

Kenya

For many people, Kenya is quite simply East Africa in microcosm. The region's premier tourist destination really does seem to have it all: wildlife and nightlife, cities and beaches, mountains and deserts, traditional cultures and modern arts, all couched in a range of landscapes as staggering in their diversity as they are stunning in their appearance. There are a million different reasons to come here, and picking just one is nigh on impossible.

The classic image of safari savanna is perhaps the single key selling point for Kenya's tourist industry, and with all the famous fauna no keen animal-spotter should go home disappointed. However, clued-up visitors face an infinite choice of alternative settings and activities, from trekking the glacial ridges of Mt Kenya to kitesurfing off the white sands of the Indian Ocean coast, and much more besides.

This sheer diversity is something to be relished, and is by no means limited to the natural surroundings. The people, too, represent a wide cross section of everything that is contemporary Africa, and everyday life brings together traditional tribes and urban families, ancient customs and modern sensibilities. Swapping the latest political gossip with the switched-on locals is just one more small pleasure that comes with the culture.

Finally, sooner or later on any trip here you'll look up at the starry skies and feel Africa all around you, living, breathing and fuelling a thousand dreams. Whatever your mental image of this region, and wherever you move on to afterwards, Kenya will provide a crucial part of the picture, and it's a microcosm not to be missed.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 583,000 sq km
- **Birthplace of** Louis and Richard Leakey; Paul Tergat; Dennis Oliech
- **Capital** Nairobi
- **Country code** 254
- **Famous for** the Masai Mara; meat eating; marathon runners
- **Languages** Kiswahili, English, tribal languages
- **Money** Kenya Shilling (KSh); US\$1 = KSh72; €1 = KSh88
- **Population** 31.6 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Masai Mara National Reserve** (p393) Expansive savanna, unmatched wildlife and the world's most fascinating traffic jam – the annual wildebeest migration.
- **Mt Kenya** (p376) Equatorial glaciers, tremendous treks and jagged peaks that would make Mt Kilimanjaro blush with envy.
- **Lamu Archipelago** (p341) The ultimate Swahili immersion experience, from Lamu's winding coral streets to the empty beaches of Kiwayu.
- **Amboseli National Park** (p300) Elephants and Kilimanjaro, two big bulks combined in Kenya's most famous picture-postcard views.
- **Loyangalani** (p428) Home to harsh conditions, unforgettable tribes and the sublime jade waters of Lake Turkana.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There are a number of factors to take into account when considering what time of year to visit Kenya. The main tourist season is January and February, when the weather is generally considered to be the best – hot and dry, with high concentrations of wildlife. However, the parks can get crowded and rates for accommodation go through the roof. Avoid the Christmas and Easter holiday periods unless you want to pay a fortune.

June to October could be called the 'shoulder season' (see p433), as the weather is still dry. During this period the annual wildebeest migration takes place, with thousands of animals streaming into the Masai Mara National Reserve from the Serengeti in July and October.

During the long rains (from March to the end of May, the low season) things are much quieter, and you can get some good deals; this is also true during the short rains from October to December. The rains generally don't affect your ability to get around, it's just that you may get rained on, especially in the Central Highlands and western Kenya.

For more details see p621 and p438.

HISTORY

The early history of Kenya, from prehistory up until independence, is covered in the History chapter (p28).

HOW MUCH?

- **Local matatu (minibus transport) ride** KSh20
- **Plate of stew/biryani/pilau** KSh120
- **Large juice** KSh60
- **Pair of kangas** KSh350
- **Taxi home** KSh400

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol/gas** KSh72
- **Litre of bottled water** KSh55
- **Bottle of Tusker** KSh80
- **Souvenir T-shirt** KSh1000
- **Street snack (sambusa)** KSh10

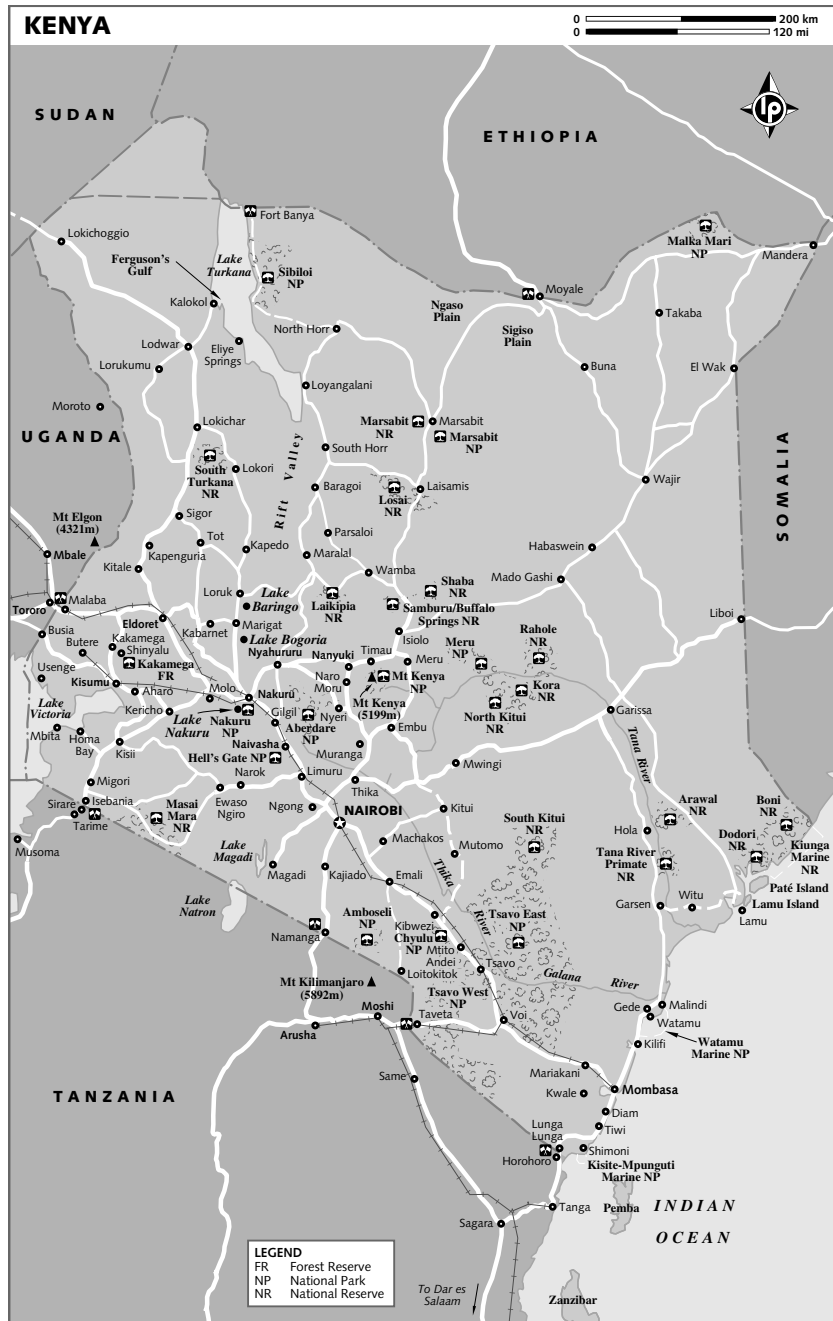
Mau Mau Rebellion

Despite plenty of overt pressure on Kenya's colonial authorities, the real independence movement was underground. Tribal groups of Kikuyu, Maasai and Luo took secret oaths, which bound participants to kill Europeans and their African collaborators. The most famous of these movements was Mau Mau, formed in 1952 by disenchanting Kikuyu people, which aimed to drive the white settlers from Kenya forever.

The first blow was struck early in 1953 with the killing of a white farmer's entire herd of cattle, followed a few weeks later by the massacre of 21 Kikuyu loyal to the colonial government. The Mau Mau rebellion had started.

Within a month, Jomo Kenyatta and several other Kenyan African Movement (KAU) leaders were jailed on spurious evidence. The various Mau Mau sects came together under the umbrella of the Kenya Land Freedom Army, led by Dedan Kimathi, and staged frequent attacks against white farms and government outposts. By the time the rebels were defeated in 1956, the death toll stood at over 13,500 Africans (guerrillas, civilians and troops) and just over 100 Europeans.

Upon his release in 1959 Kenyatta resumed his campaign for independence. Soon even white Kenyans began to feel the winds of change, and in 1960 the British government officially announced their plan to transfer power to a democratically



elected African government. Independence was scheduled for December 1963, accompanied by grants and loans of US\$100 million to enable the Kenyan assembly to buy out European farmers in the highlands and restore the land to the tribes.

Independence

With independence scheduled for 1963, the political handover began in earnest in 1962, with the centralist Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the federalist Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) forming a coalition government.

The run-up to independence was surprisingly smooth, although the redistribution of land wasn't a great success; Kenyans regarded it as too little, too late, while white farmers feared the trickle would become a flood. The immediate effect was to cause a significant decline in agricultural production, from which Kenya has never recovered.

The coalition government was abandoned after the first elections in May 1963 and KANU's Kikuyu leader, Jomo Kenyatta (formerly of the KAU), became Kenya's first president on 12 December, ruling until his death in 1978. Under Kenyatta's presidency, Kenya developed into one of Africa's most stable and prosperous nations. The opposition KADU party was voluntarily dissolved in 1964.

While Kenyatta is still seen as one of the few success stories of Britain's withdrawal from empire, he wasn't without his faults. Biggest among these were his excessive bias in favour of his own tribe and escalating paranoia about dissent. Opponents of his regime who became too vocal for comfort frequently 'disappeared', and corruption soon became endemic at all levels of the power structure.

The 1980s

Kenyatta was succeeded in 1978 by his vice president, Daniel arap Moi. A Kalenjin, Moi was regarded by establishment power brokers as a suitable front man for their interests, as his tribe was relatively small and in thrall to the Kikuyu. Moi went on to become one of the most enduring 'Big Men' in Africa, ruling in virtual autocracy for nearly 25 years. In the process, he accrued an incredible personal fortune; today many believe him to be the richest man in Africa.

Although Moi's regime was stable compared to the desperate situation in many surrounding countries, it was also characterised by nepotism, corruption, arrests of dissidents, censorship, the disbanding of tribal societies and the closure of universities.

In 1982 the ruling KANU party publicly banned opposition parties, leading to a military coup by the air force, which was promptly quashed by pro-government forces. In the run-up to the 1987 election, Moi introduced a new voting system and jailed opposition leaders without trial, ensuring that the sole candidate from the sole political party in the country won the election – no prizes for guessing who that was!

After his 'win', Moi expanded the cabinet to fit in more of his cronies, and rushed through constitutional reforms allowing him to dismiss senior judges and public servants without any redress. When dissenting politicians were arrested, Christian church leaders took up the call for change, supported by another outspoken critic of government nepotism Professor Wangari Maathai, leader of the Green Belt Movement.

Sooner or later, something had to give.

The 1990s

With the collapse of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union, it was no longer necessary for Western powers to prop up corrupt noncommunist regimes in Africa. Donors who had previously turned a blind eye to civil-rights misdemeanours began calling for multiparty elections if economic aid was to be maintained. The multiparty movement gained huge grassroots support in Kenya.

In response, KANU Youth was mobilised to disrupt pro-democracy rallies and harass opposition politicians. Things came to a head on 7 July 1990 when the military and police raided an opposition demonstration in Nairobi, killing 20 and arresting politicians, human-rights activists and journalists.

The rally, known thereafter as Saba Saba ('seven seven' in Swahili), was a pivotal event in the push for a multiparty Kenya. The following year the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) party was formed, led by Jamagori Oginga Odinga, a powerful Luo politician who had been vice president under Jomo Kenyatta. FORD was initially banned and Odinga was arrested, but the

resulting outcry led to his release and, finally, a change in the constitution that allowed opposition parties to register for the first time.

Faced with a foreign debt of nearly US\$9 billion and blanket suspension of foreign aid, Moi was pressured into holding multi-party elections in early 1992, but independent observers reported a litany of electoral inconsistencies. Just as worrying, about 2000 people were killed during ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley, widely believed to have been triggered by KANU agitation. Nonetheless, Moi was overwhelmingly re-elected.

Following the elections, the KANU bowed to some Western demands for economic reforms, but agitation and harassment of opposition politicians continued unabated. The 1997 election, too, was accompanied by violence and rioting, particularly during the Saba Saba anniversary rally. Again mysterious provocateurs stirred up ethnic violence, this time on the coast. European and North American tour companies cancelled their bookings and around 60,000 Kenyans lost their jobs. Moi was able to set himself up as peacemaker, calming the warring factions and gaining 50.4% of the seats for KANU, compared to the 49.6% won by the divided opposition parties.

The scene was set for a confrontational parliament, but in a trademark Moi manoeuvre, the KANU immediately entered into a cooperative arrangement with the two biggest opposition parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and the National Development Party (NDP). Other seats were taken by FORD-Kenya and its various splinter groups.

While all this was going on, Kenya was lashed first by torrential El Niño rains and then by a desperate drought that continued right up to 2000, causing terrible hardship in rural areas.

Preoccupied with internal problems, Kenya was quite unprepared for the events of 7 August 1998. Early in the morning massive blasts simultaneously ripped apart the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, killing more than 200 people. The effect on Kenyan tourism, and the economy as a whole, was devastating. During the next four years, though, coastal businesses slowly moved to rebuild the tourist industry, helped in part by Italian tour operators, who filled the gap left by American, British and German companies.

Further terrorist activity shook the country on 28 November 2002, when suicide bombers slammed an explosives-laden car into the lobby of the Paradise Hotel at Kikambala, near Mombasa. Moments before missiles were fired at an Israeli passenger plane taking off from Mombasa's airport. Al-Qaeda subsequently claimed responsibility for both acts.

Despite a slump in tourism immediately after the attacks, the impact has been nowhere near as great as in 1998, and visitor numbers on the coast are now as healthy as ever. However, recent worldwide events have reawakened fears of terrorism, and there was widespread controversy when the press reported a shoot-to-kill order for terror suspects supposedly issued by National Security minister John Michuki. In a country with a significant Muslim population, it's no wonder that a jittery atmosphere prevails around these issues.

Kenya Today

In June 2001 the KANU entered into a formal coalition government with the NDP and DP, creating a formidable power base. However, with Moi's presidency due to end in 2002, many feared that Moi would alter the constitution again. This time, though, he announced his intention to retire – on a very generous benefits package – with elections to be held in December 2002.

Moi put his weight firmly behind Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta, as his successor. Meanwhile, 12 opposition parties – including the DP, FORD-Kenya, FORD-Asili, the National Party of Kenya and Saba Saba-Asili – and several religious groups united under the umbrella of the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK), later known as the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc). Presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki was the former head of the Democratic party.

Although initially dogged by infighting, within weeks the opposition transformed itself into a dynamic and unified political party. When the election came on 27 December 2002 it was peaceful and fair and the result was dramatic – a landslide two-thirds majority for Mwai Kibaki and Narc. Despite being injured in a car accident while campaigning, Kibaki was inaugurated as Kenya's third president on 30 December 2002.

Sadly the optimism that swept Narc into power faded fast, and the new regime has been plagued by a constant stream of party infighting, corruption and economic problems. Above all, the path to reform has been slower and more tortuous than many people had hoped. Most Kenyans still support the president himself, but there is a widespread perception that he is too much of a 'quiet man', unwilling to speak up on important issues while his government runs amok around him. Some progress has certainly been made, you only have to look at the new *matatu* (minibus transport) regulations and omnipresent anticorruption signs to see the efforts being made. However, security and corruption remain worrying issues, locals complain that the cost of living has virtually doubled, and Kenya has fallen 20 places on the UN Human Development Index since 2002.

Marking the halfway point in his term of office, 2005 was another uncomfortable year for Kibaki, who faced criticism over his handling of the national housing crisis, the Tom Cholmondeley murder case and the civil service strikes, where thousands of bureaucrats were sacked for taking strike action over pay and conditions. Even his wife had several high-profile brushes with the media!

The biggest setback came in November 2005, when the electorate voted against proposed constitutional changes. These were the first such reforms in Kenya for 40 years and a key part of the Narc election manifesto, having been thrashed out in committee after committee for nearly three years, but many claimed they would have handed the president more power, pushing the country back into shady political territory of earlier times. Kibaki, to his credit, accepted the public's decision gracefully and promptly dismissed his entire cabinet.

With elections due once again in 2007, an energetic Uhuru Kenyatta at the head of the newly regrouped KANU, and an ambitious bid for the 2016 Olympic Games attracting international attention, the next few years will be an interesting time in Kenyan politics, and Kibaki certainly has plenty of challenges still to come.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

It's fair to say that there is not a great sense of national consciousness in Kenya. Many

residents of Kenya are more aware of their tribal affiliation than of being a 'Kenyan'; this is one of the more fascinating aspects of Kenyan life, but the lack of national cohesion undoubtedly holds the country back.

This focus on tribe, however, is generally accompanied by an admirable live-and-let-live attitude, such that only on rare occasions do tribal animosities or rivalries spill over into violence. In fact, Kenyans generally approach life with great exuberance. Be it on a crowded *matatu*, in a buzzing market place, or enjoying a drink in a bar, you cannot fail to notice that Kenyans are quick to laugh and are never reluctant to offer a smile.

This willingness to participate in life as it happens is perhaps a reflection of the African casual approach to time. You will be doing well to press a Kenyan into rushing anything. As is the case for many Africans, Kenyans tend to find that they have a lot of time on their hands so they don't see the need to do anything particularly urgently.

Education is of primary concern to Kenyans. Literacy rates are around 85% and are considerably higher than in any of her neighbours. Although education isn't compulsory, the motivation to learn is huge, particularly now that it's free, and you'll see children in school uniform everywhere in Kenya, even in the most impoverished rural communities.

Despite their often exuberant and casual approach, Kenyans are generally quite conservative, and are particularly concerned with modesty in dress. T-shirts and shorts are almost unheard of, though foreign men may *just* be able to pull it off. Shirts are an obsession for Kenyan men and almost everyone wears one, often with a sweater or blazer.

As Kenya undergoes a slow process of modernisation, tradition and modernity are locked in an almighty struggle, often resulting in the marginalisation of some elements of society. This is particularly the case as urbanisation happens apace. Kenya has its fair share of poverty, alienation and urban overcrowding, but even in the dustiest shanty towns life is lived to the full.

Daily Life

Tribe may be important in Kenya, but family is paramount. Particularly as the pace and demands of modern life grow, the role of the extended family has become even more

important. It is not unusual to encounter Kenyan children who are living with aunts, uncles or grandparents in a regional town while their parents are working a desk job in Nairobi or working at a resort in Watamu. Nonetheless, filial bonds remain strong, and the separation that brings about such circumstances in the first place is without exception a result of a parent's desire to further opportunities for their family and their children.

The strength of the family in Kenya is mirrored in the community. Life is generally played out in the streets and communal places. There is no such thing as daycare for young Kenyans; you will inevitably encounter the archetypal African scene where a range of children of different ages, usually with at least one older sister with a younger sibling on her hip, congregate and observe the hustle and bustle of daily life. This happens across Kenya, from coastal communities to villages in the Central Highlands to the shanty towns in Nairobi. And even as urbanisation happens and traditional community structures are fractured, street life remains lively. In any town of any size the afternoon rush hour is always a spectacle: it seems that all the world is afoot as they head home past street stalls and wandering pedlars and the dust rises gently into the coppersy African twilight.

For all this, as Kenya gains a foothold in the 21st century it is grappling with increasing poverty. Once classed a middle-income country, Kenya has fallen to be a low-income country, with the standard of living dropping drastically from 2002 to 2005.

Population

Kenya's population in 2001 was estimated at 30,765,900. The population growth rate, currently at around 2.6%, has slowed in the last few years due to the soaring incidence of HIV/AIDS, which now infects 15% of adults.

According to 2001 UN figures, life expectancy in Kenya is 52 years, although some sources place it as low as 47, due to the effects of HIV/AIDS. Only 42% of the population has access to clean drinking water, but 87% are now thought to have access to adequate sanitation. The infant-mortality rate is 65 per 1000 births (a marked increase on the 1997 figure) and 51% of the population

is aged under 18. A sign of growing poverty in rural regions is migration to urban areas, where 33% of all Kenyans now live, many of them in squalid shanty towns.

Multiculturalism

Kenya's population is made up almost entirely of Africans, with small but influential minorities of Asians (about 80,000), Arabs (about 30,000) and Europeans (about 30,000).

AFRICANS

Kenya is home to more than 70 tribal groups; for detailed information see p46. The most important distinguishing feature between the tribes is language. The majority of Kenya's Africans fall into two major language groups: the Bantu and the Nilotic. The Bantu people arrived in East Africa in waves from West Africa after 500 BC, and include the Kikuyu, Meru, Gusii, Embu, Akamba and Luyha, as well as the Mijikenda, who preceded the Swahili in many parts of the coast.

Nilotic speakers migrated into the area from the Nile Valley some time later. This group includes the Maasai, Turkana, Samburu, Pokot, Luo and Kalenjin, which, together with the Bantu speakers, account for more than 90% of Kenya's African population. The Kikuyu and the Luo are by far the most numerous groups, and between them hold practically all the positions of power and influence in the country.

A third language grouping, and in fact the first migrants into the country, are the Cushitic speakers. They occupy the northeast of the country, and include such tribes as the El-Molo, Somali, Rendille and Galla.

On the coast, Swahili is the name given to the local people who, although they have various tribal ancestries, have intermarried with Arab settlers over the centuries and now have a predominantly Arabic culture.

ASIANS

India's connections with East Africa go back to the days of the spice trade, but the first permanent settlers from the Indian subcontinent were indentured workers, brought here from Gujarat and the Punjab by the British to build the Uganda Railway. After the railway was finished, the British allowed many workers to stay and start up businesses, and

hundreds of *dukas* (small shops) were set up across the country.

Asian numbers were augmented after WWII and the Indian community came to control large sectors of the East African economy. However, few gave their active support to the black nationalist movements in the run-up to independence. This earned the distrust of the African community, who felt the Indians were simply there to exploit African labour.

Although Kenya escaped the anti-Asian pogroms that plagued Uganda during the rule of Idi Amin, thousands of shops owned by Asians were confiscated and Asians were forbidden to trade in rural areas. Fortunately, Kenya has learned from the lessons of the economic collapse in Uganda and calls for Asians to 'go home' have faded from the political agenda.

SPORT

Soccer is a big deal in Kenya. People are nuts about it, and even those who don't follow a local team will probably claim to support Arsenal or Manchester United. In the Kenyan Premiership, Harambee Stars, AFC Leopards and Mathare Utd vie for top slot, often drawing big crowds. The action is fast, furious and passionate, sometimes spilling onto the terraces. Tickets cost KSh300 to KSh600 and it's quite an experience.

Kenyan long-distance runners are among the best in the world, although much of their competitive running takes place outside the country. Even trials and national events in Kenya sometimes fail to attract these stars, despite being flagged in the press well in advance.

The annual **East African Safari Rally** (www.eastsafarirally.com) is a rugged 3000km rally that passes through Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania along public roadways, attracting an international collection of drivers with their vintage (pre-1971) automobiles.

RELIGION

It's probably true to say that most Kenyans outside the coastal and eastern provinces are Christians of one sort or another, while most of those on the coast and in the eastern part of the country are Muslim. Muslims make up some 30% of the population. In the more remote tribal areas you'll find a mixture of Muslims, Christians and those

who follow their ancestral tribal beliefs, the latter are definitely a minority.

ARTS Music

Although there is an indigenous Kenyan music scene, the overriding African musical influence here, as in the rest of East Africa, is Congolese *lingala* (dance music, also known as *soukous*). Kenyan bands produced some of the most popular songs in Africa in the 1960s, including Fadhili William's famous *Malaika* (Angel), and *Jambo Bwana*, Kenya's unofficial anthem, by the hugely influential Them Mushrooms.

Benga is the contemporary dance music of Kenya, characterised by electric guitar licks and bounding bass rhythms. It originated among the Luo people and became popular in the 1950s. Since then it has spread throughout the country, and been taken up by Akamba and Kikuyu musicians. Well-known exponents include DO Misiani and his group Shirati Jazz, who have been around since the 1960s. You should also look out for Globestyle, Victoria Kings and Ambira Boys.

Contemporary Kikuyu music often borrows from *benga*. Stars include Sam Chege, Francis Rugwati and Daniel 'Councillor' Kamau, popular in the 1970s and still going strong. Joseph Kamaru, the popular musician and notorious nightclub owner of the late 1960s, converted to Christianity in 1993 and now dominates the gospel-music scene.

Popular bands today are heavily influenced by *benga*, *soukous* and Western music, with lyrics often in Swahili. These include bands such as Them Mushrooms (now re-invented as Uyoya) and Safari Sound. For upbeat dance tunes, Nameless, Ogopa DJs and Deux Vultures are recommended acts.

The biggest thing in Kenya right now is American-influenced hip-hop, which has spawned both an avid listening public and an active subculture, particularly in Nairobi. Look out for local stars, like Necessary Noise, Nonini, Emmanuel Jal, the Homeboyz DJs and the Nairobi Yetu collective.

Literature

Two of Kenya's best authors are Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi. Ngugi is uncompromisingly radical, and his harrowing

criticism of the Kenyan establishment landed him in jail for a year (described in his *Detained – A Prison Writer's Diary*), lost him his job at Nairobi University and forced him into exile. Meja Mwangi sticks more to social issues and urban dislocation, but has a brilliant sense of humour that threads its way right through his books, including his latest, *The Mzungu Boy*.

Kenya's latest rising star is Binyavanga Wainaina, currently a writer for the South African *Sunday Times* newspaper, who won the Caine Prize for African Writing in July 2002. The award-winning short story *Discovering Home* is about a young Kenyan working in Cape Town who returns to his parents' village for a year.

Another interesting writer is Marjorie Oludhe Magoye, whose *The Present Moment* follows the life stories of a group of elderly women in a Christian refuge. For more writing by women in Africa try *Unwinding Threads*, a collection of short stories by many authors from all over the continent.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Kenya straddles the equator and covers an area of some 583,000 sq km, including around 13,600 sq km of Lake Victoria. It is bordered to the north by the arid bushlands of Ethiopia and Sudan, to the east by the Indian Ocean and the wastes of Somalia, to the west by Uganda and Lake Victoria, and to the south by Tanzania.

Kenya is dominated by the Rift Valley, a vast range of valleys that follows a 5000km-long crack in the earth's crust. Within the Rift are numerous 'swells' (raised escarpments) and 'troughs' (deep valleys, often containing lakes), and there are some huge volcanoes, including Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Mt Kilimanjaro (across the border in Tanzania).

The Rift Valley divides the flat plains of the coast from the hills along the lakeshore. Nairobi, the capital, sits in the Central Highlands, which are on the eastern edge of the Rift Valley. Kenya can roughly be divided into four zones: the coastal plains; the Rift Valley and Central Highlands; the lakeshore; and the wastelands of northern Kenya.

The main rivers in Kenya are the Athi/Galana River, which empties into the Indian Ocean near Malindi, and the Tana River, which hits the coast midway between Ma-

lindi and Lamu. Aside from Lake Victoria, Kenya has numerous small volcanic lakes and mighty Lake Turkana, which straddles the Ethiopian border.

Within volcanic craters, and on the Rift Valley floor, are several soda lakes, rich in sodium bicarbonate, created by the filtering of water through mineral-rich volcanic rock and subsequent evaporation.

Wildlife

ANIMALS

There's such a dazzling array of animals in Kenya that viewing them in the national parks is one of the main reasons for visiting. The 'Big Five' – lion, buffalo, elephant, leopard and rhino – and a huge variety of other animals can be seen in at least two of the major parks. Some of the most interesting are described in the *Wildlife Guide* (p57), or in much more detail in Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife East Africa*.

The birdlife here is equally varied, and includes such interesting species as the ostrich, vulture and marabou stork. Around bodies of water you may see flamingos, cranes, storks and pelicans, while the forests are home to hornbills and rare species, such as the yellow weaver bird, sunbird and touraco. There are also dozens of other species of weaver bird, which make the distinctive baglike nests seen hanging from acacia trees.

Endangered Species

Many of Kenya's major predators and herbivores have become endangered because of the continuous destruction of their natural habitat and merciless poaching for ivory, skins, horn and bush meat.

The black rhino is probably Kenya's most endangered species, due to poaching for its horn. Faced with relentless poaching for its heavily armed gangs in the 1980s, the wild rhino population plummeted from 20,000 in 1969 to just 458 today. **Rhino Ark** (☎ 020-604246; www.rhinoark.org) raises funds to create rhino sanctuaries in the parks, complete with electric fencing, and donations are always appreciated. There are currently sanctuaries in Tsavo and Lake Nakuru National Parks, while Aberdare National Park is in the process of being fenced.

While the elephant is not technically endangered, it is still the target of poachers, and

a number are killed every year, especially in the area around Tsavo East. Current numbers are estimated at 28,000.

PLANTS

Kenya's flora is notably diverse because of the country's wide range of physiographic regions. The vast plains of the south are characterised by distinctive flat-topped acacia trees, interspersed with the equally recognisable baobab trees and savage whistling thorn bushes, which made early exploration of the continent such a tortuous process.

The savanna grassland of the Masai Mara supports a huge variety of animal life. The grass grows quickly after the rains, providing food for a huge range of herbivores and insects, which in turn feed a variety of predators. Trampling and grazing by herbivores promotes the growth of grasses, rather than broadleaf plants, which are more vulnerable to damage from grazing, drought and fire.

On the slopes of Mt Elgon and Mt Kenya the flora changes with altitude. Thick evergreen temperate forest grows between 1000m and 2000m, giving way to a belt of bamboo forest up to about 3000m. Above this height is mountain moorland, characterised by the amazing groundsel tree and giant lobelias. In the semidesert plains of the north and northeast the vegetation cover is thorny bush, which can seem to go on forever. In the northern coastal areas mangroves are prolific and there are still a few small pockets of coastal rainforest.

National Parks & Reserves

Around 10% of Kenya's land area is protected by law, and the national parks and reserves here rate among the best in Africa. Despite the ravages of human land exploitation and poaching, there is still an incredible variety of birds and mammals in the parks, and going on safari is an integral part of the Kenyan experience.

More popular parks, such as the Masai Mara National Reserve and Amboseli National Park, can become heavily overcrowded in the high season (January to February). Fortunately, the smaller and more remote parks, such as Saiwa Swamp National Park, see only a handful of visitors at any time of the year. A number of marine national parks have also been established, providing excellent diving and snorkelling.

Although all the parks provide the opportunity to get 'up close and personal' with wildlife, remember that these are wild animals and their actions can be unpredictable. Heed the warnings of guides and rangers while on safari, and seek local advice before venturing off alone into the wilds.

The most important national parks and reserves in Kenya are summarised on p76. Smaller parks include Mt Longonot National Park, a dormant volcano; Marsabit National Park, with large herbivores and dense forest; and Sibiloi and Central Island National Parks on Lake Turkana.

Entry fees to national parks are controlled by the KWS, while national reserves are administered by the relevant local council. See p276 for park categories and prices.

Environmental Issues

DEFORESTATION

More than half of Africa's forests have been destroyed over the last century, and forest destruction continues on a large scale in Kenya – less than 3% of the country's original forest cover remains. Land grabbing, illegal logging, charcoal burning and agricultural encroachment all take their toll. However, millions of Kenyans still rely on wood and charcoal for cooking fuel, so travellers will almost certainly contribute to this deforestation whether they like it or not.

The degazetting of protected forests is another contentious issue, sparking widespread protests and preservation campaigns. On the flip side, locals in forest areas can find themselves homeless if the government does enforce protection orders.

Despite these problems, some large areas of protected forest remain. The Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Aberdare National Parks, Kakamega Forest Reserve and Arabuko Sokoke Forest are all tremendous places to visit, packed with thousands of species of fauna and flora.

KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE (KWS)

With a total ban on hunting imposed in 1977, the KWS was free to concentrate solely on conserving Kenya's wildlife. This came just in time, as the 1970s and '80s were marred by a shocking amount of poaching linked to the drought in Somalia, which drove hordes of poachers across the border into Kenya. A staggering number of Kenya's

NATIONAL PARK FEES

Park entry fees in Kenya are slowly being converted to a 'smartcard' system. These cards must be charged with credit in advance and can only be topped up at certain locations; they remain the property of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and must be surrendered once they run out of credit. Any credit left once you finish your trip cannot be refunded.

At the time of research the smartcard system was in use at Nairobi, Lake Nakuru, Aberdare, Amboseli, Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. Other parks still work on a cash system. You can purchase and charge smartcards at the KWS headquarters in Nairobi and Mombasa, at Aberdare headquarters, at Lake Nakuru main gate, at Voi gate in Tsavo East, and at the Malindi Marine National Park office.

Entry fees to the parks per person are as follows:

Parks (category)	Entry nonresident adult/child US\$	Entry resident adult/child KSh	Camping nonresident adult/child US\$	Camping resident adult/child US\$
Aberdare, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru (A)	30/10	500/200	10/5	300/100
Meru, Tsavo East & West (B)	27/10	500/200	10/5	300/100
Nairobi, Shimba Hills (C)	23/10	500/200	10/5	300/100
all other parks (D)	15/5	500/200	8/5	200/100
marine parks	5/2	100/50	-	-

The land-based parks and reserves charge KSh200 for vehicles with fewer than six seats and KSh500 for vehicles seating six to 12. In addition to the public camping areas, special camp sites cost US\$10 to US\$15 per adult nonresident, plus a KSh5000 weekly reservation fee. Guides are available in most parks for KSh500 per day.

The Masai Mara, Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba National Reserves have the same entry fees as category A national parks; entry to Mt Kenya National Park is US\$15/8 per adult/child. Arabuko Sokoke and Kakamega Forest Reserves are joint KWS and Forestry Department projects and charge US\$10/5 for an adult/child.

All fees cover visitors for a 24-hour period, but a recent change in regulations means that most parks will no longer allow you to leave and re-enter without paying twice.

rhinos and elephants were slaughtered, and many KWS officers worked in league with poachers until famous palaeontologist Dr Richard Leakey cleaned up the organisation in the 1980s and '90s. A core part of his policy was allowing KWS rangers to shoot poachers on sight, which seems to have dramatically reduced the problem.

However, there have been several new raids on elephants and rhinos since 2001. As a result, there is now open talk of abandoning some of the more remote parks and concentrating resources where they can achieve the best results and on the parks, that receive most visitors. At the same time community conservation projects are being encouraged, and many community-owned ranches are now being opened up as private

wildlife reserves, with the backing of the KWS and international donors.

PRIVATE CONSERVATION

It has been claimed that more than 75% of Kenya's wildlife lies outside the national parks and reserves, and an increasing number of important wildlife conservation areas now exist on private land. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (p419), near Isiolo, is a prime example. Private wildlife reserves often have the resources to work intensively on specific conservation issues and it is no accident that some of the largest concentrations of rhinos are within these areas. Supporting these projects is a great way for visitors to contribute to Kenyan communities and assist wildlife preservation.

The **Laikipia Wildlife Forum** (☎ 062-31600; www.laikipia.org) is an umbrella organisation representing many lodges and conservation areas in Laikipia, the large slab of ranch land northwest of Mt Kenya. Ranches in this area are particularly active in wildlife conservation, and the forum is a good source of up-to-date information. Other private wildlife ranches and conservation areas can be found around Tsavo and Amboseli National Parks.

TOURISM

The tourist industry is the cause of serious environmental problems, most notably heavy use of firewood by tourist lodges and erosion caused by safari minibuses, which cut across and between trails and follow wildlife into the bush, creating virtual dust-bowls in parks such as Amboseli, Samburu and Masai Mara.

The KWS now insists that every new lodge and camp must be designed in an ecofriendly manner. As a result, there are growing numbers of 'ecolodges' in Kenya, which keep their impact on the environment to a minimum through recycling, use of renewable energy resources, and strict controls on dumping of refuse and the types of fuel that are used.

As a visitor, the best way to help combat these problems is to be very selective about who you do business with. While you may end up paying more for an ecofriendly trip, in the long term you'll be investing in the preservation of Kenya's delicate environment.

FOOD & DRINK

The food in Kenya is essentially the same as you'll find in the rest of this region. *Nyama choma* is the one local speciality; this is technically barbecued meat, but bears little resemblance to any Western understanding of the term! You buy the meat (usually goat) by the kilogram, it's cooked over a charcoal pit and served in bite-sized pieces with a vegetable side dish. Sometimes it's surprisingly good, but often you'll require a large supply of toothpicks.

Despite the fact that Kenya grows some of the finest tea and coffee in the world, getting a decent cup of either can be difficult. *Chai* (tea) is drunk in large quantities, but the tea, milk and sugar are usually boiled together and stewed for ages, coming out milky and horrendously sweet. For tea

JIKO

One innovative idea to minimise firewood use is the *jiko* stove, based on a Thai design and modified to suit the Kenyan way of cooking. Easy and cheap to manufacture, the *jiko* consists of an hourglass-shaped metal casing and a ceramic insulator that delivers 25% to 40% of the heat from the fire to the pot, much more than open fires. After some uncertainty, Kenyans have embraced the *jiko* with enthusiasm and hundreds of open-air workshops now provide stoves for nearly a million households.

without milk ask for *chai kavu*. Coffee is also sweet and milky, with a bare minimum of instant granules. In Nairobi there are a handful of excellent coffee houses, and you can usually get a good filter coffee at any of the big hotels. With all the Italian tourists, you can get a decent cappuccino pretty much anywhere on the coast.

Soft drinks, such as Coke, Sprite and Fanta, are available everywhere under the generic term of sodas. The nation's favourite juice is passionfruit; pineapple, orange and mango juices also feature on most menus.

The local beers are Tusker, White Cap and Pilsner (all manufactured by Kenya Breweries), sold in 500ml bottles. Guinness is also available, but tastes nothing like the real thing – it's often drunk mixed with Coke! Castle (a South African beer) is also made under license by Kenya Breweries. Beers are cheapest from supermarkets (KSh45 for 500ml); bars charge KSh80 to KSh200. Other bottled drinks include Hardy's cider, Redd's and Kingfisher (fruity alcopops), and the ubiquitous Smirnoff Ice.

Kenya has a fledgling wine industry and the Lake Naivasha Colombar wines are said to be quite good, unlike local papaya wine, which tastes foul and smells worse. You can get cheap imported wine by the glass for around KSh150 in Nairobi restaurants. In the big supermarkets you'll pay anything from KSh500 to KSh1500 for a bottle of South African wine.

Although it is strictly illegal to brew or distil liquor, this still goes on. *Pombe* is the local beer, usually a fermented brew made with bananas or millet and sugar. It shouldn't do you any harm.

LETHAL BREW

Kenya has a long tradition of producing its own bootleg liquor, but you should steer well clear of *chang'a*. In mid-2005, 48 people died near Machakos after drinking a bad batch of the stuff; a further 84 were hospitalised and apparently treated with vodka! Such incidents are not uncommon. Sorghum Baridi, from Central Province, contains so much methyl alcohol that the bottles are actually cold to the touch! Perhaps the most dangerous *chang'a* comes from Kisii, and is fermented with marijuana twigs, cactus mash, battery alkaline and formalin. Needless to say these brews can have lethal effects and we don't recommend that you partake.

NAIROBI

☎ 020 / pop 2.5 million

Who's afraid of big bad Nairobi? Well, quite a lot of people apparently – the city's reputation precedes it, so much so that most visitors arrive prepared to dive in and out in the shortest time possible. It's certainly true that Kenya's capital requires that bit more big-city common sense than most, and it's hard not to feel a little nervous once the streets empty after dark.

However, it's easy enough to sidestep the worst of the city's dangers, and there's absolutely no reason why a streetwise traveller can't survive and even enjoy a stay here. In terms of facilities, the city has more going for it than any other Kenyan conurbation: the cultural scene is thriving, the nightlife is unbridled and it's virtually the only place in the country where you can get a truly varied diet.

Even if the inner city does terrify you, it's easy to get out into the suburbs, where you can relax with the large local expat community, and make the most of even more top-rank amenities, award-winning restaurants and friendly bars.

HISTORY

As you might guess from all the tower blocks, Nairobi is a completely modern creation and almost everything here has been built in the last 100 years. Until the 1890s the whole area was just an isolated swamp,

but as the rails of the East Africa railway fell into place, a depot was established on the edge of a small stream known to the Maasai as *uaso nairobi* (cold water). Nairobi quickly developed into the administrative nerve centre of the Uganda Railway, and in 1901 the capital of the British Protectorate was moved here from Mombasa.

Even when the first permanent buildings were constructed, Nairobi remained a real frontier town, with rhinos and lions freely roaming the streets, and lines of iron-roofed bungalows stretching across the plain. However, once the railway was up and running, wealth began to flow into the city. The colonial government built some grand hotels to accommodate the first tourists to Kenya – big game hunters, lured by the attraction of shooting the country's almost naively tame wildlife. Sadly almost all of the colonial-era buildings were replaced by bland modern office buildings following *uhuru* (independence) in 1963.

ORIENTATION

The compact city centre is in the area bounded by Uhuru Hwy, Haile Selassie Ave, Tom Mboya St and University Way. Kenyatta Ave divides this area in two; most of the important offices lie to the south, while there are hotels, the city market and more offices to the north. Most budget accommodation is northeast of the city centre, on the far side of Tom Mboya St and around Latema, Accra and River Rds. This area has a bad reputation for robbery.

North of the city centre are the University of Nairobi, the National Museum and the expat-dominated suburb of Westlands. Jomo Kenyatta International Airport is southeast of the central Nairobi; also south are Langata and Karen suburbs and Wilson airport.

Maps

For a rudimentary guide to the central area, a variety of free promotional maps are available. If you want more detailed coverage, the best option is the Survey of Kenya *City of Nairobi: Map & Guide*. Also adequate is the 1:15,000 *Map Guide of Nairobi City Centre* (KSh200) published by Interland Maps.

Much better, though bulkier, is *Nairobi AtoZ* (KSh510) by RW Moss, which covers the whole city in detail.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Book Villa (Map pp282-3; ☎ 337890; Standard St) New, discounted and second-hand books.

Bookpoint (Map pp282-3; ☎ 211156; Moi Ave)

Bookstop (☎ 714547; Yaya Centre, Hurlingham)

Text Book Centre Kijabe St (Map pp280-1; ☎ 330340, Kijabe St); Westlands (Map p288; ☎ 3747405; Sarit Centre, Westlands) One of the best bookshops in East Africa.

