

Magical Kenya

The Ultimate Adventure

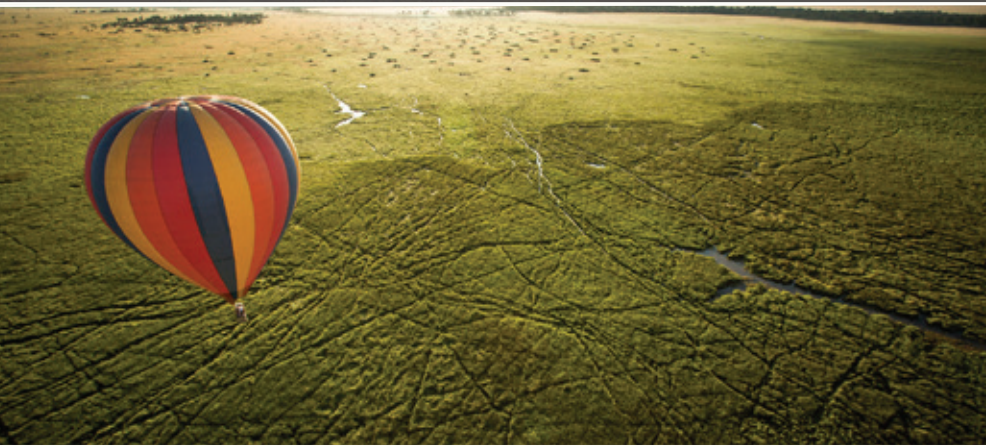
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Maasai Mara!



Karibu Maasai Mara



Editorial Note

Welcome to the Kenya Tourism Board's official magazine, your gateway to the wonders of #MagicalKenya.

The magical Kenya Destination magazine is a quarterly publication by Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) –a destination tourism-marketing agency charged with the responsibility of promoting Kenya as a tourism destination for both local and international traveler.

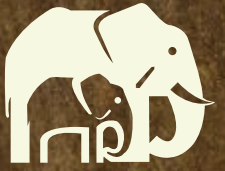
As the organization entrusted with marketing and promoting Kenya as a top travel destination, we bring you a magazine designed to inspire, indulge, and immerse you in the beauty and adventure that Kenya has to offer.

Inside, you'll discover the best of Kenya's tourism experiences, stay updated on new travel products, and explore exciting investment opportunities in the sector. Whether you're seeking breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural encounters, or thrilling adventures, this is your invitation to pack your bags and experience why Kenya is the #REALDEAL

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Karibu, Tutunze Pamoja!

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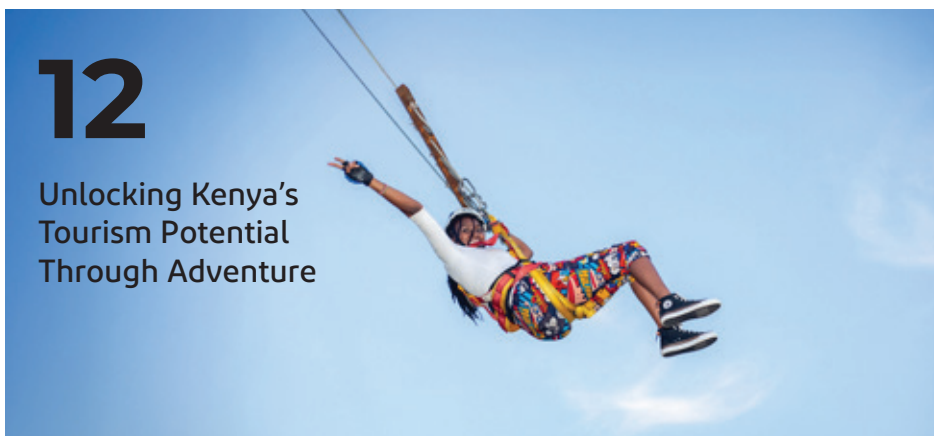
EXPLORE • EXPERIENCE • CONSERVE

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“ We reaffirm our dedication to creating more opportunities in the tourism sector and ensuring that every visitor experiences the best of Kenya in every offering. ”

tourism initiatives will no doubt benefit more host communities directly as we pave the way for more jobs and improved livelihoods.

The cover story spotlights the “Magical Kenya” trail series, a major step towards reinforcing our product diversification. Even as we do so, sustainable practices in our tourism-centric enterprises, achieving the highest quality of hospitality standards remains our ultimate goal. The magazine features a plethora of articles that attest to our numerous initiatives in biodiversity conservation.

Further, in attempting to meet the diverse needs of our clientele and in recognition of increasing global remote work trends, Kenya has developed incentives couched specifically to attract digital nomads. Add to that improved Internet infrastructure, multiple co-working spaces and long-stay visa provisions and we are home and dry!

To ensure visitors experience seamless travel and unmatched excellence in hospitality to further boost the country’s appeal as a top-tier destination, the Government is working towards improving road networks leading to major tourist destinations, modernising airports and expanding hotel facilities.

Aside from last year’s notable spike in our tourist numbers, the growth of the sector continues to expand job opportunities for young Kenyans whilst improving Kenya’s economic fortunes. Finally, as we celebrate these milestones, we reaffirm our dedication to creating more opportunities in the tourism sector and ensuring that every visitor experiences the best of Kenya in every offering.

I now invite you to immerse yourself in what Kenya has to offer.

So grab a copy of the Destination Magazine and enjoy! **mk**



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND
WILDLIFE**

Hon. Rebecca Miano, EGH,
Cabinet Secretary,
Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife

Foreword

As I welcome you to this refreshed edition of **Destination Magazine**, I am thrilled that it comes at a time when Kenya’s tourism is on the rebound as witnessed in the sector’s 2024 performance. Indeed, it is a no-brainer that tourism is a significant contributor to our economy.

In 2024 Kenya received **2,394,376** inbound tourists up from **2,089, 259** in 2023, representing a **14.6** percent leap. Meanwhile, domestic bed occupancy also grew by **12 percent** from **4,618,094** in 2023 to **5,173,966** in 2024. Similarly, room occupancy increased by **19 percent** from **6,417,531** in 2023 to **7,609,856** during the same period, reflecting strong domestic and international tourism demand.

The inbound tourism earnings also surged, reaching **Ksh. 452.20 billion** in 2024 up from **Ksh. 377.49 billion** in 2023, a 10.79 percent jump. As a destination, our strong proposition remains product and experience diversification through new scheduled airlines. On that front, we recently received Air Asia and Air Dubai. Besides, the return of Brussels Airlines has made travel more convenient for hundreds of international visitors. Lately, we have tinkered with niche market products such as eco-tourism; adventure tourism and cultural tourism to embellish experiences thereof with fresh perspective while expanding the allure menu that we believe will lead to more visitors. Meanwhile, our continued development of community-based



Magical Kenya - Where Sustainability Meets Adventure

At the heart of Kenya's tourism strategy lies innovative product development that reflects the evolving priorities of the global traveler. From wildlife rehabilitation experiences and community-based cultural tourism to agro-tourism and eco-trails, Kenya is diversifying its offerings to align with principles of low-impact, high-value tourism.

These initiatives are often developed in collaboration with local communities, ensuring that tourism revenue supports livelihoods, education, and conservation at the grassroots level.

Supporting this evolution is a robust policy environment. The government's Tourism Policy and Vision 2030 strategy underscore sustainability as a cornerstone of the sector's growth, promoting investment in green infrastructure, digital innovation, and inclusive community engagement. Partnerships between government, private investors, NGOs, and local communities are actively encouraged to co-create tourism models that prioritize resilience, ecological integrity, and social equity.

Kenya offers a unique blend of adventure, authenticity, and advocacy. Visitors can track endangered species in their habitats, explore carbon-neutral safaris, or engage with indigenous communities protecting sacred ecosystems. These experiences not only deepen travellers' connection to nature but also contribute directly to the protection and regeneration of Kenya's vast biodiversity.

Through its integrated approach encompassing policy reform, innovative tourism product development, reforestation, waste management, and community inclusion Kenya has established itself as a beacon of sustainable tourism.

By harmonizing environmental conservation with enriching travel experiences, Kenya is not just offering a destination but inviting the world to join in a meaningful journey toward a greener, more equitable planet. **mk**



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND
WILDLIFE**

Hon. John Ololuaa,
Principal Secretary,
State Department of Tourism

Kenya stands as a global exemplar of proactive environmental stewardship, seamlessly blending conservation, tourism, and policy to chart a course toward a sustainable and inclusive future.

Central to this vision is our groundbreaking "One Tourist, One Tree" campaign—an initiative launched by the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. This forward-thinking program invites each visitor to plant a tree, directly supporting Kenya's ambitious target of planting 15 billion trees by 2032.

It's a simple yet powerful gesture that transforms tourists into environmental allies from the moment they arrive. Beyond reforestation, Kenya has embedded sustainability deeply into its legislative framework. In 2017, we introduced one of the world's toughest bans on single-use plastic bags, followed by an expansive 2020 prohibition on all single-use plastics within conservation areas.

These decisive policies have not only curbed plastic pollution but have also catalysed the development of eco-friendly tourism products from plastic-free lodges, which also champions solar energy and organic agriculture, to entire conservation zones committed to zero-waste principles.

Kenya's hospitality sector has embraced this shift, with an increasing number of eco-lodges and camps investing in renewable energy, water recycling, and local sourcing. Key establishments at our key destinations operate entirely on solar power, demonstrating that luxury and sustainability can go hand in hand. Many of these properties also integrate visitor participation in conservation efforts, offering tree planting, wildlife monitoring, and community interaction—creating travel experiences that are both immersive and impactful.

The Ultimate Adventure Every Traveller Should Experience

From the majestic hills to the simple joys of campfire stories, camping leaves you feeling rejuvenated, grounded, and deeply grateful for the beauty that exists in such remote, tranquil corners of the world

Maraba Village: The connection to the land, the people, and the rhythms of rural life is palpable



By Harriet James

As the sun begins its descent behind the towering Nandi Hills, the golden light bathes the rolling hills in a warm glow, casting long shadows over the lush green fields that surround us. This is a place where nature and tranquility meet, and the perfect setting for a camping site that promises not only adventure but a deep sense of connection to the land.

Setting up camp in Maraba Village felt like stepping into a world untouched by time. We were here

Courtesy of the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), for the Taptengelei Cultural Festival and the Bargetuny Mountain Run Program and this was where we would spend the next two nights.

Camping in Maraba Village was more than just a night under the stars—it's a journey into a peaceful haven where time slows down and nature's beauty takes center stage. The connection to the land, the people, and the rhythms of rural life is palpable here.



Trekking down to Kapicha viewpoint; an ethreal and enchanting view.

From the majestic hills to the simple joys of campfire stories, it's an experience that leaves you feeling rejuvenated, grounded, and deeply grateful for the beauty that exists in such remote, tranquil corners of the world.

Around the campfire, we shared stories and laughter as we devoured our dinner after a long and tiring day of exploration, the flames dancing and crackling as if to join in. The warmth of the fire contrasts beautifully with the cool mountain air of the night, creating a cozy, intimate atmosphere.

The Nandi Hills loom quietly in the distance, their silhouette softened by the mist that gently rolls in, adding a sense of mystery to the landscape. It's as if time has slowed down, and the only thing that matters is the present moment.

Waking up at dawn in Maraba is an experience in itself. The first light of day creeps over the hills, casting an ethereal glow on the landscape. I was eager to take photos of the sunrise as I watched the sun rise majestically from the horizon. The Nandi Hills, now bathed in soft morning light, stand tall and proud, as if to greet the new day. The fresh air carries the faint scent of dew on grass, and the sounds of early morning bird calls fill the silence, creating a symphony that is both peaceful and invigorating.

Camping is experiential travel because it invites you to engage directly with your environment, encourages you to immerse yourself in nature, and fosters memorable, hands-on experiences that are far more impactful than a passive vacation. It's about stepping away from your everyday life, embracing the unpredictability of nature, and discovering new perspectives about the world and yourself. Unlike traditional vacations where you may simply observe or relax in comfortable, controlled environments, camping requires you to engage with the environment directly—whether it's setting up your tent, cooking over a campfire, or hiking through the wilderness. Every moment spent camping offers something to learn, feel, or experience, making it a true adventure in every sense of the word.

Every camping trip is unique. From different weather patterns to new landscapes and varied wildlife sightings, no two camping trips are ever the same. I recall a different camping experience I had at Eliye Springs resort, still with KTB after exploring the hidden

However, waking up to the early morning mist and rushing to watch the majestic Thompson Falls made the experience worth it.



Rock climbing is part of magical Kenya trail series.

gems of Turkana. We had our candlelit dinner on the shores of Lake Turkana, which was an amazing experience though at the back of the mind, I couldn't help but think of what I would do should a crocodile come to say hello. Though Lake Turkana has the largest concentration of Nile crocodiles, the owner of Eliye, Rolf Gloor, assured us that the place is safe. If someone asked me which kind of camping they would prefer, I would say one that is in warm areas, like the coast, northern part of western side like in Kisumu. The places are usually warmer, one doesn't need to pack a lot of stuff and above all, you will sleep soundly. In Turkana, I just had a sheet and slept soundly and that felt like the most perfect camping experience I ever had. The next day, we took photos of the beach and headed over to Napeget sand dunes which is around 25 kilometers from Eliye.

