



## Kenya Travel Information



**Airport Formalities** Upon arrival at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, you will be met by a representative of Custom Safaris as you come off the plane. With your guide's assistance, you will proceed through Visa and Passport Control, then baggage claim, then Customs. After exiting Customs, a Custom Safaris representative will chauffeur you to your hotel.

**Cell Phones** Mobile phone coverage extends to the principal urban centers and parts of popular game reserves such as the Mara. Cell phone reception is sporadic and unreliable in the rural areas. Most camps will have a central phone at reception, but no individual phones in the tents. Check with your cell phone provider regarding international calling plans from Kenya.

**Climate** The East African climate is surely one of the finest in the world. The area lies along the equator at a higher elevation, so temperature varies little during the year, varying by region rather than by season. The climate is temperate and sunny year-round with two rainy seasons: April – May and October – November. Temperature seldom varies from the mid-to-upper 70's with evening lows near 60°. Days vary little in length: sunrise about 6:20 am and sunset about 6:30 pm. June to September is cool and dry, with daytime temperatures averaging 75°. At this time of year, depending on the amount of rainfall in the south, the Mara provides one of nature's most dramatic spectacles, the annual migration of over a million wildebeest and zebras, teeming from the Serengeti in Tanzania to cross the Mara River into the Masai Mara National Reserve.

**Clothing for Safari** Safaris are very informal: wear cool, loose, comfortable clothing. Avoid bright colors on safari to help you blend into the background. Knit shirts, T-shirts, cotton tops, jeans khakis, and shorts are satisfactory. Comfortable walking or athletic shoes are a must. And don't forget your swimsuit. The tented camps have pools. Be prepared for cool weather as well as warm. Bring a couple of pairs of long pants and a sweater or jacket. Dawn and sunset game drives in open vehicles can be quite chilly with the temperatures climbing as the day goes by. Layering allows for flexibility. Remember, pack light. Inexpensive laundry service is available at each camp, and free of charge at Little Governors' Camp in the Mara.

**Currency/Banking** Bring about \$300 - \$400 in newer, smaller denomination bills (\$1's, \$5's, \$10's and \$20's). Exchange dollars at the hotels, lodges, and authorized banks. VISA and MasterCard credit cards are widely accepted in large shops, restaurants, and at the camps. Dollars are widely accepted, but you will receive change in shillings. US coins have no value. For any large purchases, save your receipts in case they are checked by Customs when you depart. Contact your bank and credit card company that you will be traveling to Kenya.

Standard currency is the Kenya Shilling (KSh). The exchange rate is approximately \$1 to 100 KSh.

100 KSh = \$1

1000 KSh = \$10

7,500 KSh = \$ 75

200 KSh = \$2

2000 KSh = \$20

10,000 KSh = \$100

500 KSh = \$5

5000 KSh = \$50

15,000 KSh = \$150

**Electricity** The electrical voltage is 220-240 volts so you will need a converter for US appliances. Cell phone chargers do not need a converter but will need a plug adapter. Plugs are two thick round pins (EU), or three rectangular prongs (UK). Hairdryers are available in the tents. Power failures occur on occasion so it's wise to bring battery operated appliances (i.e. flashlight).

**Food and Drink** When it comes to cuisine, travelers are delighted and surprised by the variety and quality of food that is served in Kenya. Food at the hotels and tented camps is fresh, well-prepared, and abundant. The British influence is evident in the type and style of meals. Indian cooking has also greatly shaped East African cuisine. For example, *chapati*, a flat type of bread is very common on Kenya's dinner tables. *Samosas*, tasty meat-filled fried dumplings, are sold everywhere. *Githeri* is a satisfying maize and bean stew that is often prepared with a variety of vegetables and sometimes meat. Goat meat is popular, but for *nyama choma* (meat roasted over wood or charcoal fire) beef is preferred. Breakfast usually consists of juices, a variety of fruits, cereals, eggs, toast, and meat.

