps so check the prices and choose the best that you can afford. Reducing the number of flights that you take will also help to keep costs down. For example it may be better to include two separate areas of the Mara such as Ol Kinyei Conservancy plus Olare Motorogi and the Mara Reserve rather than flying to the Mara and then flying to the Serengeti which is the same eco-system but in a different country.

### **Take warm clothes**

Visitors are often surprised to find just how cold it can be on an early morning game drive or in the evening. Some parts of Kenya are at the same altitude as the Alps and it can be very chilly before the sun gets up especially in the cooler months of June to September. So it is a good idea to have a warm jacket or fleece and a sweater which can be peeled off as the day warms up.

### **Keep hydrated**

While on safari make sure you have a bottle of water with you and drink plenty of water throughout the day as you may not realise that you are becoming dehydrated when the temperature is hotter and the air very dry.

## **Your driver-guide can make a huge difference to your enjoyment**

Choose camps which have drivers or guides certified by the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association, KPSGA. They will be glad to share their knowledge of the wildlife with you to enhance your safari experience.

Some camps, such as the Porini Camps, have a driver and a spotter in each vehicle: a two-man team of whom at least one will be a KPSGA certified guide. Having two pairs of trained eyes looking out for the wildlife will increase the chances of good sightings and means the driver can concentrate on the road while the spotter looks out for the wildlife.





## **QUESTION #7: What are the main questions people ask when planning a trip and what are the answers?**

### **Q: When is the best time to go to Kenya?**

**ANSWER:** Kenya is on the equator and is a “year round destination”. The hottest months are January to March while the coolest are July and August. The two rainy seasons are from end March to early June (known as “the long rains”), and during November and December (the “short rains”).

Normally it does not rain every day in the rainy seasons. When it rains it tends to be mainly at night or in the early morning so there can still be sunny days in between. All the wildlife is still present and many have their young to co-incide with the onset of the rains as the vegetation is lush so there is better grazing.

Global weather patterns are changing and sometimes the rains fail completely in some parts of Kenya and there is a period of drought or there may be heavy rains outside the normal season. Many safari camps close during May when the rains are at their height, as the tracks and roads get muddy.

During the hot months of January to March conditions can often be dry and dusty and the animals may congregate near water-holes so that there is excellent wildlife viewing.

The wildebeest migration moves into the Mara from the Serengeti between July and September and this is when many visitors come to Kenya and the parks can get more crowded with tourist vehicles.

To sum up – January to March: usually hot and dry and great for wildlife viewing, April-May: likelihood of rain, June: green and lush after the rains, Jul-August: cooler but good for the migration in the Mara, September-October: good weather and good wildlife viewing, November – early December: the short rains.

### **Q: What is a safari shower / "bucket" shower?**

**ANSWER:** Safari / bucket showers are common in mobile or tented camps where there is no permanent plumbing. They are an effective yet environmentally friendly way to shower where water is at a premium and provide plenty of hot water to wash comfortably.

Generally there is an en suite private shower stall within your tent with a “rainfall” style shower head at which you can control the water flow.

Outside the tent there is a large canvas bag or bucket which is filled with about 10 to 15 litres (5 US gallons) of hot water before being raised with a pulley rope system to connect to the shower pipe. The water is delivered at the ideal temperature so it is best to use it as soon as it arrives. Staff fill the showers at a pre-arranged time of day, or you can give them a few minutes’ notice so they can get it ready.

**Q: What type of baggage / luggage should we take?**

**ANSWER:** Luggage should be kept to a minimum, especially if you will be travelling via light aircraft. In East Africa the limit is typically 15 kg per person. This should be in soft bags as opposed to hard suit cases in order to fit in the baggage compartment on small aircraft. On road safaris the weight and size allowance is not as important but you should still try to bring as little as possible. A complimentary laundry service is offered at many camps and lodges. For game viewing it is best to wear grey, brown, khaki or green coloured clothing so the wildlife is not alerted to your presence. Camouflage clothing is not permitted in some countries.

**Q: How safe are we from wild animals if we sleep in a tent or go out in open-sided vehicles?**

**ANSWER:** Attacks on tourist visitors by wild animals in Africa are extremely rare and almost unheard of when on safari with a reputable company and experienced guide. Most animals are wary of the sight and smell of humans and will flee rather than attack but you should never attempt to approach animals yourself unless you are being escorted by a professional guide.