Westland Sundries Bookshop Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 212776; New Stanley Hotel, Kenyatta Ave); Westlands (Map p288; ☎ 446406; Ring Rd Westlands, Westlands)

Cultural Centres

All the foreign cultural organisations have libraries open to the public.

Alliance Française (Map pp280-1; ☎ 340054; www.alliancefrnairobi.org; cnr Monrovia & Loita Sts;

☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) Has the best events program of all the cultural centres, showcasing Kenyan and African performing arts.

British Council (Map pp280-1; ☎ 334855; www.britishcouncil.org/kenya; Upper Hill Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat)

Goethe Institut (Map pp280-1; ☎ 224640; www.goethe.de/nairobi; Maendeleo House, cnr Monrovia & Loita Sts; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Thu-Tue, 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

Japan Information & Culture Centre (Map pp282-3; ☎ 340520; www.ke.emb-japan.go.jp; ICEA Bldg, Kenyatta Ave; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Free video shows and Japanese cinema screenings.

Nairobi Cultural Institute (Map pp280-1; ☎ 569205; Ngong Rd) Holds lectures and other functions of local cultural interest.

Emergency

AAR Health Services (Map pp280-1; ☎ 717376; Fourth Ngong Ave)

Aga Khan Hospital (Map pp280-1; ☎ 3662000; Third Parklands Ave)

Amref flying-doctor service (☎ 502699)

Emergency services (☎ 999) Fire, police and ambulance. Don't rely on their prompt arrival.

Police (☎ 240000) For less urgent police business.

Internet Access

There are literally hundreds of Internet cafés in central Nairobi, most of them tucked away in anonymous office buildings. Connection speed is usually pretty good.

AGX (Map pp280-1; Barclays Plaza, Loita St; per min KSh1; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Best connections in town.

Avant Garde e-centre (Map pp282-3; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St; per min KSh1.50; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) Enter via Standard St.

NAIROBI IN...

Two Days

While most people use Nairobi as a stop-over, there's still plenty to do if you have a day or two to kill. Start at the **National Museum** (p284), then head to the city centre for **coffee** (p290), some **Chinese** (p289) and a **movie** (p291).

On the second day you can view the city from the **Kenyatta Conference Centre** (p285) and browse contemporary art at the **National Archives** (p285). In the evening **Carnivore** (p298) in Karen is a must, or you can dance dirty at **Simmers** (p291) and the infamous **New Florida** (p291).

Four Days

With another two days, you can also venture out towards the suburbs. Westlands has plenty of good eating spots between the shops at the **Sarit Centre** (p290) and Kenya's best Indian restaurant, **Haandi** (p289).

For your final 24 hours, breakfast at the **Pasara Café** (p289), do some **shopping** (p292), and finish at **Casablanca** (p291) for Moroccan food and drinks.

Capital Realtime (Map pp282-3; ☎ 247900; Lonrho House, Standard St; per min KSh2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat)

EasySurf (Map p288; ☎ 3745418; Sarit Centre, Westlands; per min KSh4; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Libraries

Kenya National Library (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2725550; www.knls.or.ke; Ngong Rd; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) The main public library.

McMillan Memorial Library (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221844; Banda St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) A smaller collection in a colonial-era building.

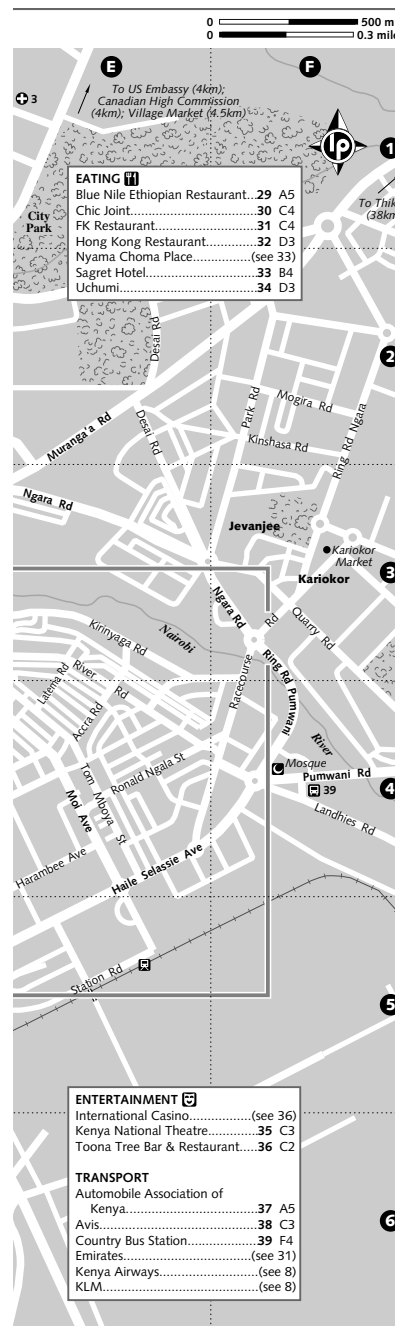
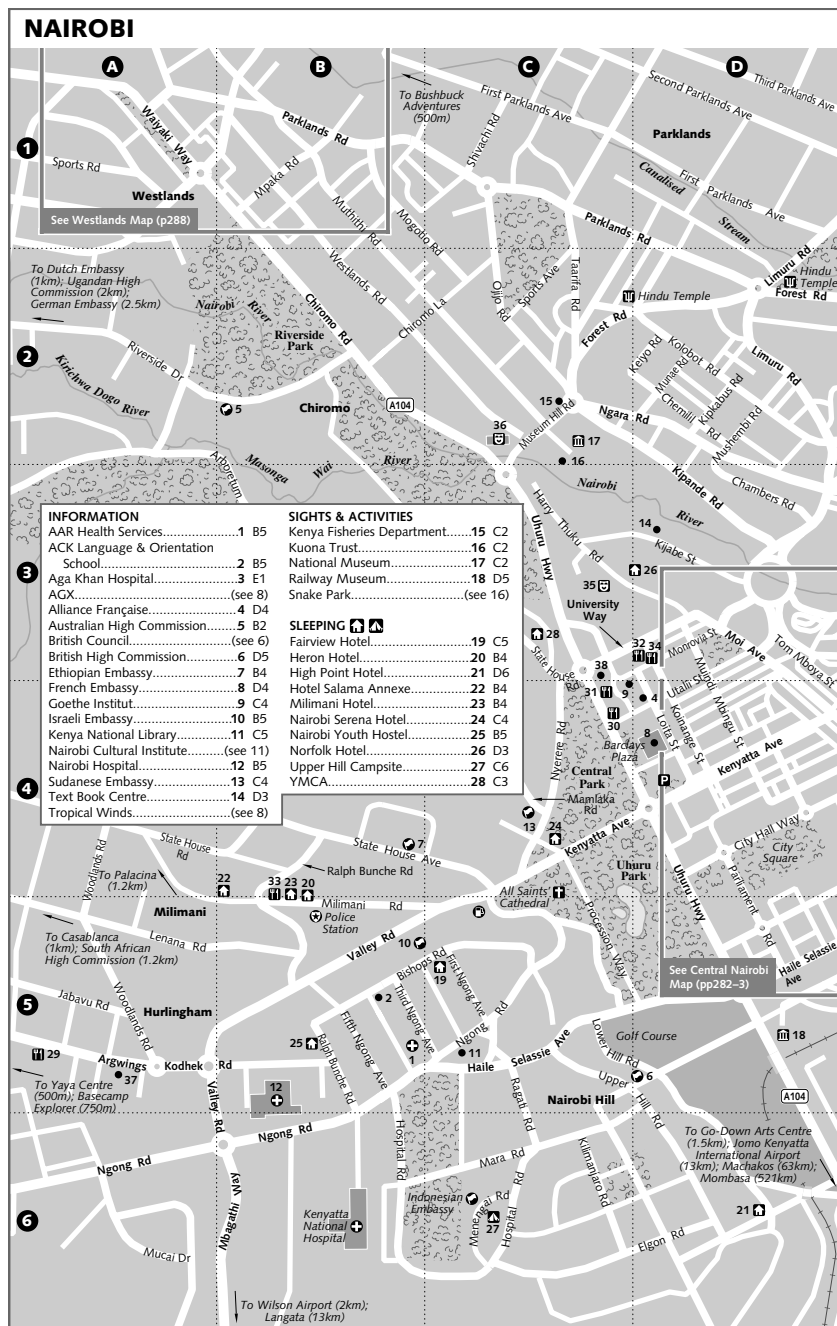
Medical Services

Avoid the Kenyatta National Hospital.

AAR Health Services Nairobi (Map pp280-1; ☎ 715319; Williamson House, Fourth Ngong Ave); Westlands (Map p288; ☎ 446201; Sarit Centre, Westlands)

Acacia Medical Centre (Map pp282-3; ☎ 212200; info@acaciamed.co.ke; ICEA Bldg, Kenyatta Ave; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat)

Aga Khan Hospital (Map pp280-1; ☎ 740000; Third Parklands Ave; ☎ 24hr)



KAM Pharmacy (Map pp282-3; ☎ 251700; Executive Tower, IPS Bldg, Kimathi St) Pharmacy, doctor's surgery and laboratory.

Medical Services Surgery (Map pp282-3; ☎ 317625; Bruce House, Standard St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Nairobi Hospital (Map pp280-1; ☎ 722160) Off Argwings Khodek Rd.

Money

In the centre of Nairobi, Barclays branches with guarded ATMs include those located on Muindi Mbingu St (Map pp282-3), Mama Ngina St (Map pp282-3), and on the corner of Kenyatta and Moi Aves (Map pp282-3). You will also find multiple branches in Westlands and Hurlingham. The other big bank in town is the Standard Chartered, which has numerous central branches.

Foreign-exchange bureaus offer slightly better rates for cash.

AmEx (Map pp282-3; ☎ 222906; Hilton Hotel, Mama Ngina St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Handles travellers checks and looks after mail for clients.

Cosmos Forex (Map pp282-3; ☎ 250582; Rehema House, Standard St)

Goldfield Forex (Map pp282-3; ☎ 244554; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St)

Mayfair Forex (Map pp282-3; ☎ 226212; Uganda House, Standard St)

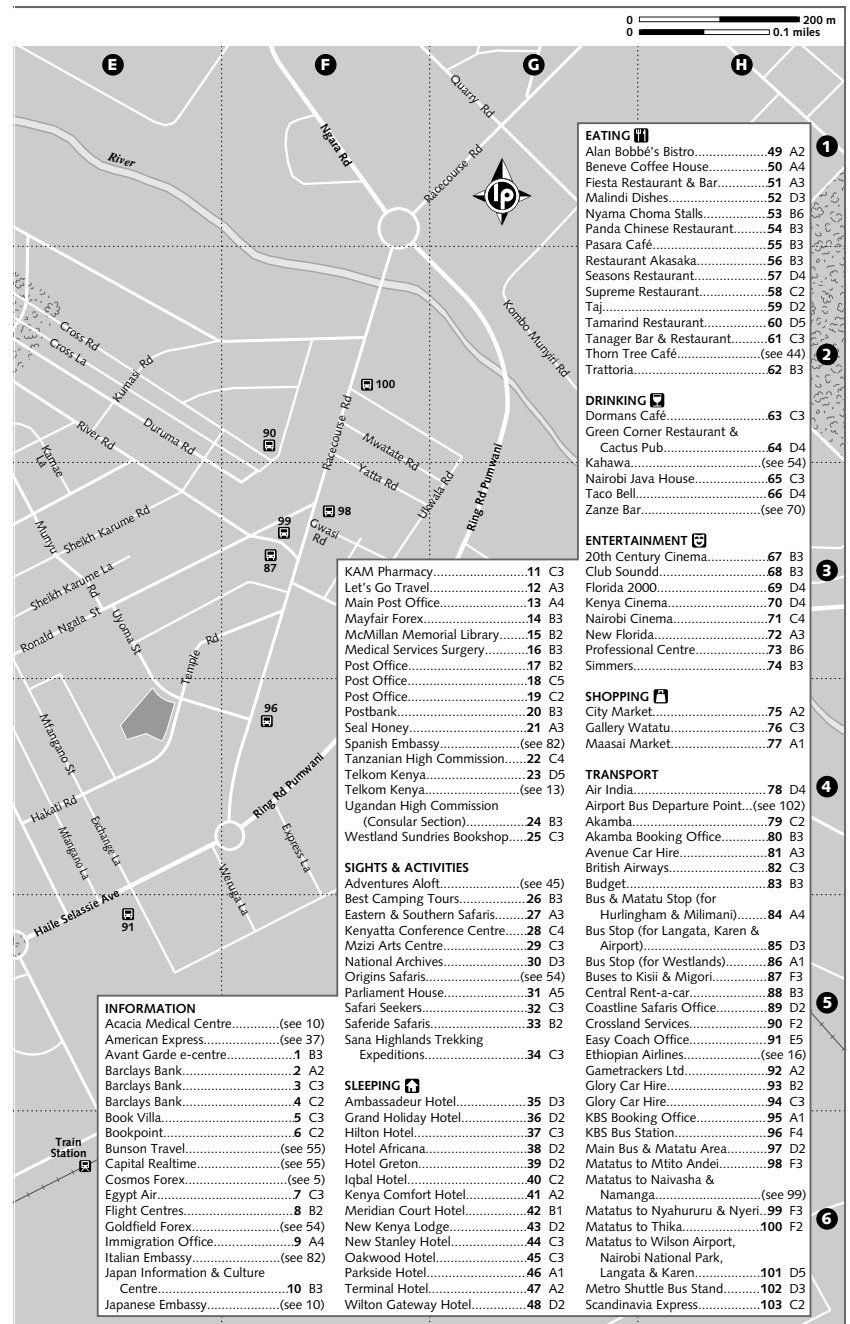
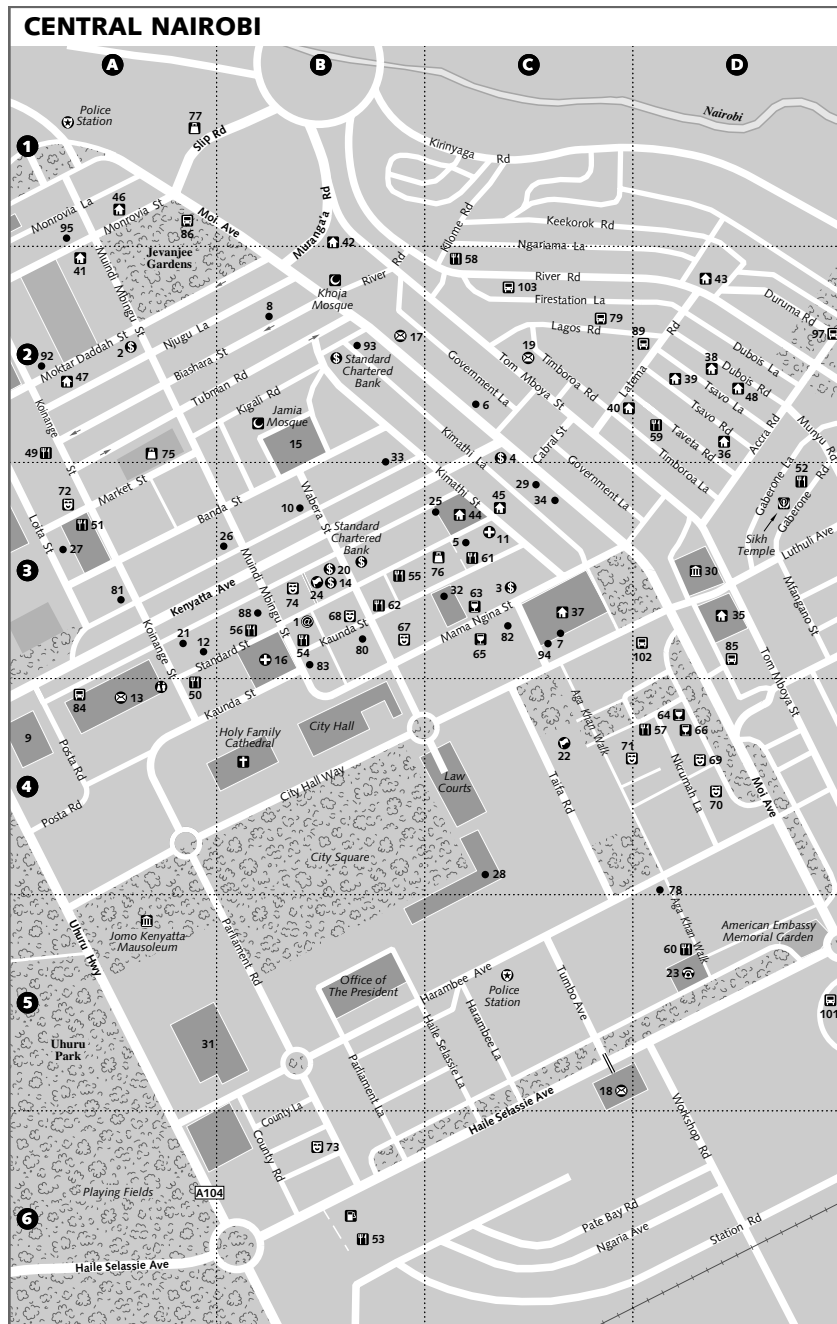
Postbank (Map pp282-3; 13 Kenyatta Ave) For Western Union money transfers.

Travellers Forex Bureau (Map p288; ☎ 447204; The Mall, Westlands)

Post

The enormous **main post office** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 243434; Kenyatta Ave; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is a well-organised edifice close to Uhuru Park. There's a very basic post-restante service in the same office as the parcel desk, where you'll need to bring your parcels so the contents can be examined. Bring a roll of parcel wrapping paper and parcel tape so you can seal the package once it's been inspected; you can buy these at **Seal Honey** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 216376; 27 Kenyatta Ave).

If you just want stamps, there are post offices on Moi Ave (Map pp282-3), Haile Selassie Ave (Map pp282-3) and Tom Mboya St (Map pp282-3). The Moi Ave office is a good place to send parcels; packing boxes are available to buy for KSh50 to KSh100.



EATING 🍴

Alan Bobbé's Bistro.....	49	A2
Beneve Coffee House.....	50	A4
Fiesta Restaurant & Bar.....	51	A3
Malindi Dishes.....	52	D3
Nyama Choma Stalls.....	53	B6
Panda Chinese Restaurant.....	54	B3
Pasara Café.....	55	B3
Restaurant Akasaka.....	56	B3
Seasons Restaurant.....	57	D4
Supreme Restaurant.....	58	C2
Taj.....	59	D2
Tamarind Restaurant.....	60	D5
Tanager Bar & Restaurant.....	61	C3
Thorn Tree Café.....	(see 44)	
Trattoria.....	62	B3

DRINKING 🍷

Dormans Café.....	63	C3
Green Corner Restaurant & Cactus Pub.....	64	D4
Kahawa.....	(see 54)	
Nairobi Java House.....	65	C3
Taco Bell.....	66	D4
Zanze Bar.....	(see 70)	

ENTERTAINMENT 🎬

20th Century Cinema.....	67	B3
Club Sound.....	68	B3
Florida 2000.....	69	D4
Kenya Cinema.....	70	D4
Nairobi Cinema.....	71	C4
New Florida.....	72	A3
Professional Centre.....	73	B6
Simmers.....	74	B3

SHOPPING 🛍️

City Market.....	75	A2
Gallery Watatu.....	76	C3
Maasai Market.....	77	A1

TRANSPORT 🚗

Air India.....	78	D4
Airport Bus Departure Point.....	(see 102)	
Akamba.....	79	C2
Akamba Booking Office.....	80	B3
Avenue Car Hire.....	81	A3
British Airways.....	82	C3
Budget.....	83	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES 🏛️

Adventures Aloft.....	(see 45)	
Best Camping Tours.....	26	B3
Bus & Matatu Stop (for Eastern & Southern Safaris.....	27	A3
Kenyatta Conference Centre.....	28	C4
Mzizi Arts Centre.....	29	C3
National Archives.....	30	D3
Origins Safaris.....	(see 54)	
Parliament House.....	31	A5
Safari Seekers.....	32	C3
Saferide Safaris.....	33	B2
Sana Highlands Trekking Expeditions.....	34	C3

SLEEPING 🛏️

Ambassadeur Hotel.....	35	D3
Book Villa.....	36	D2
Hilton Hotel.....	37	C3
Hotel Africana.....	38	D2
Hotel Gretton.....	39	D2
Iqbal Hotel.....	40	C2
Kenya Comfort Hotel.....	41	A2
Meridian Court Hotel.....	42	B1
New Kenya Lodge.....	43	D2
New Stanley Hotel.....	44	C3
Oakwood Hotel.....	45	C3
Parkside Hotel.....	46	A1
Terminal Hotel.....	47	A2
Wilton Gateway Hotel.....	48	D2

INFORMATION 📄

Accacia Medical Centre.....	(see 10)	
American Express.....	(see 37)	
Avant Garde e-centre.....	1	B3
Barclays Bank.....	2	A2
Barclays Bank.....	3	C3
Barclays Bank.....	4	C2
Book Villa.....	5	C3
Bookpoint.....	6	C2
Bunson Travel.....	(see 55)	
Capital Realtime.....	(see 55)	
Cosmos Forex.....	(see 5)	
Egypt Air.....	7	C3
Flight Centres.....	8	B2
Goldfield Forex.....	(see 54)	
Immigration Office.....	9	A4
Italian Embassy.....	(see 82)	
Japan Information & Culture Centre.....	10	B3
Japanese Embassy.....	(see 10)	

KENYA

KENYA

Telephone

Public phones are common in Nairobi, but many just don't work.

Telkom Kenya (Map pp282-3; ☎ 232000; Haile Selassie Ave; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Has dozens of payphones and you can buy phonecards. There's also a branch at the main post office.

Many stands in central Nairobi sell Telkom Kenya phonecards and top-up cards for pre-paid mobile phones. Alternatively, there are numerous private agencies in the city centre offering international telephone services. Typical charges are KSh150 to KSh200 per minute to almost anywhere in the world.

Tourist Information

Despite the many safari companies with signs saying 'Tourist Information', there is still no official tourist office in Nairobi. For events and other listings you'll have to check the local newspapers or glean what you can from a handful of magazines, which take a bit of effort to hunt down. *Go Places* (free) and the *Going Out Guide* (KSh150) are probably the most widespread, available from travel agents, airline offices and some hotels.

Travel Agencies

Bunson Travel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221992; www.bunsonkenya.com; Pan-African Insurance Bldg, Standard St) A good upmarket operator, with offices around Africa.

Flight Centres (Map pp282-3; ☎ 210024; Lakhamshi House, Biashara St) Discounted air tickets, camping safaris and overland trips.

Let's Go Travel (www.lets-go-travel.net) Central Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 340331; Caxton House, Standard St); Karen (Map p298; ☎ 882505; Karen shopping centre); Westlands ☎ 447151; ABC Place, Waiyaki Way, Westlands) Flights, safaris, car hire and pretty much anything else you might need. It publishes an excellent price list of accommodation in Kenya (also on its website), and acts as booking agent for many off-the-beaten-track options.

Tropical Winds (Map pp280-1; ☎ 341939; www.tropical-winds.com; Bardays Plaza, Loita St) Nairobi's STA Travel representative.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Prospective visitors to Nairobi are usually understandably daunted by the city's unenviable reputation – 'Nairobi', as it is often called by residents, is commonly regarded as the most dangerous city in Africa. Carjacking, robbery and violence are daily

occurrences, and the underlying social ills behind them are unlikely to disappear in the near future.

However, the majority of problems happen in the slums, far from the main tourist zones. The central Nairobi area bound by Kenyatta Ave, Moi Ave, Haile Selassie Ave and Uhuru Hwy is comparatively trouble-free as long as you use a bit of common sense, and there are plenty of *askaris* (security guards) around at night. Stay alert and you should encounter nothing worse than a few persistent safari touts and the odd wannabe con artist.

Even around the city centre, though, there are places to watch out for: danger zones include the area around Latema and River Rds, a hotspot for petty theft, and Uhuru Park, which tends to attract all kinds of dodgy characters.

Once the shops have shut, the streets empty rapidly and the whole city takes on a slightly sinister air – mugging is a risk anywhere after dark. Take a taxi, even if you're only going a few blocks. This will also keep you safe from the attentions of Nairobi's street prostitutes, who flood into town in force after sunset.

SIGHTS National Museum

A grand alternative to the dozens of poky little local museums around the country, Kenya's **National Museum** (Map pp280-1; ☎ 742131; www.museums.or.ke; Museum Rd; adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) is housed in an imposing building amid lush leafy grounds just outside the city centre, and has a good range of cultural, geological and natural-history exhibits. Volunteer guides offer tours in English, Dutch and French; it's worth booking them in advance. There's no charge for their services, but a donation is appropriate.

The 1st floor also contains the excellent **Gallery of Contemporary East African Art**, where local artists exhibit their work; as all the items are for sale the displays change regularly, and it's always an interesting cross section of the contemporary scene. For a look at the artists in action, the **Kuona Trust** (Map pp280-1), a nonprofit art studio where Kenyan artists can gather and express themselves, is just by the museum.

In the grounds, there's a recreated **Kikuyu homestead** and a **snake park** (adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 9.30am-6pm).

SCAMS

Nairobi's active handful of confidence tricksters seem to have relied on the same old stories for years. The usual tactic is to accost you in the street and strike up a conversation about current affairs in your country.

One local speciality is the Sudanese refugee scam, where your interlocutor has supposedly just won a scholarship to a university in your country and would love to have a chat with you about life there. Then at some point you'll get the confidential lowering of the voice and the Sudanese portion of the story kicks in with 'You know, I am not from here...!', leading into an epic tale of woe.

Of course once you've shown due sympathy they'll come to the crux of the matter: all they need is KSh1700 to 'get to Dar es Salaam'. Giving money or anything else is likely to result in you being 'arrested' by fake policemen and forced to pay an exorbitant fine. In some cases these accomplices get so into their role that they beat up the original conman for the sake of authenticity!

As with all these type of scams, the best way of avoiding real trouble is to decline any offers or invitations made on the street. After a day or two in Nairobi you'll quickly learn to spot a budding 'refugee'.

National Archives

Right in the bustling heart of Nairobi is the distinctive **National Archives** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 749341; Moi Ave; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat), an enormous collection of documents and reference material housed in the impressive former Bank of India building. The ground-floor atrium and gallery display an eclectic selection of contemporary art, historical photos of Nairobi, cultural artefacts, furniture and tribal objects, giving casual visitors a somewhat scatter-gun glimpse of East African heritage.

Railway Museum

You don't have to don an anorak to appreciate this interesting little **museum** (Map pp280-1; Station Rd; adult/child/student KSh200/20/100; ☎ 8.15am-4.45pm), which displays relics from the East African Railway. There are train and ship models, photographs, tableware and oddities from the history of the railway, such as the Engine Seat that allowed visiting dignitaries like Theodore Roosevelt to take pot shots at unsuspecting wildlife from the front of the train. In the grounds are dozens of fading locomotives in various states of disrepair, dating from the steam days to independence, including the steam train used in the movie *Out of Africa*.

The museum is reached by a long lane beside the train station, or you can cut across the vacant land next to the Shell petrol station on Haile Selassie Ave.

Parliament House

If you fancy a look at how democracy works in Kenya, it's possible to obtain a permit for a seat in the public gallery at **parliament house** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221291; Parliament Rd) – just remember, applause is strictly forbidden! If parliament is out of session, you can tour the buildings by arrangement with the serjeant at arms.

Kenyatta Conference Centre

Towering over City Sq, Kenyatta Conference Centre (Map pp282-3), Nairobi's signature building, was designed as a fusion of modern and traditional African styles, though the distinctive saucer tower looks a little dated now. Staff will accompany you up to the rooftop **viewing platform** (adult/child KSh400/200) for wonderful views over Nairobi. The sight line goes all the way to the suburbs, and on clear days you can see aircraft coming in to land over the Nairobi National Park. You can take photographs from the viewing level but not elsewhere. Access may be restricted during events and conferences.

Arts Centres

The **Go-Down Arts Centre** (☎ 5552227; Dunga Rd), a converted warehouse in the Industrial Area in Nairobi's southeast, contains 10 separate art studios and is rapidly becoming a hub for Nairobi's burgeoning arts scene.

The **Mzizi Arts Centre** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 574372; Sonalux House, Moi Ave) is a good place to view

contemporary Kenyan art, craft, dance, literature and performance art.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Kenya Fashion Week (☎ 0733-636300; Sarit Centre, Westlands) An expo-style fashion event held in June.

Tusker Safari Sevens (www.safarisevens.com; Impala Club, Ngong Rd, Karen) A high-profile international seven-a-side rugby tournament held every June. The Kenyan team has a strong record.

Kenya Music Festival (☎ 2712964; Kenyatta Conference Centre) Held over 10 days in August, the country's longest-running music festival was established almost 80 years ago by the colonial regime. African music now predominates, but Western musicians still take part.

SLEEPING City Centre

BUDGET

Iqbal Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 220914; Latema Rd; dm/s/d/tr KSh300/400/600/960) The Iqbal has been popular for years, and is still possibly the best place in the area to meet fellow budget-conscious travellers. It's secure and the *askari* can arrange taxis at reasonable prices.

New Kenya Lodge (Map pp282-3; ☎ 222202; www.nksafaris.com; River Rd; dm KSh300, r with shared bathroom KSh350, with private bathroom KSh650) A long-standing travellers' haunt, the New Kenya Lodge's staff are very friendly and there's a sociable lounge area. Hot water may be available in the evenings. The lodge also runs its own safaris, although we've had mixed reports.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Terminal Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 228817; Moktar Daddah St; s/d/tr KSh1200/1500/1800) Sure, there are plenty of bigger, flashier and fancier places to stay in Nairobi, but for our money the Terminal is still one of the only hotels in town where the price actually feels right. The emphasis here is on doing the basics well, and it's an approach that works: staff are relaxed, tolerant and thoroughly amenable, the location's great, the water's hot, the beds are comfortable and most rooms are a decent size. There are a few downsides, but you could pay over twice as much even in Milimani for shoddier accommodation and impersonal service. For a reliable haven in fast-paced Nairobi you can't go wrong here.

Hotel Africana (Map pp282-3; ☎ 220654; Dubois Rd; s/d/tw/tr incl breakfast KSh600/800/1000/1500) The Africana has clean, bright rooms and is better looked after than many places in its class. The plain Coffee House restaurant specialises in Indian vegetarian food.

Wilton Gateway Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 341664; Dubois Rd; s/d KSh600/900) A decent, comfortable hotel popular with Kenyan salesmen. The Gateway Pub below sells beer at 1990s prices, which explains the slight evening noise factor!

YMCA (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2724116; ymca@iconnect.co.ke; State House Rd; s/d with shared bathroom KSh690/1180, with private bathroom KSh940/1480) It might not convince the Village People, but this is an OK place with a range of passable rooms. Rates include the daily membership fee.

MIDRANGE

Kenya Comfort Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 317606; www.kenyacomfort.com; cnr Muindi Mbingu & Monrovia Sts; s US\$26-36, d US\$32-42, tr US\$42-45, q US\$52-55) An excellent addition to Nairobi's sleeping scene, this cheerily painted place is kept in top nick, offering a fine selection of modern tiled rooms. Breakfast in the popular 24-hour bar-restaurant costs an extra US\$5 (US\$4 if booked in advance).

Meridian Court Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 313991; meridian@bidii.com; Muranga'a Rd; s/d/tr KSh2950/3650/4200; ☎ ☎) The elaborate lobby is rather more prepossessing than the grey concrete blocks above it, but it's hardly worth complaining when you're essentially getting a suite for the price of a standard room. There's no great luxury involved but the facilities make it good value.

Parkside Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 333568; parkside@insightkenya.com; Monrovia St; s/d/tr KSh1300/1700/2200) Just opposite Jevanjee Gardens, Parkside is modest but decent enough value. Breakfast in the rather nice downstairs restaurant will set you back KSh300 per person.

Ambassadeur Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 246615; Tom Mboya St; s/d/tr US\$35/45/65) Believe it or not this big hotel opposite the National Archives once belonged to the posh Sarova chain, and structurally not much has changed, though we suspect room standards were rather more exacting in those days. Breakfast costs US\$10 per room.

Hotel Greton (Map pp282-3; ☎ 242891; greton@wananchi.com; Tsavo Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast KSh950/1200/1700) A big block hotel in the heart of the

budget district, with a great balcony restaurant overlooking the street. Rooms are spacious and comfortable, there's a salon and gym, and the whole effect is more inviting than most of the cheap dives nearby.

Grand Holiday Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221244; grandholidaykenya@yahoo.com; Tsavo Rd; s & d KSh1050, tr/ste KSh2000/2200) White faces seem to be a bit of a novelty here, but Kenyan businessmen have latched onto it as a good deal, particularly the suites.

Oakwood Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 218321; www.madahotels.com/oakwood.html; Kimathi St; s/d/tr US\$60/75/85) It's questionable how it justifies these prices, but this very central hotel does at least offer a bit of character. The same chain runs several properties around Kenya and Uganda.

TOP END

Nairobi Serena Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2822000; nairobi@serena.co.ke; Central Park, Procession Way; s/d US\$308/376, ste US\$418-736; ☎ ☎ ☎) Consolidating its reputation as one of the best top-flight chains in East Africa, this entry in the Serena canon displays a fine sense of individuality. Given the choice, opt for one of the amazing garden suites.

New Stanley Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 316377; www.sarovahotels.com; cnr Kimathi St & Kenyatta Ave; s/d from US\$225/250; ☎ ☎ ☎) A Nairobi classic: the original Stanley Hotel was established in 1902, but the current site has only been in use since 1912 and the latest version is a very smart modern construction, run by Sarova Hotels. Colonial décor still prevails inside, though, with lashings of green leather, chandeliers and old-fashioned fans. The various house eateries are all well regarded.

Norfolk Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 216940; www.lonrhotels.com; Harry Thuku Rd; s/d US\$281/337, ste US\$361-557; ☎ ☎ ☎) Built in 1904, Nairobi's oldest hotel was the place to stay during colonial days, and still attracts plenty of guests who at least look like old-school settlers. The stylish Ibis Grill Restaurant (mains KSh1300 to KSh3500) is one of the best in Kenya.

Hilton Hotel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 250000; rm.nairobi@hilton.com; Mama Ngina St; s/d from US\$179/209; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The Hilton dominates the city centre with its distinctive round tower, occupying virtually an entire block with its rooms, restaurants, shops and other facilities. Prices are exclusive of 26% tax and service charge.

Milimani & Nairobi Hill BUDGET

Upper Hill Campsite (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2720290; www.upperhillcampsite.com; Menengai Rd, Nairobi Hill; camping KSh300, tents KSh450-1000, dm/r KSh400/1000; ☎ ☎) Off Hospital Rd near the Indonesian embassy, Upper Hill offers a range of accommodation in a pleasant and secure compound, plus a well-used little restaurant and bar. Facilities include hot showers and a cosy fireplace. There's a vehicle-maintenance bay and the owners can help you find a mechanic. It's a 15-minute walk from the city centre, or you can take bus or *matatu* 18 from Kenyatta Ave to the Kenyatta National Hospital, which is just around the corner.

Nairobi Youth Hostel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2723012; kyha@africaonline.co.ke; Ralph Bunche Rd, Milimani; dm KSh600-700, d with shared bathroom KSh800, apt KSh2000; ☎ ☎) A well looked-after budget option, Nairobi's Hostelling International (HI) branch is still usually a good place to meet other travellers. A year's HI membership costs KSh400, or you can pay a KSh100 surcharge per day. Any *matatu* or bus going down either Valley or Ngong Rds will drop you off. Many people have been robbed returning to the youth hostel by foot after dark; always take a *matatu* or taxi at night.

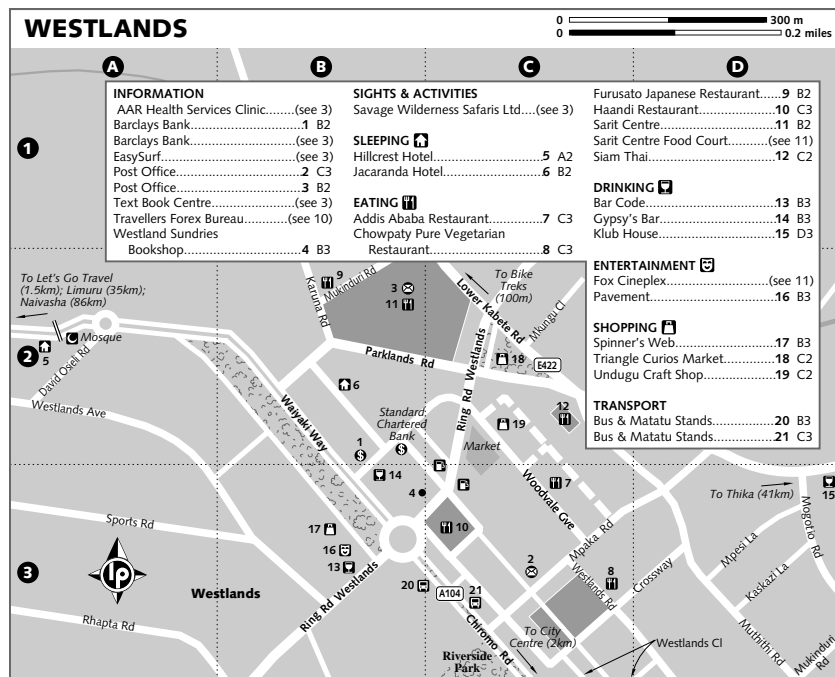
MIDRANGE & TOP END

Heron Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2720740; www.heronhotel.com; Milimani Rd, Milimani; s/d/tr KSh3295/4490/5780; ☎ ☎) Management here is very keen to shake the reputation gleaned when the house bar was the most notorious warehouse in Nairobi. Today it's a model of respectability, and the kitchenette doubles as a bargain.

High Point Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2724312; www.highpointcourt.com; Lower Hill Rd, Nairobi Hill; ste KSh4000-5000, apt KSh4000-7000; ☎ ☎) If you're looking for space and seclusion, this World Bank-affiliated suite and apartment complex is an excellent choice. The split-level rooms come with kitchenette and living room.

Palacina (☎ 2715517; www.palacina.com; Kitale Lane, Milimani; ste per person US\$190, penthouses US\$490; ☎ ☎) Possibly the first genuine boutique hotel in Kenya, this fabulous collection of impossibly stylish suites must be one of the country's top addresses for well-heeled sophisticates.

Fairview Hotel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2711321; www.fairviewkenya.com; Bishops Rd, Milimani; s/d from KSh5900/8200; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A good top-end



choice nicely removed from the central hubbub. It's near the scarily well-guarded Israeli Embassy.

Hotel Salama Annexe (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2729272; Milimani Rd, Milimani; s KSh1500, d KSh2500-3000) The Salama Annexe has a budget feel to it, even in the generously furnished 'deluxe' rooms, and it may be possible to camp here. Rates include breakfast in the popular but shabby *nyama choma* bar-restaurant.

Westlands

Hillcrest Hotel (Map p288; ☎ 4444883; hillcrest@africaonline.co.ke; Waiyaki Way; s/d KSh1300/1700) The only mid-priced option this side of Museum Hill Rd, a short walk from the Sarit Centre. There's plenty of space, and the general atmosphere is pleasant and relaxed.

Jacaranda Hotel (Map p288; ☎ 4448713; jacaranda hotel@africaonline.co.ke; Westland Rd; s/d US\$120/150; ☎ ☎) Westlands' other convenient accommodation option is a smart former Block Hotels property, slightly worn around the edges but generally offering good standards. There are restaurants on site, and free shuttle buses run to the city three times daily.

EATING

Nairobi is well stocked with places to eat, particularly in the city centre, where you can choose anything from the cheap workers' canteens around River Rd to Chinese feasts and full-on splurges off Kenyatta Ave. For dinner it's also worth heading out to the suburbs, which offer dozens of choices of cuisine from all over the world; Westlands has the best range, and there are some good choices in Hurlingham. The posher places listed here accept credit cards, and most add 17% value added tax (VAT) to the bill.

There are Nakumatt and Uchumi supermarkets all over town, and all the big shopping centres have extensive food courts.

Kenyan & Swahili

Like the rest of the country, lunch is the main meal of the day, and city workers flock to the dozens of cheap canteens dishing up simple, classic dishes.

Chic Joint (Map pp280-1; ☎ 337119; Utalii House, Utalii St; mains KSh150-250) One of our favourite new bar-restaurant discoveries, chic might not be the first word that springs to mind,

but grills, stews and *nyama* by the kilo should never go out of fashion.

Malindi Dishes (Map pp282-3; Gaberone Rd; mains KSh80-200) As the name suggests, this place serves great food from the coast. You'll get a grand feed, but it's a Muslim place, so it's closed for prayer at lunchtime on Friday.

FK Restaurant (Map pp280-1; ☎ 223448; Hazina Towers, Monrovia St; mains KSh120-200) This immaculate daytime cafeteria at the rear of an office block makes an appealing alternative to the surrounding grubbiest canteens.

Beneve Coffee House (Map pp282-3; ☎ 217959; cnr Standard & Koinange Sts; dishes KSh20-140; ☎ Mon-Fri) A small self-service chop shop that has locals queuing outside in the mornings waiting for it to open.

Seasons Restaurant (Map pp282-3; ☎ 227697; Nairobi Cinema, Uchumi House, Aga Khan Walk; mains KSh240-280, buffets KSh280) Whatever the season, the cafeteria vats here always brim with cheap Kenyan and Western favourites.

NYAMA CHOMA

Kenyans tend to give short shrift to vegetarianism – *nyama choma* (p277) is the national dish and just about every pub-restaurant in town will throw a goat leg on the coals for you any time of day. For a more exotic take on things there are some amazing restaurants where you can sample game meats; the most famous is Carnivore in Langata (p298).

Nyama Choma Place (Map pp280-1; ☎ 2720933; Sagret Hotel, Milimani Rd; meals KSh400-600) This restaurant is highly rated by Kenyans. It's best to come in a group, as meat is sold in the form of whole goat legs or complete racks of ribs.

Nyama choma stalls (Map pp282-3; Haile Selassie Ave) A definite step down the scale, but worth it for the atmosphere, are the backstreet stalls near the Railway Museum, behind the Shell petrol station.