Coffee and tea are served with meals; beer, wine and soft drinks are available at an extra cost. The Kenya beer, Tusker, is made locally and is an international favorite. Most wine served is from South Africa. Locally grown Kenyan coffee and tea are especially flavorful and strong. Bottled water is readily available. Although hotels and restaurants may advise you that their tap water is safe to drink, the safest precaution is to drink the available bottled water provided by the hotels and lodges and your guide while on safari. To be safe, only eat cooked vegetables and fruit that you peel yourself. Taking precautions with the water you use is an important factor to help avoid health problems. The same warning applies to using ice cubes and brushing your teeth.

**Health** Proof of Covid-19 vaccination will be required for entry to Kenya. Recommended vaccinations are: yellow fever (if you plan to visit another African country), typhoid, tetanus, polio, Hepatitis A, and Hepatitis B. Malaria exists throughout the year in all areas including urban areas. It is highly recommended that you obtain a prescription for a malaria precaution. Although it is unlikely you will be exposed to malaria, it is best to be cautious. The best protection against malaria is to avoid being bitten by a mosquito by using good insect repellent. Also recommended is a prescription for antibiotics and an over-the-counter anti-diarrheal. On safari, very little walking is required though some tents may be a bit of a distance from the main lodge and the paths uneven. Guards with flashlights are available to escort you whenever needed.

**Language** Kenya's national language is Swahili, but English is widely spoken. Learning a few words of Swahili can go a long way to enhancing cultural exchanges:

*Jambo* – hello

*Ahsante* – thank you

*Ndiyo* -- yes

*Kwa heri* – goodbye

*Tafadhali* – please

*Hapana* – no

**Lodges and Tented Camps** All safari lodges and camps in this itinerary are highly-rated for their attention to guests' safety, luxury accommodations, food quality, service excellence, and prime location for the best animal viewing. In the lodges and camps, you'll enjoy evening entertainment, elegant meals, fresh linens, and hot showers. All camps have private ensuite bathrooms, elegant dining areas, gift shops, and large, clean swimming pools. Some camps have watering holes and salt licks that draw animals close to the camp. Each property is personally inspected on a regular basis by Custom Safari's management team who use the strictest criteria for judging safety, comfort, location, amenities, and overall atmosphere.

**Luggage** Soft, lightweight luggage is necessary for the safari. Since there is limited space on safari vehicles, you will be given a Custom Safaris duffel bag. You may also carry one medium-sized bag on the safari vehicle and one small-sized shoulder bag or backpack. The small bag can hold cameras, binoculars, jackets, valuables, medication, etc. The duffel bag will be packed in the rear of the vehicle. Since you will be “living out of your suitcase” and changing camps, try to keep items as simple and organized as possible. Lightweight nylon packing cubes with mesh tops are highly recommended. They come in a variety of sizes, and the mesh top allows for ventilation and ability to see the items inside. Laundry service is available at the camps. For the domestic flights within Kenya, luggage is limited to 32 pounds per person. If you have plans to travel to other destinations and need more luggage, you can keep a larger piece of check-in luggage at The Boma Nairobi where it will be safely stored until you return at the end of the safari. All luggage should be locked and have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

**Passports and Visas** A U.S. passport valid for at least six months from the date of entry into Kenya is required. The passport should have at least two blank pages. All visitors are also required to have a Visa to enter Kenya. Visas may be obtained through the Kenya Embassy. Application forms can be downloaded and processed on the Kenya Embassy website before the trip. You will need the completed application form, 2 identical passport-quality photographs, a scanned copy of the information page of your passport and \$50.

**Safari Driver/Guides and Vehicles** Custom Safaris understands the tremendously positive affect a guide can have on the success and smooth operation of your tour. All of our guides are professional, experienced, English-speaking, highly educated, and experts in locating wildlife. They are eager to share their love of the land and their insights into the Kenyan culture and wildlife. Each safari vehicle carries six passengers, guaranteeing adequate space and a window seat for each passenger for amazing wildlife viewing.