The place looked like the sand dunes at Chalbi, only that these were untouched with beautiful views. We also went further to have a glimpse of Wadach pyramids, a unique natural geographical formations, on the road that connects Eliye and Kalokol which is just 10 km from Eliye. A short hike to the top of some of the soil peaks, your eyes will feast on spectacular panoramic views of the landscape and Lake Turkana. I was shocked

to see them as they looked similar to the pyramids of Egypt and didn't know that such exist in our country.

I can't say this is what happened in another camping experience at Thompson Falls which was great but different. The weather around Nyahururu was freezing cold and though I was excited about watching the stars and being intimate with nature, the biting cold made it an uncomfortable experience. This means that one should research about their environment and pack appropriate clothes and bed coverings to ensure that your dream night during camping turns not to be your worst experience.

However, waking up to the early morning mist and rushing to watch the majestic Thompson falls made the experience worth it. The sight is nothing short of magical, and being greeted by the sight of water tumbling down the cliffs brings renewed energy, as if it, too, is awakening for the day ahead.

Camping pushes you to adapt and problem-solve. From figuring out how to set up your tent in a rainstorm to navigating unfamiliar trails or cooking meals over an open fire, these challenges build resilience and confidence. You learn to survive under such harsh conditions and appreciate the blessings that you take for granted back at home. The sense of accomplishment from overcoming obstacles in the wild is one of the most profound aspects of camping as experiential travel. It's about pushing your limits and gaining new skills, making it a deeply rewarding and transformative journey. **mk**



A run in the tea farm can be refreshing and invigorating.

A snap shot through heritage trail series

By Gilbert Koech

Kenya has embarked on ambitious initiative to diversifying her tourism experience through adventure offering in latest bid to bolster visitor numbers.

The innovation also known as the Magical Kenya Mountain run and Trail Series, targets to attract about 200,000 adventure travelers in the next five years.

The first leg was launched early this year with the government emphasizing the importance of diversifying Kenya's tourism offerings beyond traditional safaris. The initiative also seeks to showcase Kenya's hidden gems and unexplored landscapes.

The five-day Heritage Trail Expedition kicked off in the county of Laikipia, to Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu, Baringo and Nandi Counties. From the Thomson falls, the cyclists pedaled their way to the stunning Subukia Viewpoint before rolling into Subukia Town and Shrine for a few minutes stop.

At the Subukia Viewpoint, cyclists had a short stop, marveling at the breathtaking views before taking Subukia Town by storm and heading to Subukia Shrines. From the marvelous and state of the art Shrine, the cyclists had an exhilarating descent back to Subukia Town, before making their way to Lake Solai and finally the picturesque Lake Baringo Viewpoint.

Hiking

The hikers started their journey at the Mochongoi drop-off before immersing themselves in a stunning six kilometers trail that snaked its way down to Waseges Center. Here, the hikers had choices.

They either hopped on a ride or embraced the thrill of a seven kilometers hike to the breathtaking Kapicha Viewpoint. The trail offered unmatched natural beauty, sweeping landscapes, and memories to last a lifetime. Participants described it as a gateway to adventure having experienced jaw-dropping scenery, warm local interactions, challenging climbs, fast descents, and fun along the way.

On January 15, participants departed for Kabarnet through Kormoson-Irong Conservancy archeological site, where

they witnessed what used to be baboon parliament. At Kormoson-Irong Conservancy archeological site, ancient structures stood out for the participants. Locals said the structures have not been studied despite the area having good scenery of stone formation.

Some of the sites provided perfect meeting point for elders in the community. The participants then proceeded to Kipngochoch forest, which is a community conservancy before arriving in Kabarnet.

As part of contributing to the 15 billion tree growing agenda, participants grew tree seedlings in all the areas where they traversed. On January 16, the participants departed to Kerio Valley, through the scenic SS road to Chebloch Gorge, where divers, who also doubles up as rescuers displayed what they have in store.

Cultural immersion

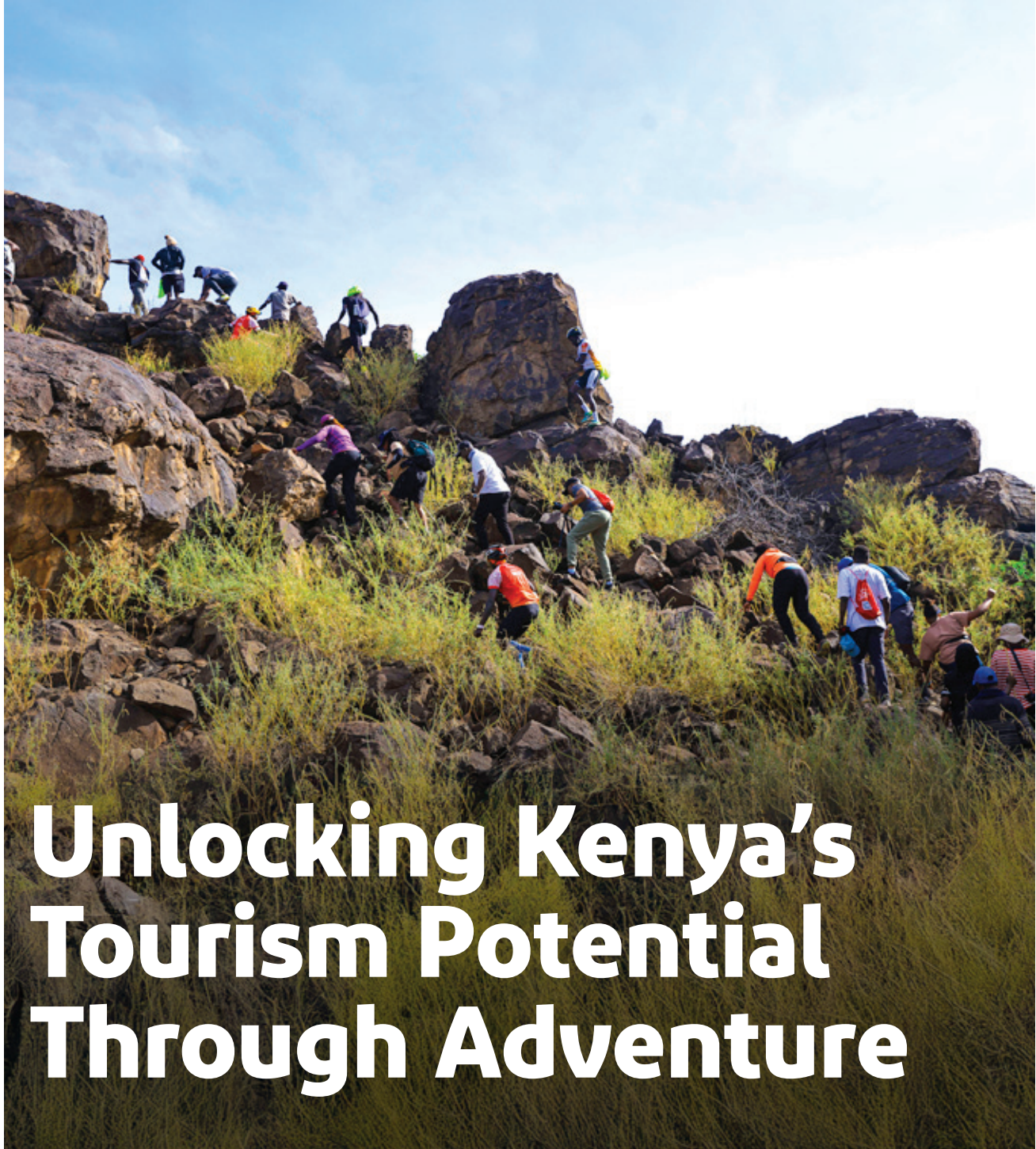
The Taptengelei Cultural Festival was also held and it provided an opportunity for young people to learn and appreciate the Nandi culture. An array of displays including traditional dances, attire, music, artifacts and cuisine, offering locals and visitors a unique glimpse into the rich culture of the community.

The great Mountain run

The climax of the expedition was on January 18 with the Barng'etuny Mountain Run, an iconic race at the heart of Nandi County. The Barng'etuny Mountain Run is an exciting annual event held in Tinderet, Nandi County, and organised as part of the Magical Kenya Trail Series. The Mountain Run featured races for various age groups and categories, as it exhibited the region's stunning landscapes, promoted community engagement and diversity.

Beyond promoting tourism, the initiative supported Kenyan athletes, local communities, and conservation efforts. As the country unveiled the Magical Kenya and Trail Series, it announced that the country was targeting to record 200,000 adventure visitors in the next five years.

mk



Unlocking Kenya's Tourism Potential Through Adventure

By June Chepkemei



The holiday season may be behind us, but the echoes of countless travel adventures still linger in 2025. While many tourists have sought solace on sandy beaches or embarked on thrilling safaris, a notable shift has emerged.

A growing number of travelers are today choosing immersive outdoor experiences over traditional holidays. This trend toward adventure tourism is shaking up the global travel industry, and Kenya is perfectly poised to seize the moment.

Adventure tourism, spanning activities such as hiking, rock climbing, whitewater rafting, and paragliding has

gained considerable momentum. Today's travelers seek more than just relaxation; they crave active, health-conscious journeys that engage both body and mind while championing eco-conscious values.

Adventure tourism is no longer a niche, it's a multi-billion-dollar industry. To achieve our tourism aspirations, Kenya has to aggressively position itself as a top destination for outdoor explorers. Kenya's natural advantages make this endeavor both logical and promising.

Our rugged mountains, expansive savannahs, pristine lakes, and diverse wildlife offer unparalleled adventure experiences. From trekking the remote northern frontier to cycling through the breathtaking Rift Valley, or winding through lush tea and coffee estates, these activities not only thrill adventurers but also bolster local economies and reinforce conservation efforts.

Globally, the adventure tourism market is valued at over USD 450 billion and is projected to skyrocket to USD 2.6 trillion by 2033. Kenya is well-positioned to capture a significant slice of this market, but it will take concerted effort, strategic investment, and cohesive marketing to compete with top-tier adventure destinations worldwide.

Success in this space requires more than just natural beauty. We must develop adventure products that resonate with today's experience-driven travelers. That's why we launched the Kenya Adventure Tourism Product Club last July, an industry-led initiative designed to foster collaboration between public and private stakeholders. By aligning strategies and pooling expertise, we are building a robust platform to market Kenya's adventure tourism potential to thrill-seekers around the globe.

A centerpiece of our strategy is the Magical Kenya Mountain & Trail Series, a flagship initiative aimed at positioning Kenya as a premier destination for both adventure and sports tourism. In partnership with Athletics Kenya, we've curated a calendar of mountain and trail running events across iconic landscapes of Mt. Kenya, the Aberdares, Mt. Longonot, Mt. Elgon, and Nyamira—offering a unique blend of adrenaline and awe-inspiring scenery.

The inaugural event, the Heritage Trails Expedition & Barngetuny Run, kicked off January this year. This immersive experience traverses the counties of Laikipia, Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu, Baringo, and Nandi, allowing participants to engage with local communities, sample regional cuisine, and delve into cultural traditions. By intertwining tourism with heritage, we create enriching experiences for visitors while empowering local communities, a crucial pillar of sustainable tourism.

However, realizing this potential won't be without challenges. Adventure tourism demands substantial investment in infrastructure, from reliable transportation networks to high-standard accommodations. It also requires rigorous training to ensure safety, top-tier logistics, and exceptional service. Moreover, we must refine our marketing approach to captivate a niche audience that values authenticity, environmental stewardship, and unique experiences.

Raw ingredients for adventure experience

The opportunity before us is immense. Kenya already has the raw ingredients, stunning landscapes, favorable climate, and rich cultural heritage. The task ahead is to blend these elements with well-packaged products, strategic partnerships, and world-class marketing. With the right execution, adventure tourism can unlock unprecedented opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and community upliftment.

As we forge ahead into a new year brimming with possibility, I am confident that adventure tourism will be the catalyst propelling Kenya to greater heights. The road ahead may be challenging, but with bold steps and a shared vision, we can transform Kenya into a global beacon for adventure seekers.

Let's lace up our boots, hit the trail, and take Kenya's tourism to the next level one adventurous step at a time.

mk

The writer is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Kenya Tourism Board (KTB)

Tembea Kenya, Capture Magical Kenya!



Photography Contest: Best Shot Pictorial



Flamingo Lake Turkana:

By Geoffrey Bagaka,
Central Island National Park-Turkana



Leaf Hoppers:

By Solomon Mwangi Ngari,
Karura Forest Reserve, Nairobi



The Wait:

By Okaka Felix,
Maikona, Marsabit



Waste to Wonder:

By Carol Kuyo,
Nyali, Mombasa



The Brotherhood Stance:

By Samuel Kisamwa,
A.B.C. Starehe, Nairobi



Whispers of Muricho:

By Leah Mureithi,
Rongai Nakuru County



Upperhill Landmarks:

By Mutahi Chiira (Tash),
Upperhill, Nairobi



Sundowner at Osieko Beach:

By Dalton Odemba,
Siaya County

Technology Transforms Conservation in Maasai Mara

A New Era for Wildlife and People



Narok county governor: Patrick Ole Ntutu.