Indian

Haandi (Map p288; ☎ 4448294; The Mall Shopping Centre, Ring Rd Westlands, Westlands; mains KSh600-995; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7-10.30pm; ☎) An international award-winner widely regarded as the best Indian restaurant in Kenya. The menu reads like a recipe book crossed with a guide to *mughlai* (North Indian) cuisine.

Chowpaty Pure Vegetarian Restaurant (Map p288; ☎ 3755050; Shimmers Plaza, Westlands Rd, Westlands; mains KSh200-350; ☎ 11am-11pm) A great place with lots

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pasara Café (Map pp282-3; ☎ 338247; Lonrho Bldg, Standard St; dishes KSh120-350; ☎ from 7am Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat) At the forefront of Nairobi's burgeoning café culture, this stylish modern bar-brasserie never fails to impress with its nifty selection of snacks, sandwiches, grills and breakfasts, always offering something a little more ambitious than the usual cafeteria fare. The juices come highly recommended, and the atmosphere equals that of any European coffee house, making it a fine place to relax away from all the stresses of the capital's streets. After 5pm it turns into a popular upscale bar, with a limited menu of snacks.

of South Indian dishes, such as *dhsa* (lentil pancakes stuffed with vegetable curry).

Supreme Restaurant (Map pp282-3; ☎ 331586; River Rd; meals KSh170-250) Near the junction with Tom Mboya St, this place offers excellent Punjabi vegetarian *thalis* (plate meals) and superb fruit juices.

Taj (Map pp282-3; Taveta Rd; dishes KSh20-100) Basic, ultracheap Indian soul food.

Ethiopian

Blue Nile Ethiopian Restaurant (Map pp280-1; ☎ 0722-898138; bluenile@yahoo.com; Argwings Kodhek Rd, Hurlingham; mains KSh300-450) Blue Nile's quirky painted lounge couldn't be mistaken for anywhere else. For the full communal African eating experience, order the seven-person *doro wat* (spicy traditional chicken stew, KSh3500).

Addis Ababa Restaurant (Map p288; ☎ 4447321; Woodvale Grove, Westlands; mains KSh400-500; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Sat & from 6pm daily) Up some stairs in an unremarkable block, you'll find good authentic food and occasional live music here.

Chinese & Thai

Nairobi's Oriental restaurants offer 'large' (good for two people) and 'small' portions (enough for one), but add 16% VAT to the bill, so prices can soon mount up.

Panda Chinese Restaurant (Map pp282-3; ☎ 213018; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St; mains KSh380-1480; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) A spacious, very classy Asian restaurant hidden away on Kaunda St. The food is the best Chinese chow we found in Nairobi.

Hong Kong Restaurant (Map pp280-1; ☎ 228612; rhk@wananchi.com; College House, Koinange St; mains KSh300-600; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) A bright-red restaurant with good food and not *too* much clichéd décor. It's the cheapest proper Chinese in town.

Tanager Bar & Restaurant (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221615; Rehema House, Kaunda St; mains KSh280-350; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat) A cheap and simple Chinese-African eatery right in the city centre.

Siam Thai (Map p288; ☎ 3751728; Unga House, Muthithi Rd, Westlands; mains KSh250-680) This attractive restaurant has an extensive menu of actual Thai food (gasp!).

Japanese

Restaurant Akasaka (Map pp282-3; ☎ 220299; Standard St; mains KSh450-800; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm Mon-Sat) A wonderful restaurant next to the Sixeighy Hotel. It's always a little quiet, but this fits with the Japanese décor and the food is very authentic.

Furusato Japanese Restaurant (Map p288; ☎ 4442508; Karuna Rd, Westlands; set meals KSh700-1500) Behind the Sarit Centre, this is a very stylish place with seductive set Japanese meals, including sushi, *teppanyaki* and *tempura*. Reservations are recommended.

International

Fiesta Restaurant & Bar (Map pp282-3; ☎ 240326; Koinange St; mains KSh450-1800; ☎ 7am-midnight) Despite the Latin resonances, Fiesta concentrates on upmarket international dishes, such as *nasi goreng* and pork chops with a honey and mustard glaze. The popular bar area occasionally hosts low-key live crooners.

Alan Bobbé's Bistro (Map pp282-3; ☎ 226027; Cianda House, Koinange St; mains KSh987-1850) The talented M Bobbé established this superb French bistro in 1962, and Nairobi gourmets have been worshipping at his culinary altar ever since. Reservations and smart dress are encouraged, cigars and pipes are not.

Thorn Tree Café (Map pp282-3; ☎ 228030; New Stanley Hotel, Kimathi St; mains KSh350-1380) The Stanley's legendary café still serves as a popular meeting place for travellers of all persuasions, and caters to most tastes with a good mix of food.

Tamarind Restaurant (Map pp282-3; ☎ 251811; Aga Khan Walk; mains KSh900-1800; ☎ 2.30-4.30pm & 8.30pm-midnight) Nairobi's best seafood restaurant, laid out in a sumptuous modern Arabic-Moorish style. Smart dress is expected, and

you'll need to budget at least KSh2500 for the full works.

Trattoria (Map pp282-3; ☎ 340855; cnr Wabera & Kaunda St; mains KSh400-1800; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) A very popular central Italian swathed in trellises and plants, offering excellent pizza, pasta dishes, varied mains and a stack of desserts.

Quick Eats

Sarit Centre (Map p288; ☎ 3747408; www.saritcentre.com; Parklands Rd, Westlands) This huge food court on the 2nd floor has a variety of small restaurants and fast-food places, including Indian, Chinese, Italian and African food. The Hidden Agenda pub-restaurant (mains KSh360 to KSh800) comes recommended, with Western and Thai menus.

DRINKING Cafés

Western café culture has hit Nairobi big time, seized on enthusiastically by local expats and residents pining for a decent cup of Kenyan coffee.

Nairobi Java House (Map pp282-3; ☎ 313565; www.nairobijava.com; Mama Ngina St; snacks KSh80-180; ☎ 7am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) This fantastic coffee house is rapidly turning itself into a major brand, and aficionados say the coffee's some of the best in Kenya.

Kahawa (Map pp282-3; ☎ 221900; zulmawani@ispnbi.com; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St; mains KSh190-410) The dhow-themed Kahawa offers an ever-changing cavalcade of unexpected specials, from frittata to a 'Mexican breakfast'.

Dormans Café (Map pp282-3; ☎ 0724-238976; Mama Ngina St; coffee KSh100-190) This venerable firm only recently branched out into the café business, opening an outlet right opposite its main rival Nairobi Java House.

Bars

The cheap but rough bars around Latema and River Rds aren't recommended for female travellers, and even male drinkers should watch themselves. There are some friendlier watering holes around Tom Mboya St and Moi Ave, and many restaurants and hotels are fine places for a drink. You can also head to Westlands, where the drinking scene attracts in a lot more expats.

Even in cosmopolitan Nairobi, foreign women without a man in tow will draw attention virtually everywhere. To avoid this, head for the outer suburbs (see p298).

Casablanca (☎ 2723173; Lenana Rd, Hurlingham; ☎ from 6pm) This hip new Moroccan-style lounge bar has been an instant hit with Nairobi's fastidious expat community, and you don't have to spend much time here to become a convert.

Zanze Bar (Map pp282-3; ☎ 222532; Kenya Cinema Plaza, Moi Ave) A lively and friendly top-floor bar with pool tables, a dance floor, cheap beer and reasonable food. During the week things are relatively quiet, but from Friday to Sunday it rocks until the early hours.

Gypsy's Bar (Map p288; ☎ 4440836; Woodvale Grove, Westlands) This long-running bar is made up of several parts, none of which are called Gypsy's! Identity crisis aside, it's probably the most popular bar in Westlands, pulling in Kenyans, expats and prostitutes. It's as close as you'll get to a gay-friendly venue in Kenya.

Taco Bell (Map pp282-3; Tumaini House, 15 Moi Ave) With an open balcony overlooking the street, this popular bar has DJs from Thursday to Sunday. We suspect the Taco Bell Corporation doesn't know they've borrowed the name...

Green Corner Restaurant & Cactus Pub (Map pp282-3; ☎ 335243; Tumaini House, Nkrumah Lane) This very popular after-work bar and restaurant has live bands on Thursday and Sunday and DJs the rest of the week.

Bar Code (Map p288; Westview Centre, Ring Rd Westlands, Westlands) It's nowhere near as cool as it thinks it is, but this very modern late-opening lounge bar does at least have a good range of drinks and semicompetent DJs.

Klub House (Map p288; ☎ 749870; Parklands Rd, Westlands) Further east, past the large Holiday Inn complex, the Klub House is an old favourite, with lots of pool tables.

ENTERTAINMENT

For information on all entertainment in Nairobi and for big music venues in the rest of the country, get hold of the *Saturday Nation*, which lists everything from cinema releases to live-music venues. There will also be plenty of suggestions run by the magazine *Going Out*.

Nightclubs

There's a good selection of dance clubs in the centre of Nairobi and there are no dress codes, although there's an unspoken assumption that males will at least wear a shirt

and long trousers. Due to the high numbers of female prostitutes, men will generally get the bulk of the hassle in all these places, though even women in male company are by no means exempt.

Pavement (Map p288; ☎ 4441711; Waiyaki Way, Westlands; admission KSh500) Split between a relaxed ground-level bar and the big, modern basement club, Pavement is the dancefloor of choice for most resident expats. Week-ends favour the kind of jump-up commercial dance music you might get on a night out in Europe.

Simmers (Map pp282-3; ☎ 216759; cnr Kenyatta Ave & Muindi Mbingu St; admission free) If you're tired of having your butt pinched in darkened discos, Simmers is the place to come to re-discover a bit of true African rhythm. The atmosphere at this open-air bar-restaurant is almost invariably amazing, with bands playing anything from Congolese rumba to Kenyan *benga*.

New Florida (Map pp282-3; ☎ 215014; Koinange St; men/women KSh200/100; ☎ to 6am, later Sat & Sun) The 'Mad House' is a big, rowdy club housed in a bizarre blacked-out saucer building above a petrol station. Whichever night you choose, it's usually mayhem, crammed with bruisers, cruisers, hookers, hustlers and curious tourists. Entry is usually free before 9pm.

Florida 2000 (Map pp282-3; ☎ 229036; Moi Ave; men/women KSh200/100) The original blueprint for the New Florida, this big dancing den works to exactly the same formula.

Club Soundd (Map pp282-3; Kaunda St; admission free-KSh200; ☎ from 3pm) Another central nightclub with a bit more to offer those who take their music seriously.

Toona Tree Bar & Restaurant (Map pp280-1; ☎ 3740802; toonatre@africaonline.co.ke; International Casino, Museum Hill Rd) Part of the massive International Casino complex, Toona Tree has live bands on Friday and Saturday, playing jazz, blues and 'classic hits'.

Cinemas

Nairobi is a good place to take in a few films at a substantially lower price than back home. The best deals are available on Tuesday.

Nu Metro Cinema (☎ 522128; numetro@swiftkenya.com; Village Market, Gigiri; tickets KSh350) The first entry in a chain of modern multiplexes springing up around Nairobi, showing new Western films fairly promptly after their international release.

Fox Cineplex (Map p288; ☎ 227959; Sarit Centre, Westlands) A good modern cinema in the same price bracket as Nu Metro, located on the 2nd floor of the Sarit Centre.

20th Century Cinema (Map pp282-3; ☎ 210606; 20th Century Plaza, Mama Ngina St), **Kenya Cinema** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 227822; Kenya Cinema Plaza, Moi Ave) and **Nairobi Cinema** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 338058; Uchumi House, Aga Khan Walk) are all owned by the same chain. The first two show mainly Western movies, while the Nairobi Cinema often screens Christian 'message' films.

Theatre

Professional Centre (Map pp282-3; ☎ 225506; www.phoenixplayers.net; Parliament Rd) Local theatre troupe the Phoenix Players perform regularly here. Tickets cost KSh650, though strictly it should be US\$20 for nonresidents.

Kenya National Theatre (Map pp280-1; ☎ 225174; Harry Thuku Rd; tickets from KSh200) This is the major theatre venue in Nairobi, staging contemporary and classic plays and special events.

For African theatre, the foreign cultural centres (p279) are often the places to head for.

SHOPPING

Nairobi is a good place to pick up souvenirs, but prices are typically higher than elsewhere in the country. Visit the 'Little India' area around Biashara St for fabric, textiles and those all-important souvenir Tusker T-shirts. If you're interested in buying local music, wander round the River and Latema Rds area and listen out for the blaring CD kiosks.

City Market (Map pp282-3; Muindi Mbingu St) The city's souvenir business is concentrated in this covered market, which has dozens of stalls selling woodcarvings, drums, spears, shields, soapstone, Maasai jewellery and clothing. It's an interesting place to wander round, though you generally need to be shopping to make the constant hassle worth the bother.

Gallery Watatu (Map pp282-3; ☎ 228737; Lonhro House, Standard St) If you want fine Kenyan art, check out what's happening here prior to investing your hard-earned cash. Be prepared to part with at least KSh20,000 just for something small.

Spinners Web (Map p288; ☎ 4440882; Viking House, Waiyaki Way, Westlands) Works with workshops and self-help groups around the country. It's a bit like a handicrafts version of Ikea,

with goods displayed the way they might look in Western living rooms, but there's some classy stuff on offer, including carpets, wall hangings, ceramics, wooden bowls, baskets and clothing.

Maasai Market (Map pp282-3; ☎ Tue) Busy, popular Maasai markets are held every Tuesday on the waste ground near Slip Rd in town.

Village Market (☎ 522488; Limuru Rd, Gigiri) This beautifully conceived shopping centre also has a selection of entertainment activities to while away an afternoon. You can get here with *matatu* 106 (KSh40) from near the train station.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The national carrier **Kenya Airways** (Map pp280-1; ☎ 32074100; Barclays Plaza, Loita St) operates international and domestic services out of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Fares come down rapidly if you can book more than a week in advance; if not, it's best to go through a travel agent.

Airkenya (☎ 501601; Wilson Airport, Langata Rd) and **Safarilink** (☎ 600777; Wilson Airport) offer domestic services to many smaller destinations at competitive prices.

One-way fares:

Destination	Fare	Frequency (daily)
Amboseli	US\$85	2
Eldoret	KSh5700	1
Kisumu	from KSh5605	1
Lamu	from US\$135	3
Malindi	from US\$85	2
Masai Mara	US\$105	3
Mombasa	from KSh6835	6
Nanyuki	US\$60-80	2
Samburu	from US\$115	3

The check-in time for all domestic flights is one hour before departure, and the baggage allowance is only 15kg. Make sure you reconfirm flights 72 hours before departure.

Bus

Most long-distance bus-company offices in Nairobi are in the River Rd area. Numerous companies do the run to Mombasa, leaving in the early morning or late in the evening; the trip takes eight to 10 hours. Buses leave from outside each company's office, and fares cost KSh400 to KSh700. **Coastline Safaris**

(Map pp282-3; ☎ 217592; cnr Latema & Lagos Rds) buses are the most comfortable.

Akamba (Map pp282-3; ☎ 340430; akamba_prs@skyweb.co.ke; Lagos Rd) is the biggest private bus company in the country, with an extensive, reliable network. Buses serve Eldoret, Kakamega, Kericho, Kisii, Kisumu, Kitale, Mombasa, Uganda and Tanzania, leaving from Lagos Rd; there's a **booking office** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 222027; Wabera St) near City Hall.

The government-owned **Kenya Bus Service** (KBS; ☎ 229707) is another large operator. It's cheaper than Akamba, but the buses are much slower. The main depot is on Uyoma St, and there's a **booking office** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 341250; cnr Muindi Mbingu & Monrovia Sts) in the city centre.

Easy Coach (Map pp282-3; ☎ 210711; easycoach@wananchi.com; Haile Selassie Ave) is a reliable new company serving western Kenyan destinations on the Kisumu/Kakamega route.

The **Country Bus Station** (Map pp280-1; Landhies Rd) is a disorganised place with buses running to Busia, Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisumu, Malaba, Meru, Nakuru, Nanyuki and Nyeri.

See p451 for details on other bus companies operating out of Nairobi. Typical fares:

Destination	Fare (KSh)	Duration (hr)
Eldoret	350-500	3
Kakamega	400-500	5
Kisii	350-550	4
Kisumu	400-550	4
Kitale	400-600	5
Malindi	800	9-10
Meru	250-350	3
Mombasa	500-1000	6-10
Naivasha	130	1-1½
Nakuru	200-300	2
Nanyuki	200	2
Nyeri	200	1½

Matatu

Most *matatus* leave from Latema, Accra, River and Cross Rds, and fares are similar to the buses. The biggest operator here is **Crossland Services** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 245377; Cross Rd), which serves destinations including Eldoret (KSh350, three hours), Kericho (KSh450, three hours), Kisii (KSh500, five hours), Kisumu (KSh550, four hours), Naivasha (KSh150, one hour), Nakuru (KSh250, two hours) and Nanyuki (KSh250, two hours).

Other companies are located on the surrounding streets. Head to the main bus and *matatu* station on Accra Rd (Map pp282-3) for *matatus* to Chogoria (KSh250, 2½ hours), Embu (KSh200, 1½ hours), Meru (KSh300 to KSh350, three hours) and Nanyuki (KSh200, 2½ hours). *Matatus* leave from Latema Rd for Nyahururu (KSh300, three hours) and Nyeri (KSh200, two hours). There are loads of *matatus* to Naivasha (KSh130, 1½ hours) and the Tanzanian border at Namanga (KSh250, three hours) from the corner of Ronald Ngala St and River Rd (Map pp282-3). For Thika (KSh70, 40 minutes), go to the Total petrol station on Racecourse Rd (Map pp280-1).

Train

Nairobi train station has a **booking office** (☎ 221211; Station Rd; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6.30pm). Only two useful passenger services currently run from Nairobi (see p456). For Mombasa (KSh3160/2275 in 1st/2nd class, 14 to 16 hours), trains leave Nairobi at 7pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The return services depart at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

For Kisumu (KSh1415/720 in 1st/2nd class, 13 hours), trains depart at 6.30pm on the same days as the Mombasa services. It's advisable to book a few days in advance for either of these routes.

GETTING AROUND To/From Jomo Kenyatta International Airport

Kenya's principal **international airport** (☎ 825400) is 15km out of the city centre. There's now a dedicated airport bus run by Metro Shuttle (part of KBS), which can drop you off at hotels in the city centre. Going the other way, the main departure point is across from the Hilton Hotel (Map pp282-3). The journey takes about 40 minutes and costs US\$5 per person. Buses run every half-hour from 8am to 8.30pm daily and stop at both air terminals.

A cheaper way to get into Nairobi is city bus 34 (KSh30), but a lot of travellers get ripped off on this bus or when they step off in the city centre. Buses run from 5.45am to 9.30pm Monday to Friday, 6.20am to 9.30pm on Saturday and 7.15am to 9.30pm on Sunday. Heading to the airport, buses pass along Kenyatta Ave.

A much safer method (and your only option at night) is to take a taxi. The asking price is usually about KSh1200 in either direction, but you should be able to bargain down to KSh800 from the city centre, or even as little as KSh500 from the domestic terminal.

To/From Wilson Airport

To get to **Wilson Airport** (Map p296; ☎ 501941), for Airkenya and Safarilink services or charter flights, take bus or *matatu* 15, 31, 34, 125 or 126 from Moi Ave (KSh20). A taxi from the city centre will cost you KSh600 to KSh800 depending on the driver. In the other direction, you'll have to fight the driver down from KSh1000.

Bus

The ordinary city buses are run by **KBS** (☎ 229707), but hopefully you won't need to use them much. Most buses pass through central Nairobi, but the main KBS terminus is on Uyoma St, east of the centre.

Useful services include bus 46 from Kenyatta Ave for the Yaya Centre in Hurlingham (KSh10), and bus 23 from Jevanje Gardens for Westlands (KSh10). There are services about every 20 minutes from 6am to 8pm Monday to Saturday. There's also a useful Metro Shuttle service from Moi Ave to Ngong Rd and Karen, passing the Karen Blixen Museum.

All these services cost KSh20 to KSh40, depending on where you get off.

Car

See p452 for information on car hire, road rules and conditions. If you are driving, beware of wheel-clampers: parking in the city centre is by permit only (KSh70 per day). If you park overnight in the street in front of your hotel, the guard will often keep an eye on your vehicle for a small consideration.

Matatu

Nairobi's horde of *matatus* follow the same routes as buses and display the same route numbers. For Westlands, you can pick up *matatu* 23 on Moi Ave or Latema Rd. *Matatu* 46 to the Yaya Centre stops in front of the main post office, and *matatus* 125 and 126 to Langata leave from in front of the train station. As usual, you should keep an eye on your valuables on all *matatus*.

Taxi

As people are compelled to use taxis due to Nairobi's endemic street crime, they are overpriced and undermaintained, but you've little choice, particularly at night. Taxis park on every other street corner in the city centre, and outside restaurants, bars and nightclubs at night.

Fares are negotiable but end up pretty standard. Any journey within the central Nairobi area costs KSh200, from the city centre to Milimani Rd costs KSh300, and for longer journeys, such as Westlands, fares cost KSh400 to KSh500.

AROUND NAIROBI

There are a number of interesting attractions within an hour's drive or *matatu* ride from Nairobi; Nairobi National Park starts right on the edge of town. Further afield are the Ngong Hills and the mysterious Lake Magadi, one of Kenya's many soda lakes.

NAIROBI'S SOUTHERN OUTSKIRTS Sights

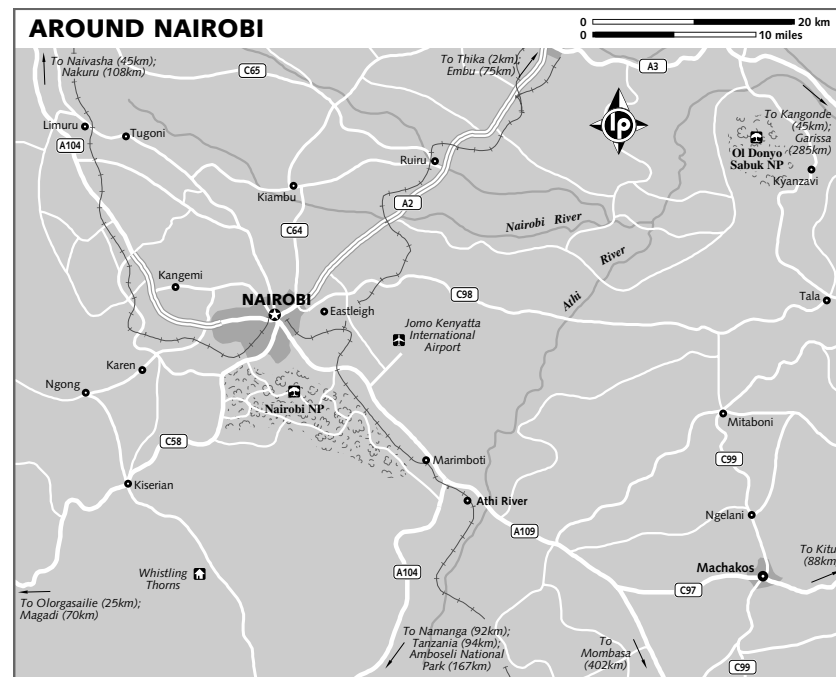
BOMAS OF KENYA

The **Bomas of Kenya** (Map p296; ☎ 891801; Langata Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh600/300, resident KSh100/25) is a cultural centre at Langata, near the main gate to Nairobi National Park. The talented resident artistes perform traditional dances and songs from the country's 16 tribal groups, including Swahili *taarab* music (combining African, Arabic and Indian influences), Kalenjin warrior dances, Embu drumming and Kikuyu circumcision ceremonies. It's touristy, of course, but it's still a spectacular afternoon out. Performances are held at 2.30pm Monday to Friday, and 3.30pm Saturday and Sunday. Bus or *matatu* 125 or 126 runs here from Nairobi train station (KSh30, 30 minutes).

NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

This somewhat underrated **park** (Map p296; nonresident adult/child US\$23/10, smartcard required) is the most accessible of all Kenya's wildlife parks, being only a few kilometres from the city centre. It's possible to visit as part of a tour or even by public transport, as the park runs its own wildlife bus (Sunday only).

Founded in 1946, the park's incongruous suburban location makes it virtually unique



in Africa and adds an intriguing twist to the usual safari experience, pitting the plentiful wildlife against a backdrop of looming skyscrapers, speeding *matatus* and jets coming into land. As the animals seem utterly unperturbed by all the activity around them, you stand a good chance of seeing gazelles, warthogs, zebras, giraffes, ostriches, buffalo, lions, cheetahs and leopards. The landscape is a mixture of savanna and swampland, and is home to the highest concentration of black rhinos in the world (over 50). The wetland areas sustain over 550 recorded species of bird, more than in the whole of the UK!

Nairobi National Park is not fenced and wildlife is still able to migrate along a narrow wildlife corridor to the Rift Valley. The concentrations of wildlife are higher in the dry season, as water is almost always available in the park.

The headquarters of the **KWS** (Map p296; ☎ 600800; www.kws.org) are at the main gate. Nearby is the **Nairobi Safari Walk** (Map p296; nonresident adult/child US\$8/5, resident KSh500/100; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), a sort of zoo-meets-nature

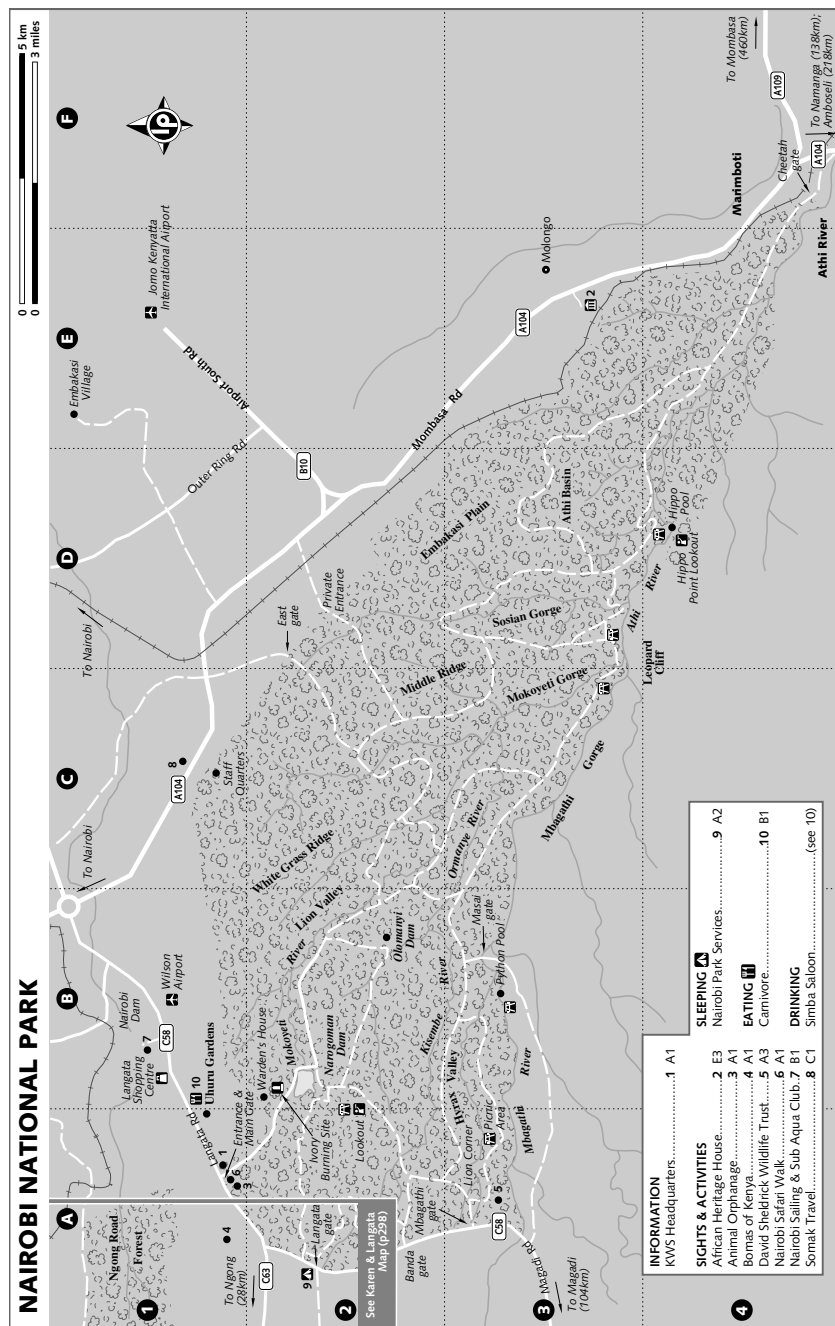
boardwalk with lots of birds and other wildlife, including a pygmy hippo and a white rhino. The nearby **Animal Orphanage** (Map p296) charges the same rates, but it's basically a rather poor zoo.

The cheapest way to see the park is with the 'Park Shuttle,' a big KWS bus that leaves the main gate at 3pm Sunday for a 2½-hour tour of the park. The cost is US\$20/5 per adult/child and you'll need to book in person at the main gate by 2.30pm. *Matatus* 125 and 126 pass the park entrance (KSh40, 45 minutes).

The main entrance to the park is on Langata Rd, but there are also public gates on Magadi Rd. The Cheetah Gate at the far (Athi River) end of the park is handy if you're continuing on to Mombasa, Amboseli or the Tanzanian border.

BUTTERFLY AFRICA

This **butterfly sanctuary** (Map p298; ☎ 884972; www.african-butterfly.org; 256 Dagoretti Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh400/200, resident KSh200/100; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is housed in a large greenhouse full of tropical plants. There are around 1000



exotic butterflies fluttering around the place at any one time, with some interesting display boards to help identify them. It's out past the Karen roundabout on Dagoretti Rd; you can get here from Moi Ave on the 111 bus or *matatu*.

KAREN BLIXEN MUSEUM

This museum (Map p298; ☎ 882779; www.blixencoffee.com; Karen Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh200/100, resident KSh50/20; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) is the farmhouse where Karen Blixen, author of *Out of Africa*, lived between 1914 and 1931. She left after a series of personal tragedies, but the lovely colonial house has been preserved as a museum. It was presented to the Kenyan government at independence by the Danish government along with the adjacent agricultural college. It's set in lovely gardens and is quite an interesting place to wander around, plus there's accommodation and a restaurant on site.

The museum is about 2km from Langata Rd. The easiest way to get here is via the Karen Metro Shuttle bus from City Hall Way (KSh20, 40 minutes). A taxi will cost about KSh900 one way. You can also come on an organised tour.

DAVID SHELDRIK WILDLIFE TRUST

Occupying a plot within Nairobi National Park, this nonprofit conservation trust (Map p296; ☎ 891996; www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org) was established shortly after the death of David Sheldrick in 1977. David and his wife Daphne pioneered techniques of raising orphaned black rhinos and elephants and reintroducing them back into the wild. Rhinos and elephants are still reared on site and can be viewed between 11am and noon. There's no charge for visiting, but a donation of around KSh300 per person is appropriate. There's an information centre and usually someone around to answer questions.

From Moi Ave, take bus or *matatu* 125 or 126 and ask to be dropped off at the KWS central workshop, on Magadi Rd (KSh40, 50 minutes). It's about 1km from the workshop gate to the Sheldrick centre.

LANGATA GIRAFFE CENTRE

The giraffe centre (Map p298; ☎ 890952; Koitobos Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh500/250, resident 100/20; ☎ 9am-5.30pm), operated by the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife (AFEW), is about

18km from central Nairobi, reached by Langata South Rd. Here you can observe, hand-feed or even kiss Rothschild's giraffes from a raised circular wooden structure, which is quite an experience, especially for children.

To get here from central Nairobi, take *matatu* 24 to the Hardy shops in Langata and walk from there, or take *matatu* 126 to Magadi Rd and walk from Mukoma Rd.

AFRICAN HERITAGE HOUSE

Designed by Alan Donovan, an African heritage expert and gallery owner, this stunning exhibition house (Map p296; ☎ 0721-518389; www.africanheritagebook.com) off Mombasa Rd, overlooking Nairobi National Park, can be visited by prior arrangement only. The mud architecture combines a range of traditional styles from across Africa, and the interior is furnished exclusively with tribal artefacts and artworks. For those with the money, it's possible to negotiate overnight stays (single/double US\$125/250), meals (US\$25 to US\$30), and steam-train or even helicopter transfers.

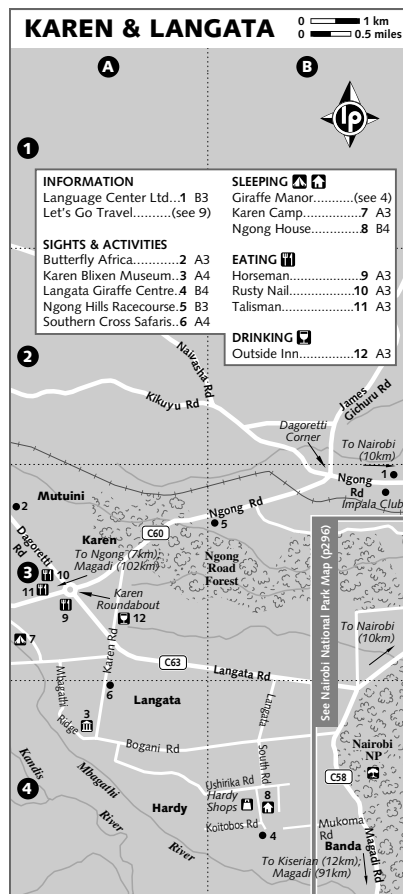
NGONG HILLS

The green and fertile Ngong Hills were where many white settlers set up farms in the early colonial days. It's still something of an expat enclave, and here and there in the hills are perfect reproductions of English farmhouses with country gardens full of flowering trees – only the acacias remind you that you aren't rambling around the Home Counties of England.

Close to Point Lamwia, the summit of the range, is the grave of Denys George Finch-Hatton, the famous playboy and lover of Karen Blixen. A large obelisk east of the summit on the lower ridges marks his grave, inscribed with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The hills still contain plenty of wildlife, and there are legends about a lion and lioness standing guard at Finch-Hatton's graveside.

The hills provide some excellent walking, but robbery has been a risk in the past, so consult locals for the latest information. If you're worried, take an organised tour or pick up an escort from the Ngong police station or KWS office.

If you prefer a flutter to a stroll, join the Sunday crowds at the **Ngong Hills Racecourse** (Map p298; ☎ 573923; jck@karibunet.com; Ngong Rd), just east of Karen. The public enclosure is



free; entry to the grandstand is KSh100, or you can pay KSh250 for a platinum pass, which gives you access to the members' seating and the restaurant overlooking the course. There are usually three races every month during the racing season, which runs from October to July. You can get here on the Karen Metro Shuttle bus (KSh40, 30 minutes) and *matatus* 24 or 111 (KSh20) from Haile Selassie Ave.

Sleeping

As you might expect, Karen and Langata have some rather exclusive accommodation options tucked away amid their leafy lanes, and if you want to splash out for something special you're certainly better off here than

in Nairobi. Reservations are mandatory for most places here, as you're rarely permitted just to walk in off the street.

Giraffe Manor (Map p298; ☎ 891078; www.giraffe-manor.com; Mukoma Rd; full board s/d US\$385/595) Built in 1932 in the style of a typical English country manor, this elegant house is situated on 56 hectares next to the giraffe centre. You dine as the personal guests of the owners, and Rothschild's giraffes may peer through your window in the morning.

Ngong House (Map p298; ☎ 891856; ngonghouse@form-net.com; Ndovo Rd; s/d US\$450/600) Also a short walk from the giraffe centre, this is an altogether different sort of hotel. The four luxurious tree houses are set on stilts, with fine views out across the Ngong Hills. Rates include transfers, all meals and drinks, and a number of excursions are provided.

Karen Camp (Map p298; ☎ 883475; www.karencamp.com; Marula La; camping/dm/r US\$3/5/20) A new venture aiming to draw the budget crowd out into the suburbs. The quiet location and smart facilities are already attracting travellers.

Nairobi Park Services (Map p296; ☎ 890325; nps@swiftkenya.com; Magadi Rd; camping US\$3, dm/d/tr US\$6/15/18) You'll find this in a quiet residential area on the edge of Nairobi National Park, set in a garden with a great bar and restaurant. The vehicle work bays make it a good pit stop for overland trucks and self-drivers. To get here, take bus or *matatu* 125 or 126 from near the train station; the entrance is opposite the Langata Gate.

Whistling Thorns (☎ 072 721933; www.whistling-thorns.com; Isinya/Kiserian Pipeline Rd; camping KSh250, with tent KSh450, d cottage per person KSh2500-3500; 📞) Near Kiserian, this is an excellent place to stay in the Maasai foothills of the Ngong Hills. To get here, take bus or *matatu* 111 or 126 from Moi Ave to Kiserian (KSh50, one hour) and change to a Isinya/Kajiado *matatu*.

Eating & Drinking

Carnivore (Map p296; ☎ 605933; set meals KSh1325) Owned by the Tamarind chain, this is hands down the most famous *nyama choma* restaurant in Kenya, beloved of tourists, expats and wealthier locals alike for the last 25 years. Just to reinforce the point, it has twice been voted among the 50 best restaurants in the world. At the entrance is a huge barbecue pit laden with real swords of beef, pork, lamb,

chicken and farmed game meats, such as camel, ostrich and crocodile. As long as the paper flag on your table is flying, waiters will keep bringing the meat, which is carved right at the table. Note that a hefty 26% tax and service charge is added to the bill. It's off Langata Rd.

Simba Saloon (Map p296; ☎ 501706; admission KSh200-300; 📞 Wed-Sun) This popular bar is right next door, usually rammed with wealthy Kenyans, expat teenagers, travellers and NGO workers, plus a fair sprinkling of prostitutes. At lunchtime, you can get here with *matatu* 126 from central Nairobi; the turn-off is signposted just past Wilson Airport. At night, you're best off hiring a taxi for the return trip. Including waiting the fare should be about KSh1200, or KSh650 one way.

Talisman (Map p298; ☎ 883213; 320 Ngong Rd; mains KSh500-900; 📞 from 9am Tue-Sun) This classy new café-bar-restaurant is incredibly fashionable right now, and rivals any of Kenya's top eateries for imaginative international food. The comfortable loungelike rooms mix modern African and European styles, and the courtyard provides some welcome air.

Rusty Nail (Map p298; ☎ 882461; rustynail@wananchi.com; Dagoretti Rd; mains KSh450-900) The Moroccan/Turkish styling of this pavillion restaurant belies the range of food on offer; menus change weekly, offering anything from fefel and steak to coronation chicken.

Horseman (Map p298; ☎ 884560; Karen shopping centre, Langata Rd; mains KSh300-500, game meat KSh680-1000) Three restaurants in one, set in a leafy patio garden straight out of rural England, with a surprisingly authentic pub to match.

Outside Inn (Map p298; ☎ 882110; Plains House, Karen Rd) Perfect for a bit of rowdy drinkage, this semi-open barn of a bar is a firm favourite with residents for its relaxed, boozy atmosphere.

LAKE MAGADI

Lake Magadi is the most southerly of the Rift Valley lakes in Kenya, about 110km from Nairobi, and is rarely visited by tourists because of its perceived remoteness, although it actually makes an easy day trip from Nairobi if you have your own transport. The most mineral-rich of the soda lakes, it is almost entirely covered by a thick encrustation of soda that supports many flamingos and other water birds, and gives the landscape a weird lunar appearance.

A causeway leads across the most visually dramatic part of this strange landscape to a viewpoint on the western shore. It's worth a drive if you have a 4WD; otherwise you can head to the hot springs further south. They aren't particularly dramatic, but you can take a dip in the deeper pools, and there are large numbers of fish that have adapted to survive in the hot water.

The hot, dry climate and sparse scrubland make the area unsuitable for most human activity, and the only settlement of any size is Magadi town, built by the multinational ICI as a company town for staff working at the massive soda factory (now run by the Magadi Soda Co). Facilities are very limited, but you will find a couple of small bars, restaurants and shops.

Sights

A number of important archaeological finds were made at **Ologasalie Prehistoric Site**, located 40km north of Magadi, in the 1940s, including hand axes and stone tools thought to have been made by *Homo erectus*. Fossils have also been discovered and some have been left in place. A guided tour (KSh200) is available.

Sleeping

Magadi is best visited from Nairobi or the Ngong Hills; Kiserian is convenient. Camping is probably the best option in Magadi itself. There's no shortage of space; ask at the roadblock for the best spot.

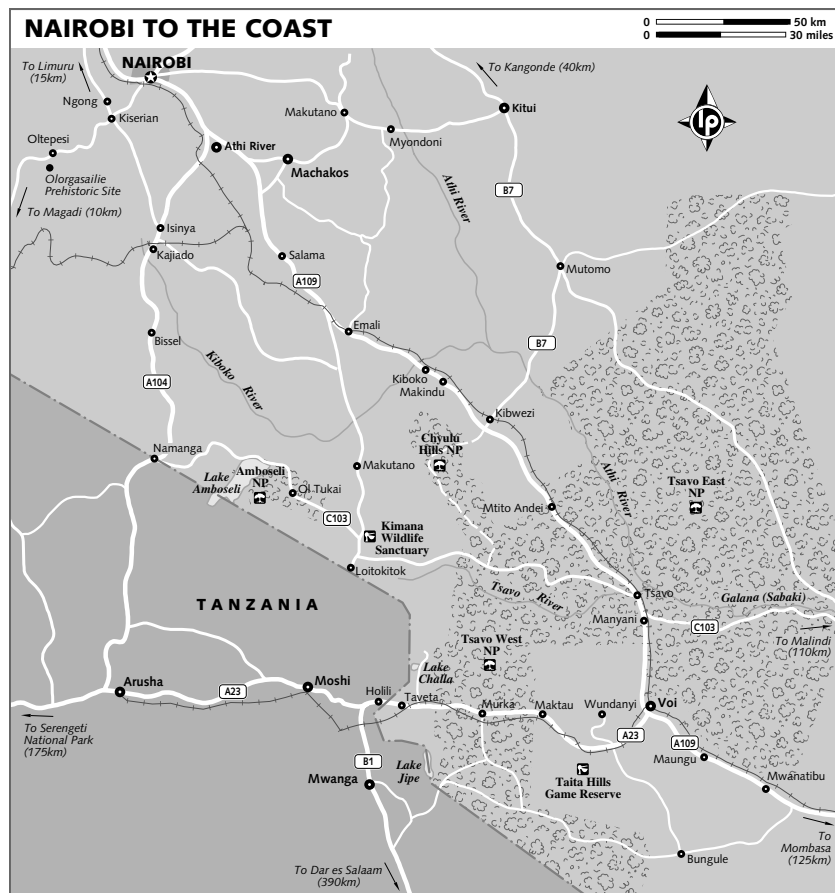
Camp site (camping KSh200, bandas s/d KSh500/800) This camp site at Ologasalie is not a bad place to stay for the night. You'll need your own food, bedding and drinking water.