While on game drives you will be taken out by expert guides who are highly trained in assessing situations and avoiding danger. They will avoid causing stress to wild animals and can read the signs.

Guides in some countries carry firearms but the key thing is they should always avoid putting guests into a dangerous situation. Wildlife can wander close to camps and lodges and pass through the camp after dark since they are typically unfenced, but every measure is in place to ensure guest safety. For example, in unfenced camps guests should be escorted around camp after dark by staff who are familiar with the behaviour of wildlife.

Sleeping under canvas in a tent in the wilds of Africa, surrounded by the sounds of the African bush is a memorable experience!

**Q: Will there be lots of bugs and creepy-crawlies? Do we need to bring mosquito nets? And what about snakes?**

**ANSWER:** Many visitors are surprised to find that on safari there are often not as many bugs as there are in their home countries in summer and frequently they tell us that they did not even see a mosquito on safari! However this is Africa and there are certainly many tropical insects in the country but most are quite harmless to humans and some of them are actually very interesting!

During the rainy season there are often more insects in evidence especially after a shower of rain. The lodges normally provide mosquito nets in the guest rooms but in the tented camps these are not needed if the tent is insect-proof with zipping doors and sewn in groundsheets.

The important thing is to leave the lights switched off when you are out

of the tent and always keep the doors zipped shut. Most people on safari do not even see an insect in their lodge room or in their tent. If you notice a gecko (small lizard) in your lodge room, these are common and absolutely harmless so they can just be ignored, especially as they eat mosquitoes and bugs.

As for snakes, there are many species of snakes in East Africa, most of which are harmless to humans. Snakes are not often seen as they avoid being in the open where people are walking about and will almost always try to get away and to hide if they sense human footsteps approaching.

Your guide may spot a snake and point it out from the safety of your vehicle when on a game drive but they are rarely seen in the grounds of the lodges or camps. If you do see a snake, do not approach it – simply give it a wide berth and tell your guide or a member of staff at the camp. If left alone at a safe distance, snakes do not pose a danger.

**Q: Can we drink the water?**

**ANSWER:** The water in many cities and small towns in much of Africa may not always be safe to drink, and we always recommend drinking only bottled water which is readily available at hotels, camps and lodges.

**Q: What type of food will we have on safari?**

**ANSWER:** The food available at most camps and lodges is of good

quality and with an international style. Breakfasts include cereals, fruit, cold meats, eggs, bacon, sausages etc and fresh bread. Lunches and dinners may include soups, salads, cold meats, pasta, meat & fish dishes and fresh fruits and vegetables. Larger lodges tend to offer a buffet selection.

Smaller camps have a more personal service with guests dining together communally. Some properties can offer bush breakfasts, picnic lunches and dinners for an experience of dining in the wild.

**Q: What is a typical day on safari?**

**ANSWER:** Each camp and lodge varies with its exact schedule, but generally safaris follow a typical pattern with two main activities each day. Activities are mainly game drives and guided walks, but in some locations can include game viewing from a river or from a fixed observation platform like a treehouse.

The morning usually begins with an early morning wake-up call and tea or coffee before the first drive / activity which starts at or just after sunrise. There are great opportunities to see wildlife at this time since it is still fairly cool and animals are most active. The morning activity usually ends by late morning with guests returning to the camp / lodge for breakfast / brunch.

Guests generally relax at the camp or lodge for the middle of the day. This is because the animals are quite inactive during the heat of the

day – seeking shelter in the shade. Guests have lunch and enjoy the camp or lodge facilities (lounge / hammocks / swimming pool etc) or some properties offer short walks or visits to a hide.

The second main activity will follow afternoon tea (drink / snacks, etc) in the late afternoon and perhaps end at a scenic point for a “sundowner”, drinks while viewing the sunset. Some camps offer night drives after this. Guests later return to the camp / lodge for drinks and dinner.

**Q: Do mobile / cell phones work on safari?**

**ANSWER:** Mobile / cell phone coverage across Kenya is generally quite good and even in the parks there may be a phone network. Your phone company will be able to tell you what service is provided in countries overseas. If you use your phone during your safari please respect other guests and do not use the phone during game drives or speak loudly on your phone while in camp.

**Q: Do the camps and lodges have Wi-Fi or internet access?**

**ANSWER:** A few safari camps have Wi-Fi / internet available for guests and this is being introduced by more and more camps although very slow download speeds may be frustrating. Some camps may have a cell phone signal through which you could access the internet (depending on your phone plan / provider) though this may be expensive. Most major hotels in Nairobi and on the coast have internet and wifi.