With state-of-the-art EarthRanger software, Maasai Mara Conservancy Centre represents a leap forward in the integration of technology in conservation

Revolution: We are witnessing a game-changing moment in the way we approach conservation– Governor Ntutu

By George Sayagie

The Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR), one of Africa's most renowned wildlife sanctuaries, has embarked on a bold new chapter in conservation and tourism management, embracing cutting-edge technology to protect its natural wonders and manage growing tourism demands. At the heart of this transformation is the Maasai Mara Conservation Center, which was recently inaugurated by Narok County Governor, Patrick Ole Ntutu. Equipped with the state-of-the-art EarthRanger software, the center represents a leap forward in the integration of technology for the region's wildlife conservation efforts.



"We are witnessing a game-changing moment in the way we approach conservation," said Governor Ntutu during the launch. "This technology will not only enhance our ability to protect the Mara's incredible biodiversity, but it will also help us manage tourism in a way that benefits both our wildlife and local communities."

The system offers an unprecedented level of detail, enabling a swift and coordinated response to emerging challenges.

EarthRanger: A Tech Revolution in Wildlife Monitoring

The EarthRanger system, the core of the Maasai Mara Conservation Center, is designed to streamline and enhance the way wildlife and their habitats are monitored. It collects real-time data from a variety of sources, including ranger patrols, remote sensors, and satellite imagery.

By consolidating information on wildlife movements, infrastructure, and even tourist activities, EarthRanger provides a comprehensive and up-to-date view of the reserve's entire ecosystem. This wealth of data allows park managers and wildlife biologists to make more informed decisions, whether they're tracking collared animals, detecting poaching activities, or identifying areas of the reserve in need of protection.

The system offers an unprecedented level of detail, enabling a swift and coordinated response to emerging challenges.

"We now have the ability to monitor every part of the reserve, 24/7," said Moses ole Kenta a ranger's head of the command center. "Whether it's the migration of wildebeests or the movement of a black rhino, we can track it in real time, allowing us to act quickly and prevent conflicts or other threats."

Tackling Human-Wildlife Conflict with Technology

One of the most pressing challenges in the Maasai Mara—and across many wildlife reserves—is human-wildlife conflict. As human populations grow and encroach on wildlife habitats, the chances of conflict rise, often with dangerous consequences for both wildlife and local communities.



Narok governor Patrick Ole Ntutu in a past functions and during the launch of the Maasai Mara Conservation center to monitor wildlife at real time.

The integration of EarthRanger technology offers a potential solution. By tracking wildlife movements in real time, the system can predict when animals are likely to cross into human settlements, allowing for preemptive action.

Alerts can be sent to rangers or local farmers, giving them time to take protective measures before an animal enters farmland or a village.

"We've seen the devastating effects of human-wildlife conflict in the past," said Ntutu. "But with EarthRanger, we can now anticipate these movements and reduce the risk of dangerous encounters between wildlife and humans. This is not just about protecting animals—it's about creating a harmonious coexistence between wildlife and the people who live alongside them."

The system also helps to monitor areas that are more prone to conflict, allowing authorities to strengthen patrols in those zones. With

satellite imagery and sensor data, the Maasai Mara's rangers can spot signs of illegal activities such as poaching or encroachment, and take proactive measures to prevent them.

Enhancing the Tourist Experience While Protecting the Reserve

While technology is revolutionizing wildlife protection, it's also helping to manage the growing numbers of tourists who flock to the Maasai Mara each year. As the reserve's popularity increases, overcrowding has become a concern for both conservationists and tourists alike.

In response, the county government has launched a new website for the MMNR, which features updated information on conservation efforts, tourism guidelines, and visitor engagement programmes.

While technology is revolutionizing wildlife protection, it's also helping to manage the growing numbers of tourists who flock to the Maasai Mara each year.

Additionally, the reserve has introduced a new annual magazine to keep visitors informed about ongoing projects, ensuring that tourism remains aligned with sustainable practices.

"We want to give visitors an experience that's both enjoyable and respectful of the environment," said Stephen ole Minis, the chief park warden at the MMNR. "The website and the magazine will provide tourists with all the information they need to plan a responsible visit. We also want to raise awareness about how technology is helping us manage the reserve and protect its incredible wildlife."

To further ensure that only responsible tour guides operate within the reserve, the county government has rolled out a licensing system. Official stickers are now required for all guides, and each sticker must be renewed annually at a fee. This initiative is designed to promote professionalism and safeguard the reserve's long-term sustainability.



A Model for Global Conservation

The Maasai Mara's adoption of advanced technology has placed it at the forefront of modern conservation efforts, making it one of the first protected areas in Kenya—and the second after Lewa Conservancy in Samburu—to integrate EarthRanger.

This model of tech-driven conservation has the potential to inspire other protected areas around the world to embrace similar tools, helping them manage wildlife and tourism in a way that benefits both ecosystems and local communities.

"The future of conservation lies in the intersection of technology and nature," said Ole Kenta. "We are setting an example for the world, showing that with the right tools, we can protect biodiversity, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and create a tourism experience that's both sustainable and enriching for everyone involved."

As climate change, habitat destruction, and a growing human population continue to place immense pressure on protected areas, the Maasai Mara's tech-driven approach provides a blueprint for other wildlife-rich regions to follow.

By combining cutting-edge technology with on-the-ground efforts, the reserve is ensuring that its rich biodiversity remains intact for generations to come.

"We're not just protecting wildlife here in the Mara but we're securing the future for all of us—wildlife and humans alike. With technology, we can achieve a balance that wasn't possible before." said Governor Ntutu.

In the Maasai Mara, the future of wildlife conservation is no longer just about protecting animals—it's about forging a path to a sustainable and harmonious coexistence, where technology and nature work hand in hand. **mk**

Bridging the Gap between Tradition and Conservation:

A Journey through Maasai Mara's Conservancies

A partnership that would allow the Maasai to continue their traditional practices while conserving environment

Shared future: What struck me the most was the sense of unity between the people, the land, and the wildlife

By Special Correspondent

I've always been drawn to the greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem. There's something magical about the vastness of the landscape—where the golden savannas seem to stretch endlessly, the sky is a canvas of blues and oranges, and the wildlife roams freely in its natural habitat.

But during my recent visit, what I didn't expect to find was a groundbreaking story about how Maasai communities and wildlife conservation are working hand in hand to shape a more sustainable future. It's a story that starts with the Maasai, an indigenous group whose relationship with the land spans centuries. But like many traditional communities, they faced challenges as human population grew, their herding lands shrank, and wildlife habitats were threatened.

There was a certain sense of peace in his words, peace that comes from knowing that change doesn't have to come at the expense of your roots.

In the midst of this, something remarkable began to take shape—a partnership that would allow the Maasai to continue their traditional practices while also benefitting from tourism and conservation.

I had the chance to visit the conservancies and witness how they're changing lives and landscapes in ways that few could have predicted.

The First Encounter

I remember my first encounter with Olmirishoi Ole Solol, an elder at the Pardamat Conservancy. We met under the shade of an acacia tree, the sun casting long shadows on the earth.

Ole Solol is a man of few words, but his eyes tell a story of wisdom and quiet pride. He explained how the conservancy model had transformed his community.

"We used to be herders, but now we see the value of wildlife. When we lease our land to safari operators, we generate income that supports our schools, healthcare, and roads. It has brought new while allowing us to keep our traditions alive," he told me, his voice steady.





There was a certain sense of peace in his words, peace that comes from knowing that change doesn't have to come at the expense of your roots.

What struck me the most was the sense of unity I felt between the people, the land, and the wildlife. Ole Solol's life is a testament to this balance—his family's herd grazes on land that is carefully managed, ensuring the grasses are not overgrazed and wildlife continues to thrive.

His people are not just protecting the land; they are also preserving their way of life.

The Faces of Change

As I ventured deeper into the conservancies, I met people whose lives had been directly impacted by this model.

Naserian Nkoitai, a young Maasai woman from the Olare Orok Conservancy, shared how the conservancy had brought more than just economic prosperity to her village.

"Before, we had to walk for hours to fetch water. Now, with the income generated from the conservancy,

we have water points nearby and my children go to school. I never imagined this would happen. It's a huge relief," she told me, smiling.

It's the little things that have made the biggest impact here—things like access to clean water, better schools, and healthcare services that were once out of reach for many. But the impact is far more profound.

Naserian's children, for the first time in generations, will be able to grow up in a community that offers them opportunities their parents could only dream of.

For Mzee Kipas Ole Sairowua, an elder from the Naboisho Conservancy, the impact of the conservancies has been more personal. His son was trained as a safari guide at the defunct Koyiaki Guiding School and works in one of the lodges, a job that not only offers steady income but also keeps the younger generation close to home.

"My son now helps me with my cattle and works as a guide. Before, I could only rely on my livestock for income, but now I know my family has options that is a salary from my son, and lease fee from the conservancy. The conservancy has opened new doors for us," he says, his pride evident.



Svein, a safari operator working in the Mara, told me about the partnership between tourism and conservation, a model that has allowed local communities and wildlife to flourish together.

"The Maasai Mara is a unique place, and without the partnership with the Maasai people, it wouldn't be the same," Svein told me. "By paying the community for the privilege of operating in these conservancies, we support not just wildlife conservation but community development. It's about creating a sustainable

future for both people and wildlife."

Opening Wildlife Corridors

What struck me as I travelled across the conservancies was not just the way the Maasai communities were benefitting, but also how these conservancies had created vital wildlife corridors that were opening up new pathways for species like elephants, wildebeest, and zebras.

In the past, these creatures had been restricted by fences and land development, but through the conservancy model, the land is now carefully managed to ensure the migration of animals remains unhindered.

These wildlife corridors are essential for the survival of many species, especially as climate change and human encroachment continue to threaten their natural habitats. By removing fences and working with local communities to manage the land sustainably, the conservancies are creating a safe passage for wildlife to roam freely across the region.

This is especially important for species that rely on seasonal migrations to survive, such as elephants, which need large, contiguous landscapes to forage and breed.

The Role of Tourism

One of the highlights of my trip was hearing from Svein Wilhelmsen, founder of Basecamp Explorer, which he founded in 1998 after a life-changing meeting with an old Maasai chief named Ole Taek.

In his view, the conservancies have created a harmonious relationship where tourism doesn't exploit the land—it strengthens it.

As I left the Mara, the sun setting behind the acacia trees, I couldn't help but feel a sense of awe

"There's no reason why conservation can't be profitable," Svein explained. "When you give local communities a stake in protecting their land, it's a win-win. The Maasai gain, and so does the wildlife."

Ole Muli, a conservancy ranger, shared how proud he was to be working to protect the land his ancestors had lived on for so long.

"We are protectors of this land, and now we are also protectors of its wildlife," he said with conviction. "It's our heritage. We want to ensure it's here for our children and our children's children."

The Maasai Mara Conservancies are a beacon of hope, showing us that conservation and economic empowerment don't have to be at odds.

Through the hard work of the Maasai people, the commitment of safari operators like Basecamp, and



the steady support of tourism, this model is showing the world how we can protect our planet and our cultures simultaneously.

A Legacy of Coexistence and Conservation

I also met Daniel Ole Sopia, CEO of Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) headquartered at Aitong area within the Mara North conservancy.

He narrated to me how proud they are of the work they've done. He said, *"As a Maasai and the CEO of the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association, I've watched the Maasai Mara Conservancies evolve into a vital part of the Greater Mara Ecosystem."*

"Covering over 400,000 acres and managed by 24 conservancies, with more than 14,500 Maasai landowners, we've built a model that benefits both wildlife and our people."

"It all began in 1991 with Ol Choro Oirouwa, the first conservancy," Daniel explained.

"Today, as I walk through the conservancies, I see children in classrooms and wildlife thriving. It's a future where the land and the people of Maasai Mara prosper side by side," he said.

"Our conservancies have preserved essential habitats for species like lions and elephants, all while improving the lives of Maasai families. This is proof that conservation and community development can and should go hand in hand."

As I left the Mara, the sun setting behind the acacia trees, I couldn't help but feel a sense of awe at the possibility of a world where communities and wildlife thrive together. It's a vision that I hope continues to grow not just in Maasai Mara but everywhere. **mk**

Maasai Women Pioneering Change in the Safari Tourism Industry

As they continue to break barriers and push boundaries, they are changing the face of the Maasai Mara and, in doing so, rewriting the future of African tourism

Sila, who works as a safari guide at JW Marriott, a luxury tented camp in the Mara, is one of the women living their dream



By George Sayagie

For centuries, Maasai women in Kenya were confined to domestic roles, their voices rarely heard in leadership or the public sphere. In a culture where men traditionally held authority, especially in sectors like tourism, women were often overlooked. But in the heart of Kenya's Maasai Mara, a quiet revolution is underway, one that is challenging norms and reshaping the safari tourism industry.

Today, a growing number of Maasai women are stepping into roles once deemed unthinkable: becoming safari guides, 4x4 vehicle drivers, and leaders in the tourism space. These pioneers are not only carving out space for themselves in a male-dominated industry but also inspiring future generations to follow suit.

At the forefront of this transformation is **Sophy Sila**, a safari guide at the luxury **JW Marriott Masai Mara Lodge**. Standing tall amidst the savannah, she shares her deep connection with the land: *"Wildlife and I belong to each other. They inspire me, they excite me,"* she says. *"When I was growing up, I saw many young men in tourism and I wondered why not women too?"*

Sila's journey has been defined by passion and perseverance. Through specialized training and certifications, she has mastered the knowledge required to guide guests through the wild while weaving in rich cultural insights. For her, guiding is more than a job; it's a calling rooted in identity, pride, and purpose.