Getting There & Away

The C58 road from Nairobi is in good condition. Akamba no longer runs services here and there seems to be only one *matatu* a day to Nairobi (KSh200), leaving in the morning and returning to Magadi in the evening.

NAIROBI TO THE COAST

The main A109 road between Nairobi and Mombasa provides access to a variety of national parks and nature reserves, most importantly Tsavo National Park, Kenya's largest. There are also some interesting



community-run nature projects in the area. The African townships of Voi and Wundanyi are worth a detour on your way down the coast.

AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK

The most popular park in Kenya after the Masai Mara is **Amboseli** (☎ 045-622251; nonresident adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required), mainly because of the spectacular backdrop of Africa's highest peak, Mt Kilimanjaro, which broods over the southern boundary of the park. Cloud cover can render the mountain's massive bulk invisible for much of the day.

The park has been at the centre of some controversy since President Kibaki's 2005 decision to downgrade it from a national

park to a national reserve. Supporters claim that the move rightfully returns control of the land to the Maasai community, but many conservation bodies have argued that it's simply a political move aimed at securing the Maasai vote.

At 392 sq km, Amboseli is a small park and lacks the profusion of animal species found in the Masai Mara, but as the landscape provides limited cover you have a good chance of seeing some of the larger predators. The vegetation here used to be much denser, but rising salinisation, damage by elephants and irresponsible behaviour by safari vehicles has caused terrible erosion. Amboseli can turn into a real dust bowl in the dry season.

Buffaloes, lions, gazelles, cheetahs, wildebeests, hyenas, jackals, warthogs, zebras, Masai giraffes and baboons are all present, but the last few black rhinos were moved to Tsavo West in 1995 after a sustained period of poaching. In the permanent swamps of Enkongo Narok and Olokenya, large elephant herds can be seen grazing with Mt Kilimanjaro in the background, probably the definitive Kenyan wildlife shot.

Erosion and grass die-off is having a dramatic effect at Amboseli, and it's only a matter of years before the lack of food makes the animals move on. It's important for vehicles to stick to the defined tracks, so that the grasslands that drew all these animals here in the first place can be preserved.

Sleeping

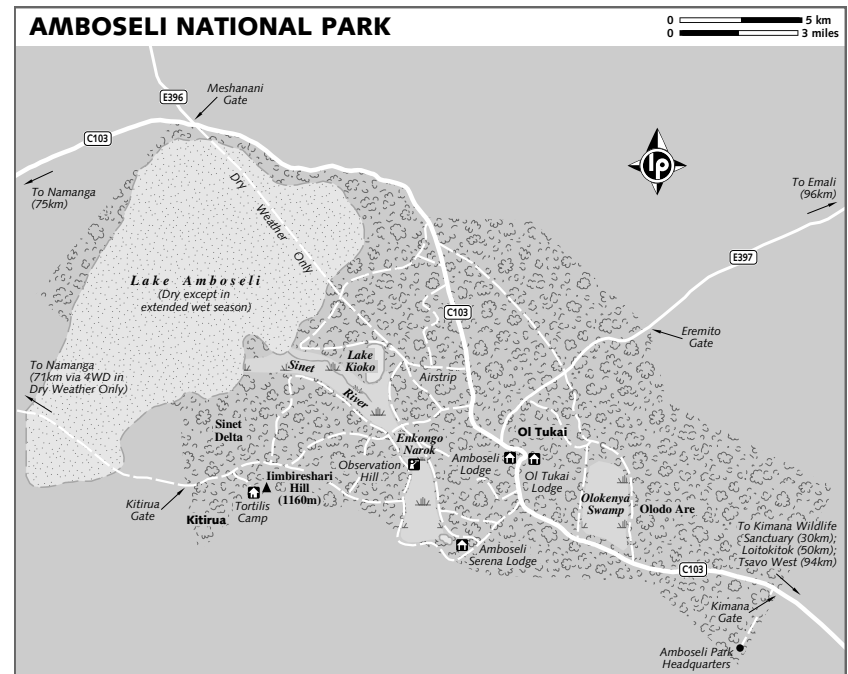
Tortilis Camp (☎ 020-604053; www.chelipeacock.com; full board s/d low season US\$340/520, high season US\$400/640) This wonderfully conceived site is one of the most exclusive ecolodges in Kenya, commanding a superb spot with perfect Kilimanjaro vistas. Food is cooked without using firewood, solar power heats the water

and there's a huge organic vegetable garden. Prices include transfers, guided walks, cultural visits, laundry and most drinks, but not park fees or fancy wine.

Oi Tukai Lodge (☎ 020-4445514; oltukai@mitsuminet.com; full board s/d low season US\$114/143, high season US\$176/220; 🏠) A splendid lodge with soaring *makuti* (thatched palm-leaved) roofs and tranquil shaded gardens. The split-level bar has wonderful views, and the overall atmosphere is of peace and luxury. Two of the cottages have wheelchair access.

Amboseli Serena Lodge (☎ 020-2710511; www.serenahotels.com; full board s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$210/260; 🏠) A posh Serena hotel in junglelike gardens near the southern perimeter of the park. The low red adobe-style cottages make a change from the usual *makuti*, the very stylish lobby bar makes great use of hanging gourds, and the nearby Enkongo Narok swamp ensures constant bird and animal activity.

Amboseli Lodge (☎ 045-622440; low season s/d/tr US\$70/90/122, full board high season s/d US\$117/180; 🏠) This lodge consists of a number of comfortable wooden cabins dotted around an



expansive lawn and garden with sweeping Kili views. Quite a few tour groups drop in for lunch.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Airkenya has daily flights between Wilson Airport in Nairobi and Amboseli (US\$88, one hour), departing from Nairobi at 7.30am. The return flight leaves Amboseli at 8.30am. Mombasa Air Safari flies here from Mombasa and Diani (US\$220, one hour).

CAR & FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE

The usual approach to Amboseli is via Namanga. The road is sealed and in surprisingly good condition from Nairobi to Namanga; the 75km dirt road to the Meshanani Gate is pretty rough but passable (allow around four hours from Nairobi).

Some people also enter from the east via the Amboseli–Tsavo West road, although this track is in a bad way. During the 1990s there were bandit attacks in this area, so vehicles have to travel together, accompanied by armed guards. Convoys leave from the Tsavo turn-off at around 7am, 9am and 1pm. Allow 2½ hours to cover the 94km from Amboseli to the Chyulu Gate at Tsavo West.

Self-drivers will need a 4WD to make the most of the park. Petrol is available at the Serena lodge.

AROUND AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK

There are several private sanctuaries and luxury tented camps hidden away in the bush between Amboseli and Tsavo West, offering a level of peace and quiet that is sadly missing from some parts of Amboseli. The only access to this area is the poorly maintained dirt track from Emali to Loitokitok, or the even more diabolical road between Amboseli and Tsavo West.

Namanga, on the opposite side of the park, is the main border crossing into Tanzania and has a few good places to stay.

Namanga

☎ 045

A large township has grown up around the Tanzanian border at Namanga, and it's a good place to break the journey to Arusha or Amboseli, with some nice places to stay and a surprisingly relaxed atmosphere away from the frontier itself. The border crossing

is open 24 hours and the two posts are close enough to walk across.

Numerous Maasai women come here to sell bead jewellery and other Maasai crafts, and seem to materialise like magic around tourist vehicles, especially at the petrol stations. There's great stuff on offer, but you'll have to haggle like a pro to get a bargain.

Namanga River Hotel (☎ 5132070; namangariverhotel@yahoo.com; camping KSh300, s/d KSh1550/2300) is a posh affair with nice cottages, a good restaurant and bar, and a shady camping area. Half and full board are available.

Next door, **Namanga Safari Lodge** (☎ 0735-249527; camping KSh300, d/tw KSh600) offers cheap and cheerful accommodation and a garden full of stucco animals. Meals are available on request, and the staff are generally eager to please.

The Kobil petrol station marks the turn-off to Amboseli and is a good place to ask around for lifts. Fill up here if you're driving into Amboseli.

Buses between Nairobi and Arusha pass through daily (KSh250, two hours). *Matatus* also run here from the junction of River Rd and Ronald Ngala St in Nairobi (KSh250); Peugeot (shared taxis) on the same route charge KSh300.

Akamba has an office at the Kobil station, where you can book seats on the morning bus to Arusha (KSh200 to KSh250, 1½ hours).

Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary

About 30km east of Amboseli, close to the road that connects Amboseli to Tsavo West, is this 40-hectare **wildlife sanctuary** (admission US\$10, vehicle KSh100). It's owned and run by local Maasai, and wildlife is just as plentiful here as in Amboseli. The sanctuary was set up with the help of the United States Agency for International Aid (Usaid) and the KWS in 1996 and has proved to be an encouraging template for similar initiatives.

As well as three guarded **camp sites** (camping KSh150) within the sanctuary itself, there are numerous luxury camps dotted around the area, including **Campi ya Kanzi** (Nairobi ☎ 020-605349; www.campiyakanzi.com; s/d from US\$480/740), a superb tented camp on a 400-sq-km Maasairun conservation project.

The only access to Kimana is the poorly maintained dirt track leading west from the Nairobi–Mombasa road to the Tanzanian

border, or the even more diabolical road between Amboseli and Tsavo West. There's officially no need to join the Tsavo convoy if you're coming here from Amboseli, but the area south of the sanctuary has a reputation for banditry.

CHYULU HILLS NATIONAL PARK

Northwest of Tsavo West National Park are the dramatic **Chyulu Hills** (adult/child US\$15/5), a collection of ancient volcanic cinder cones. The hills were gazetted as a national park in 1983, and have splendid views of Mt Kilimanjaro and populations of elands, giraffes, zebras and wildebeests, plus a small number of elephants, lions and buffaloes. Although there's loads to see, the park lacks even basic infrastructure, though there has been a serious drive to open it up for tourism lately.

Within the Chyulu Hills is Leviathan, the longest **lava tube** in the world, formed by hot lava flowing beneath a cooled crust. You'll need full caving equipment to explore it. Caving and trekking trips in the hills are possible with **Savage Wilderness Safaris Ltd** (Nairobi ☎ 020-2521590; www.whitewaterkenya.com; Sarit Centre, Westlands).

The **park headquarters** (PO Box 458, Kibwezi) are 1.3km inside the northwest gate, not far from Kibwezi on the Nairobi–Mombasa road. For the time being the best access is on the west side of the park, from the track between Amboseli and Tsavo West.

With no facilities inside the park, the most convenient accommodation option is **Ol Donyo Wuas** (Map p304; Nairobi ☎ 020-600457; www.richardbonhamsafaris.com; s/d from US\$400/640; ☎), an innovative ecolodge. The cottages are built from local materials, and a US\$20 conservation fee is charged to fund local community projects. Rates include wildlife drives and horse riding in the surrounding wildlife sanctuary.

Getting There & Away

Until the road from Kibwezi is brought up to standard, your best bet is the 4WD track that branches off the Amboseli–Tsavo West road about 10km west of Chyulu Gate. Ol Donyo Wuas can be reached via this track, although most guests fly in from Nairobi.

The park headquarters is signposted just outside Kibwezi, about 41km northwest of Mtito Andei on the main Nairobi–Mombasa road.

TSAVO NATIONAL PARK

At nearly 22,000 sq km, Tsavo is the largest national park in Kenya, divided administratively into Tsavo West National Park (9000 sq km) and Tsavo East National Park (11,747 sq km). Both parks feature some excellent scenery but the undergrowth is considerably higher than in Amboseli or Masai Mara, so it takes a little more effort to spot the wildlife. The compensation for this is that the landscapes are some of the most dramatic in Kenya, the animals are that bit wilder and the parks receive comparatively few visitors.

The northern half of Tsavo West is the most developed, with a number of excellent lodges. The landscape here is made of volcanic hills and sweeping expanses of savanna. The southern part of the park is rarely visited.

Tsavo East is more remote, but there are a number of lodges, and, refreshingly, a number of independent budget tented camps. Most of the action here is concentrated along the Galana River; the northern part of the park is bandit country and isn't really secure. The landscape is drier, with rolling plains hugging the edge of the Yatta Escarpment, a vast prehistoric lava flow.

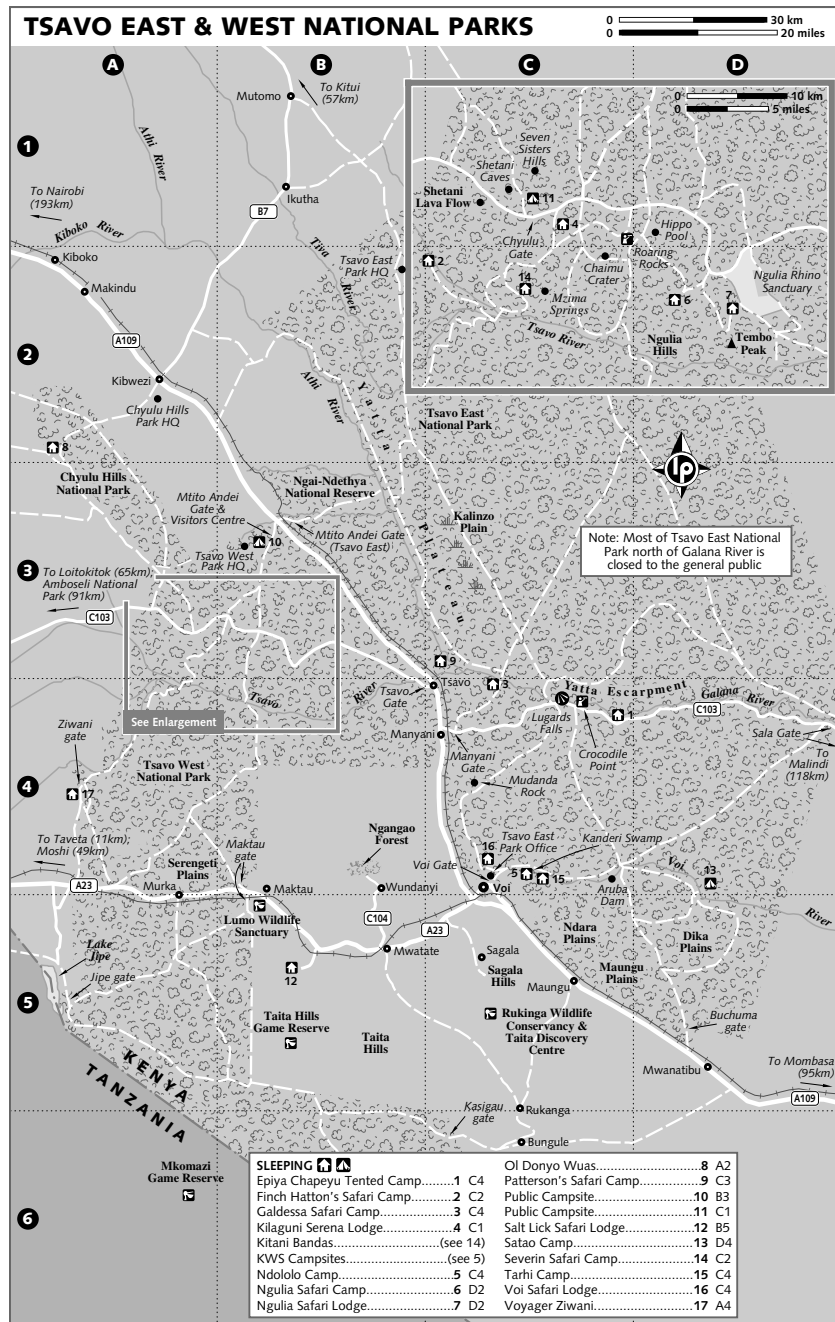
During the dry season the landscape in both parks is dusty and parched, but it erupts into colour at the end of the wet season. Of course, that means there's more greenery to hide the wildlife.

Both parks were once the lands of the Orma, Watta, Maasai and Kamba people, but all the villagers were displaced when the park was gazetted. Some of these communities have now established wildlife sanctuaries and group ranches on the outskirts of the park.

Tsavo had terrible problems with poachers during the 1980s, when the elephant population dropped from 45,000 to just 5000 and rhinos were almost wiped out entirely. Populations are slowly recovering and there are now about 9000 elephants in the two parks, but still less than 100 rhinos. The last few years have once again seen a worrying upsurge in poaching.

Information

Entry is US\$27/10 per adult/child per day, vehicles cost KSh200 and camping is US\$10 per adult; as the two parks are administered



separately you have to pay separately for each. Both use the smartcard system; you'll need enough credit for your vehicle, entry fee and camping charges for as long as you're staying. Smartcards can be bought and recharged at the Voi Gate to Tsavo East.

All track junctions in Tsavo East and Tsavo West have numbered and signposted cairns, but a map is helpful. Survey of Kenya publishes a *Tsavo East National Park* map (KSh500) and a newer *Tsavo West National Park* map (KSh700). Both are available from the main entrance gates and the visitor centre at Tsavo West. Tourist Maps' *Tsavo National Parks* (KSh250) covers both parks.

Fuel is available at Kilaguni Serena and Ngulia Safari lodges in Tsavo West, and at Voi Safari Lodge in Tsavo East.

Tsavo West National Park

This fine national park covers a huge variety of landscapes, from swamps and natural springs to rocky peaks, extinct volcanic cones to rolling plains and sharp reddish outcrops dusted with greenery. It's easily the more attractive of the two parks, but wildlife can be hard to spot because of the dense scrub. Birds are very common, and there are large populations of elephants, zebras, hippos and leopards. Lions are out there, but they tend to stay hidden.

The focus is **Mzima Springs**, which produces an incredible 93 million gallons of fresh water a day. The springs are the source of the bulk of Mombasa's fresh water, and you can walk down to a large pool that is a favourite haunt of hippos and crocodiles. There's an underwater viewing chamber, which unfortunately just gives a view of thousands of primeval-looking fish. Be a little careful here – both hippos and crocs are potentially dangerous.

Chaimu Crater, just southeast of Kilaguni Serena Lodge and the **Roaring Rocks** viewpoint, can be climbed in about 15 minutes. The views from either spot are stunning, with falcons, eagles and buzzards whirling over the plains. While there is little danger walking these trails, be aware that the wildlife is still out there.

Another attraction is the **Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary**, at the base of Ngulia Hills, part of the Rhino Ark program. The 70-sq-km area is surrounded by a 1m-high electric fence and provides a measure of security for Tsavo

West's 49 black rhinos. There are driving tracks and waterholes within the enclosed area, and there's a good chance of seeing one of these elusive creatures.

Some of the more unusual species to look out for in the park include the naked mole rat and the enigmatically named white-bellied go-away bird, which is often seen perched in dead trees. Red-beaked hornbills and bateleur eagles are also common.

It's possible to go **rock-climbing** at Tembo Peak and the Ngulia Hills, but you'll need to arrange this in advance with the **park warden** (☎ 043-622483).

Lake Jipe (*ji-pay*), at the southwest end of the park, is reached by a desperately dusty track from near Taveta. You can hire boats at the campsite to take you hippo- and crocodile-spotting on the lake (US\$5). Huge herds of elephants come to the lake to drink and large flocks of migratory birds stop here from February to May.

SLEEPING

There is no real budget accommodation in Tsavo West. Campers can use the **public camp sites** (camping adult/child US\$10/5) at Komboyo, near the Mtito Andei Gate, and Chyulu, just outside the Chyulu Gate, or a choice of **special camp sites** (camping adult/child US\$15/5).

Ngulia Safari Camp (Voi ☎ 043-30050; tsavoh@afrioonline.co.ke; r KSh3500-6000) Formerly Ngulia Bandas, new management and a complete renovation have turned this hillside camp into Tsavo's best luxury bargain, offering thatched tent-fronted stone cottages right on the edge of the escarpment. Rooms come with or without kitchen, and there's a small bar-restaurant.

Severin Safari Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-5485001; www.severin-kenya.com; s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$156/240) This is a fantastic complex of thatched luxury tents, with affable staff, Kilimanjaro views from the communal lounge area and nightly hippo visitations. The camp also has a simple but excellent self-catering annexe, Kitani Bandas (double/triple bandas US\$50/65).

Kilaguni Serena Lodge (Namanga ☎ 045-340000; www.serenahotels.com; s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$210/260, ste US\$565; 🚗 🚰) Kilaguni has recently been renovated and is as attractive a place as ever, with a splendid bar and restaurant overlooking a busy illuminated waterhole.

Finch Hatton's Safari Camp (Nairobi ☎ 020-553237; www.finchhattons.com; s/d/tr low season US\$210/285/427, high season US\$260/370/555; 📍) An upmarket tented camp in fine old colonial style. It's situated among springs and hippo pools in the west of the park, with grounds so sprawling you have to take an escort at night.

Voyager Ziwani (Voi ☎ 043-30506; www.heritage-eastafrika.com; s/d low season US\$130/180, high season US\$220/295; 📍) A luxury tented place by the Zimani Gate at the southwest end of the park, overlooking the Ziwa Dam.

Ngulia Safari Lodge (Voi ☎ 043-30000; ngulialodge@kenya-safari.co.ke; full board s/d/tr low season US\$80/160/228, s/d/tr high season US\$150/200/280; 📍) A curiously unattractive block in a spectacular location, constructed in the bad old days of emerging mass tourism. There's a waterhole right by the restaurant and sweeping views over the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The main access to Tsavo West is through the Mtito Andei Gate on the Mombasa–Nairobi road in the north of the park, where you'll find the park headquarters and visitor centre. The main track cuts straight across to Kilaguni Serena Lodge and the Chyulu Gate. Security is a problem here, so vehicles going to Amboseli travel in armed convoys, leaving the Kilaguni Serena Lodge at 8am and 10am.

Another 48km southeast along the main road is the Tsavo Gate. It is handy for the Ngulia Hills lodges and the rhino sanctuary.

The tracks here are only really suitable for 4WDs, and roads in the south of the park are particularly challenging.

Tsavo East National Park

The landscape in Tsavo East is flatter and drier than in Tsavo West, despite the fact that one of Kenya's largest rivers cuts a green gash through the middle of the dusty orange plains. The main track through the park follows the Galana River from the Tsavo Gate to the Sala Gate. The park headquarters, where you can charge and buy smartcards, is at Voi Gate.

There are several places along the flat-topped escarpments lining the river where you can get out of your vehicle, with due caution, of course. Most scenic are **Lugards Falls**, a wonderful landscape of water-sculpted channels, and **Crocodile Point**, where you may

see hippos and crocs. There are usually armed guards around, but you shouldn't get too close to the water.

The bush is thinner than in Tsavo West, so wildlife is easier to spot, although it's not as plentiful. The rolling hills in the south of the park are home to large herds of elephants, usually covered in red dust. The action is concentrated around Voi Safari Lodge and the **Kanderi Swamp**, which is home to a profusion of wildlife. You can expect elephants to stroll through the campsite in the evenings.

The area north of the Galana River is dominated by the Yatta Escarpment, a vast prehistoric lava flow, but unfortunately much of this area is off limits because of the ongoing campaign against poachers. During the 1980s the rhino population here was decimated and there are worrying signs that poaching is once again on the increase.

Until their partial translocation to Tsavo East, the sole surviving population of hirola antelope was found near the Kenya–Somalia border. Intense poaching along with habitat destruction has reduced their numbers from an estimated 14,000 in 1976 to a pitiful 450 today, 100 of them being in Tsavo East. There are also around 48 black rhinos, moved here from Nairobi National Park, although how long they last in this hard-to-police sanctuary remains to be seen.

On the positive side, the recent translocation of 400 elephants from the Shimba Hills National Reserve (p321) has replenished the populations depleted by poaching, and should herald the start of efforts to rehabilitate the wild northern sector of the park.

SLEEPING

Ndololo Camp (☎ 043-30050; tsavoh@africaonline.co.ke; full board s/d/tr low season US\$35/60/80, high season US\$40/70/90) A great-value tented camp with knotted wooden furniture, mosquito nets, and canvas toilet and shower cubicles. Annoyingly, you have to pay the US\$10 park camping fee on top of the room rates.

Tarhi Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-5486378; kedev@africaonline.co.ke; half board s/d US\$60/100) Owned by a German company, this is a reasonably priced camp on the edge of the Voi River. It's technically a special campsite, so an additional camping fee of US\$15 is levied.

KWS camp sites (☎ 043-30049; tenp@africaonline.co.ke; camping adult/child US\$10/5) There's a single camping ground with basic toilets near

MAN-EATERS OF TSAVO

The lions of Tsavo National Park are unique in many ways. For a start the males lack the typical mane that usually distinguishes this species, a fact often attributed to the thorn-filled vegetation of their habitat, which makes long hair a real hindrance to free movement. As an Earthwatch study recently revealed, they are also the only lions known to move in social groups with just one single male – most normal prides have one or two younger hangers-on as well as the alpha male.

Remarkably, scientists now believe there may be a single cause for all these idiosyncrasies: testosterone. When tested, Tsavo lions showed noticeably elevated levels of the male sex hormone, which could well be responsible for their hair loss and increased territorial behaviour.

This theory would also explain the famed aggression of the Tsavo lions, which has earned them a reputation as the fiercest predators in Africa. The best-known story concerns just two lions, who ate their way through 140 railway workers in a single year during the 19th century! The chief engineer, Colonel JH Patterson, eventually managed to trap and kill them, and subsequently wrote a best-selling book about the experience, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, which was later filmed as *The Ghost and the Darkness*.

Although there's been nothing to compare to this since, quite a few local people have been attacked over the last decade, so be a little cautious when walking at Chaimu Crater, Mzima Springs or Lugards Falls. Hormonal or not, the Tsavo lions are not to be trifled with.

Kanderi Swamp. There are also a few special camp sites (adult/child US\$15/5), which move from year to year.

Voi Safari Lodge (Mombasa ☎ 041-471861; voi.lodge@kenya-safari.co.ke; s/d low season US\$80/110, high season US\$105/150; 📍) Just 4km from Voi Gate, this is a long, low complex overlooking an incredible sweep of savanna, with a lovely rock-cut swimming pool and a natural waterhole.

Satao Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-475074; www.satao.camp.com; s/d low season US\$80/120, high season US\$160/200) On the Voi River, this popular upmarket camp is nicely laid out, with 20 canvas tents surrounding a waterhole.

Galdessa Safari Camp (Nairobi ☎ 020-7123156; www.galdessa.com; s/d low season US\$336/512, high season US\$446/684; 📍) closed May) On the Galana River, 15km west of Lugards Falls, this ecocamp is heavily involved in rhino conservation projects. Rates include wildlife drives.

Let's Go Travel (☎ 020-340331; www.lets-go-travel.net) in Nairobi handles bookings for **Epiya Chapeyu Tented Camp** (s/d US\$72/144; 📍) closed Apr–Jul), by the Galana River, and **Patterson's Safari Camp** (s/d low season US\$65/90, high season US\$85/120), 9km from Tsavo Gate.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most tourist safaris enter Tsavo East via the Sala Gate, where a good dirt road runs east for 110km to Malindi. If you're coming from Nairobi, the Voi Gate (near the town of same name) and the Manyani Gate

(on the Nairobi–Mombasa road) are just as accessible.

AROUND TSAVO NATIONAL PARK

There are a number of independent nature reserves in the bush on the edge of Tsavo West. The road between Voi and Taveta cuts through the lush hilly areas surrounding Voi, providing interesting detours for walkers and wildlife-spotters.

Taita Hills & Wundanyi

South of the dirt road from Voi to Taveta are the Taita Hills, a fertile area of verdant hills and scrub forest, a far cry from the semiarid landscape of Tsavo. Within the hills is the private **Taita Hills Game Reserve** (adult/child US\$23/12), covering an area of 100 sq km. The landscape is extremely dramatic and all the plains wildlife is in abundance. If you stay at one of the lodges here, you can take a nocturnal wildlife drive, something that's not allowed in the national parks.

Wundanyi, the provincial capital, is an interesting little place high up in the hills. Trails crisscross the cultivated slopes around town, leading to dramatic gorges, waterfalls and cliffs. It's easy to find a guide, but stout walking boots and a head for heights are essential.

Other attractions include the butterflies of **Ngangao Forest** (6km northwest, near Werugha); the huge granite **Wesu Rock**; and

the **Cave of Skulls**, where the Taita people once put the skulls of their ancestors.

SLEEPING

Salt Lick Safari Lodge (☎ 043-30270; saltlick@africaonline.co.ke; s/d/tr high season US\$185/226/286, low season US\$132/161/195) This is the main accommodation for visitors in the Taita Hills reserve. Children under five are not admitted.

Taita Rocks (☎ 0735-651349; r KSh800-2000, per person with shared bathroom KSh400-500) The best of Wundanyi's very limited accommodation offerings, perched up a slope off the road into town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent *matatus* services run between Wundanyi and Voi (KSh120, one hour). Leave Wundanyi by around 8.30am if you want to connect with the morning buses to Nairobi from Voi. There are also direct *matatus* to Mombasa (KSh300, four to five hours) and an irregular morning service to Nairobi (KSh600, seven hours).

Lake Challa

This deep, spooky crater lake is about 10km north of Taveta. There are grand views across the plains from the crater rim, with the mysterious waters shimmering hundreds of metres below. The lake gained notoriety in early 2002 when a gap-year student was killed by crocodiles here. You can walk around the crater rim and down to the water, but be very careful near the water's edge and under no circumstances consider swimming.

The road to Challa turns off the Voi-Taveta road on the outskirts of Taveta, by the second police post. On Taveta market days (Wednesday and Saturday) there are local buses to Challa village (KSh50), passing the turn-off to the crater rim.

VOI

☎ 043

Small but always busy, Voi is a key service town at the intersection of the Nairobi-Mombasa road and the road to Moshi in Tanzania. The Voi Gate to Tsavo East National Park is just east of the town, and Voi has plenty of cheap places to stay, which is great for travellers who can't afford the safari lodges inside the park. There's a lively market area and a general air of activity,

and there are some nice walks in the surrounding hills.

Information

Ashtec Computers (Fariji House) Email facilities.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 30138; Nairobi-Mombasa road)

Post office (☎ 30253)

Telkom office (Nairobi-Mombasa road)

Sleeping & Eating

Tsavo Park Hotel (☎ 30050; info@tsavoparkhotel.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast KSh1200/1800/2500) The large rooms aren't bad value, with some satellite TVs, but ongoing building means the plumbing's a bit dodgy. There's a good-value restaurant.

Voi Town Lodge (☎ 30705; s with shared bathroom KSh400, s/d with private bathroom KSh650/1000) A friendly and economical alternative to the Tsavo Park Hotel, with a handful of odd windowless rooms. Some of the walls don't reach the ceilings, but it's comfortable enough.

Johari's Guest House (☎ 30489; s/d with shared bathroom KSh250/350) A cheap courtyard place behind a drycleaner, one block north of the main road through Voi.

Silent Guest Resort (☎ 30112; silentresort@yahoo.com; s/d incl breakfast KSh2200/3200) Technically this has a good claim to be the best hotel in town in terms of facilities, but there's not much justification for the exorbitant price tag.

Most of the guesthouses have reasonable restaurants, particularly the Tsavo Park Hotel, and there are a few small food *dukas* and cafés around the bus and *matatu* stand. As Voi is a transport hub, there's a low-key prostitution scene servicing the truck drivers, which can be a hassle in some bars.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses and *matatus* run to Mombasa (KSh250, three hours), and buses to Nairobi (KSh500 to KSh800, six hours) pass through town at around 10.30am and midnight. There are daily *matatus* to Wundanyi (KSh100, one hour) and Taveta (KSh250, two hours), on the Tanzanian border.

The **train station** (☎ 30098), at the eastern end of town, has trains to Mombasa (KSh1410/1130 in 1st/2nd class) at around 4am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and to Nairobi (KSh2100/1475 in 1st/2nd class) at around 11pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

THE COAST

It may seem at odds with the immediate mental image of safari Africa, but Kenya's Indian Ocean shoreline is one of its greatest assets, and the unique flavour of this steamy, sultry region never fails to weave a spell over its visitors. Even the most jaded beach bum can find something to delight in amid the palm-fringed white-sand stretches that run pretty much all the way from Tanzania to Somalia.

Don't be fooled into thinking it's all about the beaches, though. In fact, it's likely these will only play a minor part in your trip; for the adventurous independent traveller, the real draw of the coast is the Swahili culture that permeates every aspect of daily life here, from the bustling markets of Mombasa to the living history enshrined in Lamu's ever-captivating old town. Wandering narrow streets, exploring ancient ruins and setting sail in traditional dhows are the experiences that truly define a visit here, and you should take every opportunity to soak up the atmosphere that sets the region apart from the rest of Kenya.

For the active, the lure of coral reefs, remote islands and unlimited water sports is another hefty incentive to splash beneath the surface. Even away from the ocean, the region can muster up more than enough treats and surprises to enthrall its fans and convert its critics, with something unexpected at every turn. Sunbathing be damned – with coastal rainforest, tribal shrines, coral mosques, thumbless monkeys, elephants and elephant shrews, Kenya's coast should barely leave you time to relax.

HISTORY

The Swahili culture of the coast was a product of trade, initiated by Persian and Arab merchants, who used the monsoon winds to reach African shores and quickly established trading posts. By the 9th century a series of fully fledged city-states had spread out along the coast from Somalia to Mozambique, and the first African slaves began to appear in Arabia.

Intermarriage between Arabs and Africans gradually created the Swahili race, language and culture, and established some powerful dynasties. In the early 16th century

the Portuguese swanned over the horizon, attracted by the wealth and determined to end the Arab trade monopoly.

It's fashionable to portray the Portuguese as the bad guys, but the sultans of Oman, who defeated them in 1698, were no more popular with the locals. Despite their shared faith, the Swahilis staged countless rebellions, even passing Mombasa into British hands from 1824 to 1826 to keep it from the sultans. Things only really quietened down after Sultan Seyyid Said moved his capital to Zanzibar in 1832.

Said's huge coastal clove plantations created a massive need for labour, and the slave caravans of the 19th century marked the peak of the trade in human cargo. News of massacres and human rights abuses soon reached Europe, galvanising the British public to demand an end to slavery. Through a mixture of political savvy and implied force, the British government was eventually able to pressure Said's son Barghash to ban the slave trade.

Of course, this 'reform' didn't hurt British interests: as part of the treaty, the British East Africa Company took over administration of the Kenyan interior. A 16km-wide coastal strip was recognised as the territory of the sultan and was leased by the British from 1887. Upon independence in 1963, the last sultan of Zanzibar gifted the land to the new Kenyan government.

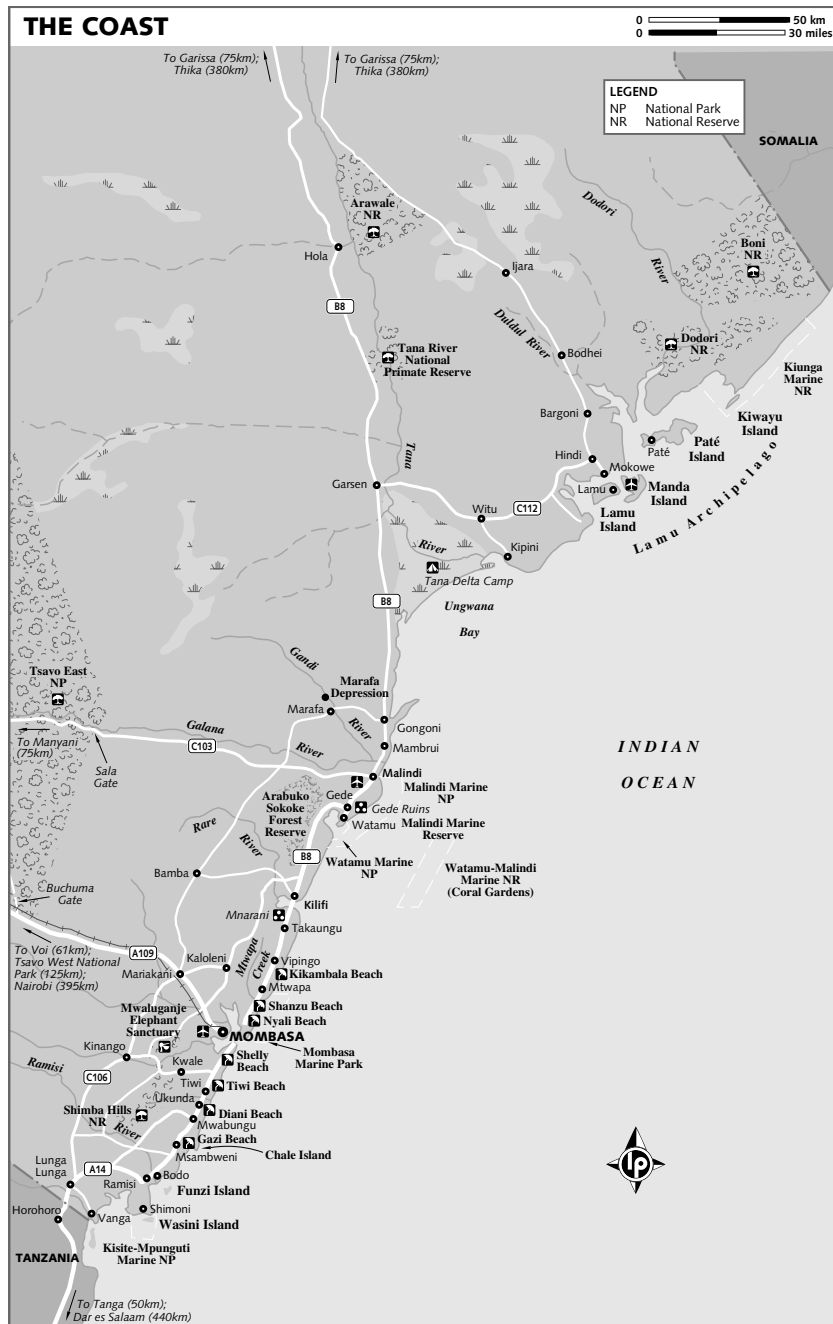
Today the coast province remains culturally and socially distinct from the rest of the country, still heavily influenced by its Swahili past. Indians are the largest minority, descendants of railway labourers and engineers brought here by the British, and the population as a whole is predominantly Muslim.

MOMBASA

☎ 041 / pop 653,000

Mombasa is the largest city on the Kenyan coast and also the largest coastal port in East Africa. The city sprawls across a low-lying island at the mouth of a broad inlet, providing a fantastic natural anchorage for ships. Traders have been coming here since at least the 12th century, and goods from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) all still pass through here on their way overseas.

The city's population is overwhelmingly African, many of whom are Swahilis, but



there are a remarkable range of races and cultures here, from Africans to British expats, Omanis, Indians and Chinese.

Most package tourists stay in the beach resorts north or south of town, but leaving Mombasa out of your itinerary completely would be a shame. The most interesting part is the characterful Old Town, with its narrow, winding alleyways, historic Swahili houses and the remains of the mighty Fort Jesus.

History

Mombasa has always been at the centre of the coast's key events, a crucial stronghold for local and invading powers ever since the Arab-Swahili Mazrui clan emerged as one of the most powerful families in 9th-century East Africa.

The first Portuguese forays into Arab territory took place here in 1505, when Dom Francisco de Almeida arrived with a huge armada and levelled the city in just 1½ days. The plundered remains were soon rebuilt, but in 1528 Lisbon struck again as Nuña da Cunha captured the city, first by diplomacy (offering to act as an ally in Mombasa's disputes with Malindi, Pemba and Zanzibar) and then by force. Once again Mombasa was burned to the ground while the invaders sailed on to India.

The Portuguese made a bid for permanency in 1593 with the construction of Fort Jesus, but the hefty structure quickly became a symbolic target for rebel leaders and was besieged incessantly. During the 17th and 18th centuries Mombasa changed hands dozens of times before the Portuguese finally gave up their claim to the coast in 1729.

Waiting to step into the power vacuum were the sultans of Oman, who had defeated the Europeans and occupied Fort Jesus after an incredible 33-month siege in 1698. The city remained in their control until the 1870s, when British intervention ended the slave trade and gained for the Empire a foothold in East Africa.

Mombasa subsequently became the rail-head for the Uganda railway and the most important city in British East Africa. In 1920, when Kenya became a fully fledged British colony, Mombasa was made capital of the separate British Coast Protectorate.

Today the cut and thrust of politics and power play largely passes Mombasa by, but

it's still Kenya's second city and a crucial social barometer for the coast province as a whole.

Orientation

The main thoroughfare in Mombasa is Digo Rd and its southern extension Nyerere Ave, which run north-south through the city. The ferry to Likoni and the south coast leaves from the southern end of Nyerere Ave.

Running west from the junction between Nyerere Ave and Digo Rd is Moi Ave, where you'll find the tourist office and the famous sculpted 'tusks', two huge pairs of aluminium elephant tusks forming an M over the road, which were erected to mark a visit by British royal Princess Margaret in 1956. Heading east from the same junction, Nkrumah Rd provides the easiest access to the Old Town and Fort Jesus.

North of the city centre, Digo Rd becomes Abdel Nasser Rd, where you'll find many of the bus stands for Nairobi and destinations north along the coast. There's another big group of bus offices west of here at the intersection of Jomo Kenyatta Ave and Mwembe Tayari Rd. The train station is at the intersection of Mwembe Tayari and Haile Selassie Rds.

