

Safari

The need for modern city dwellers to escape crowds, pollution, and anonymity explains the increasing popularity of safari trips to the unspoiled landscapes of East Africa. Kenya's 13,000 square miles of big game sanctuaries beckon for refreshment of the spirit and the exciting call of the wild. Safaris, however, are no longer the rugged, forbidding bush treks of Frank Buck, escorted by long files of African porters, menaced by prowling beasts, strafed by hungry insects. But a safari 1977-style is still very much of an adventure.

Most safaris (over 90%) nowadays are for game-viewing and photographing. Hunting safaris have become exclusive, expensive affairs requiring far more elaborate arrangements than simply booking a package tour to Nairobi. 'Safari' in Swahili means 'any kind of trip or journey', and travel agents in Europe and Kenya have done their best to suit every taste.

With a superb climate, Nairobi attracts more tourists than any other African city, and has gained a reputation as 'Safari Capital of the World'. Over 80 safari tour operators are headquartered in this sophisticated metropolis at the hub of a galaxy of game reserves and national parks spread around the country. Nairobi's safari-mindedness is evident everywhere. Scoreboards in hotels and travel agents' windows keep count of how many 'Big Five' (lion, rhino, elephant, leopard, buffalo) were sighted the night before at game lodges, like **Treetops** in the **Aberdare Forest**, **Amboseli Serena** in the shadow of **Mt Kilimanjaro**, or **Keekorok** in the grassy **Masai Mara Reserve**.

Trading post

The most popular trading post — and communications center — in town is the well-known **Message Board** fastened to a tree trunk at the **Thorn Tree** sidewalk cafe. Ads offering all kinds of safari items are pinned up along with personal notes ('Beth — leaving for Zambia, where are you?'). Adjoining the **New Stanley Hotel**, the **Thorn Tree** is the meeting place where all safari trails seem to converge. Bush-jacketed, zebra-sandalled, tunic and **kanga**-clad, a motley gathering of guides, visitors, hangers-on, diplomats and journalists sip drinks, swap safari tales, and exchange advice.

The easiest to arrange and least expensive game-viewing safaris are all-inclusive package tours to Nairobi from principal European cities booked through travel agents. Prices range from \$950 to \$1,600 for two-week trips averaging ten days in the game parks. The remaining time is spent in Nairobi or at Kenya's superb Indian Ocean beaches.

But safari combinations can vary widely as to locations, time spans, accommodations, and conveyances. For those who prefer more individualized trips and have the time for 19/45-day excursion tickets from Europe (18% to 30% less than the normal Nairobi air fare), tailor-

made safaris (averaging \$40-\$50 a day) can be arranged directly with Kenya tour operators. (For a list of operators, contact Kenya Tourist Offices in London, Paris, Frankfurt, Stockholm or Zurich).

A handful of operators specialize in hunting safaris. By law, a professional hunter must accompany each two shooters. It is his responsibility to book the hunting area, secure the necessary game licenses and Firearms Certificates, and see that his clients adhere strictly to all hunting regulations. Basic costs for a party of one to four shooters hunting big game are \$410 to \$895 per day, which includes the professional hunter's fee, equipment and food, but not weapons or licenses. The license fees for killing a rhino, for example, are \$2,250, a bush lion, \$1,168.75. License fees for "lightweight" hunts for smaller game, like steenbok, gnu, or warthog, can amount to only \$113.75, although basic costs still range from \$330 to \$550 per day. Professional hunters must be booked at least six months in advance. For further info on hunting safaris, write, East African Professional Hunters' Association, Nairobi Hilton, POB 40528, Nairobi, Kenya.

Kenya has three main safari circuits with a wide choice of accommodations — elegant lodges, comfortable hotels, luxury tent camps, and simple campsites.

One circuit proceeds north out of Nairobi to the Aberdare and Mt Kenya Park region where rhino, elephant, buffalo, and the elusive bongo antelope dwell. By day, safari-ers roam the roads in their vehicles seeking the animals, but at night, at the floodlit watering holes at Treetops, The Ark, and Mountain Lodge the animals find the seekers. In this area, too, is the 'millionaires' retreat', the posh Mt Kenya Safari Club.

A second circuit runs southeast from Nairobi through **Masai** country to **Amboseli Reserve** where **Mt Kilimanjaro**, Africa's highest peak, looks down on plentiful lion, elephant, zebra, giraffe and cheetah. In **Amboseli**, as in nearby **Tsavo Park**, swanky lodges and camps provide every imaginable facility — swimming pools, saunas, cocktail lounges, tennis courts, air strips. The third route heads southwest to **Masai Mara Reserve**, 'Hemingway country', where vast herds of zebra and wildebeeste migrate twice annually from Tanzania's adjacent **Serengeti**. Circling back to Nairobi, **Lake Nakuru** offers a fantastic spectacle of a million flamingoes turning the world pink.

TIPS: Best times for animal-watching are early morning and dusk. Look beneath trees and bushes for pricked-up animal ears. Scan trees for dangling tails of leopards, baboons, monkeys. If small game appear jumpy, distressed, lion or other predators may be nearby. Tick birds can indicate rhino or buffalo in vicinity. Hovering vultures usually mean a kill. Approach animals slowly. Never, never get out of car. Best to close windows if monkeys, baboons get too chummy. Don't wear bright clothing. Bring binoculars, telephoto lens, lens hood, bush hat, insect repellent, sunglasses.