Another trailblazer is **Purity Karia**, a 23-year-old safari guide at **Entumoto Luxury Camp** in the Siana Conservancy. Her love for wildlife was sparked as a child after visiting Nairobi National Park. *"That moment changed everything,"* she recalls. *"I knew I wanted to work with animals."*

Growing up in a traditional Maasai village, Karia faced societal expectations that confined her to household duties. But she pushed back, determined to pursue her dream. In 2018, she graduated from the prestigious **Koiyaki Guiding School**, where she honed essential skills in survival, wildlife behavior, communication, and leadership.

"Training at Koiyaki was one of the most valuable experiences of my life," she shares. *"It gave me not just technical skills, but the confidence and resilience to succeed in a field where few women tread."*

On game drives, Karia's passion shines. She excitedly

explains the dynamics of impala herds, noting the role of dominant males and bachelor groups. Her deep understanding of animal behavior captivates tourists, but her mission goes beyond education.

"I want to show young girls that they don't have to accept what tradition dictates," she says. *"They can lead, they can dream, and they can achieve whatever they set their minds to."*

Sila and Karia represent a broader shift in the Maasai Mara—one where women are not only participating in tourism but reshaping it. Their presence offers tourists a more nuanced, culturally rich experience and sends a powerful message of inclusion and empowerment.

The rise of female safari guides is also helping to boost the local economy and preserve Maasai heritage. As more women enter the industry, they bring with them stories, perspectives, and voices that were previously left out of the narrative.

"This isn't just about gender equality," says Sila. *"It's about recognizing the value women bring to this space—their knowledge, their strength, and their unique ability to connect people to the land and culture."*

Through sheer determination, these women are proving that given the opportunity, they can thrive and lead. Their success is not just a personal milestone—it's a symbol of progress for their communities and a beacon of hope for future generations of Maasai girls.

In redefining their roles, Sila and Karia are not only guiding tourists through the wilderness—they are also guiding their communities into a more inclusive and promising future for African tourism. **mk**



The Safari in Nairobi's Capital

Get a sneak preview of the places to visit

1 Nairobi National Park

- **Where:** Langata
- **How far:** Just 10km from the city center
- **How long:** A half-day safari adventure awaits you!



Yes, you heard that right. Nairobi is the only capital city in the world with a national park right on its doorstep. Picture this: a lush, green park filled with black rhinos, lions, cheetahs, and giraffes—all with the city skyline in the background. It's a safari like no other, just minutes away from downtown Nairobi. Get ready for an unforgettable experience!

2 Nairobi National Museum

- **Where:** Museum Hill
- **How far:** 3km from the CBD
- **How long:** 1 hour of history and culture



Step into Kenya's rich history at the Nairobi National Museum, where culture, art, and nature collide. From prehistoric fossils and ancient art to stunning botanical gardens, this museum is an oasis of knowledge. Plus, it's right next to the Snake Park—so you can meet some of Kenya's slithery residents!

3 Bomas of Kenya

- **Where:** Langata
- **How far:** 10km from the CBD
- **How long:** 3-4 hours of cultural immersion

Discover the vibrant cultures of Kenya's diverse tribes at Bomas of Kenya. From traditional music and dance performances to recreations of tribal homesteads, Bomas offers an authentic taste of Kenya's rich heritage. It's not just a show—it's an unforgettable experience!

4 Daphne Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage

- Where: Karen
- How far: 10km from CBD
- How long: 1-2 hours of heartwarming moments



Meet the cutest orphans in town: elephant calves! Brought here from across Kenya after being orphaned, these adorable elephants are lovingly cared for by the dedicated staff at Daphne Sheldrick's Elephant Orphanage. Time your visit during feeding time to interact with the calves and hear their incredible rescue stories. Plus, you can even adopt an elephant and help with their care.

5 Giraffe Centre

- Where: Karen
- How far: 15km from the CBD
- How long: Half-day with giraffes

Who wouldn't want to feed a giraffe? At the Giraffe Centre, you can do just that. This center was founded to protect the endangered Rothschild giraffe, and today it is one of Nairobi's most beloved spots. Get a bird's-eye view of these magnificent creatures from the feeding platform, and learn more about their conservation.





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Your Kenyan Bucketlist Experiences

1 Home of Human Origins – Heritage Corridor & Rich Cultural Fabric

Kenya is the home of human origins, home to some of the world's most significant prehistoric discoveries. Visit the Koobi Fora site, where the famous Turkana Boy was found, offering insight into human evolution. Discover the rich tapestry of cultures by touring Nairobi National Museum, Karen Blixen Museum, and Fort Jesus in Mombasa, which tells tales of past conquests and Swahili resistance.

Step into history at Shimoni Caves, once a hub of the East African slave trade, or visit the Rabai Mission, where Christianity first took root in Kenya. Engage in cultural experiences in Kaya Forests, sacred to the Mijikenda people, and explore Swahili heritage in Lamu Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has remained unchanged for centuries.



2 Home of Urban Adventures & Wildlife – All in a Day

Nowhere else in the world can you experience a thriving metropolis and a safari in one day. Nairobi, the "Green City in the Sun," offers an unparalleled urban adventure—take a morning game drive in Nairobi National Park, where lions roam against a backdrop of skyscrapers, then visit the Giraffe Centre and the David Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage for up-close animal encounters.

Explore the vibrant art scene in local galleries, experience the colorful matatu culture, and dive into Kenya's culinary delights at high-end restaurants and street food markets. Heritage walking tours through Nairobi's monuments offer a glimpse into the city's storied past, while nightlife hotspots bring the city alive after dark.

3 Home of Great Marathoners – Where Human Potential Knows No Bounds

Kenya has produced the world's fastest marathoners, with legends like Eliud Kipchoge inspiring generations. Visit Iten, the Home of Champions, where elite athletes train at high altitudes, pushing human limits.

Explore the Lornah Kiplagat High Altitude Training Centre, meet young aspiring runners, and even join a morning run along the scenic escarpments of the North Rift. Delve into the science behind Kenya's running dominance and experience the unwavering discipline and dedication that has put Kenyan athletes on the world stage.

For adventure enthusiasts, combine your visit with hiking in the Kerio Valley or paragliding over Rimoi National Reserve.





4 Home of Breathtaking Landscapes & Thrilling Adventures

Kenya's landscapes are a playground for adventure seekers. Challenge yourself with a trek up Mount Kenya, Africa's second-highest peak, or go rock climbing in Hell's Gate National Park. Journey through the Great Rift Valley, marveling at dramatic escarpments and picturesque lakes like Lake Nakuru, home to flamingos, and Lake Bogoria, famous for its geysers.

Explore the Chalbi Desert, an otherworldly expanse of sand dunes and salt pans, or embark on a quad biking adventure in Suguta Valley. For a unique experience, try white-water rafting on the Tana River or explore the Aberdare Ranges, where misty forests hide waterfalls and rare wildlife.

5 Home of Swahili – Where Trade and Culture Unite

The Swahili Coast is a living testament to centuries of trade, blending African, Arab, Persian, and Portuguese influences. Stroll through the narrow streets of Lamu Old Town, Kenya's oldest continually inhabited town, where Swahili architecture and traditional dhow boats define the landscape.

Visit the ruins of Gedi, a lost medieval city shrouded in mystery, and explore Jumba la Mtwana, another ancient settlement along the coast. Savor the flavors of Swahili cuisine, from spiced biryanis to freshly caught seafood. Enjoy water sports in Diani, go diving in Watamu's coral reefs, or sail into the sunset on a traditional dhow cruise. Immerse yourself in the culture through Taarab music, coastal festivals, and warm Kenyan hospitality.



6 Home of Ecotourism – Where Community & Conservation Converge

Kenya is a global leader in sustainable tourism, boasting over 200 conservation areas. Engage in voluntourism projects, from tree planting to wildlife monitoring in sanctuaries like Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

Explore urban green spaces like Karura Forest and Ngong Hills, offering serene escapes within city limits. Visit community-led conservancies in Laikipia, Samburu, and Maasai Mara, where locals play a key role in protecting wildlife. Stay in eco-lodges that use solar power and sustainable practices, and support conservation efforts like the black rhino sanctuary and elephant corridors.

Experience authentic village life by visiting a Maasai, Samburu, or Turkana homestead, learning about their traditions while contributing to local economies.

7 Home to Farm-to-Table Experiences – Authenticity Redefined

Kenya's rich agricultural landscape offers one-of-a-kind farm-to-table experiences. Take a tour of coffee farms in Kiambu, where you can pick, roast, and taste freshly brewed coffee.

Walk through lush tea plantations in Kericho and Nandi, experiencing the process from leaf to cup. Visit the flower farms of Naivasha, where Kenya's world-famous roses are grown. Discover the world's first purple tea farm at Gatura Greens, and experience authentic Kenyan cuisine with farm-fresh ingredients in countryside homesteads. The farm-to-table movement extends to vineyards in Naivasha, fresh avocado farms, and organic markets across the country.



8 Home of the Original Safari – Diverse Ways to Experience the Wild

Kenya is the birthplace of the safari, offering diverse and immersive wildlife experiences. Witness the Great Migration in Maasai Mara, where millions of wildebeest cross the crocodile-infested Mara River. Explore the elephant herds of Amboseli, set against the majestic backdrop of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Choose a hot air balloon safari for a breathtaking aerial view of the savannah or embark on a walking safari in conservancies like Lewa and Laikipia. Experience wildlife in unique ways—horseback safaris in Chyulu Hills, camel rides with Samburu warriors, and cycling safaris in Hell's Gate.

9 Home of Innovation & Talent – The Silicon Savannah

Kenya is Africa's tech powerhouse, home to M-Pesa, the world's leading mobile money platform. Nairobi's iHub and Konza Technopolis foster cutting-edge innovation, attracting global investors.

Visit co-working spaces buzzing with entrepreneurs, or explore Kenya's start-up ecosystem, where young minds are creating game-changing solutions in fintech, AI, and agritech. Beyond technology, Kenya shines in music, film, and fashion, with talents making waves internationally. Experience the vibrant Kenyan creative scene, from the booming Afropop industry to art galleries showcasing contemporary African artists.



10 Home of Vibrant Cities – Where Culture, Entertainment & Urban Life Thrive

Kenya's cities are cultural hubs brimming with energy, Nairobi is a blend of modernity and tradition, offering Maasai markets, luxury malls, and art galleries.

Mombasa's Old Town transports you back in time with its Swahili charm, while Kisumu on Lake Victoria offers breathtaking waterfront experiences. Nakuru, a rising metropolis, is rich in nature and culture, while Eldoret is the gateway to Kenya's highlands and marathon training camps. From rooftop bars to live music venues, Kenya's urban life is as diverse as its landscapes.



Why I love Agro-tourism

Agro-tourism is more than just a vacation—it's a way to truly connect with the land, the people, and the stories that shape a community

Eccentric: Unlike conventional travel, which often places you in passive observer mode, agro-tourism is all about engagement

By Harriet James

Stepping onto the lush, rolling hills of Kiambethu Farm feels like entering a world where time slows down, and every leaf, every breeze, tells a story. The vibrant green tea plantation tells not just the story of the farm but the history of tea and how its cultivation began.

As we walked together through the plantation, Fiona Vermont, the passionate owner and knowledgeable steward of Kiambethu, guided me through the intricacies of tea cultivation with an intimacy that only comes from decades of experience. Her voice is like a bridge connecting the past and present, that makes her not just sound like an expert, but a storyteller, weaving tales of how the farm has flourished, the challenges faced by the early pioneers, and the profound relationship between the land and its people.

Fiona began the tea tours by 'fate', if I may put it that way, and this saw her handling the tea tours that she once swore to her mother that she would never do.

Each step I take with Fiona feels like a page turning in a living book of tea history. She points out the different varieties of tea bushes, explains the nuances of hand-picking, and offers insights into the environmental and social aspects of the tea industry in Kenya. The experience is deeply immersive—it's not just about facts and figures; it's about understanding the soul of the land and the people who have cultivated it for generations.

Agro-tourism is more than just a vacation for me—it's a way to truly connect with the land, the people, and the stories that shape a community. Having been born and bred in the city, there's something incredibly rewarding about stepping away from the hustle and bustle of city life and immersing myself in the rhythms of rural life. From the first step onto a family farm to the moment you taste food grown right before your eyes, agro-tourism is an experience that allows you to savour the essence of a place in the most personal way.

Unlike conventional travel, which often places you in passive observer mode, agro-tourism is all about engagement. Whether you're planting seeds, harvesting crops, going behind the scenes to find out how a crop is grown, or cooking a traditional dish using ingredients picked from the garden, the experience invites you to become an active participant. This hands-on approach is at the core of experiential travel, where every moment is an opportunity to learn, connect, and grow.

What makes agro-tourism so special is that it not only introduces you to the natural beauty of the land but also opens a window into the rich cultural heritage that exists in farming communities. It's about slowing down, taking the time to appreciate the connection between food and nature, and understanding the importance of sustainable practices that protect both the environment and the livelihoods of local people.

During my travels, I have come across various places where people who want to get hands on in the farm can tour. For instance, Gatura Greens Tea Farm in Muranga County is one of the farms where tourists can learn about tea. The farm has been operational since 1984 and ventured into Purple Tea in 2009, making them the first farm ever to plant purple tea. They then began processing their own tea in 2016. Seeing how Purple tea, a fairly new variant in the world was taking the industry by storm, the farm decided to curate an experience around it for guests to learn more about the purple tea at the farm and had the first tour in October 2020, right in the middle of the global pandemic. It offers tours around four times a week; Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and costs around 3,500 shillings per adults, 1750 shillings for children under 12 and free for children under five. The tea plantations are such a delight to watch and one can gaze at it oblivious to the surrounding. The blue sky and the green and purple brownish estate blend so perfectly into each other to form picturesque landscape.