MAPS

Choices are limited but your best option is the 1:10,000 *Streets of Mombasa Island* map (KSh350), updated in 2004 and available from the tourist office. For more detailed coverage seek out the *Mombasa A to Z* (KSh300), which was fully revised in 2003 – it may be easier to find in Nairobi than in Mombasa itself.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

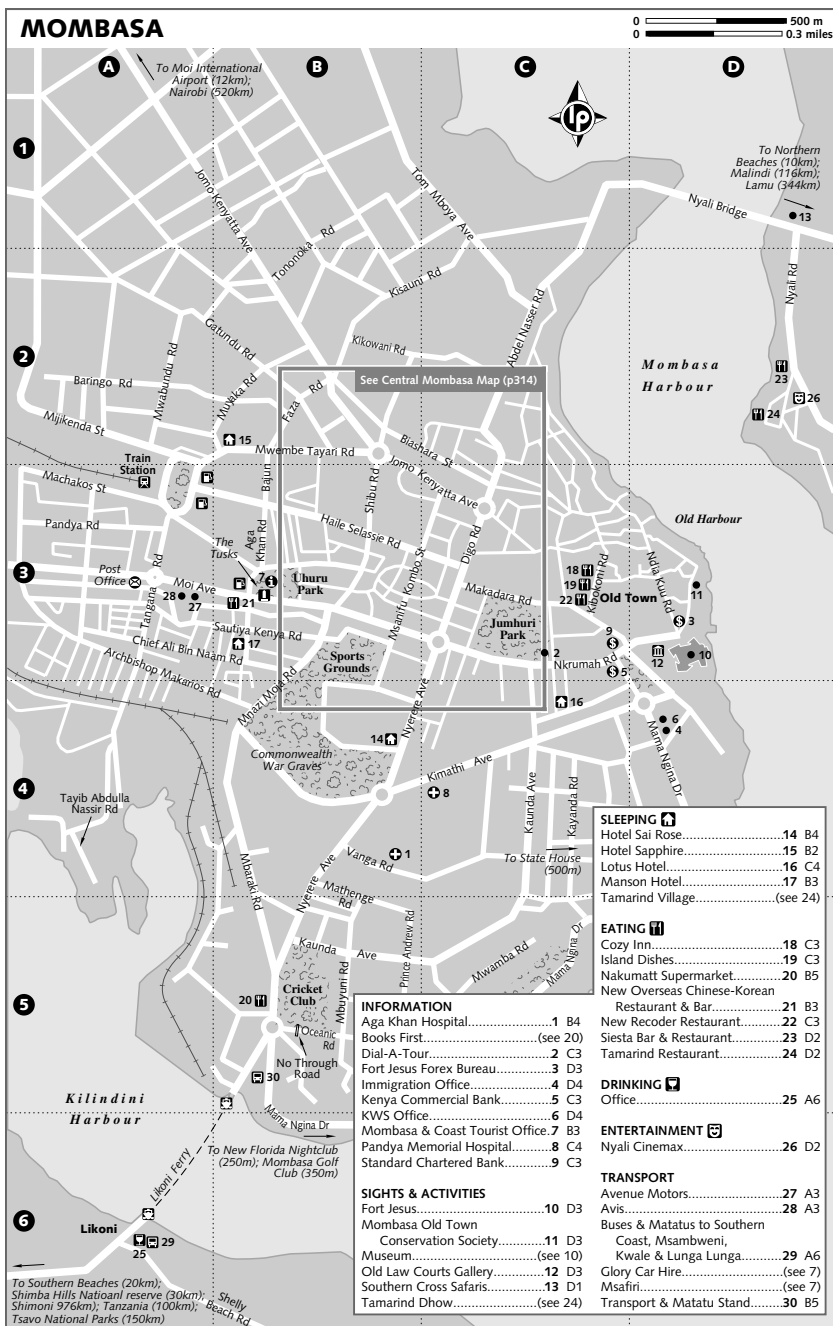
- Bahati Book Centre** (Map p314; ☎ 225010; Moi Ave)
- Books First** (Map p312; ☎ 313482; Nakumatt, Nyerere Ave; 📺) Well-stocked outlet with separate café.
- City Bookshop** (Map p314; ☎ 313149; Nkrumah Rd)

EMERGENCY

- AAR Health Services** (☎ 312409; 🏠 24hr)
- Police** (☎ 222121, 999)

INTERNET ACCESS

- Blue Room** (Map p314; ☎ 224021; www.blueroomonline.com; Haile Selassie Rd; per min KSh2; 🕒 9am–10pm)



Info Café (Map p314; ☎ 227621; infomombasa@yahoo.com; Ambalal House, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1)
Wavetek (Map p314; ☎ 0735-295007; TSS Towers, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1) Also offers international calls from KSh15 per minute.

KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE
KWS office (Map p312; ☎ 312744/5; Nguua Court, Mama Ngina Dr; ☎ 6am-6pm) Sells and charges smartcards.

MEDICAL SERVICES
 All services and medication must be paid for upfront, so have travel insurance details handy.
Aga Khan Hospital (Map p312; ☎ 312953; akhm@mba.akhmkenya.org; Vanga Rd)
Pandya Memorial Hospital (Map p312; ☎ 229252; Kimathi Ave)

MONEY
 Outside business hours you can exchange money at major hotels, although rates are usually quite poor. Exchange rates are generally slightly lower here than you'll find in Nairobi, especially for travellers cheques.
Barclays Bank Nkrumah Rd (Map p314; ☎ 224573); Digo Rd (Map p314; ☎ 311660)
Fort Jesus Forex Bureau (Map p312; ☎ 316717; Ndia Kuu Rd)
Kenya Commercial Bank Moi Ave (Map p314; ☎ 220978); Nkrumah Rd (Map p312; ☎ 312523)
Postbank (Map p314; ☎ 3434077; Moi Ave) Western Union money transfers.

Pwani Forex Bureau (Map p314; ☎ 221727; Digo Rd)
Standard Chartered Bank (Map p312; ☎ 224614; Treasury Sq, Nkrumah Rd)

POST
Post office (Map p314; ☎ 227705; Digo Rd)

TELEPHONE
Post Global Services (Map p314; ☎ 230581; inglobal@africaonline.co.ke; Maungano Rd; ☎ 7.30am-8pm; ☎) International calls are around KSh85 per minute. Owner Rashmi is re-establishing his travel agency, and can act as a capable and friendly 'fixer' for travellers.
Telkom Kenya (Map p314; ☎ 312811) Locations on Nkrumah Rd and Moi Ave.

TOURIST INFORMATION
Mombasa & Coast Tourist Office (Map p312; ☎ 225428; mcta@ikenya.com; Moi Ave; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) Provides information and can organise accommodation, tours, guides and transport.

TRAVEL AGENCIES
Dial-A-Tour (Map p312; ☎ 224114; dialatour@ikenya.com; Oriental Bldg, Nkrumah Rd)
Express Travel (Map p314; ☎ 315405; PO Box 90631, Nkrumah Rd) AmEx agent. Mail can be held here for cardholders.
Fourways Travel (Map p314; ☎ 223344; Moi Ave)

VISA EXTENSIONS
Immigration office (Map p312; ☎ 311745; Uhuru ni Kari Bldg, Mama Ngina Dr)

Dangers & Annoyances
 Mombasa is relatively safe compared to Nairobi, but the streets still clear pretty rapidly after dark so it's a good idea to take taxis rather than walk around alone at night. You need to be more careful on the beaches north and south of town. The Likoni ferry is a bag-snatching hot spot.

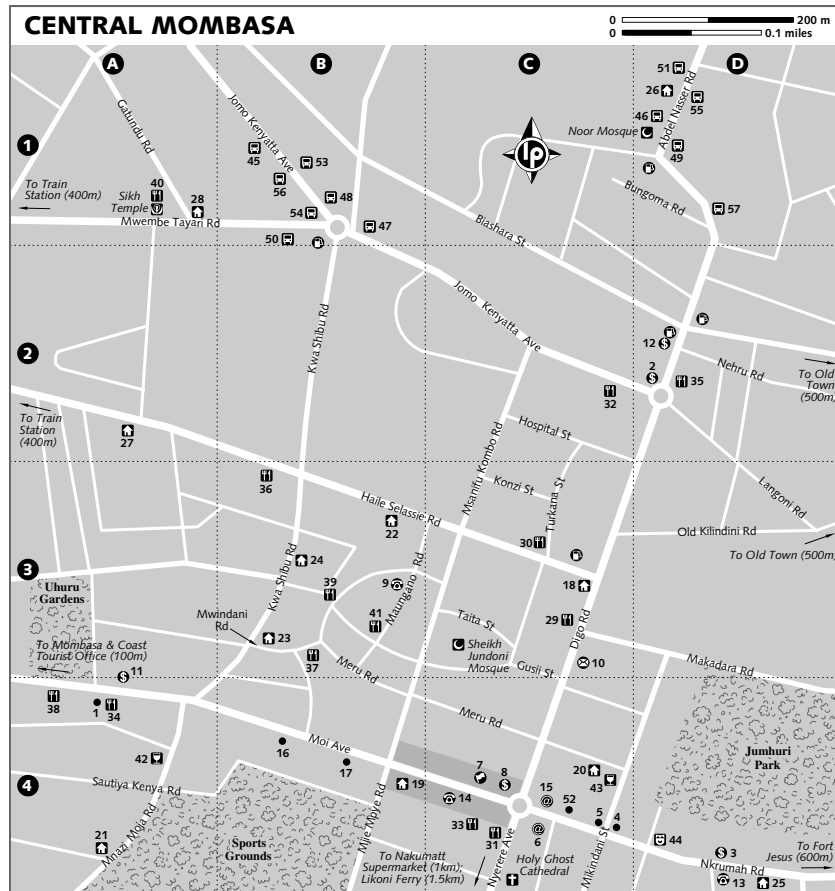
Visitors should also be aware of anti-Western sentiment among some Kenyan Muslims: hostile graffiti and Osama Bin Laden T-shirts abound, and demonstrations against Israel and America are increasingly common. Keep a low profile during any escalation of violence in the Middle East or terrorist activity in the West.

Malaria is a big risk on the coast, so remember to take your antimalarial drugs (see p643).

Sights & Activities
FORT JESUS
 Mombasa's biggest tourist attraction dominates the harbour entrance at the end of Nkrumah Rd. The metre-thick coral walls make it an imposing edifice, despite being partially ruined. The fort was built by the Portuguese in 1593 to enforce their rule over the coastal Swahilis, but they rarely managed to hold onto it for long. It changed hands at least nine times in bloody sieges between 1631 and 1875, finally falling under British control.

The fort was the final project completed by Italian architect Joao Batista Cairato in his long career as Chief Architect for Portugal's eastern colonies. There are some ingenious elements in its design, especially the angular configuration of the west walls, which makes it impossible to attack one wall without being a sitting duck for soldiers on the opposite battlements.

These days the fort houses a **museum** (Map p312; ☎ 222425; nmfortj@swiftmombasa.com; adult/child



KSh200/100; ☎ 8am-6pm), built over the barracks. The exhibits are mostly ceramics, reflecting the variety of cultures that traded along the coast, but include other interesting odds and ends donated from private collections or dug up from sites along the coast. Also displayed are finds from the Portuguese frigate *Santo António de Tanná*, which sank near the fort during the siege in 1698, and the far end of the hall is devoted to the fascinating culture of the nine coastal Mijikenda tribes.

Exploring the battlements and ruined buildings within the compound is just as interesting, though the fort feels much smaller than it looks from the outside. The **Omani house** in the San Felipe bastion in the northwestern corner of the fort was built

in the late 18th century, and houses a small exhibition of Omani jewellery and artefacts. Nearby is a ruined church, a huge well and cistern, and an excavated grave complete with skeleton. The **eastern wall** of the fort includes an Omani audience hall and the **Passage of the Arches**, a passage cut through the coral to give access to the sea.

Coach tours arrive here late in the morning, so if you come early you may have the place to yourself. Many official and unofficial guides will offer their services, often for free, though a tip is expected. Alternatively, you can buy the 1981 *Fort Jesus* guide (KSh60) from the ticket desk and go it alone. At 7pm there's a daily 'sound and light show' illustrating the fort's history; tickets cost US\$15.

INFORMATION		ENTERTAINMENT	
Bahati Book Centre.....	1 A4	Glory Bed & Breakfast.....	22 B3
Barclays Bank.....	2 D2	Glory Guest House.....	23 B3
Barclays Bank.....	3 D4	Hotel Dorse.....	24 B3
Blue Room.....	(see 30)	New Palm Tree Hotel.....	25 D4
City Bookshop.....	4 C4	New People's Hotel.....	26 D1
Express Travel (Amex).....	5 C4	Royal Court Hotel.....	27 A2
Fourways Travel.....	(see 17)	Tana Guest House.....	28 A1
Info Café.....	6 C4	EATING	
Italian Consulate.....	7 C4	Baron Restaurant & Pub.....	29 C3
Kenya Commercial Bank.....	8 C4	Blue Room Restaurant.....	30 C3
Post Global Services.....	9 B3	China Town Restaurant.....	31 C4
Post Office.....	10 C3	Fayaz Baker & Confectioners.....	32 C2
Postbank.....	11 A3	Fontanella Steakhouse & Beer Garden.....	33 C4
Pwani Forex Bureau.....	12 D2	Little Chef Dinners Pub.....	34 A4
Telkom Kenya.....	13 D4	Main Market.....	35 D2
Telkom Kenya.....	14 C4	New Chetna Restaurant.....	36 B3
Wavetel.....	15 C4	Pistacchio Café.....	37 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Rozina House Restaurant.....	38 A4
Ketty Tours.....	16 B4	Shehna Restaurant.....	39 B3
Safari Seekers.....	17 B4	Singh Restaurant.....	40 A1
SLEEPING		Splendid View Restaurant.....	41 B3
Beracha Guest House.....	18 C3	DRINKING	
Castle Royal Hotel.....	19 B4	Casablanca Restaurant & Club.....	42 A4
Dancourt Hotel.....	20 C4	Club.....	42 A4
Evening Guest House.....	21 A4	Toyz Disco.....	43 C4
SHOPPING		Kenya Cinema.....	
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Buses & Matatus to Malindi.....		46 D1	
Buses to Arusha & Moshi (Mwembe Tayari Health Centre).....		47 B1	
Buses to Dar es Salaam & Tanga.....		48 B1	
Busscar.....		(see 55)	
Busstar.....		49 D1	
Coastline Safaris.....		50 B1	
Falcon.....		51 D1	
Falcon.....		(see 53)	
Kenya Airways.....		52 C4	
Kobil Petrol Station.....		(see 54)	
Mash Express.....		53 B1	
Matatus to Voi & Wundanyi.....		54 B1	
Mombasa Raha.....		55 D1	
Mombasa Raha.....		56 B1	
Oman Air.....		(see 7)	
TSS Express.....		57 D1	

OLD TOWN

While Mombasa's Old Town doesn't quite have the medieval charm of Lamu or Zanzibar, it's still an interesting area to wander around. The houses here are characteristic of coastal East African architecture, with ornately carved doors and window frames and fretwork balconies, designed to protect the modesty of the female inhabitants. Sadly, many of these have been destroyed; there is now a preservation order on the remaining doors and balconies, so further losses should hopefully be prevented. The **Mombasa Old Town Conservation Society** (Map p312; ☎ 312246; Sir Mbarak Hinawy Rd) is encouraging the renovation of many dilapidated buildings.

From the outside there's little evidence of what any of these buildings were once used for. To flesh out their history, it's worth picking up a copy of the booklet *The Old Town Mombasa: A Historical Guide* (KSh200) from the tourist office or the Fort Jesus ticket office. This guide features old photos, a good map and building-by-building descriptions.

OLD LAW COURTS

The old law courts on Nkrumah Rd have been converted into an informal **gallery** (Map p312; Nkrumah Rd; admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm), with regularly changing displays of local art, Kenyan crafts, school competition pieces and votive objects from various tribal groups.

Tours

A number of tour companies have branches in Mombasa (see p94 for more details) and offer standard tours of the Old Town and Fort Jesus (from US\$50 per person), plus safaris to Shimba Hills National Reserve and Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. Most safaris are expensive lodge-based affairs, but there are a few camping safaris to Tsavo East and West.

Numerous activities are possible both north and south of Mombasa; most operators will pick you up from wherever you're staying for a small extra charge.

HARBOUR CRUISES

Luxury dhow cruises around the harbour are very popular in Mombasa and, notwithstanding the price, they are an excellent way to see the harbour, the Old Town and Fort Jesus, and get a slap-up meal at the end of it.

Topping the billing is the **Tamarind Dhow** (Map p312; ☎ 475074; www.tamarinddhow.com), run by the posh Tamarind restaurant chain of the same name. The cruise embarks from the jetty below the Tamarind restaurant in Nyali, and includes a harbour tour and a fantastic meal. The lunch cruises leave at 1pm and cost US\$40/20 per adult/child, or US\$80/40 when combined with a city tour. Longer and more splendid evening cruises leave at 6.30pm and cost US\$70/35. There

is a choice of seafood, steak and vegetarian dishes. Prices include a complimentary cocktail and transport to and from your hotel.

The other big operator is **Jahazi Marine** (☎ 5485001; www.severin-kenya.com), which offers evening trips for US\$75. The price includes transfers, a sunset cruise, a walk through the Old Town and entry to Fort Jesus for the light show and a five-course meal; for an extra US\$10 you can sample a casino and head on to the Bora Bora International Nightclub in Bamburi, in the northern beaches.

Festivals & Events

The **Mombasa Carnival** (zainab@africaonline.co.ke) is the city's major annual event, held every November. The festival sees Moi Ave come alive for the day with street parades, floats, and lots of music from the diverse cultural groups of the coastal region and the rest of Kenya.

Sleeping

There are plenty of budget choices in Mombasa, as well as some excellent midrange hotels, but there are few top-end options. Many people choose to skip Mombasa and head straight for the beaches to the north and south. All the places listed here have fans and mosquito nets as a minimum requirement, though their condition varies widely!

BUDGET

Most of the really cheap choices are in the busy, noisy area close to the bus stations on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenyatta Ave. Women travelling alone might want to opt for something a little further up the price scale.

Tana Guest House (Map p314; ☎ 490550; cnr Mwembe Tayari & Gatundu Rds; s/d/tr KSh400/500/600) A simple but friendly place in the slightly seedy area close to the Jomo Kenyatta Ave bus stations. Rooms are clean, tidy and pretty much what you'd expect for the price.

New People's Hotel (Map p314; Abdel Nasser Rd; s/d with shared bathroom KSh200/350, with private bathroom KSh350/500) This basic dosshouse gets loads of noise from traffic and the Noor Mosque next door, but you can't argue with the prices. There's a good, cheap restaurant downstairs, and it's very convenient for buses to Lamu and Malindi.

Evening Guest House (Map p314; ☎ 221380; Mnazi Moja Rd; s/d with shared bathroom KSh600/800, s with private bathroom KSh700-800, d with private bathroom

KSh1000) Set in a thatched courtyard behind its own large restaurant area, the Evening does have something of the night about it, but is still mostly good value despite a few cramped singles.

Beracha Guest House (Map p314; ☎ 0722-673798; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d KSh500/750) This popular central choice has variable but clean rooms in a range of unusual shapes. There's a cheap restaurant, and ongoing building work should add a few more strange angles to the geometry.

Glory Bed & Breakfast (Map p314; ☎ 228282; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast KSh700/1000/1400) Adequate, if a little cramped: rooms have fans but no mosquito nets. Taking a room with shared bathroom knocks KSh200 off the price. There have been no reports concerning security issues lately, but always be cautious when travelling.

MIDRANGE

Rates include breakfast for all of the following options.

Castle Royal Hotel (Map p314; ☎ 220373; info@680 hotel.co.ke; Moi Ave; s/d/tr KSh2300/3000/4200; ☎ 📺) Quite simply the best hotel in town, and at these prices one of the best deals in the whole of Kenya. The newly renovated Castle Royal is a joy to stay in, with TV, phone, fridge, safe, iron-framed bed and stylish décor in every room, plus an excellent breakfast in the cool terrace restaurant at the front. A shop, travel agent and Chinese restaurant round out the amenities.

New Palm Tree Hotel (Map p314; ☎ 312623; Nk-rumah Rd; s/d KSh1160/1740) The appealing New Palm Tree may be a step down from the competition in facilities, but it has character and charm in spades, with all the rooms set around a fantastic roof terrace. The mosquito nets are variable and hot water can be unreliable, but the rooms are big, the bar and restaurant are well priced, and it has the most sociable atmosphere in town.

Lotus Hotel (Map p312; ☎ 313207; lotus_hotel@hotmail.com; Cathedral Rd; s/d/tr KSh1800/2500/3000; ☎) A welcome change from dull everyday hotel design. The rooms don't quite live up to the delightful inner courtyard with its Muslim-style fountain, but they're quiet and well sized, with two bars and a restaurant catering amply for other needs.

Manson Hotel (Map p312; ☎ 222356; vnmulji@africaonline.co.ke; Kisumu Rd; s KSh1050-1650, d KSh1650-2300; ☎) This tall balconied block is hidden

away in a quiet residential neighbourhood and is well looked after, with plain but spacious standard rooms. Security is very tight, and amenities include a restaurant, TV and pool room.

Hotel Dorse (Map p314; ☎ 222252; hoteldorse@africaonline.co.ke; Kwa Shibu Rd; s/d/tw KSh2500/3000/3500; ☎) Marketed at a conference clientele, this is a good low-lying building with balconies, big beds and showers designed for very tall people. As a minor downside, it's currently overlooked by shabby tenement blocks and a building site.

Hotel Sapphire (Map p312; ☎ 491657; hotelsapphire@africaonline.co.ke; Mwembe Tayari Rd; s/d/tr KSh2200/3300/4200; ☎ 📺) The Sapphire offers passable rooms conveniently close to the train station, but the big multistorey building looks better from the outside than inside, and could do with a touch up in places. The swimming pool's often empty.

Dancourt Hotel (Map p314; ☎ 226278; swamboi2002@yahoo.com; Meru Rd; s/d KSh1500/2000) Only half built, the existing rooms show laudable ambition, with fancy carved doors and huge TVs, but the blocked views detract considerably. When the upstairs balcony rooms are finished they'll be much nicer and the charming pastel-orange patio café should come into its own.

Glory Guest House (Map p314; ☎ 228202; Kwa Shibu Rd; s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh600/1000/1400, s with private bathroom KSh900-1500, d with private bathroom KSh1300-2000, tr with private bathroom KSh2100; ☎) This place shares a dodgy air with its fellow Glory properties, but most rooms are reasonable, especially the VIP rooms further up the scale. As the massive padlocks suggest, be conscious of the security of your belongings while travelling.

TOP END

Royal Court Hotel (Map p314; ☎ 223379; royalcourt@swiftmombasa; Haile Selassie Rd; s US\$60-70, d US\$75-95, ste US\$130; ☎) The swish lobby is the highlight of this stylish business hotel – executive rooms are reasonably plush, but the standard rooms are beaten hands down by those at the Castle Royal, which cost half as much! Still, service and facilities are good, disabled access is a breeze, and you get great views and excellent food at the Tawa Terrace restaurant on the roof.

Tamarind Village (Map p312; ☎ 473161; www.tamarind.co.ke; Silos Rd, Nyali; apt KSh8000-16,000; ☎ 📺)

The highly superior Tamarind restaurant chain now has its own highly superior accommodation complex, with a range of luxury serviced apartments for anyone too full, rich or highly superior to stagger back to town. Full kitchenettes give you the option of cooking, but really, with Tamarind and the resort's private Harbour restaurant next door, why on earth would you want to?

Hotel Sai Rose (Map p312; ☎ 222897; hotelsairose@iconnect.co.ke; Nyerere Ave; s US\$30-40, d US\$40-60, ste US\$75; ☎) It has to be said that this is a bit of an oddity: a long narrow building with tight pastel corridors stuck between two patches of waste ground. For the price, though, rooms aren't bad at all, especially the Swahili-themed executive rooms and the blue honeymoon suite.

Eating

Eating on the coast can be a completely different experience from dining inland, with more variety, fresh seafood, and a whole new range of spices and flavours. There's a wide selection of restaurants in Mombasa, reflecting both Swahili tradition and the cosmopolitan ethnic make-up of the city itself.

RESTAURANTS

Kenyan & Swahili

Explore the Old Town for cheap, authentic Swahili cuisine; if in doubt, follow the locals to find the best deals. Most places are Muslim-run, so no alcoholic drinks are sold and they're closed until after sunset during Ramadan.

Island Dishes (Map p312; ☎ 0720-887311; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh50-180) Once your eyes have managed to adjust to the dazzling strip lights, feast them on the tasty menu at this whiter-than-white Lamu-themed canteen. **Mishkaki** (kebabs), chicken tikka, fish, fresh juices and all the usual favourites are on offer to eat in or take away, though the biryani (curry and rice) is only available at lunchtime.

New Recoder Restaurant (Map p312; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh50-180) A local favourite in a new location, slightly tattier than Island but with much the same coast cuisine.

Singh Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 493283; Mwembe Tayari Rd; mains KSh50-150) The Sikh temple near the bus stands operates this small cafeteria restaurant, tipped by Mombasans in the know as one of the best places in town for

vegetarians. KSh250 is more than enough to get you a massive feed.

Indian

Shehna Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 224801; Fatemi House, Maungano Rd; mains from KSh290; ☎ noon-2pm & 7.30-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Mombasa's classiest curry house specialises in tandoori and *mughlai* (north Indian) cuisine, and has a huge menu, complimented by a tasteful line in drapery. It's very popular with well-heeled Indian families, and the food is authentic and very good.

Splendid View Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 5487270; splendidrestaurants@yahoo.com; Maungano Rd; mains KSh100-300; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5.30-10.30pm) You'll be looking in vain if you expect magnificent vistas from the street seating here – the name merely refers to the Splendid Hotel opposite. Luckily the food compensates for this sly misnomer, covering styles from tandoori to Chinese-influenced *pili pili*, a kind of curry.

New Chetna Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 224477; Haile Selassie Rd; mains KSh200-300) This is a very popular South Indian canteen restaurant with a long list of vegetarian goodies, including *masala dosa* (curried vegetables inside a lentil-flour pancake) and *idli* (rice dumpling). The various *thali* are great value.

Chinese

New Overseas Chinese-Korean Restaurant & Bar (Map p312; ☎ 230729; Moi Ave; mains KSh220-480) Despite the overblown name and the hilariously clichéd interior design, the New Overseas delivers on its Oriental promises and is particularly strong on seafood; a full Chinese or Korean feast will cost you up to KSh1000.

China Town Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 315098; Nyerere Ave; mains KSh400-600) More incredibly chintzy décor, more great Korean and Chinese food. It's opposite the Holy Ghost Cathedral on Nyerere Ave.

International

Tamarind Restaurant (Map p312; ☎ 471747; Silos Rd, Nyali; lobster per 100g KSh330, mains KSh900-1800) Perhaps the finest of the various Tamarind ventures. Eating on the terrace of this grand Moorish building overlooking the water is a romantic splurge you can't afford to miss. Seafood is the focus, but meat eaters won't

go hungry and vegetarians even get their own menu. The only bum note is the rather cheesy keyboard music, which takes a few *dawas* (vodka, lime and honey cocktails) to drown out.

Little Chef Dinners Pub (Map p314; ☎ 222740; Moi Ave; mains KSh100-210) Thankfully this funky green-hued pub-restaurant has nothing to do with the British motorway diners of the same name, dishing up big, tasty portions of Kenyan and international dishes from pilau to stroganoff. The 1st-floor bar has a pool table and a great breezy balcony, one of the most relaxed places in town for a beer. There are a couple more outlets in the area, but this is by far the nicest.

Baron Restaurant & Pub (Map p314; ☎ 314971; Digo Rd; mains KSh250-650) While it appears at first like a pretty average drinking hall, a glance at Baron's ambitious menu reveals a lot more than cold Tusker passing through the kitchen. Crocodile, ostrich, guinea fowl and lobster (KSh1750) all feature, and even the drinks list takes up a page or two.

Siesta Bar & Restaurant (Map p312; ☎ 474896; Nyali Rd, Nyali; mains KSh350-600; ☎ from 5pm Tue-Sun) You say *mzungu* (white person), they say gringo...we just say *olé* – this is quite possibly the only Mexican restaurant in East Africa, set in a fine garden above the harbour by the Nyali Bridge. It's great for a sunset beer and the near-authentic food comes highly recommended.

Fontanella Steakhouse & Beer Garden (Map p314; ☎ 222740; City House, Moi Ave; mains KSh100-250) A popular open-air place in a courtyard off Moi Ave, with *nyama choma*, steaks and Western offerings, such as spag bol. There's a large birdcage for entertainment, though without many outside lights you can hardly see it (or the menus) at night.

Rozina House Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 311107; Moi Ave; mains KSh500-1200) Walk along Moi Ave in the evening and you're bound to be approached by touts for this would-be upmarket eatery. The food is reputedly good, but if you've just been dragged in off the street the prices are distinctly off-putting. Cheaper meals are available at the café next door.

CAFÉS

Cozy Inn (Map p312; ☎ 0733-925707; Kibokoni Rd; mains KSh80-195; ☎) A rare new addition to the Old Town scene, this friendly little café's classical music soothes the senses as you surf

or snack. Lunch and dinner are planned weekly, with just four Italian-themed main dishes available each day.

Pistacchio Café (Map p314; ☎ 221989; cnr Meru Rd & Mwindani Rd; buffet lunch KSh450; ☎ Mon-Sat) A Swiss-run place, with excellent ice cream and popular lunchtime buffets, usually consisting of a mixture of Indian and Western dishes. À-la-carte staples such as spaghetti are also served.

QUICK EATS

There are dozens of inexpensive local cafés and restaurants serving quick meals and snacks. Street food is an even faster option: stalls around town sell snacks like cassava, samosas, bhajis and kebabs, while a few set up trestle tables to dish out stew and *ugali* (maize meal). For dessert, vendors can ply you with *haluwa* (an Omani version of Turkish delight), fried taro roots, sweet baobab seeds and sugared donuts.

Blue Room Restaurant (Map p314; ☎ 224021; Haile Selassie Rd; snacks KSh20-50, mains KSh110-325; ☎) The Blue Room is hugely popular for its fast food, from cakes and sandwiches to curries, steaks and pizza. Drinks are made with filtered water, and there are no fewer than two back-up generators in case of power cuts! There's also a highly recommended ice-cream parlour.

Fayaz Baker & Confectioners (Map p314; ☎ 220382; Jomo Kenyatta Ave) Mombasa's 'Master Baker' cooks up excellent cakes and muffins in several locations around town; great for breakfast on the run or a leisurely mid-morning snack.

SELF-CATERING

Nakumatt supermarket (Map p312; ☎ 228945; Nyerere Ave) Close to the Likoni ferry, with an astounding selection of provisions, drinks, consumer goods and hardware items, just in case you need a TV, bicycle or lawnmower to go with your groceries.

Main market (Map p314; Digo Rd) Mombasa's dilapidated 'covered' market building, formerly the Mackinnon Market, is packed with stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables. Roaming produce carts also congregate in the surrounding streets, and dozens of *miraa* (bundles of leafy twigs and shoots that are chewed as a stimulant and appetite-suppressant) sellers join the fray when the regular deliveries come in.

Drinking

There are plenty of good drinking holes in Mombasa and many restaurants cater primarily to drinkers in the evening. Keep an eye out for flyers advertising reggae concerts and other events.

New Florida Nightclub (☎ 313127; Mama Ngina Dr; admission men/women KSh150/70; ☎ 24hr; ☎) This vast seafront complex houses Mombasa's liveliest nightclub, which boasts its own casino, restaurants and even an open-air swimming pool. It's owned by the same people as the infamous Florida clubs in Nairobi, and offers much the same atmosphere, clientele and Las Vegas-style floorshows. A taxi fare here is around KSh400.

Office (Map p312; ☎ 451700; Shelly Beach Rd, Likoni) Perched above the Likoni ferry jetty and *matatu* stand, the entirely unaptly named Office is a real locals' hang-out, with regular massive reggae and dub nights shaking the thatched rafters.

Casablanca Restaurant & Club (Map p314; Mnazi Moja Rd; admission KSh50-100) Amid the *makuti* and cartoon animals, this loud split-level bar-club pulls in plenty of Westerners, but also a *lot* of prostitutes – all-male groups will be mobbed mercilessly, especially on the dance floor.

Toyz Disco (Map p314; ☎ 313931; Baluchi St; admission KSh100) A loud and lively Kenyan night-spot just off Nkrumah Rd. The 'Be Casual' sign outside announces in graphic form that drugs, nudity, fighting and weapons are banned, which seems to work as it's perfectly friendly inside. Admission is free for women. Expect plenty of gangsta rap and jangly Congolese music.

Entertainment

Nyali Cinemax (Map p312; ☎ 470000; info@nyalycinemax.com; Nyali Centre, Nyali Rd, Nyali; tickets KSh250-350) A plush, modern cinema complex close to Tamarind, also incorporating a casino, sports bar, cybercafé, Indian deli and restaurant, plus a bowling alley.

Kenya Cinema (Map p314; ☎ 312355; Nkrumah Ave; tickets stalls/balcony KSh120/150) An appealing old cinema that screens Hindi movies regularly (usually with English subtitles) and Western blockbusters occasionally.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Flights are available with **Kenya Airways** (Map p314; ☎ 221251; www.kenya-airways.com; TSS Towers,

Nkrumah Rd) between Nairobi and Mombasa's **Moi International Airport** (☎ 433211) at least six times daily (KSh6835, one hour).

Mombasa Air Safari (☎ 433061; www.mombasaair.safari.com; Moi International Airport) flies to Malindi (US\$21, 25 minutes), Lamu (US\$90, 1¼ hours), and Amboseli (US\$220, one hour), Tsavo (US\$220, on request) and Maasai Mara (US\$229) National Parks.

BUS & MATATU

Nairobi

There are dozens of daily departures in either direction (mostly in the early morning and late evening). Recommended companies:

Akamba (Map p314; ☎ 490269; Jomo Kenyatta Ave)

Busscar (Map p314; ☎ 222854; Abdel Nasser Rd)

Busstar (Map p314; Nairobi ☎ 02-219525; Abdel Nasser Rd)

Coastline Safaris (Map p314; ☎ 312083; Mwembe Tayari St)

Falcon (Map p314; Nairobi ☎ 02-229662) Offices on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenyatta Ave.

Mash Express (Map p314; ☎ 491955; Jomo Kenyatta Ave)

Mombasa Raha (Map p314; ☎ 225716) Offices on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenyatta Ave.

Msafiri (Map p312; ☎ 314691; Aga Khan Rd)

Daytime services take at least six hours, while the overnight trip takes anywhere from eight to 10 hours. Fares vary from KSh500 to KSh1000. Most companies have at least four departures daily.

All buses travel via Voi (KSh300), which is also served by frequent *matatus* from the Kobil petrol station on Jomo Kenyatta Ave (KSh200).

Heading North

Red Metro Mombasa city buses run north from the Likoni ferry, which lands roughly every 45 minutes, passing through town on Digo Rd and heading to Mtwapa (KSh30, 40 minutes) or Malindi (KSh120, two hours).

There are numerous daily *matatus* and small minibuses up the coast to Malindi, leaving from in front of the Noor Mosque on Abdel Nasser Rd. Buses take up to 2½ hours (KSh100), *matatus* about two hours (KSh120). You can also catch an 'express' *matatu* (KSh150), which takes longer to fill up, but is then supposedly nonstop all the way.

Tawakal, Falcon, Mombasa Raha and TSS Express have buses to Lamu, most leaving at

around 7am (report 30 minutes early) from their offices on Abdel Nasser Rd. Buses take around seven hours to reach the Lamu ferry at Mokoke (KSh400 to 500), stopping in Malindi (KSh150, two hours).

Heading South

For buses and *matatus* to the beaches south of Mombasa you first need to get off the island via the Likoni ferry (see below). Very frequent buses and *matatus* leave from the mainland ferry terminal and travel down the southern coast.

TRAIN

The popular overnight train to/from Nairobi is a great place to meet other travellers and hook up for safaris or travel on the coast. Trains leave from Mombasa at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, arriving the next day somewhere between 8.30am and 11am. The fares are KSh3160/2275 in 1st/2nd class with dinner, breakfast and bedding; reserve as far in advance as possible. The **booking office** (☎ 312220; ☎ 8am-5pm) is at the station in Mombasa.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There is currently no public transport to/from the airport, so you're best taking a taxi; the fare to central Mombasa is around KSh650. Coming from the city centre, the usual fare is KSh800, but you'll have to bargain down from KSh1000.

BOAT

The two Likoni ferries connect Mombasa Island with the southern mainland, running at frequent intervals throughout the day and night. It's free to pedestrians and KSh35 for a car. To get to the jetty from the centre, take a Likoni *matatu* from Digo Rd (KSh10).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Recommended car-hire companies in Mombasa include the following:

Avenue Motors (Map p312; ☎ 225126; Moi Ave)

Avis (Map p312; ☎ 314950; Southern House, Moi Ave)

Budget (☎ 221281; budgetmba@budget-kenya.com; Moi International Airport)

Glory Car Hire (Map p312; ☎ 313561; Moi Ave) Insurance excess costs KSh150,000.

Hertz (☎ 4332405; mombasa@hertz.co.ke; Moi International Airport)

MATATU

Matatus charge KSh10 to KSh20 for short hops. For the Likoni ferry and Nakumatt supermarket, loads of *matatus* run south along Nyerere Ave to the transport stand by the ferry terminal.

TAXI

Mombasa taxis are just as expensive as those in Nairobi, only harder to find. Assume it'll cost KSh200 to KSh300 from the train station to the city centre.

SHIMBA HILLS NATIONAL RESERVE

This 320-sq-km **reserve** (adult/child US\$23/10; ☎ 6am-6pm) lies directly inland from Diani Beach and covers a wonderful landscape of steep-sided valleys, rolling hills and lush pockets of tropical rainforest, rated one of the country's best surviving biodiversity zones. The hills are home to a healthy population of leopards and a vast abundance of birdlife, and you may also spot the reserve's most famous resident, the rare sable antelope. This tall, regal antelope has a striking black-and-white coat and long, curved horns, and is now protected after the population plummeted to less than 120 animals in the 1970s.

The other main attraction is the large community of elephants. In 2005 numbers reached an amazing 600, far too many for this tiny space; instead of culling the herds, KWS organised an unprecedented US\$3.2 million translocation operation, capturing no fewer than 400 elephants and moving them to Tsavo East National Park.

Highly recommended guided forest walks are run by the **KWS** (☎ 040-4159; PO Box 30, Kwale) from the Sheldrick Falls ranger post at the southern end of the park down to scenic Sheldrick Falls on the Machenmwana River. Walks are free but a tip would be appropriate.

One more initiative that should be fully operational by the time you read this is the **Shimba Hills Triangular Forest** project, a community initiative run by the forest guides on the northeastern boundary of the reserve. This biologically rich area is being developed as an ecotourism attraction, with 90-minute tours taking in a replica *kaya* (sacred forest) shrine, troupes of resident Sykes monkeys and over 40 species of butterfly.

SAFETY ON THE COAST

Security along the coast has improved in recent years, but you still need to be careful around the popular resorts. Muggings are a risk on the minor roads that run between the main highway and the various beach hotels. Take a taxi or *matatu*, particularly at night.

All the resorts and cottages on the coast employ *askaris* (guards) to keep out undesirable, but once you're on the beach it's easy to become a target for 'snatch and run' crimes. Leave watches, wallets, jewellery and other items of value in your room.

Beach boys – young Kenyan men who walk up and down the beaches selling everything from woodcarvings to marijuana and sexual favours – are a fact of life at the big resorts and their dogged persistence can be wearing. All you can do is refuse politely; they should move on quickly.

Sleeping

Shimba Rainforest Lodge (☎ 040-4077; Kinango Rd; full board with shared bathroom per person US\$120) A good Treetops-style affair built from indigenous woods, with a walkway through the rainforest and a viewing platform and bar. Children under seven years are not admitted. The floodlit waterhole here attracts quite a lot of wildlife, including leopards.

Mukurumuji Tented Camp (☎ 040-2412; www.dianihouse.com; full board per person US\$94) Set on a forested hill, this place is perched above the Mukurumuji River on the southern boundary of the park. Guests can enjoy walking trips along the river and to Sheldrick Falls. Transfers from Diani cost US\$10 each way.

The **public campsite** (per person US\$8) and excellent round **bandas** (per person US\$20) are superbly located on the edge of an escarpment close to the main gate, with stunning views down to Diani Beach. It's also possible to camp at Hunter's Camp, close to Sheldrick Falls.

Getting There & Away

You'll need a 4WD to enter the Shimba Hills National Reserve. From Likoni, small minibuses (number 34) to Kwale pass the main gate (KSh40). Most visitors come on overnight safari packages, but the Mukurumuji Tented Camp can organise transfers from Diani Beach.

MWALUGANJE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

This **sanctuary** (☎ 040-41121; nonresident adult/child US\$15/2, vehicles KSh150-500; 🕒 6am-6pm) is a good example of community-based conservation and most local people are stakeholders in the project. It was opened in October 1995 to create a corridor along an ancient elephant migration route between the Shimba Hills National Reserve and the Mwaluganje Forest Reserve, and comprises 2400 hectares of rugged, beautiful country along the valley of the Cha Shimba River.

More than 150 elephants live in the sanctuary and you're likely to see a large variety of other fauna and flora, including rare cycad forest. (This primitive, palmlike plant species is over 300 million years old.) There's a good information centre close to the main gate and a second ticket office on the outskirts of Kwale. Don't miss the chance to buy the unique postcards and paper goods as souvenirs for the folks back home – they're all made from recycled elephant dung!

The main entrance to the sanctuary is about 13km northeast of Shimba Hills National Reserve on the road to Kinango. A shorter route runs from Kwale to the Golini gate, passing the Mwaluganje ticket office. It's only 5km, but the track is 4WD only.

TIWI BEACH

☎ 040

This wonderfully undeveloped beach is reached by two dirt roads that wind their way through the coastal scrub about 20km south of Likoni. It's a world away from the bustle down the road at Diani Beach, and while the seclusion does mean you have to be a bit careful walking around, it's worth it for the real sense of peace and quiet on the beautiful white-sand beach.

Tiwi is a tranquil haven but it's still very popular with those in the know, so you should book well ahead if you intend to visit during the high season. Beach boys and souvenir sellers are fairly prevalent at the southern end of Tiwi, but are almost unheard of at the northern end of the strip.

Sleeping & Eating

Unlike the all-inclusive resorts at Diani, self-catering is the name of the game here. The options are divided into two groups, linked by a bumpy track just inland from the beach (walking is not recommended).