**Q: Is there power on safari to charge a camera / video camera / laptop / iPad / phone?**

**ANSWER:** Yes, the camps and lodges have power – perhaps as solar lighting and / or a generator. The power may be switched off for part of the day. At small camps and lodges you may not be able to use a hairdryer or electric shaver but batteries can be charged either in your tent / room or in a communal area.

Your charger must be 220v or you will need to bring a transformer – though most electronic equipment now automatically converts from 110v to 220v. The required adaptor plugs are included in most international travel adaptor kits. For Kenya it is plug type G (the British-style 3 rectangular pin plug).

**Q: What happens if there is a medical emergency on safari?**

**ANSWER:** There are high quality medical facilities in Nairobi, Mombasa and some of the larger towns, in case you require medical attention while on your trip.

In the event of a serious medical emergency on safari, an aircraft from Kenya’s Flying Doctor service in Nairobi can be sent to lodges or camps to provide medical care.

Medical travel insurance is a necessity and we recommend that you purchase a policy which includes emergency medical evacuation which will cover the Flying Doctor service.



**Q: How can my family contact me if there is an emergency at home?**

**ANSWER:** Some of the camps may not always be easy to contact from overseas so it is recommended that you leave the 24 hour contact details of your tour operator with your friends and family so that they can assist should they need to contact you in an emergency.

**Q: What about security and the threat from Somali pirates?**

**ANSWER:** While there are certain inherent risks involved in travel to most countries, the chances of actually being caught up in a terrorist incident are very unlikely. It is extremely rare for tourists to be involved in such attacks and the risk is global and not confined to Kenya.

The Piracy off the coast of Somalia targeting international shipping was virtually ended after international forces including the Kenyan army took control of the border area all the way down to the Somali port of Kismayu.

Kenyans are friendly and hospitable people and English is widely spoken. Visitors often say how very welcome they were made to feel by everyone.

However it is important to follow the advice of your safari company and to avoid walking around unfamiliar streets on your own, just as there are parts of many international cities which visitors would be advised to avoid.

It is also sensible to avoid anywhere in the cities of Nairobi where political rallies or marches are being held as these sometimes may result in violent confrontations between demonstrators and police.

There is no hostility towards foreign visitors, quite the opposite in fact as tourists are generally treated with great friendliness by all, but it is best to be guided by your safari company who will be aware of places to avoid.

Generally the feedback from all visitors about their experience in Kenya is excellent and we have no hesitation in encouraging anyone to visit this beautiful country with its wonderful landscapes, magnificent wildlife, tropical beaches and friendly hospitable people.

**Q: Which airlines fly to Kenya?**

**ANSWER:** Many of the major world airlines including Kenya Airways, British Airways, Air France, KLM, Lufthansa and Swissair fly several times a week from Europe to Jomo Kenyatta International airport, Nairobi.

From North America, airlines including American Airlines and Delta offer services that connect via Europe.

Other airlines include Emirates, Qatar, Etihad, Egypt Air, Ethiopian Airlines, South African Airways, Turkish Airlines and Air India.

With such a wide choice of airlines, the airfares to Kenya are often very competitive and usually lower than to other countries in Africa.

**Q: Should we bring sweets, pens or gifts for local children in the villages?**

**ANSWER:** Please do not offer sweets / candy to children as with little or no dental care available it is best that they don't develop a sweet tooth.

The village chiefs and elders request that you do not give gifts directly to children, however monetary donations to projects are most appreciated as many of the camps or safari companies have outreach projects to benefit the local communities.

**Q: Are we expected to give tips to lodge staff and the driver-guides and is there any advice on the normal amounts?**

**ANSWER:** Tipping at the safari camps is entirely at your discretion but as a guideline if you wish to give a gratuity then most guests give a tip on the last day in each camp equating to around US\$5 per guest per full day to the Driver Guide (who will share this with the spotter if they are a 2 person crew) plus around US\$5 per guest per night into the staff tip box for the rest of the staff.

It may be difficult to obtain change or to exchange foreign currency at the smaller camps so it is best to plan ahead and have cash for tips before starting a safari.

**Q: I am travelling alone .. can you advise?**

**ANSWER:** A safari holiday is a great choice for single travellers as

it is a chance to meet like minded people on shared game drives. At the smaller camps you can also enjoy the company of other guests as it is easier to get to know the others in the more friendly setting of a small group and at meal times in some camps all the guests dine together.