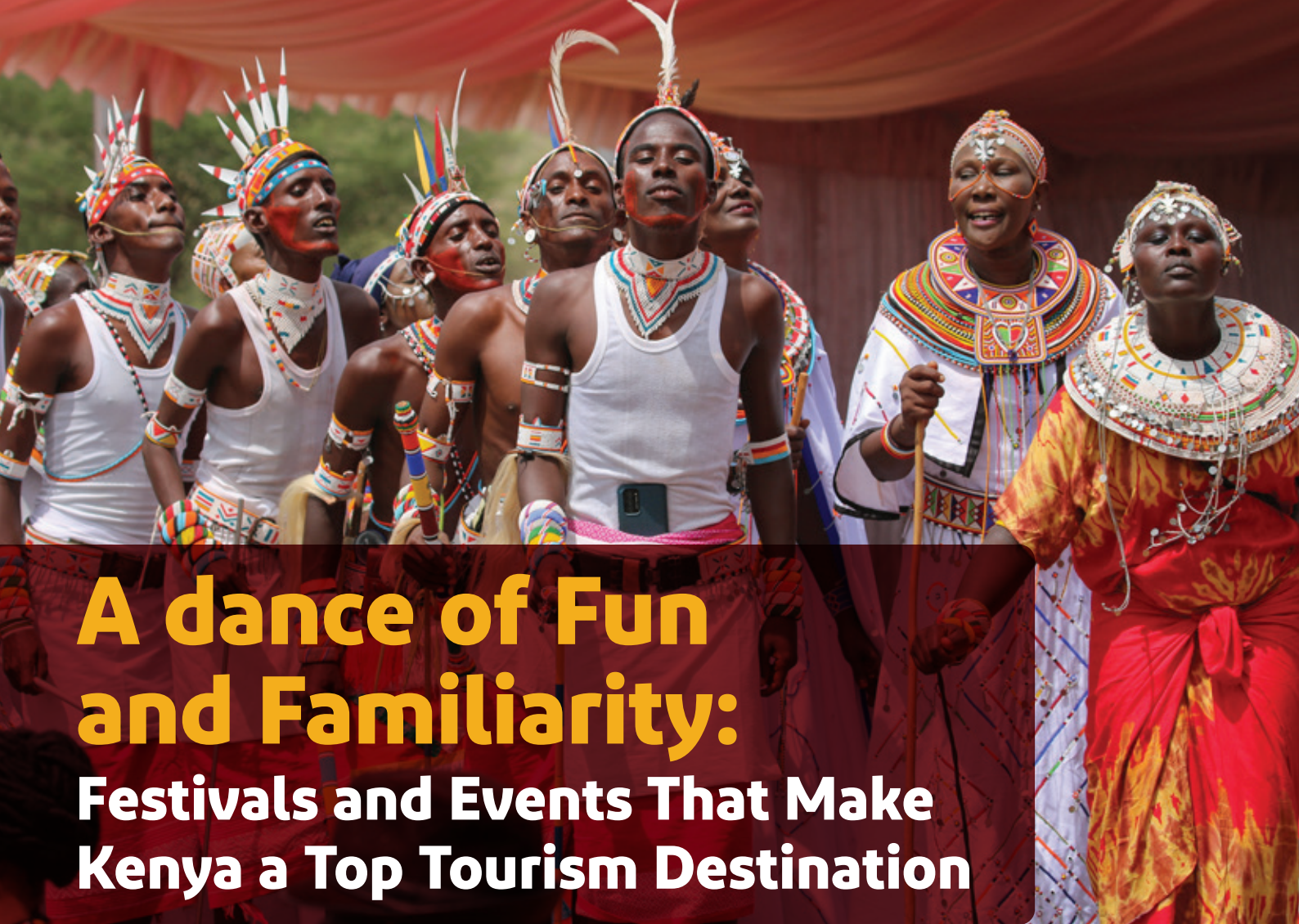
While at the farm, we were taught how to pick tea and also the benefits of taking purple tea as opposed



to other kind of tea. For it not to lose its flavour and to retain its shape, one usually picks two leaves and a bud. The farm is also environmentally conscious and they use little fertiliser and organic manure for farming.

Another farm where one can have a taste of the coffee experience is the Waihiga farm, a family farm which officially began its tours in 2019 after having a large number of foreign and local tourists visit the place to learn about coffee and dairy farming. I loved the fact that one can learn a lot, not just on coffee, but farming in general, and it can inspire you to do farming as a business. Since they are starting out, the farm hopes to add more activities like a cupping station/lab where they would teach guests how to cup and brew coffee and also a station where they can identify various unique coffee flavours our region offers.

Fairview Coffee estate is another farm where coffee enthusiasts can learn more on it and also have the chance of buying Kenyan-processed coffee. For the past six years, Fairview coffee estate has been offering the coffee farm tours to both international and domestic travellers. The tours not only offer Kenyans the experiential travel that they desire but also give them a chance to learn about their key export products, sample and buy their own products. They have also tapped into the wedding market where Kenyans book their venue for photo shoots. In the future, they desire to have a coffee theme park. **mk**



A dance of Fun and Familiarity:

Festivals and Events That Make Kenya a Top Tourism Destination

Welcome to Kenya, a place where adventure meets heritage, and every festival is a journey unto itself

The country pulses with energy all year-round, inviting travellers to embrace Kenya's true spirit

By Tracy Obinge

Festivals in Kenya offer a vibrant and immersive way to experience the country's rich heritage, dynamic communities and breathtaking landscapes.

Contrary to widespread opinion, the country's allure stretches far beyond its iconic safaris and the spellbinding migration in Maasai Mara. This vibrant country offers a celebration of life itself, pulsing with energy all year-round, inviting travellers to embrace Kenya's true spirit.

Whether it's the rhythm of drums echoing through the savannah or the tranquil calm of coastal retreats marked with smiles, these festivals offer travellers a chance to connect with something deeper. Welcome to Kenya—a place where adventure meets heritage, and every festival is a journey unto itself.

Find some must-attend festivals and events that shape Kenya's tourism calendar:

The Lamu Cultural Festival, nestled on the Northern Coast of Kenya, is a vibrant celebration of Swahili heritage, held annually in the historic town of Lamu, Kenya. This festival brings together the rich traditions, arts and customs of the coastal community, making it a must-attend event for culture enthusiasts, travellers and history lovers.

During the festival, the town comes alive with dhow races, donkey races, poetry readings, traditional music, and dance performances—all showcasing the

unique cultural identity of the region. The event also includes Swahili cuisine tastings, artisan exhibitions, and storytelling sessions, giving visitors a deep dive into the customs of the coastal people.

Beyond the festivities, the festival offers a rare chance to experience authentic Swahili life in a setting untouched by time. The narrow streets, centuries-old mosques and warm hospitality make this event a unique and immersive travel experience. Whether you're interested in history, adventure, or simply soaking in the laid-back island vibe, the festival has something for everyone.

The Lamu Yoga Festival, set on the pristine beaches of Manda Island, Lamu Old Town and Shela Village is a retreat like no other. The four-day event, offers an experience that blends wellness with the serene beauty of Lamu's coastline covering over 150 yoga classes, bringing together yogis from across the world for an unparalleled journey of self-discovery. Beyond the yoga mats, the island's coastal serenity invites participants to sail in dhows, meditate by the tranquil Indian Ocean and savour traditional Swahili cuisine. It's not just a festival—it's an invitation to harmonize body, mind and spirit in one of Kenya's most peaceful corners.

The event is held in late October

Maa Cultural Festival, held across Narok, Kajiado and Samburu counties, the heart of Kenya's Maasai community, is an annual vibrant celebration stretching beyond the Kenyan borders into Tanzania, uniting the different Maasai sub-groups. Here—the vibrant red shukas and intricate beadwork of the Maa people come alive in a celebration of their rich history and traditions.

This event celebrates the resilience of indigenous culture in the face of modernity, highlighting the Maasai's harmonious relationship with nature and their enduring cultural pride. Through oral storytelling, the Maasai narrate their rites of passage, thrilling dances, and intricate beadwork exhibitions. The festival stands tall in reinforcing the importance of conservation and emphasizing the protection of ecosystems such as the Maasai Mara and Samburu landscapes as a call for conservation.

This vibrant country offers a celebration of life itself, pulsing with energy all year-round, inviting travellers to embrace Kenya's true spirit.

Turkana Cultural Festival

—Tobong'u Lore, meaning "Welcome Back Home," is a vibrant festival uniting communities from across northern Kenya

and beyond in celebrating their shared heritage. Set against a striking desert landscape, the event features camel races, traditional wrestling, and performances and narratives that tell the story of the Turkana people's enduring bond on cultural preservation.

With its cultural significance and breathtaking scenery, this festival offers an unforgettable glimpse into a community rich with history and tradition. Turkana is also home to the world's oldest complete human fossil, Turkana Boy.

Rusinga Festival, set on the tranquil shores of Lake Victoria, Rusinga Island becomes a vibrant hub of culture and tradition in mid-December. This festival celebrates the

Abasuba people's culture, featuring traditional music, storytelling, boat races, and artistic performances. The event serves as a bridge between the Abasuba and the Luo communities, showcasing their intertwined histories and traditions. With its focus on preserving indigenous culture and promoting eco-tourism in Kenya's western region, the Rusinga Festival is as much about honouring the land as it is about celebrating the people.



Major Events

Kenya's tourism sector also prides itself as a thought leader in shaping Africa's economic and tourism industries by hosting impactful events.

The Magical Kenya Travel Expo (MKTE) is where Kenya's story comes to life on a global stage. The event, hosted annually by the Kenya Tourism Board, is one of Africa's leading travel trade exhibitions. The event brings together global tourism stakeholders, showcasing Kenya's destinations, luxury resorts and unique experiences, opening the door to all that makes Kenya a must-visit destination. The expo plays a crucial role in boosting visitor numbers by positioning Kenya as a premier travel destination. This year's event will be held from 15 th -17 th October. **mk**



The World Rally Championship (WRC) – Safari Rally Kenya –hold your breath as roaring engines navigate Kenya's rugged terrains at the Safari Rally Kenya! The World Rally Championships (WRC), Safari Rally Kenya, is an adrenaline-pumping event on the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) calendar. This thrilling rally pushes the limits of both man and machine winding through the Rift Valley's dramatic escarpments and the awe-inspiring Hell's Gate National Park. The rally held annually in February blends motorsport and nature into an exhilarating spectacle that attracts rally legends and adventure seekers. **mk**



The Magical Kenya Open, part of the DP World Tour, is an annual golfing event held in February that draws elite players from across the globe. Traditionally held at Muthaiga Golf Club, the event showcases Kenya's lush courses, making it a must- attend for golf enthusiasts. This world-class tournament not only offers fierce competition but also showcases Kenya's growing reputation as a golfing destination. **mk**

Aberdare National Park: Where Royalty and Wildlife Converge

Magura Falls is also known as the Queen's Cave in honour of Queen Elizabeth who had a picnic at the site moments before being enthroned

Historic: From royal visits to revolutionary battles, the Aberdare National Park is a unique crossroads of stories that have shaped its legacy



A cross section of the refurbished Treetop Lodge in Aberdare national Park.

By Harriet James

The Mount Kenya Tourism circuit has a new lease of life, thanks to the reopening of the Treetop Lodge which had closed down during the pandemic in 2021.

Positioned as a pillar of luxury and eco- tourism in Kenya, the establishment now gives life to Aberdare National Park known for its adventure and nature tourism. So far, there are only three hotels in the park, each with its own distinctness.

Founded in 1932 by Eric Walker, a British colonialist and wild-life enthusiast, Tree Top has continuously evolved while preserving its timeless charm.

In the 1970s, the lodge underwent significant renovations while retaining its original character. Luxury amenities were added to ensure that guests enjoy both comfort and an unparalleled connection with nature.

The water hole has also been refurbished to accommodate a larger number of wildlife to quench their thirst. One of the most unique ways to experience the Aberdare National Park is through this lodge. Guests can watch elephants, buffaloes, and hyenas from the comfort of their rooms, making for a truly immersive wilderness experience. A game drive experience during your stay will also open your eyes to the wonders of the park.

Tucked away in central Kenya, the Aberdare Range is a land of mystery, beauty, and breathtaking contrasts. Rising to an elevation of nearly 4,000 meters, this highland paradise is a hidden gem often overshadowed by the more famous Maasai Mara or Mount Kenya. I got to experience this during the game drive while staying at the lodge.

As we drove along, I was mesmerized by the large herds of elephants roaming freely, often emerging from the mist like ancient spirits of the land. The matriarch leads the way as usual, her watchful eyes scan the environment for any signs of danger.