Sand Island Beach Cottages (☎ 3300043; www.sandislandtiwi.com; cottages low season KSh2750-5500, high season KSh3000-6050) A lively posse of dogs enhances the warm welcome you'll get at these lovely colonial-style cottages, set in a tidy garden at the northern end of the beach. Nearby Sand Island is a lovely place to relax and catch some sun.

Maweni Beach Cottages (☎ 3300012; www.maweni.beach.com; cottages low season KSh2000-4700, high season KSh2500-5200) Owned by the Tiwi Beach Resort, this place consists of attractive *makuti*-roofed cottages overlooking a peaceful cove, with a choice of garden or sea views. There's no direct beach frontage, but facilities are good.

Moonlight Bay Cottages (☎ 3300040; cottages low season KSh3000-5400, high season KSh3400-6200) Just next door to Sand Island, this is a decent option, with well-equipped one- to three-bedroom cottages and a shady open-air bar-restaurant area.

Coral Cove Cottages (☎ 3205195; coralcove.tiwi.beach.com; cottages KSh3500-5200) A fantastically friendly place, with a wide variety of comfy, nicely decorated cottages sleeping one to five people. The larger cottages have kitchens, and cooks/cleaners can be hired for KSh500 per day.

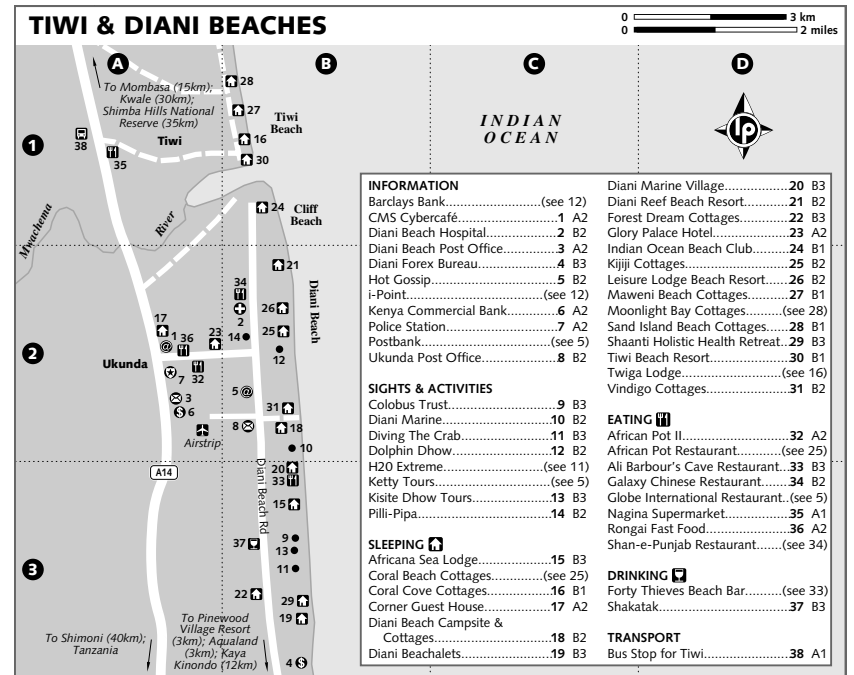
Twiga Lodge (☎ 3205126; camping KSh200, s/d KSh800/1500, cottages KSh1500) The only really backpacker-oriented place in Tiwi, Twiga is a good place to meet younger independent travellers. Accommodation runs from the beachfront camp site and basic four-bed cottages to the superior 'show rooms' (B&B KSh3000 to KSh4500). Local taxi drivers tout quite heavily for this place, and there always seems to be a crowd of hangers-on; you'd be sensible not to leave valuables lying around.

Tiwi Beach Resort (☎ 3202801; www.tiwibeachresort.com; half board s/d low season US\$46/79, high season US\$54/96; 🍷 📺 🚿) This vast package-holiday complex is the diametric opposite of the little family-run concerns here, with long whitewashed accommodation blocks, three restaurants, a nightclub and a rather snazzy pool design.

Nagina supermarket (A14 Hwy) Near the turn-off to the Tiwi Beach Hotel, self-caterers can pick up supplies here.

Getting There & Away

Any buses and *matatus* on the Likoni-Ukunda road can drop you at the start of



either track down to Tiwi (KSh30); keep an eye out for the sign to Tiwi Beach Resort. The southern turn-off by the supermarket, known locally as Tiwi 'spot', is much easier to find.

Although it's only 3.5km to the beach, both access roads are notorious for muggings, so be sure to take a taxi (KSh300) or hang around for a lift.

DIANI BEACH & UKUNDA

☎ 040

As the principal package resort on the southern coast, Diani Beach tends to inspire mixed feelings among its various visitors. There's certainly not much Kenyan about the massive hotel complexes that line the long beach, but the setting as a whole is certainly more exotic than your average Mediterranean holiday strip; the inland parks and southern islands are within easy reach; and the number of activities on offer should be enough to keep even the most cynical tourist from grumbling. If you're just out for a drink, a laugh and a bit of time out between 'serious' travel, the atmosphere

is as good as you'll find anywhere on the Kenyan coast.

Orientation

The town of Ukunda, which is on the main Mombasa-Tanzania road, is the turn-off point for Diani Beach. It has a post office, a bank, several shops, and a number of basic lodging houses and restaurants. From there, Palm Ave runs about 2.5km to a T-junction with the beach road, where you'll find everything Diani has to offer.

Information

EMERGENCY

Diani Beach Hospital (☎ 3202435; www.dianibeachhospital.com; 🕒 24hr)

Police (☎ 3202121, 3202229; Ukunda)

INTERNET ACCESS

CMS Cybercafé (Palm Ave, Ukunda; per min KSh1.50;

🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-7pm Sun)

Hot Gossip (☎ 3203307; wellconnectednet@hotgossip.co.ke; Legend Casino Complex; per min KSh5; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Also offers international phone and fax services.

MONEY**Barclays Bank** (☎ 3202448; Barclays Centre)**Diani Forex Bureau** (☎ 3203595)**Kenya Commercial Bank** (☎ 3202197; Ukunda)**Postbank** (Diani shopping centre) Western Union money transfers.**POST****Diani Beach post office** (Diani Beach Rd)**Ukunda post office** (Ukunda)**TOURIST INFORMATION****i-Point** (☎ 3202234; Barclays Centre; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Private information office with plenty of brochures. Also sells the slightly dated *Diani Beach Tourist-Guide* (KSh50).**Dangers & Annoyances**

Crime is an occasional problem at Diani; see p321 for more information. Souvenir sellers around the shopping centres are a daily nuisance.

Sights

As a beach resort Diani isn't exactly geared towards cultural tourism, but there are a few interesting spots worth seeking out.

The **Colobus Trust** (☎ 3203519; www.colobustrust.org; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), a conservation project aimed at protecting Diani's population of endangered colobus monkeys, offers informative guided walks (KSh500) from its research station off the southern part of Diani Beach Rd. They provide an excellent introduction to the coral rainforest habitat and a good chance of seeing other indigenous wildlife alongside the resident monkeys.Inaugurated in 2001, **Kaya Kinondo** (☎ 0722-344426; kayakinondo@hotmail.co.ke) is a superb grass-roots ecotourism project south of Diani. Guided walks take you through the *kaya* itself, a forest sacred to the Digo people, and include visits to a traditional village, a tribal medicine man and the main primary school. The local community is involved at every level, managing the conservation process, training guides, and producing crafts and other goods for sale to visitors.**Activities****DIVING**

All the big resorts either have their own dive schools or work with a local operator. Rates are fairly standard: Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) open-water

courses cost €490, and reef trips with two dives cost €90. Most dive sites here are under 29m and there's even a purposely sunk shipwreck, the 15m former fishing boat MFV *Alpha Funguo*, at 28m.

Main operators:

Diani Marine (☎ 3203450; www.dianimarine.com; Diani Marine Village) Very professional German-run centre with its own accommodation (see opposite).**Diving The Crab** (☎ 3202003; www.divingthecrab.com; Nomads complex) The most commonly used outfit for the big hotels. Offers the cheapest open-water course (€350).**WATER SPORTS**

With such a long stretch of beach, water sports are unsurprisingly popular, and everything from banana boats to jet skis are on offer. As with diving, all the big hotels either have their own equipment (for common activities, such as snorkelling and windsurfing) or arrange bookings with local firms.

Main operators:

H2O Extreme (☎ 0721-495876; www.h2o-extreme.com; Nomads complex)**Wet & Wild** (☎ 0722-705350; www.wetandwilddiani.com; Aqualand, Pinewood Village Resort)**Sleeping BUDGET****Corner Guest House** (☎ 3203355; Ukunda; s/d with shared bathroom KSh400/500) If you really need to sleep cheap, Ukunda's your only option. This is the best of a number of basic lodgings near the Diani junction; rooms are simple but clean, with fans and piped music until midnight. Add KSh50 from November to March. Breakfast is available for KSh200.**Diani Beach Campsite & Cottages** (☎ 3203192; dianicampsite@yahoo.com; camping low/high season KSh300/400, cottages low season KSh1500-2500, high season KSh3000-6000) The only budget choice anywhere near the beach, although unless you're camping, even the low-season prices are steep. The tent space is a small, simple lawn site with toilets and an eating area. The compact cottages sleep up to four people.**Glory Palace Hotel** (☎ 3203392; Palm Ave; low season s KSh800, d KSh1200-2000, tr 2000, high season s KSh1000, d KSh2000-3000, tr KSh2500; ☎) Not exactly a bargain but the cheapest hotel option for solo travellers, and at least you get breakfast, security and use of the swimming pool for your money. With constant *mata-tus* passing by, it's easy to get to the beach strip or the Ukunda transport stage.**MIDRANGE**

All of Diani's other accommodation is spread out along the beach road. Unless otherwise indicated, all places in this category are self-catering.

Kijiji Cottages (☎ 3300035; forbes@wananchi.com; cottages KSh5000-7000; ☎) These big, characterful cottages, sleeping up to five people, are set along winding paths in their own garden complex, giving them an exclusive feel. Even better, the secluded beach is often cut off from the beach boys by the tide. Rates drop by KSh1000 in May and June but almost double over Christmas and New Year.**Coral Beach Cottages** (☎ 3202205; cottages low season KSh4000-5000, high season KSh7000-10,000) Just north of the junction, Coral Beach has large, well-appointed cottages set in a neat garden. The atmosphere is pleasant and relaxed, and the excellent African Pot Restaurant (p326) is right at the entrance gate.**Diani Marine Village** (☎ 3202367; www.dianimarine.com; s/d low season €25/30, high season €30/35) Although primarily a dive resort, the huge guest rooms are appealing, with fans, stone floors and four-poster mosquito nets. Unlike most places in this class it's not self-catering.**Vindigo Cottages** (☎ 3202192; vindigocottages@kenyaweb.com; cottages low season KSh1500-3500, high season KSh2000-4000) A rather sweet collection of little orange cottages sloping down to the sea, each sleeping between two and eight people. There are no fans but the sea breeze keeps you cool, and all the cottages have mosquito nets.**Diani Beachalets** (☎ 3202180; dianibeachalets@wananchi.com; bandas per person KSh550, cottages low season KSh900-2500, high season KSh1300-3400) Towards the southern end of the strip, this place is a little old, but offers plenty of space. The accommodation options vary hugely, from two-person *bandas* to four-bedroom sea-front cottages with kitchen.**TOP END**

There are at least 13 flashy resort complexes spread out along the beach strip. Unless otherwise stated, prices listed are all-inclusive rates for standard rooms. Note that many of these places close for renovation between May and June.

Diani Reef Beach Resort (☎ 3202723; www.diani.reef.com; half board s/d low season from US\$100/160, high season from US\$190/250; ☎) One of the sharpest resorts on the south coast, Diani

Reef is well executed in every respect and boasts excellent facilities, including a health club, casino, water slide, six bars, three presidential suites and an open-air disco. The rooms themselves are nicely laid out, with spotless bathrooms and ethernet connections, and there's good disabled access.

Indian Ocean Beach Club (☎ 3203730; www.jacarandahotels.com; full board s/d low season US\$96/150, high season US\$130/200; ☎) A tasteful, low-key hotel in a Moorish style, near the mouth of the Mwachema River. It's one of the more sensitively designed places, consisting of 100 cottage-style rooms. Rooms have minibars and baths, and some are specially equipped for disabled guests.**Leisure Lodge Beach Resort** (☎ 3203624; www.leisurelodgebeachresort.com; s/d low season from €64/100, high season from €110/144; ☎) Bring your sense of direction if you want to stay here: the complex is so vast it's practically a small town in its own right, and even the staff sometimes have to consult the handy pathside maps! The sports facilities are particularly good and include an 18-hole golf course. Offers some disabled access.**Shaanti Holistic Health Retreat** (☎ 3202064; shaantihhr@yahoo.co.uk; low season s KSh7000-7900, d KSh12,200-13,700, high season s KSh11,500-13,300, d KSh19,400-22,300; ☎) This brand-new Ayurvedic sanctuary is the antithesis of the usual resort blocks, appealing to New Agers and pleasure seekers alike. There are just eight rooms, designed and decorated in a distinctly Indian-influenced sandstone style. Rates include the full-day's yoga spa program; other packages are available, and non-guests can also visit for the various classes and treatments.**Forest Dream Cottages** (☎ 3203224; www.forest.dreamcottages.com; cottages €124-290; ☎) If you're not bothered about the beach, Forest Dream is a fantastic luxury choice, set in an actual forest reserve. The six thatched houses are set up to an excellent standard; koi ponds, Jacuzzis and fully fitted kitchens are just some of the other treats on offer.**Pinewood Village Resort** (☎ 3203720; www.pine-wood-village.com; half board s/d US\$79/112, ste US\$164; ☎) On Galu Beach, down past the far end of the Diani strip, this tasteful, comprehensively equipped villa resort is run by Southern Cross Safaris. The Aqualand water-sports centre (☎ 3202719) is one of the best in the area.

Eating

African Pot Restaurant (☎ 3203890; Coral Beach Cottages; mains KSh200-220) Meals work to a simple formula: you order your meat (chicken, beef or goat), then choose from one of five or six ways to have it prepared and add any accompaniments you like. The house speciality, *karanga*, a tomato-based sauce with garlic, coriander and onions cooked in a real earthenware pot, is highly recommended. There's another branch (African Pot II) on Palm Ave.

Ali Barbour's Cave Restaurant (☎ 3202033; mains KSh550-900; ☎ from 7pm) A very sophisticated semi-open restaurant built into a cave near the Diani Sea Resort. Seafood is the main attraction, with lobster at KSh1800. Use the courtesy bus or take a taxi as people have been mugged walking down the track.

Galaxy Chinese Restaurant (☎ 3202529; Diani Complex; mains KSh305-615; ☎ noon-6.30pm) A smart Chinese restaurant with an outdoor 'island' pavilion bar and seating area. Courtesy bus available.

Shan-e-Punjab Restaurant (☎ 3202116; Diani Complex; mains KSh300-600) A very popular Indian restaurant opposite the Diani Reef Beach Resort. A wide range of curries are on offer, including some vegetarian options.

Globe International Restaurant (☎ 0733-740938; Diani Beach shopping centre; mains KSh380-850) As the name suggests, the Globe spans a number of far-flung cuisines, though much of the emphasis is on good old British cooking.

Rongai Fast Food (Palm Ave, Ukunda) Head for the painted flames to sample this local butchery restaurant, highly recommended for *nyama choma*. You can also buy fresh meat for beach barbecues here.

Self-caterers can stock up at the supermarkets in Diani's shopping centres, or at any of the shops, *dukas* and market stalls in Ukunda.

Drinking & Entertainment

Forty Thieves Beach Bar (☎ 3203419) Part of the Ali Barbour empire, this is easily the best bar on the strip, frequented on a daily basis by a crowd of expats and regulars known affectionately as the Reprobates. Food is served during the day, and it's open until the last guest leaves, ie pretty damn late.

Shakatak (☎ 3203124) Essentially the only full-on nightclub in Diani not attached to a hotel, Shakatak is quite hilariously seedy,

but can be fun once you know what to expect. Like most big Kenyan clubs, food is served at all hours.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Mombasa Air Safari's routes to Lamu and the southern national parks originate in Diani, passing through Mombasa (see p319).

BUS & MATATU

Numerous *matatus* run south from the Likoni ferry directly to Ukunda (KSh50, 30 minutes) and further south. From the Diani junction in Ukunda, *matatus* run down to the beach all day for KSh20.

TAXI

Taxis hang around Ukunda junction and all the main shopping centres; most hotels and restaurants will also have a couple waiting at night. Fares should cost KSh150 to KSh650, depending on distance.

SHIMONI & WASINI ISLAND

☎ 040

The village of Shimoni sits at the tip of a small peninsula about 76km south of Likoni. Dhow tours to nearby Wasini Island and the coral reefs of Kisite Marine National Park have become a big industry here. They're well run, but you can easily organise your own trip directly with the boatmen.

Sights

Villagers have opened up the old **slave caves** (adult/child KSh100/25; ☎ 8.30-10.30am & 1.30-6pm) as a tourist attraction, with a custodian who'll take you around the dank caverns to illustrate this little-discussed part of East African history.

Wasini Island is at its most appealing in the peace of the evening. There are several worthwhile things to see, including some ancient **Swahili ruins** and the **coral gardens** (adult/child KSh100/20), a bizarre landscape of exposed coral reefs with a boardwalk for viewing.

KISITE MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Just off the south coast of Wasini Island, this **marine park** (adult/child US\$5/2) is one of the best in Kenya, also incorporating the **Mpunguti Marine National Reserve**. The park covers 28 sq km of pristine coral reefs, and offers excellent diving and snorkelling. You have a

reasonable chance of seeing dolphins in the Shimoni Channel, and humpback whales are sometimes spotted between August and October.

It's easy to organise your own boat trip with a local captain; the going rate is KSh1500 per person or KSh6000 per boat, including lunch and a walk in the coral gardens on Wasini Island. Masks and snorkels can be hired for KSh200. A good place to start looking for a boatman is the office of **KWS** (☎ 52027; ☎ 6am-6pm), about 200m south of the main pier.

The best time to dive and snorkel is between October and March. Avoid June, July and August because of rough seas, silt and poor visibility.

Tours

Various companies offer organised dhow tours for snorkelling, all leaving Shimoni by 9am. Transfers from north- and south-coast hotels are available (US\$10 to US\$20), and longer trips with overnight stays can also be arranged. Certified divers can take one/two scuba dives for an extra US\$30/50 with any of these companies.

Main operators:

Dolphin Dhow (Map p323; ☎ 52255; office 3202144; www.dolphindhow.com; office Barclays Centre, Diani Beach; tours US\$75)

Kisite Dhow Tours (☎ 3202331; www.wasini-island.com; office Jadini Beach Hotel, Diani Beach; tours US\$55-75) Popular ecotourist trips.

Pilli-Pipa (☎ 3202401; www.pillipipa.com; office Colliers Centre, Diani Beach; tours US\$80) Diving trips from US\$130.

Sleeping & Eating

Mpunguti Lodge (☎ 52288; Wasini Island; camping KSh300, half board r with shared bathroom per person KSh1200) This is the only accommodation in Wasini village. The rooms are uncomplicated, with mosquito nets and small verandas; water comes from rain barrels. You'll need to bring towels, soap and any alcoholic drinks from the mainland.

Camp Eden (☎ 52027; KWS, Shimoni; camping adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person US\$10) Behind KWS headquarters, this camping ground offers accommodation with 'birdsong and insect noise' in the tropical forest south of the main jetty. There's a camp site, a covered cooking area, pit toilets and showers.

Pemba Channel Fishing Club (☎ 0722-205020; www.pembachannel.com; Shimoni; full board per person low season US\$85, high season US\$150; ☎) A proper

slice of elegant colonial style, with a handful of airy cottages set around a swimming pool. Deep-sea fishing is almost mandatory here; boats cost from US\$500 for nine hours (valid for up to four fishers).

Coral Reef Lodge (☎ 52015; www.oneearthsafaris.com; Shimoni; per person low season US\$52/64, high season US\$80/104; ☎) A pleasant resort-type place on a bluff overlooking the Shimoni Channel.

Getting There & Around

There are *matatus* every hour or so between Likoni and Shimoni (KSh100, one hour) until about 6pm. It's best to be at Likoni by 6.30am if you want to get to Shimoni in time to catch one of the dhow sailings.

The price of getting across the channel to Wasini Island depends to a degree on who you meet on arrival, how many are in your group and how affluent you look. Crossings should cost KSh300 to KSh500 each way, less if you negotiate return journeys.

MOMBASA TO KILIFI

☎ 041

Like the south coast, the coastline north of Mombasa has been extensively developed, although this trails off once you get north of Shanzu Beach. It's mostly set up for European package tourists on all-inclusive holidays, but there are some decent choices for independent travellers.

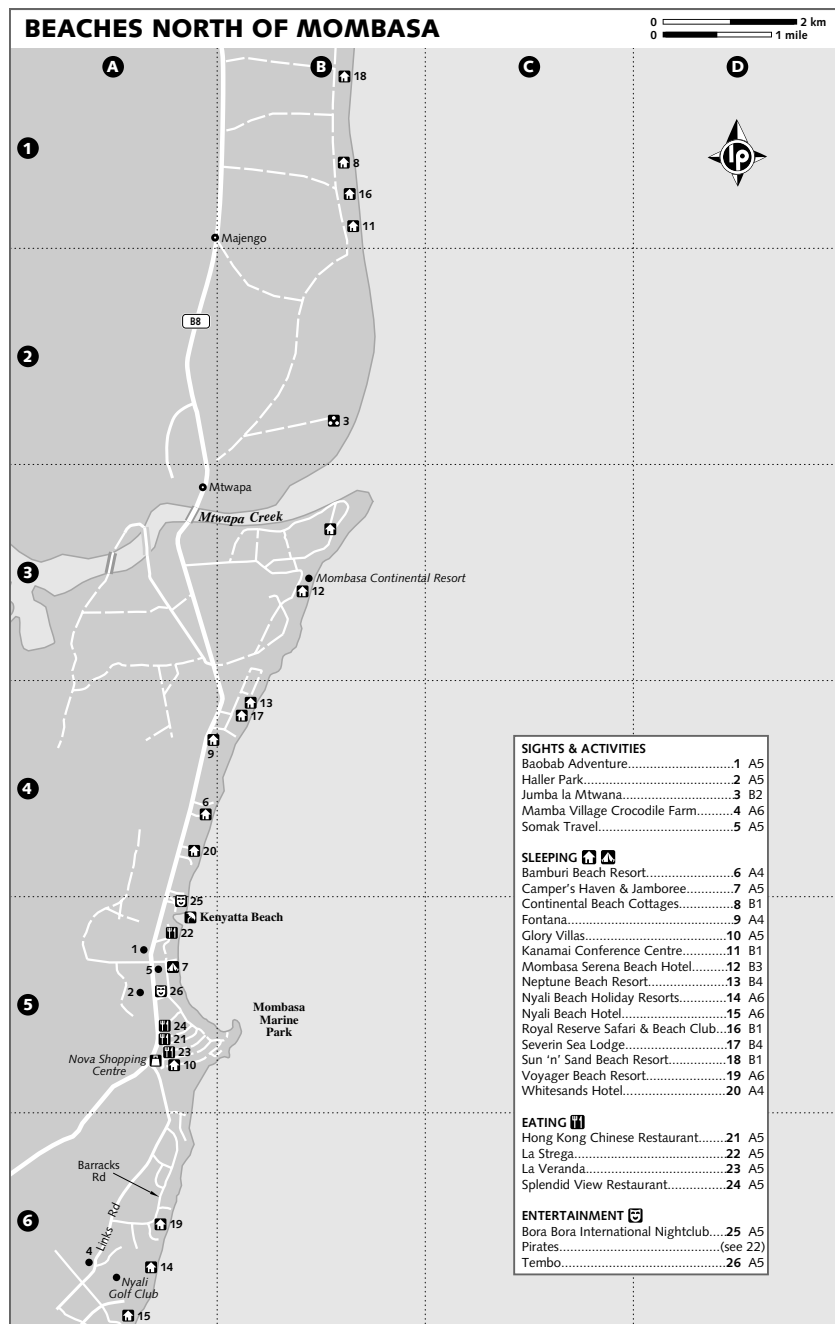
The northern beaches are also dogged by seaweed at certain times of the year. They are usually clear between December and April, but at other times the sand can vanish under piles of black seaweed. The expensive resort hotels employ people to burn or bury the troublesome weed on the beach.

Going north from Mombasa, the beaches are Nyali, Bamburi, Shanzu, Kikambala and Vipingo.

Sights & Activities

MAMBA VILLAGE CROCODILE FARM

A rather bizarre combination of commercial crocodile farm, animal park, sports bar and nightclub, **Mamba Village** (☎ 475184; mambavillage2001@hotmail.com; Links Rd, Nyali Beach; nonresident adult/child KSh450/250; ☎ 8am-6pm) has around 10,000 scaly inmates baring their teeth for the public. There's a feeding show at 5pm, which rouses the lethargic beasts quite dramatically.



BAOBAB ADVENTURE

The former Bamburi Cement Company plant was a derelict eyesore until the creation of **Baobab Adventure** (☎ 5485901; Malindi Rd, Bamburi Beach), an ingenious complex of nature trails and wildlife sanctuaries. The main attraction is **Haller Park** (nonresident adult/child KSh450/225; 🕒 8am-5pm), which includes a wildlife sanctuary, crocodile farm, fish farm, reptile park and drive-through giraffe compound.

The various parts of the Baobab Adventure are well signposted from the highway north from Mombasa and have well-marked bus stops.

JUMBA LA MTWANA

Just north of Mtwapa Creek is this **national monument** (Mtwapa; adult/child KSh200/100; 🕒 8am-6pm). The ruins are from a 15th-century Swahili settlement, and some interesting structures remain, of which the **Mosque by the Sea** stands out. A handy guidebook may be available from the ticket office for KSh20, or the custodian will happily give you the tour for a small gratuity. The site is a 3km walk down a dirt track, signposted from the highway about 1km north of Mtwapa bridge; a taxi there and back should cost KSh200.

Sleeping BUDGET

Budget accommodation is in short supply along this strip, and if you want to be anywhere near the beach you'll need to find the extra cash to step up a price category.

Kanamai Conference Centre (☎ 32046; kanamai@iconnect.co.ke; Kikambala Beach; dm/s/d KSh700/1800/3000, cottages KSh1800-2700) This is a quiet Christian conference centre with a tranquil, laid-back atmosphere. Alcohol is prohibited, but there's a cafeteria serving breakfast and meals. All the rooms are simple but comfortable, and the self-catering cottages are particularly immaculate.

Glory Villas (☎ 474758; Nyali Beach; s KSh800, d KSh1200-2000, cottages KSh3000; 🕒 🍴 🚿) The only vaguely budget option for miles, this entry in the Glory empire is a complex of odd conical towers behind the Nova shopping centre. Nyali Beach is a 15-minute walk away.

MIDRANGE

Bamburi Beach Resort (☎ 0733-474482; www.bamburi-resort.com; Bamburi Beach; r US\$20-90; 🕒 🍴 🚿) This tidy little complex has direct access to the

beach, and a choice of appealing bamboo-finished hotel rooms and self-catering rooms (outdoor kitchens).

Fontana (☎ 5487554; Malindi Rd, Bamburi Beach; d low/high season KSh2500/3000; 🕒 🍴 🚿) While the rooms are liveable, the highlight of this small place is the big thatched lobby restaurant (mains KSh420 to KSh700), which resembles a musty safari lodge stuffed with African art. The beach is 100m beyond the compound.

Continental Beach Cottages (☎ 32190; manasseh@wananchi.com; Kikambala Beach; B&B/full board per person KSh950/1450, cottages KSh1700-3850; 🕒 🍴 🚿) A quiet little place with a beach bar. The cottages are neat and well looked after, with kitchens and palm gardens facing onto the beach.

Camper's Haven & Jamboree (☎ 5486954; campers_haven@yahoo.com; Bamburi Beach; camping per tent KSh500, r low/high season KSh2500/5500) A large, slightly bumpy camping ground going right up to the beach. Four-person tents are available for KSh1500; room prices include breakfast in the low season and half board during the high season.

TOP END

Nyali Beach

Voyager Beach Resort (☎ 475114; www.heritage-eastafrica.com; Barracks Rd; s/d low season US\$185/260, high season US\$230/310; 🕒 🍴 🚿 🚿) The nautical theme is possibly stretched a bit far, but Voyager can happily cruise through life on its reputation as Nyali's best luxury resort. Facilities are comprehensive, prices are all-inclusive, staff are well drilled, the grounds are huge and the beach is right there.

Nyali Beach Hotel (☎ 471541; www.blockhotelske.com; Beach Rd; s/tw low season US\$118/147, high season US\$184/234; 🕒 🍴 🚿 🚿) At the southern end of the beach, this is Voyager's main competition, managing to take up even more space and offer even more facilities.

Nyali Beach Holiday Resorts (☎ 472325; nbhr@wananchi.com; Beach Rd; s/d low season KSh3500/5800, high season KSh4500/6800, cottages from KSh5500; 🕒 🍴 🚿 🚿) A good option if you want the Kenyan beach experience without the European price tag. It's less luxurious than the other resorts, but you still get a restaurant, bar, games room and self-catering cottages.

Bamburi Beach

Whitesands Hotel (☎ 485926; www.sarovahotels.com; s/d low season from US\$90/140, high season from US\$140/180; 🕒 🍴 🚿 🚿) This multi-award-winning and

almost invariably busy place could be justified in dubbing itself the best resort hotel on the coast, offering consistently good service, thoughtful design, full luxury facilities and general high standards throughout. There are an amazing five pools and the grounds front directly onto the sand.

Severin Sea Lodge (☎ 5485001; www.severin-kenya.com; s/d low season US\$54/108, high season US\$165/206; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This place is so classy it actually has a Swiss consulate on the grounds. Accommodation is in appealing round cottages running down to the beach, and there are some nice bars and restaurants, including a funky restaurant in a converted dhov.

Neptune Beach Resort (☎ 5485701; www.neptunehotels.com; s/d/tr low season KSh2700/4400/6600, high season KSh4300/7000/10,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Best described as an endearing eyesore, the haphazard colour scheme and curiously panda-shaped pool do at least help Neptune stand out from the competition. High-season rates are all-inclusive.

Shanzu Beach

Mombasa Serena Beach Hotel (☎ 485721; www.serena-hotels.com; halfboards/s/d low season US\$95/190, high season US\$200/260; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Serena's only Kenyan beach resort is so extensive that it's styled on a traditional Swahili village – the pathways around the tree-filled complex even have street names. The split-level rooms are equally impressive, and the design lends an incongruous intimacy.

Kikambala Beach

Royal Reserve Safari & Beach Club (☎ 32022; www.royalreserve.com; apt US\$66-100; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Possibly the best-value self-catering on the coast, with all-new fittings, including microwave and utensils, complemented by a full range of facilities and activities. It's heavily marketed for timeshares, so book early in the high season.

Sun'n'Sand Beach Resort (☎ 32621; www.sunsand.co.ke; half board s/d low season US\$45/90, high season US\$70/100; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Despite its 900-head capacity there's a really nice feel to the pastel-orange Sun'n'Sand, and it's known as one of the best hotels on the north coast for kids.

Eating

La Veranda (☎ 5485482; Nyali Beach; mains KSh350-650) This is a reliable Italian restaurant behind

the Nova shopping centre, with a big pizza oven, alfresco veranda dining and reasonable prices. It's closed between 3pm and 6pm on weekdays.

Hong Kong Chinese Restaurant (☎ 5485422; Malindi Rd, Nyali Beach; mains KSh280-595) On the main road next to the shopping centre, the Chinese food dished up in this round pavilion-style building is a good example of its breed and will definitely fill a hole. Choose from small and large portions or set menus for up to six people (KSh1900 to KSh6850).

Splendid View Restaurant (☎ 5487270; Malindi Rd, Bamburi Beach; mains KSh100-500; 🍷 noon-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun) Sister to the original branch in Mombasa, this is definitely the more attractive sibling aesthetically and also has a wider menu, serving up the customary Indian cuisine plus a handful of Western dishes. It's right at the start of the strip, next to the Nova complex; ironically the views here aren't that much better than in town.

La Strega (☎ 5487431; stephanie@africaonline.co.ke; Pirates complex, Bamburi Beach; mains KSh350-1000) You wouldn't think so to look at it, but the thatched restaurant next to the Pirates nightclub is a great Italian eatery in its own right, with a small but well-tempura'd Japanese menu to boot.

Entertainment

Mamba International Nightclub (☎ 475180; Mamba Crocodile Village, Links Rd; admission KSh100-200) Who knows what twisted genius thought it was a good idea to have a disco in a crocodile farm, but the result is one of the most popular independent nightspots around Mombasa.

Bamburi is also known for its infamous nightclubs, which pull in a slightly wild crowd of locals, tourists, prostitutes and hustlers. Pirates, Bora Bora International and Tembo are the big players.

KILIFI

☎ 041

Like Mtwapa to its south, Kilifi is a gorgeous river estuary with effortlessly picture-perfect views from its massive road bridge. Many white Kenyans have yachts moored in the creek, and there are numerous beach houses belonging to artists, writers and adventurers from around the globe.

The main reasons that most come here are to stay at one of the pleasant beach resorts at the mouth of the creek or to visit the ruins of

Mnarani, high on a bluff on the south bank of the creek.

Information

Barclays Bank (Ronald Ngala St) ATM only.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 522034; Ronald Ngala St)

Tourist police (Kilifi Shopping Arcade)

Sights

The **Mnarani ruins** (nonresident adult/child KSh100/50; 🍷 7am-6pm) are high on a bluff just west of the old ferry landing stage on the southern bank of Kilifi Creek. Only partly excavated, the site was occupied from the end of the 14th century to around the first half of the 17th century, when it was abandoned following sieges by Galla tribespeople from Somalia and the failure of the water supply.

The best-preserved ruin is the **Great Mosque**, with its finely carved inscription around the *mihrab* (the niche showing the direction of Mecca). Also here are a group of **carved tombs** (including a restored pillar tomb), a small mosque dating back to the 16th century and parts of the town wall. Tucked away in the woods are all manner of other ruins and unexcavated structures. The path up to the ruins (about 300m long) is clearly signposted off the Tarmac road behind Mnarani village.

Sleeping

Dhows Inn (☎ 522028; dhowsinn_kilifi@yahoo.com; Malindi Rd; s/d KSh650/900) On the main road south of Kilifi Creek. It's a small but well-maintained hostelry, with simple but decent thatched blocks set around a garden. The Mnarani ruins are within easy walking distance, and there's a popular bar and restaurant.

Makuti Villas (☎ 522415; s/d incl breakfast KSh800/1000; 🍷) Also known as Mkwajuni Motel or Dhows Inn Annex, this bungalow complex isn't nearly as grand as it sounds, but you're certainly not short on space in the big thatched buildings. Prices include breakfast at the bar-restaurant on site.

Tushauriane Bar & Lodge (☎ 522521; s/d with shared bathroom KSh150/300) This is a bright-yellow building behind the bus station. Unsurprisingly at this price, rooms are basic, with just beds, mosquito nets and plenty of market noise.

Mnarani Club (☎ 522318; mnarani@africaonline.com; s/d low season US\$62/99, high season US\$79/115; 🍷 🍷) Atop the cliff on the southern side of Kilifi Creek, this very stylish resort complex has

a choice of garden and creek views and an amazing trompe l'oeil pool, which seems to blend into the ocean. The hotel has an adults-only policy.

Eating & Drinking

Kilifi Members Club (☎ 525258; mains KSh100-260) A fantastic spot for sunset, perched on the northern cliff edge with a clear sight line to the creek bridge. There's a good menu with lots of *nyama choma* (up to KSh460 per kg) and the Tusker's very reasonable for these parts (KSh70). Despite the name you don't have to be a member.

Kilifi Boatyard (☎ 522552; mains KSh350) A very nice sand-floored café serving excellent seafood and cold beers to expat boating types. It's a long walk from town down a dirt road off the highway just south of Kilifi. A taxi will cost around KSh600 return.

New Kilifi Hotel (☎ 0733-793700; Biashara St; mains KSh80-140) Just past the bus station is this very popular local canteen with good pilau and biryanis, plus the usual stew and *ugali* options.

Getting There & Away

All buses and *matatus* travelling between Mombasa (up to 1½ hours) and Malindi (1¼ hours) stop at Kilifi; the fare to either destination is KSh70. Falcon, Busstar and Busscar all have offices here for their Nairobi-Malindi route; buses to Mombasa and on to Nairobi leave at around 7.45am and 7.45pm (KSh600).

WATAMU

☎ 042

About 24km south of Malindi, Watamu is popular beach village with sandy beaches and plenty of hotels, though the atmosphere is a lot more resortlike than in Kilifi. Off-shore is the southern part of Malindi Marine Reserve, and the unspoiled forests of Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve and the Swahili ruins of Gede are both a short distance away.

The coast at Watamu is broken up into three separate coves divided by eroded rocky headlands. Each of the bays becomes a broad white strand at low tide, and many people walk across to the offshore islands to sunbathe and swim. Like the southern resorts, Watamu is inundated with seaweed at certain times of the year, but the sand is usually clear between December and April.

Information

There are now no banks in Watamu, so your only options are the foreign exchange bureaux at the big hotels and Tunda Tours. If you need to use an ATM, your nearest choices are Kilifi and Malindi. Online information can be found at www.watamu.net.

Corner Connections (Watamu Supermarket) Internet access.

Post office (Gede road)

Telkom Kenya office (Beach Way Rd)

Tunda Tours (☎ 32079; Beach Way Rd; per minute KSh5) Heavily touted Internet access.

Sights

BIO KEN SNAKE FARM & LABORATORY

This excellent **snake farm** (☎ 32303; snakes@africaonline.co.ke; adult/child KSh500/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm) is by far the best of the snake parks along the coast. It was established by the late James Ashe, a reptile expert and former curator from the National Museums of Kenya. As well as touring the facilities, staff can take you on a day safari to look for snakes in their natural habitat (KSh4500).

The centre is just north of Watamu village on the main beach road.

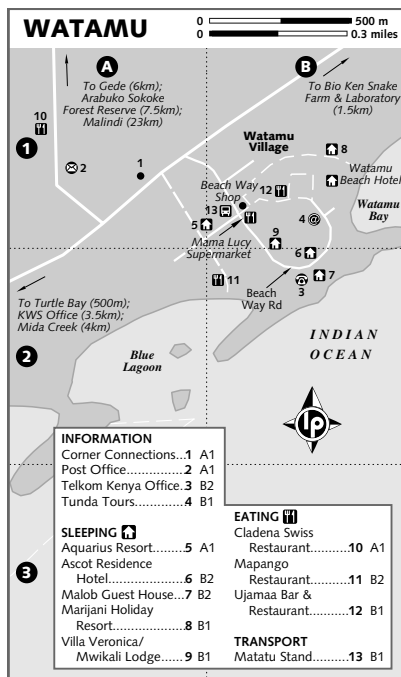
WATAMU MARINE NATIONAL PARK

The southern part of Malindi Marine Reserve, this **marine park** (adult/child US\$5/2) includes some magnificent coral reefs and abundant fish-life. It lies around 2km offshore from Watamu. To get to the park you'll need to hire a glass-bottomed boat, which is easy enough at the **KWS office** (☎ 32393), at the end of the coast road, where you pay the park fees. For marine park trips, boat operators ask anything from KSh1800 to KSh3500 per person, excluding park fees; it's all negotiable. All the big hotels offer 'goggling' (snorkelling) trips to nonguests for around KSh1500.

Activities

DIVING

With the marine park just offshore, diving is understandably popular. **Aqua Ventures** (☎ 32420; www.diveinkenya.com; Ocean Sports Hotel Turtle Bay) offers guided dives in the marine park for UK£18 and an open-water PADI dive course for UK£275. The best time to dive and snorkel is between October and March. Avoid diving from June to August because of rough seas and poor visibility. Also popular



are dive trips to the **Tewa Caves**, at the mouth of Mida Creek, where a group of giant rock cod loiter menacingly at the bottom.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

If you want to ape the fish-wrestling antics of Ernest Hemingway, deep-sea fishing is possible at Ocean Sports Hotel and Hemingway's Resort for around UK£540 per boat (high season, up to four anglers). People are a little more environmentally sensitive now than in old Ernie's day – tag and release is standard procedure (see the boxed text, opposite).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Malob Guest House (☎ 32260; Beach Way Rd; s KSh600) Opposite Ascot, Malob is a good small budget choice. Rooms are clean and well looked after, and are set around a peaceful courtyard.

Villa Veronica/Mwikali Lodge (☎ 0735-499836; Beach Way Rd; d KSh600) A friendly, secure family-run lodging. Rooms come with fans, mosquito nets and fridges; they're a bit scrappy and don't always have power, but you could

do worse. In the high season breakfast is available for KSh100.

MIDRANGE

Marijani Holiday Resort (☎ 32448; marijani@swiftmalindi.com; s/d €18.50/20.50, cottages €38.50-52) Easily the best place to stay in the village: distinctive coral facing, traditional furnishings, comfy balcony sofas and local art set this very personal guesthouse a cut above any competition. To get here, take the path beside the Mama Lucy supermarket and turn left at the Beach Way Shop.

Ascot Residence Hotel (☎ 32326; info@ascotresidence.com; Beach Way Rd; s/d KSh1600/2800, apt KSh3500-7000; ☎) This is a comfortable complex of tidy rooms and apartments set in a garden with a dolphin-shaped pool (no, really). Security is good and there's a fine pizza restaurant.

Scuba Diving Watamu (☎ 32099; www.scuba-diving-kenya.com; Turtle Bay; cottages €29-52; ☎) No prizes for figuring out what the main line of business is here – luckily for keen self-caterers the German owners also offer accommodation in five charming one- and two-bedroom cottages.

TOP END

Turtle Bay Beach Club (☎ 32003; www.turtlebay.co.ke; r per person low season €58-85, high season €93-122; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) At the far end of the cove, Turtle Bay is one of the best resorts of its kind in the area, with palm-planted gardens to disguise the size of the site. Facilities are excellent and it's particularly strong on kids' entertainment. Loads of excursions are on offer at the community-oriented Discovery Centre, most of which are open to non-guests. Prices quoted are all-inclusive.