**Safety** Common sense safety precautions you normally observe when traveling anywhere should be followed to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss. Be cautious of uneven walking surfaces and slippery showers (non-slip shower shoes are recommended). Lock up your valuables and medications. While on safari, lodges and camps are located in or near wildlife parks. Be aware that it gets dark early and you may find wildlife wandering onto the grounds on your way back to your tent after dinner. Incidents involving animals in East Africa are rare, but guards with flashlights are readily available to escort you if requested. Historically, Kenya is one of Africa’s most stable democracies and after considerable unrest at the end of 2007, normalcy has returned. There have been a few terrorist incidents over the years along the Somali border, but this tour does not go anywhere near that area. However, in the event of any problem, you are in capable hands of the experienced Camp staff, Custom Safaris guides, and Nairobi office staff.

**Shopping** East Africa is a shopper’s paradise. You will find many opportunities to buy souvenirs. You are expected to negotiate a price in bazaars and markets. Check with the larger shops in Nairobi or some of the gift shops in the lodges to establish a price range. Many times they have better quality merchandise, but their prices are fixed. Among the interesting souvenirs you will find are: Masai tribal ornaments, spears, hand-woven sisal baskets and bags, local books and maps, gemstones and jewelry, and array of batiks and paintings, beadwork, meerschaum pipes, camel-hair rugs, soap stone carvings, pottery, multicolored fabrics, safari outfits, and a variety of handmade and craft items. You’ll also find a lot of wood carvings and masks in a variety of woods and quality of craftsmanship. Kenya is also known for its locally grown coffee and tea.

Tips for successful bargaining:

- Bargaining should be fun. It is a means of communicating and striking up a conversation with the local people. They enjoy talking to you and learning about where you are from while you are in the bargaining process.
- Your first offer should be much lower than the asking price. Establish a price in your own mind how much the item is worth to you and what your top dollar price will be.
- Their first offer will normally be high. Your first counteroffer should be low. The game is your move up in what you offer, while the seller moves down.
- Do not be afraid to walk away. The seller may drop the price.
- You will also get a better price per item if you buy several items from the same vendor.

**Time** Kenya is 10 hours ahead of California Time in June.

**Tipping** Tipping is not compulsory, nor are the amounts fixed. The following are general tipping guidelines, but if someone provides exceptional service, an extra gratuity is much appreciated:

- Hotel Housekeeper: 100 KSh (\$1) per traveler per day
- Baggage Handling: Tips for porters at the airports, hotels, and camps are included. If you want to give an extra tip, give 100 KSh (\$1) for all luggage brought to your room.
- Tent Steward: 500 KSh (\$5) per traveler per day
- Camp Staff: 500 – 1000 KSh (\$5 - \$10) per traveler per day to be deposited in the tip box near the front desk. This will be evenly distributed to the staff at the end of the day.
- Driver/Guide: One driver/guide accompanies each safari vehicle. Customary gratuity is 1000 – 2000 KSh (\$10 - \$20) per traveler per day

**Travel Insurance** To protect yourself for any eventuality, travel insurance with the “Cancel for any Reason” option is strongly recommended for your safari to Kenya.

**Traveler’s Etiquette** While on safari, try to make an effort to speak softly while near animals. Keep your head and arms in the vehicle area, don’t make sudden moves or try to attract attention. The less you impact the environment of the animals you want to see, the longer they will stay in your presence, and the better you’ll be able to observe their natural behavior. Practice patience and silence. A safari is a very spiritual and emotional experience. Even though many of the roads are rough and dusty and the savannah is vast, you will end each day tired but content.

You are guaranteed to come up against cultural differences between your customs and those of Africa. Different traditions and philosophies, some of which are very old, govern attitudes towards time, business, social norms, and politics in Africa. But this is at the heart of why we travel – to experience the world through other cultures and viewpoints. Travel necessitates being a good-natured realist as well as a romantic so take the time to listen and learn. Being a genial, flexible traveling companion and observing simple rules of common courtesy make for an enjoyable travel experience and an extraordinary safari experience for everyone.

A few last words of advice on the subject of safari etiquette: leave no trace of your presence; be sure to remove your shoes if you have permission to stand on the seat to get a better view; use hand sanitizer often but not in front of your driver; take your perfect shot and then trade places with another photographer; take time to put the camera aside, be silent, and gaze in wonder at what’s there in front of you.