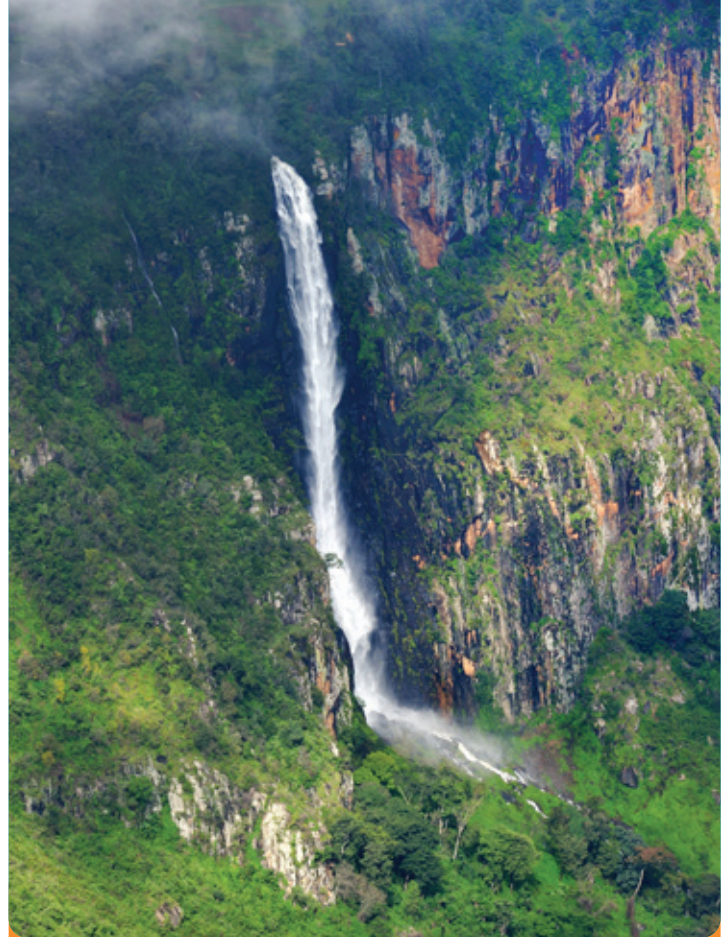
In addition, there was the lone buffalo standing in the midst of the lush greenery, a powerful silhouette against the backdrop of the dense forest.

The park is also a refuge for black rhinos, leopards, rare bongo antelope, giant forest hogs, and even tree-climbing lions—an unusual sight in Kenya. I was also intrigued to catch a glimpse of the leopard during the game drive. The leopard boldly crossed the unpaved road moving effortlessly with grace and then quickly vanished in the thicket not waiting for me to take a picture of it.

Though the weather was as cold as Iceland and the mist created this ethereal atmosphere as it blanketed the landscape in a soft dreamlike haze, it was still stunning to view the landscape. The following day we were chasing the stunning waterfalls in the park, another captivating feature.

For travellers seeking more than just a typical safari, the Aberdares offers an escape. Whether hiking through the moorlands, marveling at the waterfalls, or watching wildlife from a treetop lodge, the Aberdares promise a journey of discovery.

There are four major waterfalls in the park which all cascade against the backdrop of the lush forest and the rugged terrain. There is Karuru Falls, the longest in East and Central Africa. Chania Falls is the most accessible, while Magura Falls, also known as the Queen's cave in honour of the late Queen Elizabeth of England who visited the waterfall and had a picnic. Beneath the waterfalls are caves where Mau Mau would hide from the colonialists. Sapper Huts Falls were originally used by British Royal Engineers known



Karuru Falls.

as Sappers but later on became a honeymooner's paradise.

From royal visits to revolutionary battles, the Aberdare National Park is a unique crossroads of stories that have shaped its legacy.

On a tranquil evening in February 1952, the late Queen Elizabeth, then a princess, and his husband Prince Philip arrived at Treetops Lodge, eager for a night of wildlife watching in the heart of Aberdare National Park, oblivious that their fate was about to change. The next morning, as she descended from Treetops Lodge, history had already been rewritten—she had climbed as a princess and descended as a queen. This moment cemented the lodge's place in history and forever linked the Aberdares to the British royal family.

I was meditating about this as I viewed the majestic elephants drinking water from the waterhole in the late queen's room at the lodge.

The park's dense forests and rugged terrain also made it an ideal hideout for Mau Mau freedom fighters during Kenya's struggle for independence. The locals still regard the range as a sacred place, rich with folklore and spiritual importance. **mk**



Mida Creek: Eking Out A Living Through Mangroves

By Gari Alphonse

A group of women is reaping big from the fruits of their conservation efforts within the Mida Creek in Kilifi County after struggling for over a decade planting mangroves within the ecosystem that was under threat due to destruction.

What started as a women's group for conserving the environment is now becoming a major ecotourism enterprise attracting hundreds of tourists both locals and foreigners.

Bidii Na Kazi Women group members started by setting up mangrove seedlings for sale to conservation

organizations and government agencies to cover up the area destroyed by the community.

Today the women majority of them illiterate are the proud owners of an Eco-tourism restaurant at the tail end of the famous Mida Creek boardwalk.

Kenya seeks to increase her forest cover with a target of 15 billion trees by the year 2032 and the initiative by the group, which is also one of the blue economy projects will go a long way.

The women also own canoes to facilitate excursion for tourists who visit their dhow house restaurant to enjoy the natural ecosystem, which is full of unique bird species.

Their founder a renowned award-winning conservationist, Arafat Salim Baya died five years ago but that did not pull them back as they have since moved on and are prospering thanks to massive support received from the National Museums of Kenya who came up with the maritime cultural heritage project.

Sidi Baya the vice chairperson of Bidii na Kazi Women Group said they started their group by planting vegetables in the farms at home and planting mangrove seedlings nursery.

With the restaurant sales and proceeds from other projects such as bee keeping, vegetables, canoes, fish traps, mangrove seedlings, the members would easily access loans to boost their economic status.

Traditional dishes and fresh fish and vegetables coming directly from their organic farm has made the facility popular.

National Museums of Kenya has been conducting a case study at the Mida creek on cultural heritage and it has become instrumental in supporting the community initiatives with a view to transforming lives.

Ceaser Bitia an underwater archaeologist from the National Museum of Kenya said their aim is to help develop cultural heritage.

Bitia said they got support and funding from UK Rising from the Depth project that funds projects across the Oceans in Eastern Africa.

According to him, projects such as bee keeping, Eco tourism would form part of their research component to document and project cultural heritage within the Mida Creek.

So far, the group has managed to restore over 10 acres of mangrove reforestation and with support from Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI).

The group is creating community awareness on conservation, a key component on sustaining and conserving maritime Cultural heritage. **mk**



Gedi Ruins, Kilifi's Hidden Gem Crowned as Kenya's 8th UNESCO World Heritage Site

By Gari Alphonse

On July 24, 2024, Kenya's heritage tourism earned global recognition when the Gedi Ruins were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site during the 46th session of the World Heritage Congress in India. This milestone placed Kilifi County on the global cultural tourism map as a hub of ancient Swahili civilization.

Tucked away in a lush coastal forest south of Malindi and just 6.5 kilometers from the Indian Ocean, Gedi (locally pronounced as Gede) is among East Africa's most studied Swahili towns. The town offers visitors a rare glimpse into a 10th-century city-state that once flourished through maritime trade. Set within the Arabuko Sokoke Forest—the largest remaining coastal forest in East Africa—Gedi's mystique begins with the whispering trees and playful monkeys that welcome guests to this serene archaeological marvel.

The architectural prowess

The architectural prowess of Gedi's inhabitants is evident in its coral stone structures that have withstood the test of time. The ruins reveal an advanced medieval urban society with a palace, mosques, residential houses, tombs, wells, and a network of streets laid out in a grid.

Historically, Gedi rose to prominence between the 14th and 15th centuries and was later mysteriously abandoned in the 16th century.

Particularly intriguing are the site's two concentric town walls, constructed for defense or perhaps to keep wild animals at bay. Visitors also marvel at



the Great Mosque, still standing to the roof, and the palace, where a ruler once dispensed justice in an open court.

Further, one of Gedi's most distinguishing features is its sophisticated water management system. Researchers have documented numerous wells—possibly the largest collection in any Swahili town—indicating the community's ingenuity in sourcing and conserving water. The presence of in-built lavatories and possibly hammams (baths) speaks to an advanced level of sanitation and urban planning rarely seen elsewhere in medieval settlements.



Historically, Gedi rose to prominence between the 14th and 15th centuries and was later mysteriously abandoned in the 16th century. However, the reasons behind Gedi's eventual abandonment remain shrouded in mystery, adding an element of intrigue to its history. The site's spiritual and cultural significance is equally compelling with its massive baobab trees believed to be sacred, forming a symbiotic relationship with the ruins. The local communities have since retained sacred ties to Gedi, keeping its stories alive through generations of oral history.

A report from the National Museums of Kenya reveals that Gedi first came to the attention of the international community when it was reported by Sir John Kirk, the British vice-consul of Zanzibar, in 1884. It later became a protected monument in 1927 under British colonial rule paving the way for the declaration of the site as a National Park in 1948. Since then, Gedi has received all the protection accorded to a national monument, ensuring its survival and intactness despite the rapid developments around the Coastal region of Kenya.

Researchers' attraction

Although always known to local communities for its spiritual and cultural value, it wasn't until the 1920s that Gedi gained wider recognition. Its rediscovery

sparked renewed interest from researchers and colonial administrators, comparing its layout and complexity to that of Kilwa in Tanzania. Since then, Gedi has remained one of the most intensely studied medieval Swahili settlements in Eastern Africa. Today, it continues to attract global researchers, tourists, and institutions interested in archaeology, architecture, and biodiversity.

More recently, events like the Italian Classical Music Concert and the Pre-Kilifi Investment Conference held at the site underscore its growing status not just as a cultural monument, but also as a catalyst for local development. Sites like Gedi have the potential to drive local economies, create jobs, and hence reduce rural-urban migration, especially when integrated into broader cultural tourism strategies.

Gedi is not just a monument; it's a living testimony to the brilliance of a past Swahili civilization where culture and nature have always lived in harmony. Its UNESCO status now offers an even greater opportunity to preserve, promote, and sustainably leverage this heritage for both community and national gain. When in Kilifi, make Gedi Ruins your must-visit. The stories hidden in its ancient stones, shaded by sacred trees, are waiting to be told. **nk**

Sun & Sand Aside

**Did you Know you Could
Go on a Wildlife Safari in
Kenya's North Coast?**





By Andrew Kasuku

Under the cover of the early evening moonlight, a lioness and her cubs patrol her territory, possibly scouting for a dinner or orienting the little ones the ways of the jungle.

Witnessing the lion family can be both exciting and terrifying. Exciting because for nature enthusiasts, a big cat sighting is a game of chance in some places and terrifying because mothers will defend their space for the sake of security of the young ones.

But this is not Maasai Mara National Reserve or Amboseli where these kinds of scenes are daily sights. This is at the heart of a conservation area in little-known Kipini, Tana River County, Kenya's North Coast region.

For many years, Kenya's Coast region is famed for Sun and Sand, understandably for the right reasons, Kenyan beaches have severally been voted as the top destinations by Trip Advisor and World Travel Awards. The pristine beaches that stretch from the coastline of Kwale to Lamu Island are known to attract thousands of visitors from across the world, the beaches with the kiss of sun are irresistible.

While tourists enjoy the allure of the sun kissing the sand, unknown to many, the region boasts a fusion of wildlife treasures. The North coast region, in particular where tourists primarily travel to enjoy Lamu Old Town, the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa, adding wildlife tours in the bucket-list can cap your experience. The wildlife hasn't had much popularity because in the past, forests in the region had been associated with insecurity and terrorism.

Militants had made the forests a hide out, launching attacks and retreating into the dense forests which stretch into the inhabited ocean beaches and into the border of Somalia.

But the government agencies worked around the clock to restore normalcy. The region has since been pacified.

A new tarmac road from Minjila area to Mokowe jetty and other roads have undergone transformation making movement easier for visitors in Lamu.

A land safari offers a glimpse into the little-known wildlife treasures the region, and an opportunity to interact with the culture of hospitality and generosity among Coastal communities.

Why you need to try a safari in this region is because consistent efforts by conservationists in the region have meant wildlife numbers go up and critical species are maintained- by the way, it's the only conservation area encompassing marine and terrestrial wildlife.

The region boasts of a blend of many habitats, including riverine forest, grassland, woodland, bushland, lakes, mangroves, dunes, beaches and coastal waters.

On the other hand, security has been beefed up and in recent years, there are no major incidents in the area and with a multi-agency patrols in the region, your security is guaranteed.



With these habitats, area hosts a variety of species including elephants, buffalos, zebras, African gerenuks, Topi antelopes, Reticulated giraffes, Waterbuck, Lesser Kudu, Desert Warthog, Spotted Hyaena and several primate species.

The wildlife is distributed in the larger Lamu and Tana-River counties.

Some critically endangered species in this region include Hirola (Hunter's Hartbeest), Ader's Duiker and the Lesser Elephant Shrew.

The area serves as a major elephant migratory corridor connecting the Boni forest area and Galana-Tsavo ecosystems and is a maternity elephant ground.

But your safari can not be complete without a visit of the neighboring Tana River Primate National Reserve Delta which protects endangered primates – the Tana River Mangabey and the Red Colobus.

Visitors on safari can also view other animals including hippos, Nile crocodiles, zebras, Maasai

giraffe, oryx, lesser kudu, baboons and an amazing collection of over 200 species of birds.

Whether you are visiting the beaches of Malindi or Lamu, the tarmac road network has made accessing Tana River bush experience easier.

On the other hand, security has been beefed up and in recent years, there are no major incidents in the area and with a multi-agency patrols in the region, your security is guaranteed.