Ocean Sports Hotel (☎ 32008; oceansps@africaonline.co.ke; Turtle Bay; half board s/d low season US\$82/111, high season US\$100/160; ☎ ☎) A small, informal family-run resort with a deep-sea fishing slant. It's modest considering the prices, but the atmosphere's very relaxed. Good cheap snorkelling trips are available (KSh800).

Hemingways Resort (☎ 32624; www.hemingways.co.ke; Turtle Bay; half board s/d low season UK£57/82, high season UK£143/203; ☎ ☎) Next door to Ocean Sports, this very stately luxury lodge has snappy service and an exclusive ambience. Prices include transfers from Malindi airport, snorkelling in the marine park, and trips to Malindi and Gede.

TAG & BRAG

While the idea of wrestling a huge marlin on the open sea has a powerful macho allure, catches of billfish in the Indian Ocean are getting smaller all the time. The biggest threat to game fish is relentless overfishing by commercial tuna companies, who routinely hook other pelagic fish as so-called 'bycatch'. Pollution and falling stocks of prey species are also having a serious knock-on effect. Some large species are believed to have declined by as much as 80% since the 1970s; sharks are particularly vulnerable.

Instead of bashing some unfortunate fish over the head with a boathook, you can do your bit to help sustain shark and billfish populations by tagging your catch and releasing it back into the ocean. Most deep-sea fishing companies provide anglers with a photo and official recognition of their catch, then release the fish to fight another day, carrying tags that will allow scientists to discover more about these magnificent predators.

Aquarius Resort (☎ 32069; www.aquariuswatamu.com; full board s/d low season €64.50/86, high season €78/104; ☎ ☎ ☎) A brand-new place set back from the water. The *makuti*-roofed buildings are set in a lovely garden and there are peaceful communal balconies overlooking the pool. The Mapango Restaurant, in a separate compound nearer the beach, is highly recommended.

Eating

As the better hotels cater more than amply for their clients, there's not much need for an independent restaurant scene in Watamu, and most places close relatively early.

Ujamaa Bar & Restaurant (mains KSh150-600; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-9pm) This central village eatery has some tourist standards, such as steak and spaghetti, thrown in to complement the local favourites (and up the prices).

Cladena Swiss Restaurant (☎ 32500; mains KSh200-600) It's not often you get a taste of the Alps in coastal Kenya, so if you have a hankering for fondue and sausage this is the place to come.

Getting There & Around

There are *matatus* between Malindi and Watamu throughout the day (KSh50, one hour). All *matatus* pass the turn-off to the Gede ruins (KSh10). For Mombasa, the easiest option is to take a *matatu* to the highway (KSh10) and flag down a bus or *matatu* from there.

Taxis charge KSh800 to the Gede ruins and KSh1800 to Malindi. There are also a handful of motorised rickshaws, which are cheaper and can be handy for the long beach road.

ARABUKO SOKOKE FOREST RESERVE

Close to the marine park at Watamu, **Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve** (adult/child US\$10/5) is the largest tract of indigenous coastal forest remaining in East Africa, with four distinct vegetation zones. Gazetted in 2002 as an International Heritage Site, it's administered jointly by the Forestry Department and KWS, and contains an unusually high concentration of rare species, especially birds (240 species) and butterflies (260 species). A good deal of work has gone into involving the local community in the protection of the forest.

The most high-profile birds are: Clarke's weaver, found nowhere else in the world; the beautiful miniature Sokoke scops owl, only 15cm tall; the east coast akalat; the Sokoke pipit; the Amani sunbird; and the spotted ground thrush. The reserve's signature animal is the charming golden-rumped elephant-shrew.

The **Arabuko Sokoke Visitor Centre** (Malindi Rd; ☎ 042-32462; ☒ 8am-4pm) is very helpful; it's at Gede Forest Station, with displays on the various species here. The shop sells the excellent KWS/Forestry Department guide *Arabuko Sokoke Forest & Mida Creek* (KSh300) and Tansy Bliss' *Arabuko-Sokoke Forest - A Visitor's Guide* (KSh120). The noticeboard in the visitor centre shows the sites of recent wildlife sightings.

From the visitor centre, a series of nature trails, running tracks and 4WD paths cut through the forest. Trained bird and wildlife guides (☎ 0734-994931) can be hired at KSh600 for up to three hours, KSh1200 for a full day, and KSh800 for a half day or a highly recommended night walk (leaving the visitor centre at 6pm). They're very knowledgeable about the forest, and also

offer walks in Mida Creek on the opposite side of the highway.

There are basic **camp sites** (per person US\$8) close to the visitor centre and further south near Spinetail Way.

The forest is just off the main Malindi-Mombasa road. The main gate to the forest and visitor centre is about 1.5km west of the turn-off to Gede and Watamu, while the Mida entrance is about 3km further south. All buses and *matatus* between Mombasa and Malindi can drop you at either entrance. From Watamu, *matatus* to Malindi can drop you at the main junction.

GEDE RUINS

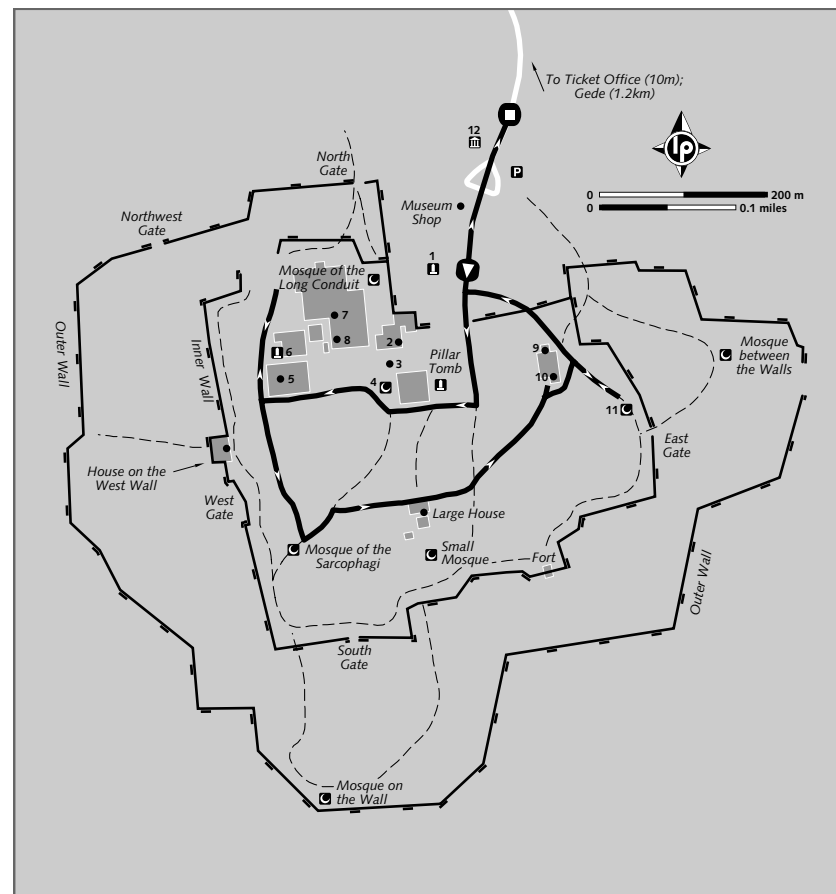
Some 4km from Watamu, just off the main Malindi-Mombasa road, are the famous **Gede ruins** (adult/child KSh200/100; ☒ 7am-6pm), one of the principal historical monuments on the coast. Hidden away in the forest is a vast complex of derelict houses, palaces and mosques, made all the more mysterious by the fact that there seem to be no records of Gede's existence in any historical texts.

Gede (or Gedi) was established and actively trading by at least the 13th century. Excavations have uncovered porcelain, glass and glazed earthenware, indicating not only trade links, but a taste for luxury among Gede's Swahili elite. Within the compound are ruins of ornate tombs and mosques, and the regal ruins of a Swahili palace, further evidence of Gede's prosperity.

When the city was abandoned in the 17th or 18th century, the forest took over and the site was lost to the world until the 1920s. Since then, there have been extensive excavations, revealing the remains of substantial Swahili houses and complex sanitation facilities, including toilets and cisterns for ritual washing. Most of the excavated buildings are concentrated in a dense cluster near the entrance gate, but there are dozens of other ruins scattered through the forest.

Walking Tour

The tree-shrouded ruins are very atmospheric and you'll often have the site to yourself if you visit early in the morning. Guides are available at the gate for KSh300; they definitely help bring the site to life, pointing out the various trees and plants as well as interesting features of the buildings, but



will generally stick to a standard circuit of the most important ruins.

Gedi - Historical Monument (KSh50), a guidebook to the ruins containing a map and descriptions of many buildings, should be available at the ticket office or the museum shop.

On your right as you enter the compound is the **Dated Tomb** (1), so called because of the inscription on the wall, featuring the Muslim date corresponding to 1399. This tomb has provided a reference point for dating other buildings within the complex. Near it, inside the wall, is the **Tomb of the Fluted Pillar** (2), which is characteristic of such pillar designs found along the East African coast.

Past the tomb, next to the **House of the Long Court** (3), the **Great Mosque** (4) is one of Gede's most significant buildings. It originally dates from the mid-15th century, but was rebuilt a century later, possibly after damage sustained at the time of Gede's first abandonment. The mosque is of typical East African design with a *mihrab* or echo chamber facing Mecca.

Behind the mosque are the ruins of an extensive **palace** (5) spread out over a quarter of an acre and thought to have been owned by the former ruler of Gede. This regal structure is entered through a complete arched doorway and many interesting features have been preserved, including the great audience hall and a strongroom with no doors or windows. The palace also has a particularly

fine **pillar tomb (6)**; the hexagonal shape is unique in East Africa.

Following the path past the tomb, around old **Swahili houses (7)** have been excavated here, in a compact group beside the Great Mosque and the palace. They're each named after particular features of their design or after objects found in them by archaeologists. The **House of the Cistern (8)** is particularly interesting, with ancient illustrations incised into the plaster walls.

The other excavations on the site are more spread out, with numerous paths running through the woods from the main complex. The most interesting structures are east of the Great Mosque, including the **House of the Dhow (9)**, the **House of the Double Court (10)** and the nearby **Mosque of the Three Aisles (11)**, which has the largest well at Gede. There are a handful of other structures in the forest if you wish to explore further.

As you head back out past the car park, there's a small **museum (12)** and 'interpretation centre' with displays of artefacts found on the site, although the best stuff was taken to the Fort Jesus museum in Mombasa.

Getting There & Away

The ruins lie just off the main highway near the village of Gede, on the access road to Watamu. The easiest way to get here is to take a Watamu-bound *matatu* to Gede Village and follow the well-signposted dirt road from there; it's a 10-minute walk.

It's also possible to get a taxi to take you on a round trip from Malindi for about KSh1000, with an hour or more to look around the site. This could be worthwhile if your time is limited.

MALINDI & AROUND

☎ 042

Malindi is one of those holiday towns that inspire wildly opposite reactions in people. For many, especially Italians, this is their Kenyan beach paradise and even adopted home; for others it's a cynical tourist trap with few redeeming features. If you're new to Africa, the high-season hassle may well incline you towards the latter angle, but once you get under its skin you may well find there's more to the town than pizza and sunloungers.

From a tourist perspective, modern Malindi is all about the beaches, with little in the way of cultural attractions. Offshore

are the coral reefs of the Malindi Marine National Park, one of Kenya's best marine parks, with plenty of opportunities for snorkelling and diving.

The town is best visited in the high season, from August to January, and can seem pretty dead outside these times.

Orientation

The actual centre of Malindi is the area around the old market on Uhuru Rd; the tourist accommodation, restaurants and malls are spread out north and south along the coast. Mama Ngina Rd (also known as Government Rd, Vasco da Gama Rd, Sea Front Rd or Ocean View Rd on certain sections) provides access to the resorts south of town, while the KWS headquarters is at the south end of parallel Casuarina Rd. The big shopping arcades and restaurant complexes are north of the centre on Lamu Rd.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 30575)

Fire (☎ 31001, 0733-550990)

Police (☎ 31555; Kenyatta Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Bling Net (☎ 30041; Lamu Rd; per min KSh2) Also serves food.

Inter-Communications (☎ 31310; Lamu Rd; per min KSh1; ☎ 8am-11pm)

Y-Net (☎ 30171; y-netinternational@yahoo.com;

Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd; per min KSh2)

MONEY

Barclays Bank (☎ 20656; Lamu Rd)

Dollar Forex Bureau (☎ 30602; Lamu Rd) Rates may be slightly better here than at the banks.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 20148; Lamu Rd)

Postbank (Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank (Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd)

POST

Post office (Kenyatta Rd)

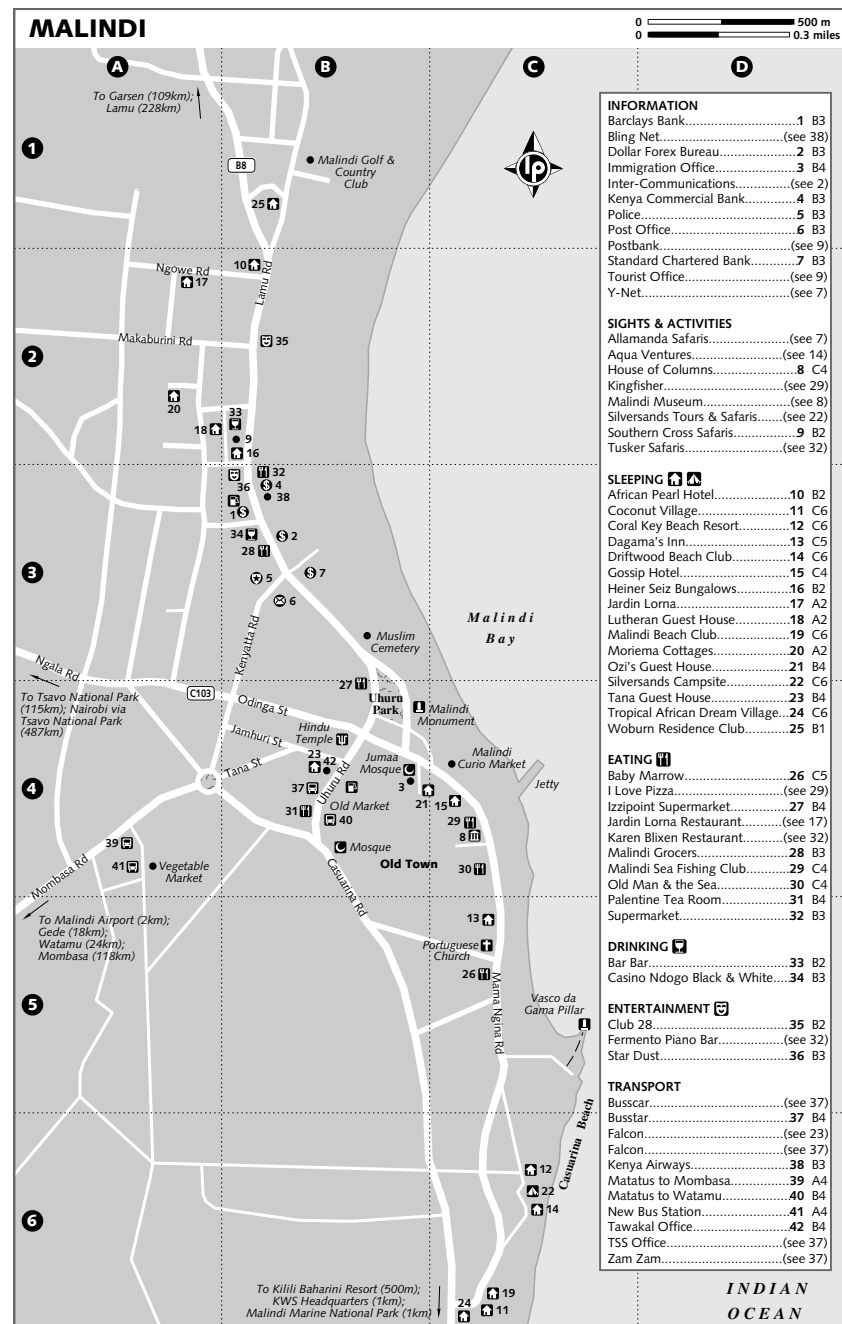
TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 20689; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd;

☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Staff are friendly but really don't have much information to dispense.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Immigration office (☎ 30876; Mama Ngina Rd) Travelers seeking visa extensions are often referred to Mombasa.



Dangers & Annoyances

Don't walk back to your hotel along the beach at night. In the past many people have been mugged, although there haven't been any incidents lately. The long, dark walk from the north end of town to the resorts south of central Malindi should also be avoided at night.

Beach boys are the usual fact of life and, as well as sex and souvenirs, drugs are widely offered. This is often part of a sting in which phoney policemen appear, confiscate the drugs and extract a large 'fine'. Drugs *are* illegal here, and being ripped off is nothing compared to what will happen if you are arrested by a bona fide cop – either way, it isn't worth the risk.

Sights & Activities

HOUSE OF COLUMNS

One of a handful of traditional Swahili houses left in Malindi, the recently restored **House of Columns** (Mama Ngina Rd) contains the new **Malindi museum** (adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 8am-6pm), a fairly haphazard collection of pictures, objects and exhibits covering the region's past and present.

MALINDI MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Immediately offshore from Malindi and extending south as far as Watamu, this important **marine park** (adult/child US\$5/2; ☎ 7am-7pm) covers 213 sq km and protects some impressive coral reefs, although the piles of seashells on sale in Malindi may make you wonder just how much that protection is worth.

Despite the extensive damage there is still some amazing marine life here, and there's always a chance you may see megafauna, such as whale sharks and mako sharks. Note that underwater visibility is severely reduced by silt from the Galana River between March and June.

Most people visit on a snorkelling or glass-bottomed boat trip, which can be arranged at the **KWS office** (☎ 31554; malindimnp@kws.org) on the coast road south of town. Boats only go out at low tide, so it's a good idea to call in advance to check times. The going rate is around KSh3500 per boat (five to 10 people) for a two-hour trip, and masks and snorkels are provided. Alternatively, you can take a tour with any of the agencies in town.

The KWS compound (opposite) sits on a lovely stretch of beach, and there's a KWS campsite and *bandas*. You can also charge national park smartcards here for trips to Tsavo East and West.

DIVING

With the marine park just offshore, scuba diving is a popular activity, although, as mentioned, the visibility is greatly reduced by silt between March and June. All the big hotels have dive centres, usually run in conjunction with local companies. Single dives cost €40 plus the park entry fee, while a PADI open-water diver course will cost around €330.

Main operators:

Aqua Ventures (☎ 32420; www.diveinkenya.com; Driftwood Beach Club, Mam Ngina Rd)

Blue Fin (☎ 0722-261242; www.bluefindiving.com) Operates out of several resorts in Malindi.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

Kingfisher (☎ 31275; Mama Ngina Rd), below the Malindi Sea Fishing Club, is one of the best places on the coast to find a cheap, private deep-sea fishing charter. It has a large fleet of boats and charges US\$350 for a 'short day' of around six hours (up to four anglers).

Tours

Numerous safari companies operate from Malindi to Tsavo East National Park, entering the park via the Sala Gate. The going rate for a day trip is US\$120 per person. Trips to the Malindi Marine National Park are also a standard option (US\$20).

Reliable companies:

Allamanda Safaris (☎ 31272; allamanda@swiftmalindi.com; Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd)

Silversands Tours & Safaris (☎ 30014; Mama Ngina Rd)

Southern Cross Safaris (☎ 30547; sxsmld@swiftmalindi.com; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd)

Tusker Safaris (☎ 30525; tuskersaf@swiftmalindi.com; AG Complex, Lamu Rd)

Sleeping

BUDGET

Tana Guest House (☎ 30940; Jamhuri St; s/d with shared bathroom KSh350/450, s/d/tr with private bathroom KSh550/550/650) Just round the corner from the market area, this is a severely convenient location for buses and cheap food. Rooms are decent for the price, with fans, mosquito nets, squat toilets and what appear to be

changing rooms. You can buy day-old chicks at reception, if you so wish.

Lutheran Guest House (☎ 30098; tw/tr/q with shared bathroom KSh800/1200/1500, tw with private bathroom KSh1000, bungalows KSh1500) This Lutheran religious centre has simple rooms with fans, mosquito nets and little else; the bungalows have living rooms and kitchens. Alcohol is prohibited.

Dagama's Inn (☎ 31942; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d KSh600/800) Big, bare doubles and rather smaller singles in a modern block, now under new management, with a decent Indian restaurant downstairs (mains KSh190 to KSh495). Only one room has a fan, but there's plenty of breeze through the slatted walls.

KWS compound (☎ 31554; Casuarina Beach; camping adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person KSh600) KWS provides a shady camp site, with lights and a cooking area, and eight popular *bandas*. Water and bedding are provided and there's a kitchen and mess hall you can use for KSh300. Mountain bikes can be hired for KSh200 per day.

Silversands Campsite (☎ 20412; camping adult/child KSh200/100, bandas KSh500-600) On the southern beach strip, this is a much-loved site for travellers and there are good facilities, but limited shade. The simple tented *bandas* have recently been fully refurbished. Bicycles can be hired for KSh200 per day.

MIDRANGE

African Pearl Hotel (☎ 0733-966167; www.africanpearl.com; Lamu Rd; s/d from KSh1800/2200, cottages KSh2000-4500; ☎ ☎) Blessed with a real personal touch, this is the kind of pearl it's worth shuckin' a few shellfish for. Rooms are spacious and light, all with their own balconies, and foregoing a room with air-con to get an atmospheric wood-paneled fan room is no hardship.

Ozi's Guest House (☎ 20218; ozi@swiftmalindi.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh600/1200/1800) Barely out of the budget category, this friendly hostelry is a travellers' favourite, though with the mosque next door light sleepers may want to start praying.

Jardin Lorna (☎ 30658; harry@swiftmalindi.com; Mtangani Rd; r KSh2500-3500; ☎ ☎) Don't be fooled by the French *nom de plume* – Lorna is as unpretentious as they come, providing accommodation mainly for students of the Hospitality Training & Management Institute. Rooms are endearingly quirky.

Heiner Seiz Bungalows (☎ 20978; Lamu Rd; s/d KSh1400/1600; ☎ ☎) These quiet German-run cottages are subdivided into fanciful but well-kept rooms with fridges. Some kitchens are also available to guests.

Moriema Cottages (☎ 31326; s/d KSh1400/2500) These large cottage-style rooms are a pretty good deal, but whoever thought of putting in carpets and dull green furnishings was way off the mark aesthetically. They're tucked away in a quaint garden behind the Sabaki shopping centre.

Gossip Hotel (☎ 0723-516602; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d KSh700/1200) Just down from Ozi's, the Gossip aims for much the same backpacker clientele. Rooms have four-poster mosquito nets, dark wood and plastic chairs, and the downstairs restaurant boasts an intriguing TV lounge/junk corner.

TOP END

Tropical African Dream Village (☎ 31673; www.planhotel.ch; Casuarina Rd; s/d/tr low season from €94/130/175, high season from €116/160/216; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This place consists of three resorts around the intersection of Mama Ngina and Casuarina Rds. The Tropical African Dream Village section is a rather grand complex of *makuti*-roofed plantation-style houses. Around the corner, the fancy Malindi Beach Club section has accommodation in stylish Moorish cottages, while the cheaper Coconut Village is a more predictable collection of villas.

Kilili Baharini Resort (☎ 20169; www.kilili.baharini.com; Casuarina Rd; half board s/d from US\$153/182; ☎ ☎) This is a splendid Italian resort, with flamboyant décor and Swahili beds set all over the complex so you can read and catch the sea breeze. It fronts directly onto the sand, and the light, spacious rooms are clustered around attractive pools.

Coral Key Beach Resort (☎ 30717; www.coralkey.malindi.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d low season from €23/31, high season from €44/58; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A huge mass-tourism resort catering particularly for young Italians. It's very lively, with activities such as water-volleyball and a climbing wall. Rooms are divided into groups within five themed areas, each block with its own separate pool.

Driftwood Beach Club (☎ 20155; www.driftwood.club.com; Mama Ngina Rd; s/d/tr KSh5300/7600/9120, cottages KSh16,500; ☎ ☎ ☎) One of the best-known resorts in Malindi, Driftwood prides

itself on an informal atmosphere and attracts a more independent clientele than many of its peers. The restaurant, bar and other facilities are all open to nonguests for a temporary membership fee of KSh200 per day.

Woburn Residence Club (☎ 31085; www.woburnresidence.com; s/d from €79.20/104, apt low season €152-232, high season €190-290; 🍷 🍷) If you're not bothered about direct beach access, this swish complex offers modern rooms and apartments with giant marble bathrooms.

Eating

Palentine Tea Room (☎ 31412; Uhuru Rd; mains KSh60-140; 🍷) A recommended all-hours Muslim canteen opposite the old market, serving stews, curries, pilau and soups in tiled surroundings. It's friendly and almost always busy.

Old Man & the Sea (☎ 31106; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh300-590, seafood KSh550-1100) Definitely the daddy of Malindi's restaurants, this old Moorish house on the seafont really has no competition. The food's superb, service is attentive and you can get decent wine by the glass (KSh110). A 16% VAT charge is added to the bill.

Jardin Lorna Restaurant (☎ 30658; Mtangani Rd; mains KSh150-550) Amid the trees and obsolete beer pumps, this peaceful garden restaurant serves a limited but unusual selection of French, Italian and African dishes.

Malindi Sea Fishing Club (☎ 30550; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh240-400; 🍷 noon-8pm) A popular hang-out for the deep-sea fishing crowd. The walls feature some huge stuffed sharks and billfish in dramatic poses. The seafood is excellent. It's a great place for a sundown beer, but it closes early and you have to pay a KSh100 temporary membership fee.

I Love Pizza (☎ 20672; Mama Ngina Rd; nwright@africaonline.co.ke; pizza KSh300-550, mains from KSh600) A very popular Italian restaurant on the seafont, full of diners pointedly ignoring the naff name. Luckily the pizza is excellent.

Baby Marrow (☎ 0733-542584; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh350-800) Everything about this place is quirkily stylish, from the thatched veranda and the plant-horse to the Italian-based menu and the tasty seafood (KSh1400 to KSh1800).

Karen Blixen Restaurant (☎ 0733-974756; cely3@yahoo.it; Galana Centre, Lamu Rd; mains KSh600-950) A fine (wait for it) Italian terrace restaurant hinting at Art Deco style. The menu has all

the usuals and an added dose of Chinese, seafood and grill dishes, plus crocodile and warthog (!) for KSh1000. It's also good for a morning cappuccino.

Useful outlets for self-caterers:
Izzipoint supermarket (☎ 30652; Uhuru Rd)
Malindi Grocers (☎ 20886; Lamu Rd)
Supermarket (Galana Centre, Lamu Rd)

Drinking & Entertainment

Bar Bar (Sabaki Centre, Lamu Rd) A perennially popular high-season courtyard bar, restaurant and ice-cream parlour with nonstop Italian cable TV in the background.

Fermento Piano Bar (☎ 31780; Galana Centre, Lamu Rd; admission KSh200; 🍷 from 10pm Wed, Fri & Sat; 🍷) Fermento has the town's hippest dance floor, apparently once frequented by Naomi Campbell. It's young, trendy and Italian, so wear your showiest outfit.

Casino Ndogo Black & White (☎ 0724-236476; Lamu Rd; admission KSh100; 🍷 24hr) A typical semi-open *makuti* bar-club with regular live Congolese *lingala* bands.

The main nightclubs outside the resorts are **Star Dust** (Lamu Rd) and **Club 28** (Lamu Rd), which open erratically out of season but are generally crammed when they do.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are daily afternoon/evening flights with **Airkenya** (☎ 30646; Malindi Airport) to Nairobi (US\$85, 1½ hours). **Kenya Airways** (☎ 20237; Lamu Rd) flies the same route at least once a day (from KSh4010).

Mombasa Air Safari (☎ 041-433061) has daily flights to Mombasa (US\$21, 25 minutes) and Lamu (US\$62, 30 minutes) in the high season; booking in Malindi is through Southern Cross Safaris.

BUS & MATATU

The new bus station just off Mombasa Rd is currently only used by Mombasa Raha, which has numerous daily buses to Mombasa (KSh150, two hours). Metro Mombasa buses and Mombasa *matatus* (KSh100 to KSh150) stop at the road stage near here.

Companies such as Busstar, Busscar, TSS and Falcon have offices opposite the old market in the centre of Malindi. All have daily departures to Nairobi at around 7am and/or 7pm (KSh800, 10 to 12 hours), going via Mombasa.

Thanks to improvements on the Malindi-Garissa road, taking a bus to Lamu is an easier and safer proposition than a few years ago, though buses are still accompanied by armed guards for some of the way. Among the various companies offering services, Tawakal buses leave at 8.30am, Falcon at 8.45am and Zam Zam at 10.30am; the fare is KSh300 to KSh400. The journey takes at least four hours between Malindi and the jetty at Mokowe. The ferry to Lamu from the mainland costs KSh50 and takes about 20 minutes.

Getting Around

Taxis are mainly concentrated along Lamu Rd and out the front of any of the big hotels south of town (the best place to start is Coral Key Beach Resort). From the southern resorts, it costs KSh200 to Malindi town, KSh300 to Lamu Rd and KSh500 to the airport.

Malindi also has Kenya's biggest fleet of Indonesian-style tuk-tuks, which are cheaper than taxis; a trip from town to the KWS office should cost around KSh100.

LAMU

☎ 042

Lamu town is the core of everything the Lamu archipelago stands for in the hearts and minds of inhabitants and visitors alike, a living throwback to the Swahili culture that once dominated the entire Indian Ocean coast. In 2001 it was added to Unesco's list of World Heritage Sites. The winding streets, carved woods and traditional houses are simply captivating, and few experiences can compare with wandering the narrow lanes, immersed in the everyday sights and sounds of another age. It's simply a different world, and one you'll be in no hurry to leave.

Orientation

Although there are several restaurants and places to stay along the waterfront (Harambee Ave), most of the guesthouses are tucked away in the confusing maze of alleys located behind. Lamu's main thoroughfare is Kenyatta Rd, a long winding alley known popularly as 'Main St', which runs from the northern end of town past the fort and then south to the Muslim cemetery and the inland track to Shela.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Lynx Infosystems (☎ 833134; per min KSh2; 🍷 8am-10pm) Temperamental connections over a Safaricom line – worth a look when the post office is closed. To find it, head west down the street next to the Khadi Star office and turn left at the end.

MEDICAL SERVICES

King Fadh Lamu District Hospital (☎ 633012) One of the most modern and well-equipped hospitals on the coast. It's south of the town centre.

Lamu Medical Clinic (☎ 633438; Kenyatta Rd; 🍷 8am-9pm)

MONEY

If you're stuck outside bank times, ask around: local shopkeepers may be able to help you out with changing money, sometimes at surprisingly reasonable rates.

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 633327; Harambee Ave) The only bank on Lamu. No ATM, Visa advances only. Beware of large commissions on cards and travellers cheques.

POST

Post office (Harambee Ave) Postal services, cardphones and the best Internet connections in town.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information office (☎ 633449; 🍷 9am-1pm & 2-4pm) A commercial tour and accommodation agency that also provides tourist information. It's off Kenyatta Rd.

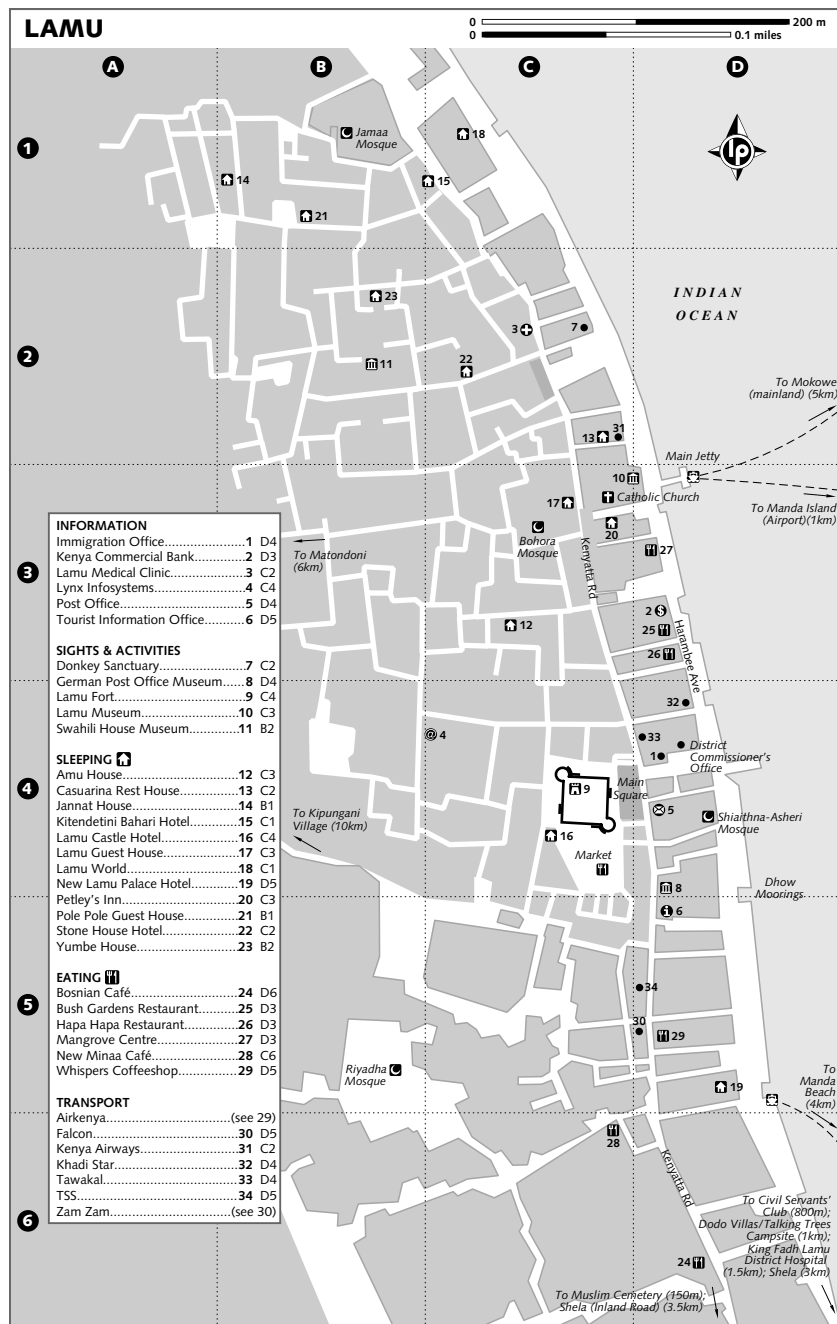
VISA EXTENSIONS

Immigration office (☎ 633032) There's an office off Kenyatta Rd near the fort where you should be able to get visa extensions, although travellers are sometimes referred to Mombasa.

Dangers & Annoyances

Beach boys are the primary nuisance in Lamu. Most loiter around the waterfront offering dhow trips, marijuana and other 'services'. Men can generally get away with a friendly chat, but single women and even groups of female travellers are likely to have constant company, which can get very wearing. There's not a lot you can do except be firm, stay polite and keep on walking.

Lamu has long been popular for its relaxed and tolerant atmosphere, but it's still a Muslim island, with all the associated views of acceptable behaviour. Keep public displays of affection to a minimum and respect local attitudes to modesty.



Sights

All of Lamu's museums are open from 8am to 6pm daily. Admission to each is KSh200/100 for a nonresident adult/child.

LAMU MUSEUM

Housed in a very grand Swahili warehouse on the waterfront, the Lamu Museum is an excellent introduction to the culture and history of Lamu Island. It's one of the most interesting small museums in Kenya, with displays on Swahili culture, the famous coastal carved doors, the Maulid Festival, Lamu's nautical history and the tribes who used to occupy this part of the coast in pre-Muslim days, including the Boni, who were legendary elephant-hunters.

The pride of the collection are the remarkable and ornate *siwa* (ceremonial horns) of Lamu and Paté, dating back to the 17th century. Lamu's *siwa* is made of engraved brass but it pales beside the glorious ivory *siwa* of Paté, carved from a single massive elephant tusk. Swahili relics from Takwa and other sites in the archipelago are displayed in the gallery downstairs.

SWAHILI HOUSE MUSEUM

If the Lamu Museum stokes your interest in Swahili culture, this beautifully restored traditional house tucked away off to the side of Yumbe House hotel will put you firmly back in the past. Inside you'll find a re-creation of a working Swahili home, with cookware, beds and other furniture. The attendant will give you a whistle-stop but informative tour in between small talk, including some fascinating descriptions of the regimented lives of Swahilis in the 18th and 19th centuries. The museum is well signposted from Kenyatta Rd.

LAMU FORT

The bulky, atmospheric Lamu Fort squats on Lamu's main square like a weary intruder among the airy Swahili roofs. The building of this massive structure was begun by the Sultan of Paté in 1810 and completed in 1823. From 1910 right up to 1984 it was used as a prison, and it now houses the island's library, and some lacklustre displays on natural history and the environment, which a guide will show you around. The highlight is scaling the ramparts for some sweeping town views.

GERMAN POST OFFICE MUSEUM

In the late 1800s, before the British decided to nip German expansion into Tanganyika in the bud, the Germans regarded Lamu as an ideal base from where they could successfully and safely exploit the interior. As part of their efforts the German East Africa Company set up a post office on Kenyatta Rd, and the old building is now a museum exhibiting photographs and memorabilia from that fleeting period of colonial history.

DONKEY SANCTUARY

With around 3000 donkeys active on Lamu, *Equus asinus* is still the main form of transport here, and this **sanctuary** (☎ 633303; Harambee Ave; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) was established by the International Donkey Protection Trust of Sidmouth, UK, to improve the lot of the island's hard-working beasts of burden. The project provides free veterinary services to donkey owners and tends to injured, sick or worn-out animals.

Activities

Taking a **dhow trip** is almost obligatory and drifting through the mangroves is a wonderful way to experience the islands. Prices vary depending on where you want to go and how long you go for; with a bit of bargaining you should pay around KSh500 per person. Groups of more than five aren't recommended as the boats aren't very big.

Whatever you arrange, make sure you know exactly how much you'll be paying and what that will include, to avoid misunderstandings and overcharging. Don't hand over any money until the day of departure, except perhaps a small advance for food. On long trips, it's best to organise your own drinks. Make sure you take a hat and some sunscreen, as there is rarely any shade on the dhows.

Most day trips meander around the channel between Lamu and Manda Islands, and the price includes fishing and snorkelling. Lunch is usually served on a beach on Manda Island. Longer trips head for Manda Toto Island, which has better snorkelling. Multiday trips head out to the remote island of Kiwayu (p356).

Dhows without an outboard motor are entirely dependent on wind and tides, so it's probably unwise to go on a long trip if you have a flight or other appointment to meet.

Walking Tour

The best, indeed only, way to see Lamu town is on foot. This tour will take you past some of the more noteworthy buildings in under an hour, but don't feel bound to follow it too rigidly. In fact, getting slightly lost is a vital part of the process!

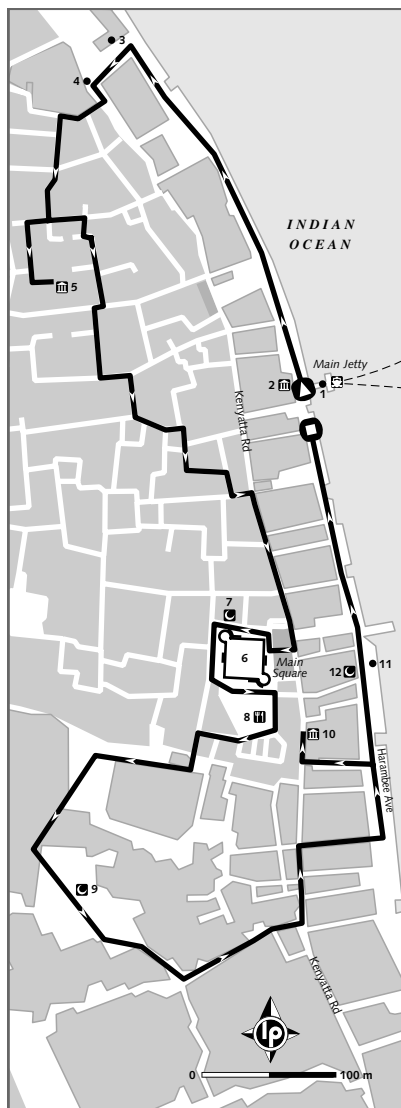
Most of Lamu's buildings date back to the 18th century and are constructed out of local materials, with cut coral-rag blocks for the walls, wooden floors supported by mangrove poles and intricately carved shutters for windows. Lavish decorations were created using carved plaster, and carpenters were employed to produce ornately carved window and door frames as a sign of the financial status of the owners. There are so many wonderful Swahili houses that it's pointless to specify examples – keep your eyes open and don't forget to look up.

Starting at the **main jetty** (1), head north past the **Lamu Museum** (2; p343) and along the waterfront until you reach the **door carving workshops** (3). In recent years there has been a real revival in woodcarving, and you can once again see traditional carved lintels and doors being made in workshops like these all over Lamu.

From here head onto Kenyatta Rd, passing an original Swahili **well** (4), and head into the alleys towards the **Swahili House Museum** (5; p343). When you've had your fill of domestic insights, take any route back towards the main street.

Once you've hit the main square and the **fort** (6; p343), take a right to see the crumbled remains of the 14th-century **Pwani Mosque** (7), one of Lamu's oldest buildings; an Arabic inscription is still visible on the wall. From here you can head round and browse the covered **market** (8), then negotiate your way towards the bright Saudi-funded **Riyadha Mosque** (9), the centre of Lamu's religious scene, founded by the great scholar Habib Swaleh in 1891.

From here head back to the waterfront, then stroll back up along the promenade, diverting for the **German Post Office Museum** (10; p343) if you haven't already seen it – the door is another amazing example of Swahili carving. If you're feeling the pace, take a rest and shoot the breeze on the **baraza ya wazee** (Old Men's Bench; 11) outside the appealing stucco minarets of the **Shiaithna-Asheri Mosque** (12). Benches of this kind were a crucial fea-



ture of any Swahili home, providing an informal social setting for men to discuss the issues of the day.

Carrying on up Harambee Ave will bring you back to the main jetty and the end of our tour.

