

How to Plan Your Own Kenya Safari and Beach Adventure

By Claire Baranowski

In recent years, Kenya has quietly asserted itself to become an unbeatable destination for modern romantic and conservation-minded travel. And even Prince William agrees, as his recent engagement to Kate Middleton was on the slopes of Mt Kenya. There's so much more to associate with Kenya than the macho hunting tales of the Ernest Hemingway and Teddy Roosevelt eras (or, unfairly, with the 2007 localized election riots). Here are some tips for making the most of your African adventure, in the bush and on the beach.

Book Through a Safari Tour Operator

There are some countries where traveling independently enhances your experience ten-fold, and others where having someone else sweat the small stuff means you can actually experience the adventure you came for. Kenya is one of the latter, and a tour operator will advise you on which out of the myriad safari options on offer best suits your tastes and your budget, as well as arrange airport transfers and shopping excursions. Plus, if you need special assistance, you know you'll be looked after. Why stress over your complex travel arrangements for what is for many people a once-in-a-lifetime trip?

Top Tour Operator Pick: Top-of-the-range operators, such as Micato, are raved about on the Fodor's Africa forums and with good reason, as the service they offer really is impeccable.



Timing Tip: You really can visit Kenya any time of the year. From January to February, it's hot and dry and animals are easier to see as they congregate at drinking holes. March to May is the time when short rains make everything lush and green. From July to September is the time of the wildebeest migration, so be prepared to join the crowds. October to January is a good time to visit as it's not too hot—although avoid the coast at Christmas, as this is peak season and resorts are usually packed.

Have a Good Night's Sleep in Nairobi

You'll likely be jet lagged after your long journey to East Africa, and although a day's layover in Nairobi before heading off on safari is recommended, the city isn't exactly restful, with major pollution and traffic jams. While budget options are available, it's worth splurging



a little to start your trip in a relaxing hotel. Plus there are some fun places to visit like the Karen Blixen Museum and Giraffe Center.

Top Nairobi Hotel Picks: There are some fantastic options: the colonial Norfolk for example, where a gin and tonic on the terrace is de rigeur, or the brand new, ultra modern Sankara Nairobi, which has a gorgeous interior and facilities to rival any major city luxe hotel in the world.

After Your Safari: Don't Miss the Coast

Most people go to Kenya to go on safari, and a wonderful safari they have; but don't overlook the fact that Kenya has some beautiful coastal destinations too. And your safari operator can also easily arrange the beach portion of your trip. Tiny Lamu, with its grand Arab merchant houses made of coral, donkeys wandering down medieval, winding alleyways, and the haunting sound of the Muslim call to prayer, must be one of the most special places on earth. Wander around and mingle with the locals going about their daily business, feast on abundant seafood, or snorkel in untouched reefs. The government is talking about building a port near Lamu, and if that happens the ambience of this quaint town will be lost forever, so visit now.



Top Lamu Hotel Picks: You can stay at the far reaches of the island, away from all civilization, at a place like Kipungani Explorer, or in a gorgeous boutique hotel in town, such as Lamu House.

Give a Little Back

If you have space in your luggage, pack some pens to give to children, and t-shirts and clothing are always gratefully accepted. Buying local handicrafts is a good way to support local artisans and traders. There are some incredible charity projects going on in Kenya; if you feel inspired to see if there is any way you can contribute, often your tour operator or hotel is linked with a program worth supporting.

Top Charity Pick: Micato supports an excellent organization called AmericaShare that focuses on youth education.

Gratuities Tip: Although no one expects you to tip like a prince, be sure to leave gratuities of about 10% for good service. Tip your driver and guide approximately US\$10-US\$15 per day. Many Kenyans in the tourism industry rely on tips to help support many other family members.