You don't need to choose whether to experience the beach or the bush – enjoying boat rides and Swahili cuisines in the seas of Lamu and a land safari watching some of Kenya's big five is now possible under just a day all within a radius of just a few kilometers.

Kenya's North coast is one of the few regions in the country where you can combine intimate ocean and wildlife experiences, without the hustle of changing your accommodation location. **nrk**



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Explore Kenya's Best Wildlife, Coasts, and Culture



With great company, surrounded by soothing water and the twinkling stars above, Lamu and Kenya gave me my best birthday ever

Special experience: Kenya is beautiful, blessed with wildlife, rich in culture and dishes out soul-satisfying cuisine

By Khursheed Dinshaw

When you first think of Kenya, your mind instantly jumps to the classic images of wildlife – vast, open savannahs dotted with majestic herds of elephants, prowling lions, trotting zebras, and elusive leopards. Kenya is practically synonymous with safaris, and for good reason too. But what truly surprised me was the beauty of Kenya's

coastal paradise – a hidden treasure, an unexplored gem that takes your breath away and certainly deserves greater recognition.

The 2024 Magical Kenya Travel Expo (MKTE), media personalities from various countries embarked on an unforgettable five-day journey through Kenya to



We started our exploration with Diani Bikes – a great way to embrace eco-tourism, explore lost paths, and connect with locals.

showcase the vibrant landscapes, rich wildlife, and cultural treasures that make Kenya a bucket-list destination.

My adventure started with a smooth and seamless flight on Kenya Airways (KQ) from Mumbai to Nairobi. After landing, we relaxed at the Ole Sereni Hotel, and in the evening, we gathered at the Emara Rooftop Sky Lounge to meet our fellow media travellers and get our first briefing. Conversations buzzed as strangers turned to friends – all under the dazzling night sky and a mesmerizing view of the city.

The next morning, our group of six set off for Ukunda – gateway to the idyllic beaches of Diani. We boarded the Jambojet plane, and as a self-proclaimed beach fanatic, I had my nose glued to the window, enthusiastically scanning for a glimpse of Kenya's tropical coastline. I have always loved watching

the world's beauty from up high and by the time we touched down in an hour, I was ready to have sand between my toes and ocean breeze in my hair. The baggage claim experience was unique, no belts or long lines. We got off the plane, stood outside for 10 minutes and all our luggage arrived in a cart – take yours & leave – it was that easy.

Diani's Village Charm

We started our exploration with Diani Bikes – a great way to embrace eco-tourism, explore lost paths, and connect with locals. They offer a wide range of bikes and tours. It's the best way to discover Diani's hidden gems, one pedal push at a time.

After walking through the bustling village market, we visited the tribes. "There are about 20,000 people and nine tribes," shared David, our guide. We were greeted by a bunch of energetic kids full of life, who ran up to us with big smiles making us feel delightfully welcomed. I was more than thrilled to take a few selfies and dance with them. Their joy was beyond contagious!

We enjoyed fresh coconut water and got first-hand experience in making Ugali – Kenya's staple dish made from cornmeal. We had it with lemon and salt and I was pleasantly surprised at how delicious it tasted. Definitely, worth trying at home.

The village, while full of life and laughter, lacked many basic amenities we often take for granted. It's true, how little we need and just how much we overlook because we are privileged enough to have it. These kind-hearted people, with so little to their name but bright smiles and big hearts, make me wonder – are they happier than we could ever be?

We also had an enlightening conversation with Mganga – a witch doctor or medicine man healing through herbal treatments. With a flair for (of?) dramatic (drama?), he acted out what each herb could do – help with insomnia, cure an upset stomach, or even make someone fall in love with you.

After the long day, we settled in our exclusive resort by the beach – Diamonds Leisure Beach & Golf Resort. It was so massive, I got lost thrice until I finally found my way to the restaurant. A delicious dinner buffet awaiting, filled with many options ranging from Salad, Pasta, Rice, and Indian cuisine. My poolside



suite featured a cozy bed with a mosquito net, a spacious living room, an elegant bathroom and basic amenities. It was easy to believe this is one of the best resorts in Kenya.

Dolphins and Snorkelling

The next day, we set off on a scenic drive to Shimoni, passing through vast fields, tall palm trees, and lush greenery. A part of me couldn't believe I was in Kenya. Once we arrived, we started the journey towards **Wasini Island** with Coral Spirit. Barack, our guide, was as lively as they come. We set sail on the traditional Arab dhow and cruised across the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean, the coastline stretching out like a dreamy postcard. Between sips of refreshing drinks, my eyes were glued to the water, eager to spot dolphins. And then we saw – a glimpse of a single dolphin darting through the water, but as quickly as it appeared, it vanished into the depths. Just when we thought our luck had run out, a pod of 4-5 dolphins emerged, gracefully swimming alongside our boat and then we spotted a few more dolphins. The sight was magical and what truly blew my mind was that I saw more dolphins in Kenya than I did during my trip to the Maldives.

Next, we set sail for **Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park** to dive into the underwater world. I was a little nervous to snorkel in the open ocean without a life jacket but Barack put me at ease and guided me through the lazy waves. Underwater, I was greeted by a kaleidoscope of marine life, vibrant schools of fish, delicate corals, and a thriving ecosystem. I got the rare chance to hold a starfish – yay! For Thalassophiles like me – this was pure paradise. After an hour of snorkeling, we energized ourselves with fresh fruits, and the Coral Spirit team entertained us with a catchy Hakuna Matata song. Honestly, this is an experience I will never forget!

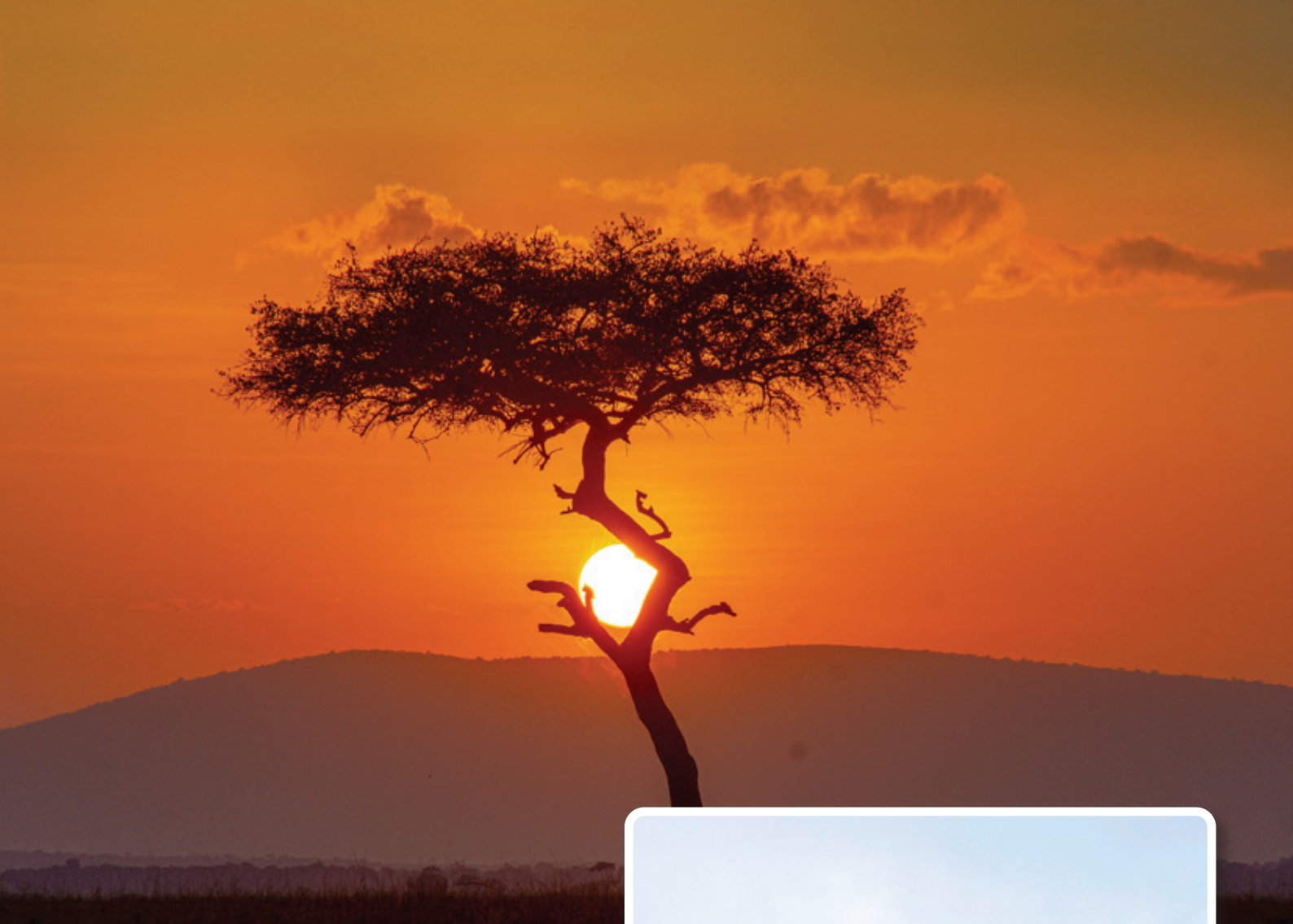
We returned to the mainland for lunch, then visited the historic **Shimoni Slave caves**. Entering the cool, damp caves, our guide explained how these caves once held enslaved people before they were shipped off to the Zanzibar slave market. We saw old iron chains once used to bind people. The air felt thick with the haunted echoes of their grief and suffering.

Diani Beach

At breakfast, I had the pleasure of meeting Indian Chef Rawat and talking about the impressive variety of Indian dishes on the menu. I headed straight to the beach which had direct access from our resort. The beach was absolutely beautiful and pristine, crystal-clear waters sparkled under the sun. As I strolled, I met a few locals selling crafts and souvenirs, all so welcoming and friendly. I dipped my toes in the inviting waters and closed my eyes, soaking in the morning sun. I couldn't help but think to myself – I can't wait to be back here again. This is a slice of paradise I want to experience again.

Mara Adventure

The next two days of my trip were dedicated to Maasai Mara! We boarded a small Air Kenya flight from Wilson and like always, I was glued to the window eager to spot tiny animals on the golden plains.



Unfortunately, due to unforeseen weather conditions, we were forced to return to Nairobi.

But the next morning, we were back in the Mara, this time skies on our side. Edward, our guide from **Saruni Basecamp Wilderness**, knew the land like the back of his hand and had a sixth sense when it came to finding wildlife. We got into the open jeep for our first game drive. At the reserve, we saw a dozen jeeps surrounding a pit where reportedly a lioness sat. Instead of waiting, Edward took us past it and despite our protests, he promised us better sightings and he delivered. Since we were staying at Saruni, we had access to the private Naboisho Conservancy, and trust me, these conservancies are the best spots to find more animals and fewer people.

Our first animal spotting was a sauntering hyena followed by three ostriches – bigger and more majestic than any other I have seen. Not far from it, we spotted zebras and impalas grazing peacefully. We saw a variety of wildlife, including Thomson's Gazelles with their distinctive swinging tail, a herd of African buffaloes, hippos lounging in the waters, elephants



Superb Starling commonly found in Masai Mara Game reserve and other parts of Rift Valley region.

bathing themselves, and giraffes munching on the tall trees. Our eyes were constantly on the hunt, trying to spot as many animals as we could.

We also spotted many birds including Heron, Kenya's national bird Lilac-breasted Roller, Eagles, and Kingfishers.

Lions & Cheetahs

Then came the highlight – Lions! Lions are territorial and Maasai Mara has seven prides. Of all the lion sightings I had imagined – this wasn't on the list. We saw a couple of lionesses sprawled out in the grass with their cubs snuggled up next to them. Watching those little cubs, with their fuzzy manes and playful nuzzles, gave me a whole new perspective on these famously fierce predators. The lioness yawned, the cub stretched, and lapped the water in a puddle and we all held our breath – just staring in sheer awe.

After a highly successful game drive, we settled in our tents and grabbed lunch. The camp was beautiful, surrounded by the silence of the savannahs. We drank healthy Dawa and South Africa's famous Amarula, relaxed for a bit, and then left for the evening game drive. This time, we saw a bigger pride of lionesses and their adorable cubs trying to hunt wildebeests – the experience was surreal! To see them in the wild, moving in sync with each other, every step carefully calculated, magically communicating with each other – easily one of the most captivating sights to witness. A rare glimpse into the wild's raw, unfiltered energy.

As the sun was starting to set, we were sure we had missed our chance to see a cheetah but luck and Edward were on our side. And there it was – a cheetah resting without a worry on the grass, we took our time, admiring the fascinating animal and soon it stood, stretched its legs, and walked off – my heart skipped a beat, it was that phenomenal.

We also spotted many birds including Heron, Kenya's national bird Lilac-breasted Roller, Eagles, and Kingfishers.

The basecamp had great security and clean tents equipped with mosquito repellent and torches. In the evening, they had a bonfire and traditional Mara music and dance. At night, we heard lions roaring and the next day, for our last game drive, they arranged a bush breakfast, in the open wild nature surrounded by animals. We finally saw the King of the Jungle – Lion, gracefully moving like he owned the land.

It's comforting to see how unbothered these animals are in the human presence – they aren't scared, they feel safe, this is their home, their land. And that is one of the most beautiful things!