There are some points to consider however. Many safaris only operate with a minimum of 2 people so you may need to be flexible with your choice of dates. And internal flights also have a minimum passenger rule which is between 2 and 4 people, depending on the time of year. Most operators will endeavour to book you on flights where others are already confirmed but the airlines reserve the right to cancel the service, or ask you to buy an extra seat, should others cancel.

Camps generally do not offer to 'pair' people up so in many cases you would need to pay a single supplement for sole occupancy of a tent, especially in the high season.

**Q: Do I need a Visa for Kenya and can I get this on arrival?**

**ANSWER:** Most people can get a visa on arrival apart from citizens of the following countries who require a visa issued prior to arrival in Kenya and this must be done in advance through a Kenyan Embassy: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Republic of North Korea, Eritrea, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Palestine, Senegal, Somalia, Syria, Tajikistan.

For all other Nationals, Visas can be issued on arrival, at Passport Control at the airports in Nairobi

and Mombasa. They can also be obtained prior to departure from Kenyan embassies overseas or they can be obtained online as an E-Visa.

At present there is no advantage in obtaining an online E-Visa as you will still be required to queue up with all the other arriving visitors who are obtaining their visas from the Passport Control desk on arrival. Visas are valid for 90 days from date of issue. If you are travelling back into Kenya from other East African Countries on the same trip within the 90 day validity period then you do not require an additional visa.

**Q: When is the wildebeest migration and will I be able to see it?**

**ANSWER:** The migration is a mass movement of hundreds of thousands of wildebeests in huge herds that move around the Serengeti in Tanzania and into the Mara in Kenya.

The annual calving of the wildebeest takes place in the southern Serengeti plains in late February and early March each year and then they start moving north, arriving in the Maasai Mara Reserve in Kenya around late June or early July before heading back to Tanzania around late September or early October. As there are so many animals, they are spread out over a vast area and do not all arrive at the same time.

To get into the Mara they have to cross the river and this scene has

featured in numerous TV documentaries. As a result, many people are under the impression that the migration is the crossing of the river and are very keen to see this happen! As a result there can be large numbers of tourist vehicles in the Mara Reserve waiting all along the river in the hope of seeing a "crossing", often without success.

River crossings by groups of wildebeest can take place at any time and are very unpredictable and not one continual event. Our advice is not to spend too much time hoping to see them swim across the river as it is often just a matter of luck. Even without seeing them swim across a river, it is still an impressive sight to see thousands of animals covering the plains.

As well as the Serengeti migration, there is another migration of wildebeest from the Loita plains, north east of the Mara Reserve. This moves through Ol Kinyei Conservancy in February/March when they calve (at the same time as the Serengeti wildebeest) and then spreads into Naboisho and Olare Motorogi Conservancy during the next few months before the Serengeti migration arrives.

When the wildebeest herds have moved back to the Serengeti, the Loita wildebeest remain in the Mara before they also swing back through the Conservancies. The Mara still has large numbers of plains game, all the big cats and elephants throughout the year and there is still wonderful wildlife viewing after the migration has moved on.

## Conclusion

I do hope that you will find this information and these suggestions useful in planning your own safari. If you need any further assistance in arranging your safari then our helpful Safari Advisors here at [Gamewatchers Safaris](#) will be glad to answer any further questions which you may have or to provide personalised advice to help you to have the best possible safari.

As one of the longest established safari outfitters based in East Africa, we can offer you very competitive rates **at all the leading safari camps and lodges in Kenya**: [This list of camps and lodges](#) shows our prices inclusive of all the costs, so there are no "hidden extras".

We also own and manage our own small eco-friendly camps in Kenya, the **Porini Camps**. These are in wildlife conservancies in **Selenkay, Laikipia and the Mara**. [This 11 minute video](#) gives a great insight into what guests experience on safari in the conservancies.

As well as in Nairobi, we also have our own team of Safari Advisors based in the USA, in UK and in India who will be glad to be of service in confirming prices, answering your questions and booking your choice of safari camps and lodges for you.

Our Safari Advisors have helped hundreds of guests to plan their trips and will be delighted to assist you and to help you plan your ideal safari.

### [Receive our recommendations for your safari](#)

I will be delighted if we can be of service and we would be very glad to hear from you.

With best wishes



Jake Grieves-Cook  
Gamewatchers Safaris