Mara Village

Our last stop was the Mara Village where we met Danson, son of the chief of the village. He showed us around and explained more about their culture and traditions. After their jumping dance and a warm welcome, they showed us how they make fire from machete, wood and dry grass or elephant poop. Out of the 42 tribes, Maasai tribe is the most connected to their culture. It was a highly enlightening experience filled with incredible stories of their customs and heritage.

It's true, Maasai Mara doesn't just have safaris – it offers unbelievable memories and unforgettable adventures.

Karibu Nyumbani

Back in Nairobi for MKTE, we stayed at Emara Ole Sereni. My room offered a striking view—one side overlooking the vast Nairobi National Park while the other, busy city roads. The contrast was surreal, a reminder of Kenya's beautiful duality.

MKTE was full of new connections and lasting friendships. We met incredible people and it was hard to say goodbye to the warm Kenyan hospitality. My journey back to Mumbai with KQ's business class was the perfect ending, a comfortable seat, wonderful service, and tons of amazing memories.

Already counting the days to visit Kenya again, as they say in Swahili, 'Karibu Nyumbani' – welcome home! **mk**

Wild Escape in Meru

Head to Meru National Park in Kenya—a hidden treasure off the beaten path, far from the crowds that flock to popular reserves such as the Masai Mara or Amboseli. Here, nature unfolds in all its splendor, offering a complete immersion.



By Christine Nayagam

It is said that Africa holds an irresistible quality in its very soil, calling out to us the moment we set foot on it. Like drumbeats resonating within me, the memory of Africa's wild nature lingers as I wander the gray streets of Paris. And when the opportunity to return to Kenya arises—be it by chance or destiny—I seize it without hesitation. This time, I opt for an entirely wild itinerary.

For the first time, I set off without meticulously planning or researching my destination, knowing only that Meru was a national park I had yet to explore. On the charter flight departing Nairobi, I immediately notice

the landscape transform. From above, the savannah adopts a more golden hue and the terrain becomes arid; several streams can be seen emerging from the distant Nyambene mountain range.

A Welcome Solitude in the Heart of the Savannah

Unlike the crowded reserves, we are not here to follow a convoy in search of the famed “Big Five.” Although Meru's wildlife is abundant, encountering these animals is a privilege granted by nature without any guarantees. On our way to camp, we soon came



The park is also encircled by local communities, notably the Ameru, who live in harmony with their environment through subsistence farming and livestock rearing. Their culture and traditional wisdom are deeply intertwined with this wild region. After a restorative night's sleep in our luxurious tent at Rino River Camp—lullabyed by the natural sounds—we set off on an adventure at sunrise.

Saving the Rhinos

Into the wild, we took ample time to observe the animals. The park is home to most of the species found in Kenya, including the famed Big Five (elephant, lion, rhinoceros, buffalo, leopard) as well as the so-called Small Five (Elephant Sherew, Leopard Tortoise, Antyion, Rhinos Beatels, and the White Headed Buffalo Weavers), not to mention rarer species

such as the gerenuk, the Defassa kob, and even Somali ostriches.

across elephants, giraffes, impalas, and herds of zebras. Here, the animals roam freely—sometimes remaining hidden—and you are merely a humble guest in their realm.

“Meru is the perfect destination for wildlife and flora enthusiasts, free from the frenzy of other parks. Its varied landscapes—from palm-lined rivers to a shrubby savannah spanning 870 km²—are intersected by no fewer than 13 rivers, creating an environment that fosters a beautiful diversity of animal and plant species,” explains our guide, Jonathan.

Safaris typically take place in the early morning, starting at 6 a.m., and again in the late afternoon around 4 p.m., each lasting about three hours.

The Sound of the River

During our stay, we spent two nights at Rino River Camp, an eco-lodge nestled beside a river.

Rino River Camp distinguishes itself with an eco-responsible approach. It is seamlessly integrated into its surroundings, constructed with natural materials and designed to minimize its impact on the fragile ecosystem. The meals were delicious and prepared with locally sourced ingredients, while our guides, John and Johnathan, shared their in-depth knowledge of the region, making every excursion fascinating.

It's varied landscapes from palm-lined rivers to a shrubby savannah spanning 870 km² are intersected by no fewer than 13 rivers

“Meru is especially known for its reserve of black and white rhinos, which are safeguarded in a secure area of the park to ensure their survival,” adds Jonathan. We encountered them on the same day—a group that included many calves, as it is the breeding season.

The black rhinoceros is generally smaller and more agile than its white counterpart. It is characterized by a prehensile, pointed upper lip, ideal for browsing leaves, branches, and shrubs. By nature solitary, it tends to be highly territorial and can become aggressive when threatened. In contrast, the white rhinoceros is much larger and more robust. It is distinguished by a broad, square lip adapted for grazing on grass, making it a true herbivore. Typically more sociable than the black rhino, it often lives in groups, which also facilitates its monitoring in certain reserves.



on the importance of conservation efforts and contemplating the delicate balance between humans and wildlife.

Ecological philosophy reminds us that, despite our intelligence and capacity for transformation, we are fundamentally animals living in symbiosis with our environment. Rather than viewing nature merely as a reservoir of resources to exploit, it is far more enriching to see it as a partner with whom we share a common destiny.

Indeed, in an era marked by rampant urbanization and technological advancement, returning to nature represents a deep-seated aspiration—a desire to reconnect with our roots. By embracing an ethical approach that recognizes the right of wildlife to exist and thrive, we can envision a world where human progress does not come at the expense of the environment, but in harmony with it.

"In Kenya, black and white rhinos have become emblematic of the struggle for African wildlife conservation. Although their populations face threats from poaching, measures such as secure sanctuaries and intensive patrols have significantly enhanced their protection," explains Jonathan.

Elsa the Lioness

Ecological philosophy reminds us that, despite our intelligence and capacity for transformation, we are fundamentally animals living in symbiosis with our environment.

The park is also renowned for its connection with George and Joy Adamson—lion enthusiasts who released Elsa the lioness here, a story made famous by the book and film *Born Free*. Elsa's tale raised public awareness about wildlife conservation and helped shift the perception of lions from fearsome predators to creatures capable of coexisting harmoniously with humans. Today, Elsa is laid to rest in the park, and her grave has become a pilgrimage site for nature lovers and conservation advocates.

Sitting near this memorial, I found myself reflecting

Meru National Park invites us to transform our relationship with life—one in which the collective well-being embraces every form of existence on our planet.

How to Get to Meru from Nairobi

Reaching Meru from Nairobi requires some preparation, but the journey is well worth every kilometer. There are two main options:

1. By Car:

This is the most common option. The journey takes about 5 to 6 hours, depending on road conditions. The route passes through the towns of Nanyuki and Isiolo, offering superb views of Mount Kenya. Once in Meru, a dirt road leads directly to the park entrance.

2. By Plane:

For those who prefer to save time, charter flights operate from Nairobi to the airport at Meru Mulika Lodge, located near the park. The flight, lasting about 50 minutes, is not only quick and comfortable but also offers breathtaking views of the Kenyan landscape.

mk

Savour Taste of Elephant Gorge Camp's Allure in the Wild of Amboseli

Exclusive enclave that offers night game drives, which other camps located at the national park can't do

Luxury: Exquisite nature and artistry of its construction, composition and amenities are amazing to behold



By Andrew Iro Okungbowa

It was a big relief when our vehicle on this day in September, 2024, a cold and wintry night, finally made its way safely into the parking lot of Elephant Gorge Camp.

We, the *team* of international media on pre-tour of MKTE, 2024 had an eventful evening game drive at the Amboseli National Park, one of Magical Kenya's fascinating eco-tourism attractions.

Everyone was obviously tired and hungry, looking forward to when we would eventually make our way into the camp.

Taking in the surroundings, the outlook of the camp, which is located in the wild, was amazing. It is as you settle in that you later discover that the camp is nestled against Mount Kilimanjaro.

An exciting discovery though, but wait until you have a full view of the camp then you would be enamoured with the appealing pull of the camp, which is an admixture of nature and human's creativity at its best. The glamorous and sophisticated nature of the camp, exuding luxury and opulence, are among what make this little enclave right at the heart of the forest most exotic. The exquisite nature and artistry



of its construction, composition and amenities are amazing to behold and explore.

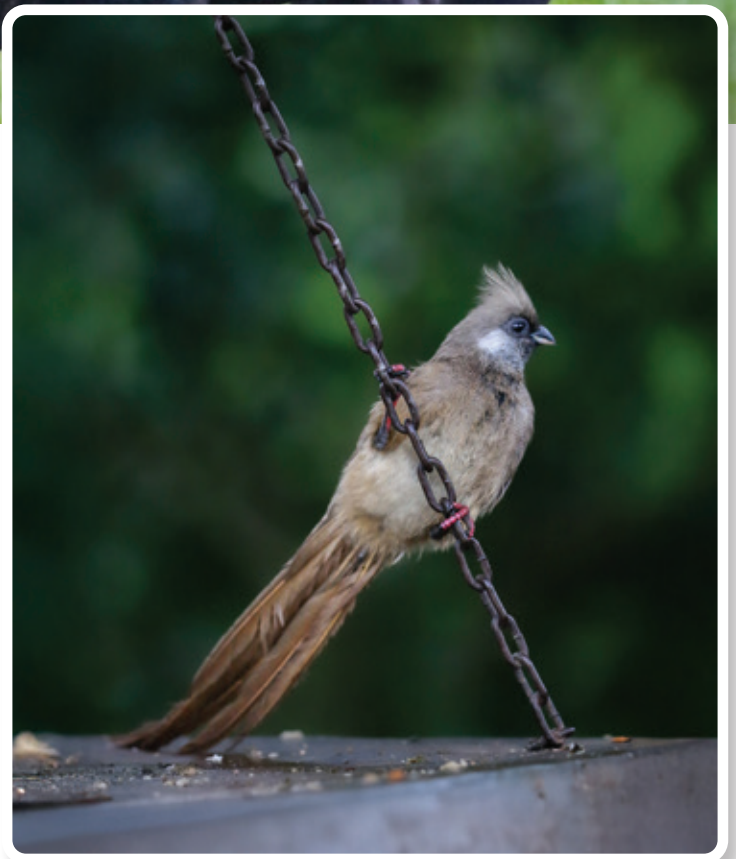
From its main area, which is a combination of the reception area, which opens up to its lounge/bar, restaurant and then the infinity swimming pool, with sit-out area, you are enthralled by the symmetric spatial flow that makes this section of the camp a beautiful and enticing sight to behold.

Its artistry and imaginative creativity are simply mind blowing and breathless.

Then you walk through the grounds that are well paved and landscaped to the accommodation area; either the deluxe rooms or villa suites, that are all lavishly fitted and furnished to taste. One was treated to a villa suite, which judging by the plush setting and fittings, is tailor-made for royals.

The camp, which is located in the ALOCA conservancy, has a rich history. It boasts, among other facilities, five deluxe rooms, five villa suites, with individual plunge pools and outside showers, and two-bedroom villa suites, with a plunge pool as well, with each featuring different amenities for the relaxation and comfort of guests.

With a breathtaking sight that makes for memorable wildlife immersive experience, the camp also boasts



a gorge, from which it derives its name and a water hole that attracts quite a number of wildlife to the camp area.

It was a delight to have a late night chat, after dinner, the first night of our stay, with the young and dashing manager of the camp, Shyam Gosrani. He runs the camp with his wife alongside other managers. He cut his teeth in hospitality in the United Kingdom before moving back to Kenya, his country of birth, to begin from where he left off in the UK. Elephant Gorge Camp is his first since moving over to Kenya in 2024.

The camp, which is an old facility, was bought over by Atua Enkop Africa led by Minaz Manji, a Kenyan investor in hospitality and other businesses. The facility is presently undergoing transformation and hopefully, will not only be a premium facility but one of the most sought – after once the group is done with the ongoing transformation.

On the morning of our departure from the camp, we met and exchanged pleasantries with Manji and two of his friends and co-investors who were at the camp. We also had a photo session with them.

Aside Elephant Gorge Camp, the group has four other camps; Mara Ngenche Safari Camp, Tipilikwani Mara Camp, Mbueha Camp, and Elephant Bedroom Camp. Below are excerpts of the interview with Gosrani.

Elephant Gorge Camp

It got its name from the thousands of elephants that are around and also the ones that travel through the camp itself. This is because the camp is located in one of the wildlife corridors connecting Tanzania to Amboseli National Park.

The other thing that the camp got its name from is a very beautiful gorge, just a few hundred meters past the camp.

Target audience

We look forward to having international visitors who want to experience the beauty of Amboseli National Park because we are one of the few camps that

enable guests to look at the whole of Amboseli from the height.

Of course, we also welcome the local guests who want a quick getaway weekend because we are only four hours-drive from Nairobi. The roads are good to get here, so, a lot of local guests also visit us.

Unique selling points

The personalization of the service. We are not a big camp, we only have 12 rooms. So, we have to ensure that we give the best of personalized service to all our guests. The second thing, is of course, the location. We are set up on the hills and from our camp you can see Mt. Kilimanjaro, you can see Amboseli National Park, the whole of it.

You can see Chyulu Hills, so there is vast area of plains that you can see from here. Since it is located on a private conservancy, we can offer a range of activities at the camp itself. We can offer night game drives, which other camps can't do especially if they are located at the national park.

We can also offer bush walks and our guests get to experience the gorge. It is very beautiful to catch the sight and it is very unique.

All year business

Yes, we are opened all year-round. **nk**






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