(Continued on page 353)

(Continued from page 344)

Festivals & Events

The **Maulid Festival** celebrates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. Its date shifts according to the Muslim calendar, and it will fall on 20 March 2007 and 20 March 2008. The festival has been celebrated on the island for over 100 years and much singing, dancing and general jollity takes place around this time. Organised events include swimming galas, poetry reading, calligraphy competitions, donkey races for young boys and dhow races for all the dhow captains.

The **Lamu Cultural Festival** is another colourful cultural event held in the last week of August, though it's actually a recent initiative, established in 2000 and aimed more at tourists than local people. Attractions include traditional dancing, displays of crafts, such as *kofia* embroidery (a *kofia* is a cap worn by Muslim men), and dhow races.

Sleeping BUDGET

Lamu has been catering for budget travellers for several decades and still has loads of inexpensive guesthouses. Prices are remarkably consistent because of the competition for clientele, although you get what you pay for.

Rates rise by up to 50% from August to September and around Christmas and New Year. At other times there's plenty of scope for negotiation, especially if you plan to stay for more than a day or two. Touts will invariably try and accompany you from the jetty to get commission; the best way to avoid this is to book at least one night in advance, so you know ahead of time what you'll be paying.

Casuarina Rest House (☎ 633123; s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh300/500/700, s/d with private bathroom KSh400/800) Exactly the kind of friendly personal vibe that gets people backpacking in the first place. The roof terrace acts as a social lounge, the staff are great fun and the breezy top-floor balcony double is fantastic. It's often full both in and out of season; ongoing expansion should create a few more berths.

Pole Pole Guest House (☎ 0722-652477; s/d KSh500/1000) Pole Pole is north of the centre of town and back from the waterfront. One of the tallest buildings in Lamu, it has bright doubles with fans and mosquito nets. There's a spacious *makuti*-roofed terrace area with great views and its own mini 'tower'.

Lamu Guest House (☎ 633338; Kenyatta Rd; s/d/tr with shared bathroom KSh400/800/900, s/d with private bathroom KSh500/1000.) Behind Petley's Inn, the basic rooms are very plain, but the upper-floor ones are better and catch the sea breeze. The 'official' rates posted in reception are a good KSh500 more than quoted here!

Lamu Castle Hotel (☎ 0722-355240; s/d with shared bathroom KSh300/400) A lick of fresh pink paint has left the Castle looking rather spruce, but inside it's just the basics, and even some of the walls seem to be left a little short.

MIDRANGE

Yumbe House (☎ 633101; lamuoldtown@africaonline.co.ke; s/d/tr low season KSh1100/2100/2900, high season KSh1290/2700/3860) Close to the Swahili House Museum, Yumbe is a tall, traditional house with a leafy courtyard. The pleasant rooms have fridges and are spotlessly clean, decked out with *kangas* (printed cotton wrap-around, incorporating a Swahili proverb), woven rugs and Lamu furniture. Go for the big, chic 'tower' room right under the thatch.

Jannat House (☎ 633414; www.jannathouse.com; s/d with shared bathroom KSh2175/3675, with private bathroom KSh2625/4500; ☎) The architects clearly had a field day designing the Jannat House: it's essentially two houses spliced together around a courtyard, with several levels and multiple terraces. The lower rooms are disappointing but the upper levels are as nice as you'd hope for. Follow the signs from Kenyatta Rd; you'll need to keep looking up.

Stone House Hotel (☎ 633544; half board s/d US\$45/66) Another wonderful old Swahili place with Escher-like stairways and a fine leafy courtyard. The hotel has its own superb rooftop restaurant (no alcohol) with views over the town and waterfront. Rooms can be booked with Kisiwani Ltd (☎ 020-4446384).

Amu House (☎ 633420; amuhouse@aol.com; s/d/tr KSh1700/2300/2700) Of all the restored Swahili hotels, this beautiful 16th-century house has received perhaps the greatest attention to detail. Rates include breakfast, transfers from Manda airstrip and a free water-skiing lesson at Shela Beach. Knock KSh500 or so off in the low season.

Kitendetini Bahari Hotel (☎ 633172; s/d incl breakfast KSh700/1200) A borderline budget option set around a neat rectangular courtyard. All rooms have fans, mosquito nets and fridges, though the toilets lack seats. Prices are usually negotiable.

TOP END

Lamu World (☎ 633491; www.lamuworld.com; Harambee Ave; s/d low season US\$90/100, high season US\$150/200, ste low/high season US\$150/250; 📶 📶) It almost rankles to recommend something so new in such a traditional town, but the pale stone design of this luxury establishment is such a perfect modern interpretation of Swahili style that it frankly outshines even some of the authentic places. There are just 10 rooms shared between two houses, all with immaculate fittings.

Petley's Inn (☎ 633107; www.chaleislandparadise.com; Harambee Ave; s/d US\$70/90; 📶) Petley's has plenty of traditional touches, but is looking a bit worn these days. It's a fine place, though, especially the 'penthouse' room and rooftop bar. Rates include transfers to and from Manda Island airstrip.

New Lamu Palace Hotel (☎ 633164; Harambee Ave; s/d US\$70/90) This modern hotel is not as sensitively designed as its peers, but rooms are smart and comfortable, and there's a good restaurant (mains KSh650 to KSh1200) and a bar. The problem, as with all the top-end options here, is that you could rent a whole Swahili house for these prices!

Eating

It's important to know that *all* the cheap places to eat and many of the more expensive restaurants are closed all day until after sunset during the month of Ramadan.

Bush Gardens Restaurant (☎ 633285; Harambee Ave; mains KSh180-800) The Bush Gardens is the template for a whole set of restaurants along the waterfront, offering breakfasts, seafood – excellent fish, top-value 'monster crab' (KSh400) and the inevitable lobster in Swahili sauce (KSh750) – and superb juices and shakes. Just about every traveller on Lamu ends up here at some point.

Hapa Hapa Restaurant (Harambee Ave; mains KSh150-750) Very much in the same vein as Bush Gardens, and advocated just as vehemently by its regulars, this waterfront eatery is a bit more informal and African under its low thatch.

New Minaa Café (meals under KSh120; 🕒 6.30am-midnight) On the road towards the Riyadhha Mosque, this busy, clean rooftop café serves Swahili favourites, such as beef kebabs, *maharagwe* (beans in coconut milk), chicken tikka and *samaki* (fried fish). It's cheap and popular with both locals and travellers.

Mangrove Centre (Harambee Ave; mains KSh250-380) Facing the main jetty, the restaurant does a lively trade at lunchtime, and it's handy for a juice while you wait for a boat or find your feet on arrival. You'll find a video store and an informal cinema behind the eating area.

Whispers Coffeeshop (Kenya Rd; mains KSh240-550; 🕒 9am-9pm) In the same building as the posh Baraka Gallery, this is a great place for an upmarket meal, a freshly baked cake or a real cappuccino. There's a lovely palm-shaded courtyard and simple meals are available even during Ramadan, though it closes in the low season.

Bosnian Café (Kenya Rd) One of several dirt-cheap local canteens at the far end of the main street that set up takeaway stalls in the evening, selling samosas, chapatis, *mishkaki* (kebabs), chips and the like from 10 bob apiece.

Drinking & Entertainment

As a Muslim town, Lamu caters very poorly for drinkers; Petley's Inn (left) and New Lamu Palace Hotel (left) are about the only places you can sink a cold beer.

Civil Servants' Club (admission KSh100) Along the waterfront towards Shela village. Virtually the only reliable spot for a drink and a dance at weekends. It's small, loud, rowdy and great fun, though women travelling alone should run for cover.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Daily afternoon flights are available with **Airkenya** (☎ 633445; Baraka House, Kenya Rd) between Lamu and Wilson Airport in Nairobi (US\$143, 1½ hours). The inbound flights also continue to Kiwayu Island (US\$65, 15 minutes). **Safarilink** (Nairobi ☎ 020-600777) runs virtually identical services (US\$140).

Kenya Airways (☎ 633155; Casuarina House, Harambee Ave) has daily afternoon flights between Lamu and the domestic terminal at Nairobi's Kenya International Airport (KSh10,860, 2¼ hours).

Mombasa Air Safari (Mombasa ☎ 041-433061) flies to Mombasa (US\$90, 1¼ hours) via Malindi (US\$21, 30 minutes). Book through **Ndau Safaris** (☎ 633576).

The airport at Lamu is on Manda Island, and the ferry across the channel to Lamu costs KSh100.

BUS

The main bus companies operating between Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu are TSS, Falcon, Zam Zam, Khadi Star and Tawakal.

There are booking offices for all these companies on Kenyatta Rd, apart from Khadi Star, which has its office on the waterfront. The going rate to Mombasa is KSh400 to KSh500; most buses leave between 7am and 8am, so you'll need to be at the jetty at 6.30am for the boat to the mainland. Tawakal also has 10am and 1pm services. It takes at least four hours from Lamu to Malindi, plus another two hours to Mombasa. Book early as demand is heavy.

Getting Around

There are ferries (KSh40) between Lamu and the bus station on the mainland (near Mokowe). Boats leave when the buses arrive at Mokowe; in the reverse direction they leave at around 6.30am to meet the departing buses. Ferries between the airstrip on Manda Island and Lamu cost KSh100 and leave about half an hour before the flights leave.

SHELA

This ancient Swahili village, often spelled Shella, sits at the start of glorious Shela Beach on Lamu island. In some places it seems even more medieval than Lamu, with few signs of modernity along its mazelike alleyways. Although it's something of a European enclave, with almost unseemly amounts of building going on to cater for foreign demand, it's still an atmospheric place to wander around, and the mood is as languorous and laid-back as it's always been.

Most people come here for the **beach**: this spectacular dune-backed strip runs for 12km around the headland, so you're guaranteed a private stretch of sand, and it's a good place to comb the beach for shells. The Indian Ocean tsunami washed away a lot of sand here, revealing some sharp rocks, but it's expected to return to normal within a few seasons.

There's no surf at Shela village because it's still in the channel between Lamu and Manda Islands, which makes it a prime spot for **windsurfing**. For traditional surfing, there are real breakers at the mouth of the channel, although this is also the realm of some substantial sharks.

SLEEPING & EATING

Stopover Guest House (☎ 633459; mtendeni@ikenya.com; d incl breakfast KSh3000) This is the first place you come to on the waterfront, above the popular restaurant of the same name. The rooms are nice and light with big beds; prices should be thoroughly negotiable when it's not busy.

Shella Bahari Guest House (☎ 632046; bahari.guest@swiftlamu.com; d low season KSh2000-3000, high season KSh2500-4000) Another waterfront place with a very similar setup to the Stopover. Again, you can often bargain down; aim for around KSh500 per person.

Dodo Villas/Talking Trees Campsite (☎ 633500; camping per tent KSh400, r KSh600-1200, apt per person KSh200) This is Lamu's only budget beach option, 50m back from the seafront on the Shela-Lamu track. The main building has large, unfussy rooms and several concrete blocks hold apartments for up to 10 people, with more being built.

Peponi Hotel (☎ 633421; www.peponi-lamu.com; s/d high season US\$220/300; 🕒 closed May & Jun; 📶) At the east end of Shela is the top resort hotel on the island, right on the waterfront facing the Lamu Channel. It blends neatly into the surrounding Swahili buildings and offers just 24 individually styled rooms. The hotel has excellent facilities, plus a bar and up-market restaurant, all open to nonguests.

Kijani House Hotel (☎ 633235; www.kijani-lamu.com; d US\$160-180; 🕒 closed May & Jun; 📶) Set in splendid gardens, Kijani was painstakingly rebuilt over 10 years from the remains of three separate Swahili houses. Like Peponi, all manner of activities and trips can be arranged.

Island Hotel (☎ 633290; half board s/d US\$37/52) In the centre of Shela is a superb Lamu-style house with a romantic rooftop restaurant. It's only five minutes' walk from the waterfront, along the alley beside Kijani House, but you'll probably have to ask for directions.

Kisiwani Ltd (Nairobi ☎ 020-4446384; www.lamu.homes.com) Rents out whole houses in Shela from US\$180 to US\$280 per day. Properties include Mnarani House, behind the Mnarani Mosque, and Mtakuja House and Jasmine House, behind the Kijani House Hotel. Book well in advance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Shela, you can take a motorised dhow from the moorings in Lamu for

KSh100 per person (or KSh250 to KSh300 for a solo ride). Alternatively, you can walk it in about 40 minutes.

ISLANDS AROUND LAMU

The Lamu archipelago has plenty to offer outside Lamu itself. The easiest to get to is **Manda Island**, just across the channel, where most visitors go on dhow trips for snorkelling and to visit the Takwa ruins. The tiny Manda Toto Island, on the other side of Manda, has perhaps the best reefs on the coast.

Further northeast, **Paté Island** was the main power centre in the region before Lamu came to prominence, but is rarely visited now, preserving an uncomplicated traditional lifestyle as much by necessity as by choice. A regular motor launch shuttles between the towns of Mtangawanda, Siyu, Faza and Kizingitini.

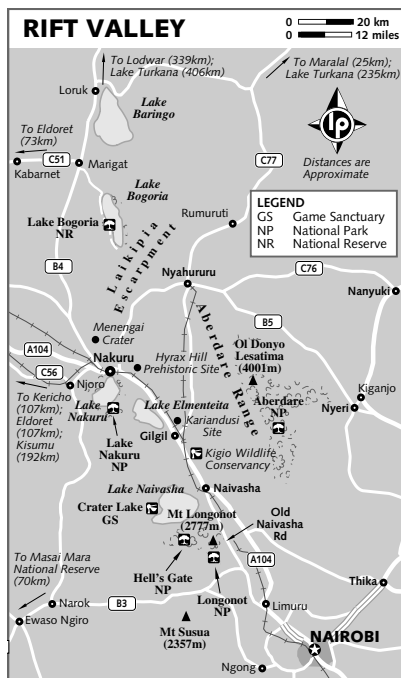
Even further out, remote **Kiwayu Island** is part of the Kiunga Marine National Reserve, and gets most of its scant tourist traffic from extended dhow trips and visitors to the exclusive luxury resort on the mainland. Snorkelling here is highly recommended.

THE RIFT VALLEY

Around eight million years ago Mother Earth tried to rip Africa clear in two; Africa bent, Africa buckled, but Africa never gave in. The continent's battle scar, stretching thousands of kilometres from Ethiopia to Mozambique, forms a series of stunning landscapes.

Some of the most attractive wounds are found in Kenya's famed Rift Valley, where serrated escarpments and splintered volcanoes tower over ochre soils, grassy plains and shallow soda lakes. Perhaps it's Earth's anger over failing to crack Africa that still causes steam and boiling fluids to spurt from its surface at Lake Bogoria and Hell's Gate National Park...

Today the valley's fertile floor, dotted with several large freshwater and soda lakes, is alive with some of Kenya's most spectacular wildlife. Lake Nakuru's shores are often famously dyed pink with hundreds of thousands of wading fluorescent flamingos, while its forested slopes host significantly bigger treats, like rhinos, giraffes, buffaloes, antelopes and leopards. And if you under-



take the challenge to walk or cycle unguided through the dramatic gorges of Hell's Gate National Park, you'll never see a zebra or giraffe in the same way again – being on foot is the ultimate amplifier of observation.

Hikes up the valley's various dormant volcanoes are rewarding and offer tremendous views over the rift. Similar views are also available from the viewpoints on the Old Naivasha Rd as it drops into the valley from the town of Limuru.

Geography

Kenya's Rift Valley is part of the Afro-Arabian rift system, which stretches 6000km from the Dead Sea in the Middle East to Mozambique in southern Africa, passing through the Red Sea then Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. A western branch forms a string of lakes in the centre of the continent, including Albert and Edward on the Uganda–DR Congo border, Kivu on the DR Congo–Rwanda border, and Tanganyika on the Tanzania–DR Congo border, which joins the main system at the northern tip of Lake Malawi.

In Kenya the Rift Valley can be traced through Lake Turkana, the Cherangani Hills, and Lakes Baringo, Bogoria, Nakuru, Elmenteita, Naivasha and Magadi. A string of volcanic peaks and craters also lines the valley. While most are now extinct, 30 remain active, and according to local legend, Mt Longonot erupted as recently as 1860. This continuing activity supports a considerable number of hot springs and provides ideal conditions for geothermal power plants, which are increasingly important in Kenya's energy supply.

Besides providing fertile soil, the volcanic deposits have created alkaline waters in most Rift Valley lakes. These shallow soda lakes, formed by the valley's lack of decent drainage, experience high evaporation rates, which further concentrates the alkalinity. The strangely soapy and smelly waters are, however, the perfect environment for the growth of microscopic blue-green algae, which in turn feed lesser flamingos, tiny crustaceans (food for greater flamingos) and insect larvae (food for soda-resistant fish).

LONGONOT NATIONAL PARK

Few places offer better Rift Valley views than the serrated crater rim of Mt Longonot, rising 1000m above the baking valley floor. In dog years this dormant volcano is ancient, while in geological terms it's a wee pup at 400,000 years of age.

Since the best vistas in this park (adult/child US\$15/5) are only reached with some effort on foot, peace and quiet accompany the panoramas. The steep climb to the rim takes just under an hour, while the rewarding jaunt to the summit (2777m) and around the crater takes another three hours. Despite the bounty of Rift Valley views, your eyes may just be drawn inward to the 2km-wide crater, a little lost world hosting an entirely different ecosystem. Calculating time for gawking, this 11km trek should take about six hours.

Although security has improved and the KWS no longer requires rangers to escort you, double-check the situation at the gate.

You can camp in the park, or there are plenty of hotels in nearby Naivasha.

Getting There & Away

If you're driving, the national park is 75km northwest of Nairobi on the Old Naivasha Rd. If you're without a vehicle, take a *matatu* from Naivasha to Longonot village, from

where there's a path to the park's access road (ask locals how to find it).

NAIVASHA

☎ 050

Bypassed by the new A104 Hwy to Nairobi, Naivasha has become an agricultural backwater. The streets have descended into cratered madness and services primarily focus on the area's blossoming flower industry. Although a convenient base for visits to Longonot National Park, staying at nearby Lake Naivasha (p358) is more enjoyable.

The only conceivable reason to stop is for supplies en route to the lake, as there are very limited stocks in the *dukas* further on.

Information

Barclays Bank (Moi Ave)

Cyber Cafe (Kenyatta Ave; per hr KSh120)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Moi Ave)

Medical Clinic (Biashara Rd; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4pm Sun)

Post office (Moi Ave)

Sleeping

La Belle Inn (☎ 2021007; Moi Ave; s/d incl breakfast KSh2500/2900) A classic colonial-style option, with rooms of various sizes and a level of cleanliness unseen anywhere else in town.

Ken-Vash Hotel (☎ 2030049; s/d/tw KSh1400/2000/2200) A large tourist-class place with TVs and thick shag carpets, but lacking La Belle's character. It's off Moi Ave.

Naivasha Silver Hotel (☎ 2020580; Kenyatta Ave; s/tw KSh600/1000) A slightly more pleasant option than other budget lodgings. Rooms and beds vary in size, so scope out a few. It has a decent restaurant and secure parking.

Kafico Lodge (☎ 2021344; Biashara Rd; s/tw KSh350/600) One of the odd places that 'seal' the rooms after cleaning, meaning you can only see your accommodation after paying. The rooms are tattered, the toilets lack seats, but they're comfy enough, and security is good.

Sam's Holiday Inn (☎ 0721-474556; Mbaria Kaniu Rd; s/tw KSh250/400) It's a bit gloomy, but should do the trick. Rooms have mosquito nets.

Eating

La Belle Inn (Moi Ave; meals KSh180–400) Whether your stomach is rumbling for curry, steak, pork, fresh *tilapia* (Nile Perch) or even apple pie, this colonial veranda is for you. It's also a great place for drinks.

Ming Yue Chinese Restaurant (Moi Ave; meals KSh300-700; ☎ Mon-Sat) With a menu boasting the likes of bean curd satay, fried *bok choy* and scrumptious spring rolls, it's safe to say that there's nothing else like this for miles.

Dancing Spoons (Biashara Rd; meals KSh60-130) Located below the Kafico Lodge, this is the restaurant of choice for simple Kenyan fare.

Jolly Cafe (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh80-220) While Martha Stewart would gasp at the window treatments and fluorescent chairs, she wouldn't choke on the Kenyan and Western dishes here.

Getting There & Away

The main bus and *matatu* station is off Mbaria Kaniu Rd, close to the municipal market. Frequent buses and *matatus* leave for Nakuru (KSh120, 1¼ hours), Nairobi (KSh150, 1½ hours), Nyahururu (KSh200, 1¾ hours) and points west. Some Nairobi *matatus* and all those for Kongoni via Fisherman's Camp (KSh70, 45 minutes) leave from Kenyatta Ave.

LAKE NAIVASHA

☎ 0311

The area around Naivasha was one of the first settled by *wazungu* (whites) and was a favourite haunt of the decadent Happy Valley set in the 1930s. Along with Karen, near Nairobi, it is now probably the largest remaining settler and expat community in Kenya.

The lake level has ebbed and flowed over the years, as half-submerged fencing posts indicate. Early in the 1890s it dried up almost completely, but over the next 20 years it rose a phenomenal 15m and inundated a far larger area than it presently occupies. It currently covers about 170 sq km and is home to an incredible variety of bird species, including the fish eagle.

As a freshwater lake, Naivasha's ecology is quite different from that of the Rift Valley's soda lakes. Since the water can be used for irrigation, the surrounding countryside is a major agricultural production area; the flower market has become a major industry here.

Naivasha has been a focus of conservation efforts in Kenya, and in 1995 the Lake Naivasha Riparian Association was formed to educate the estimated 300,000 people dependent on the lake about the environmental issues involved. The results are promising, but so far improvement has

WARNING

Security has taken a sad turn for the worse around Lake Naivasha in the past few years. With the flower industry paying decent wages, thousands have flocked here expecting jobs; of course, in reality there isn't enough work to go around, and some failed jobseekers have turned to crime.

Several lodges have been held up by armed thieves, and the owner of one prominent place was murdered in 2005. Most top-end lodges have increased security personnel and erected electric fences.

While most visitors enjoy their time here without incident, it's wise to take some precautions – ask about security measures and always be back in camp before dark.

been slow, and further drops in the water level are predicted for the next 15 to 20 years.

Sights & Activities

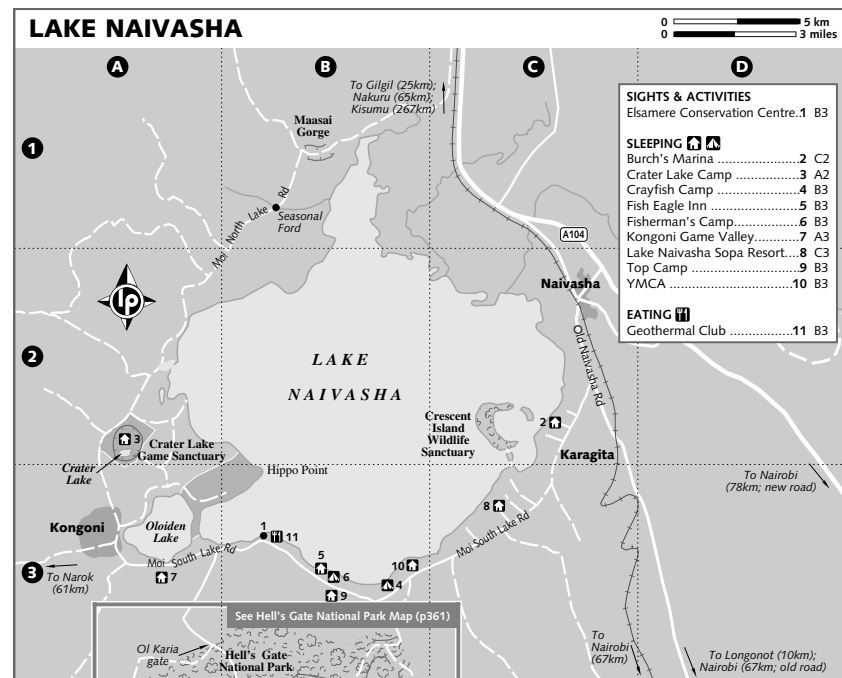
On the western side of Lake Naivasha, north of the village of Kongoni, is the **Crater Lake Game Sanctuary** (admission KSh100), a small park set around a beautiful volcanic crater. Wildlife is plentiful, and the tiny jade-green crater lake is held in high regard by the local Maasai, who even believe its water helps soothe ailing cattle.

On the eastern side of the lake is **Crescent Island** (adult/child nonresident US\$14/7), a wildlife sanctuary you can visit by boat or car.

A couple of kilometres past Fisherman's Camp on Moi South Lake Rd you'll find **Elsamere Conservation Centre** (☎ 2021055; elsa@africaonline.co.ke; admission KSh500; ☎ 8am-6.30pm), the former home of the late Joy Adamson of *Born Free* fame. The site is now a public conservation centre; entry includes afternoon tea (with a chance to see the eastern black-and-white colobus monkeys), a visit to the memorial room and a showing of the weathered 40-minute *Joy Adamson Story*. The only way to visit outside of hours is to sleep here or to book in for a meal. All bookings should be made in advance.

Sleeping BUDGET

Due to its popularity, Lake Naivasha has the Rift Valley's best range of budget



accommodation. All sites are located on or near Moi South Lake Rd unless otherwise specified.

Fisherman's Camp (☎ 2030088; camping KSh200, dm KSh500, s/tw with shared bathrooms from KSh800/1600) Spread along the grassy tree-laden southern shore, this is a perennial favourite of campers, overland companies and hungry hippos. The site is huge, enabling you to get away from the overlander crowds and the noise from the popular bar and restaurant. With overpriced simple rooms and basic *bandas*, camping is clearly the best option.

Top Camp (☎ 2030276; camping KSh200, s/tw *bandas* from KSh500/1000, 5-person cottages KSh5000) Although lacking Fisherman's lakeside location, Top Camp boasts crazy lake views from its hill-top perch. It's a quiet place with various tin-roofed, bamboo-walled *bandas* (almost all have bathrooms).

YMCA (camping KSh250, dm KSh250, *bandas* per person KSh300-450) For basic roofed accommodation, you'll do no better than the Y. There are two dorms and a number of spartan *bandas*; firewood and bedding can be provided for a small charge.

MIDRANGE

Crayfish Camp (☎ 2020239; craycamp@africaonline.co.ke; camping KSh250, s with shared bathroom KSh750, s/d with private bathroom KSh2500/3000; 🏠) Crayfish Camp can seem more like a beer garden than a campsite, but it's not a bad option. The pricey new rooms are a bit minimalist, but have some charm, while the petite rooms with shared facilities are very plain Jane. There's a restaurant and two bars, kitchen facilities, pool tables, and tent, bicycle and boat hire.

Burch's Marina (☎ 0733-660372; camping KSh200, 2-person rondavels KSh600, cottages d/tr/q KSh2200/2600/3000) A pleasant and well-shaded site, with hot showers, a communal cooking area and a well. It has a choice of basic twin-bed rondavels (circular buildings with conical roofs) or thatched four-bed family cottages. Advance booking is mandatory.

Fish Eagle Inn (☎ 2030306; fish@africaonline.co.ke; camping KSh220, dm KSh450, s KSh2110-2660, d KSh3550-4100; 🏠) If you have money to burn and find plywood charming, you'll love the overpriced DIY standard rooms. The 'Jumbo House' rooms are even more pricey, but have satellite TV and canopy beds.

TOP END

Kongoni Game Valley (☎ 2021070; www.kgvalley.com; full board per person US\$150; 🚰) Nothing around the lake can compare with this grand colonial farmhouse for utter African safari charm. Most rooms surround the house's lovely courtyard, and boast hardwood floors, rich rugs, comfortable beds and bear-claw bathtubs. Packages including all activities and trips to Hell's Gate National Park cost US\$300 per person.

Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort (☎ 2050358, Nairobi 020-3750235; full board s/d US\$188/250; 🚰) Towering cacti and manicured gardens front massive luxury cottages at this new resort. Besides the pool, there's a gym, sauna and lakeside path. The arc-shaped bar and restaurant is gorgeous.

Crater Lake Camp (☎ 2020613; crater@africaonline.co.ke; low season full board s/d KSh4930/8925, high season KSh5880/10500) A luxury tented camp nestled among trees and overlooking the tiny jade-green lake. The food is good and the service excellent, but we're not sure how the owner's recent tragic death will affect things.

Elsamere Conservation Centre (☎ 2021055; elsa@africaonline.co.ke; full board s/d US\$85/140) Small bungalows with great lake views dot the lovely lawn at Elsamere Conservation Centre (p358). Although lacking the 'wow' factor of others, it's comfortable, friendly and a relative bargain.

Eating

Since food and drinks can be had at most of the places listed earlier, there's little in the way of independent dining and dining.

Geothermal Club (meals KSh140-270) Set in a beautiful spot above the lake about 45 minutes' walk from Fisherman's Camp, this relaxed restaurant caters for employees of the KenGen thermal power plant but will happily serve visitors.

Getting There & Away

Frequent *matatus* (KSh80, one hour) run along Moi South Lake Rd between Naivasha town and Kongoni on the lake's western side, passing the turn-offs to Hell's Gate National Park and Fisherman's Camp.

It's a 5km walk from Kongoni to Crater Lake, but don't do this alone due to recent muggings.

There's one daily *matatu* along Moi North Lake Rd, leaving from the Total pet-

rol station in Naivasha around 3pm. Returning to town, you'll need to be on the road by about 7am, otherwise it's a long, dusty walk.

Getting Around

Most budget and midrange accommodation options hire reasonable boats for lake trips (KSh2500 per hour). Top-end lodges charge KSh3000 to KSh4000 per hour for similar rides. If you'd rather row row row yourself, Fisherman's Camp can help you out (KSh300 per hour).

Most sites also hire mountain bikes; Fisherman's Camp and Fish Eagle Inn both charge KSh500 per day. You'll find cheaper rides at various places signposted off Moi South Lake Rd, but check the contraptions carefully before paying.

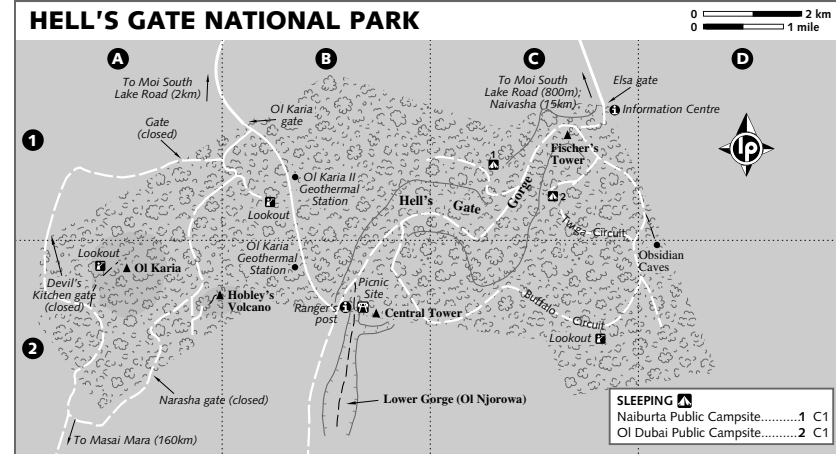
HELL'S GATE NATIONAL PARK

There's visiting national parks and then there's experiencing national parks – and **Hell's Gate** (☎ 050-2020284; adult/child US\$15/5) is an experience indeed. The park is truly unique, as it allows you to walk or cycle unguided across its breadth. Knowledge that cheetahs, lions and leopards may be lurking only adds to the excitement of it all!

Keep an eye out for the massive lammergeyers (bearded vultures), which are slowly being reintroduced. Their wingspans can reach almost 3m.

The scenery is dramatic, with rich ochre soils and savanna grasses squeezed between looming cliffs of rusty columnar basalt. Marking the eastern entrance to **Hell's Gate Gorge** is **Fischer's Tower**, a 25m-high volcanic column named after Gustav Fischer, a German explorer who reached here in 1882 only to have his party slaughtered by local Maasai. The tower is one of the park's many popular rock-climbing sites.

Rising from the gorge's southern end is the large **Central Tower** (climbing prohibited). A picnic site and ranger's post are close by, from where an excellent walk descends into the **Lower Gorge** (Ol Njorowa). This narrow sandstone ravine has been stunningly sculpted by water, and the incoming light casts marvellous shadows. It's a steep and very slippery descent, but some steps have been cut into the rock and whole school parties manage it on a regular basis. Flash floods are common, so check with rangers before proceeding.



If you want to explore further, the **Buf-falo Circuit** offers fine views over Hell's Gate Gorge, the surrounding countryside and the serrated profile of a distant Mt Longonot. This circuit has more soft sections of sand, which isn't conducive to cycling.

The park's western half is much less scenic and hosts the **Ol Karia Geothermal Station**. The plumes of rising steam can be seen from many of the park's viewpoints. It's usually possible to have a look around the site; ask the guards at Ol Karia II.

Camping here is highly recommended. Ol Dubai and Naiberta camp sites are probably the best. See p358 for details on other places to stay and opposite for information on how to get to the park.

NAKURU

☎ 051 / pop 163,000

Although Nakuru is Kenya's fourth-largest town, it still has a relaxed atmosphere and makes a pleasant base for a few days. It's on the doorstep of the delightful Lake Nakuru National Park and is only a few kilometres from the deep, dramatic Menengai Crater.

Information

Changing cash and travellers cheques in Nakuru is easy, with numerous banks and foreign exchange bureaus. Barclays ATMs are the most reliable. Plenty of cardphones are scattered around town.

Aga Khan Satellite Laboratory Lab services and malaria tests (KSh160). It's off Court Rd.

Crater Travel (☎ 2215019) One of the few reputable travel agencies in town. It's off Kenyatta Ave.

Dreams Cyber World (Kenyatta Lane; per hr KSh120; 📞 8am-8pm, closed 1-2pm Fri) Fast connections and open Sunday.

Post office (Kenyatta Ave)

Sleeping BUDGET

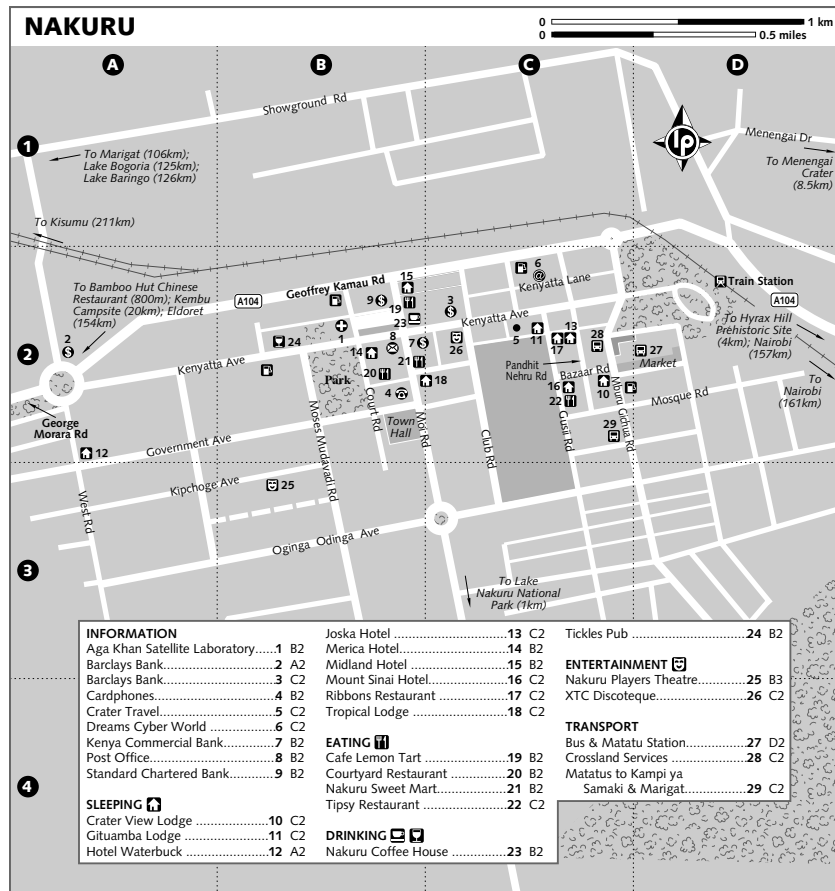
Mount Sinai Hotel (☎ 2211779; Bazaar Rd; s/tw/tr KSh350/500/650) A big, clean place with sound security (iron bars all over!). The rooms on the scenic roof terrace are the brightest of the bunch.

Joska Hotel (☎ 2212546; Pandhit Nehru Rd; s KSh400) Foam mattresses have shag-carpet covers in these basic rooms. Everything is rather clean, but you'll have to be a porcelain jockey – the toilets lack seats. Ask for an upstairs or inward-facing room, as they're more quiet.

Tropical Lodge (☎ 2216847; Moi Rd; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh250/350) While the bathrooms are shared, they do have toilet seats (a rarity in these parts). The rooms are simple, quiet and baby blue. It's run by a cheerful woman, which makes up for the odd cockroach.

Crater View Lodge (☎ 2216352; Mburu Gichua Rd; s/tw KSh300/350) All rooms face a bright inner courtyard, and noise is less than you'd suspect. The twin rooms are a bargain, even if the bathrooms are a bit rough. Secure parking is available.

Gituamba Lodge (Gusii Rd; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh260/345, with private bathroom KSh310/400) Rooms are all bare-bones basics, but they're rather



large and some have big bright windows. It can be noisy, so take a top-floor room.

There is no camp site in Nakuru itself, but you can camp in the national park or 20km west of town at **Kembu Campsite** (☎ 0722-361102; kembu@africaonline.co.ke; camping US\$4, 1-2-bedroom cottages KSh3000/6000). Kembu has a great atmosphere and it's particularly popular with overlanders; however, there's enough space for smaller parties not to be overwhelmed. The larger cottages have kitchens and are great for families. To get here, take a *matatu* heading to Molo (via Njoro; KSh80) and ask to be dropped at the metal gecko sign, about 6km northwest of Njoro on the C56. It's also signposted from the A104.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Waterbuck (☎ 2215672; West Rd; s/d/tw KSh2000/2500/2500; 🚰) Behind this boring exterior lurk large kitschy African-themed doubles. Although a bit brash, they're comfortable and more memorable than any other room in town. The singles and twins are small, dull and lack balconies.

Midland Hotel (☎ 2212125; Geoffrey Kamau Rd; s/d from KSh2300/3700) This popular place has a wide range of rooms with wall-to-wall carpets and varying levels of comfort. A third wing has recently been added.

TOP END

Merica Hotel (☎ 2216013; merica@kenyaweb.com; Kenyatta Ave; halfboards/d US\$65/110; 🚰 🚰) Opened

in 2003, this contemporary tower hosts Nakuru's only top-end rooms. Besides modern comfort, there's classic fun in Nakuru's best swimming pool (nonguests KSh200).

Eating

Bamboo Hut Chinese Restaurant (Giddo Plaza, George Morara Rd; meals KSh300-700) Highly recommended by Nakuru's expat community, this place serves great Chinese fare.

Courtyard Restaurant (meals KSh250-500) This place off Court Rd scratches a variety of itches, from Indian to Italian and beef stew to seafood. As the name suggests, it's got a nice courtyard.

Ribbons Restaurant (Gusii Rd; meals KSh50-200) One of the best restaurants for cheap Kenyan dishes. There's a balcony overlooking the street and the servers are pretty in pink.

Cafe Lemon Tart (Moi Rd; meals KSh100-200) A bright and popular café serving Kenyan fare. No alcohol is served, which guarantees a peaceful ambience.

Tipsy Restaurant (Gusii Rd; mains KSh100-250) A fast-food feel, complete with 1970s swivelling chairs. It's well liked by locals, and offers reasonable value for Indian and Western-style food, although dishes can be greasy.

Nakuru Sweet Mart (Gusii Rd) A perennial favourite, this bakery dishes out Indian sweets, puff pastries and tasty gingerbread men.

Drinking

Plenty of places in town serve idiot juice (beer), including the top-end hotels, and one wee shop even brews great coffee.

Nakuru Coffee House (Kenyatta Ave) For a straightforward caffeine fix, this café grinds out excellent fresh roasts.

Tickles Pub (Kenyatta Ave) This mellow pub is the friendliest choice and has several TVs for footy fans. Things pick up on weekends when it hosts local DJs.

Entertainment

Unusually for a rural town, there's actually a choice of evening options here.

Nakuru Players Theatre (Kipchoge Ave) Four evenings a month this theatre stages entertaining Kenyan plays.

XTC Discoteque (Kenyatta Ave) With strobe lights and a dark dance floor, it's the nearest you'll get to a proper nightclub in Nakuru. They were playing J-Lo when we visited – we'll try not to hold it against them.

Getting There & Away

Buses, *matatus* and occasional Peugeots leave the chaotic stands off Mburu Gichua Rd for Naivasha (KSh120, 1¼ hours), Nyahuru (KSh100, 1¼ hours), Kericho (KSh200, two hours), Nyeri (KSh250, 2½ hours), Eldoret (KSh200, 2¾ hours), Nairobi (KSh200, three hours), Kitale (KSh350, 3½ hours), Kisumu (KSh350, 3½ hours) and Kisii (KSh375, 4½ hours).

Matatus for Molo (KSh100, one hour) leave from **Crossland Services** (Mburu Gichua Rd), while services to Kampi ya Samaki (for Lake Baringo) via Marigat (for Lake Bogoria) leave further south on Mburu Gichua Rd. Kampi ya Samaki (KSh200, 2½ hours) costs slightly more and takes 30 minutes longer to reach than Marigat.

Buses serve most of the same destinations at slightly cheaper rates.

AROUND NAKURU

Menengai Crater

The gentle slopes of this dormant volcano conceal a stunning hidden crater, where striking red cliffs radiate outward to encircle a cauldron of convoluted black lava flows. While lush vegetation now proliferates on the harsh crater floor, some 480m below, the violent and dramatic volcanic history is easily seen.

A grim local legend states that the plumes of steam rising from the bottom are the souls of Maasai warriors thrown into the crater after a territorial battle, trying to make their way to heaven.

While hiking to the viewpoint from town offers great views back over Lake Nakuru, it's rather isolated and tourists have been mugged. To be safe, the 9km walk from town should only be done in groups. Alternatively, you can take a taxi for KSh1000.

Hyrax Hill Prehistoric Site

This **archaeological site** (adult/child KSh100/50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) is located just outside Nakuru on the Nairobi road. A small visitor's guide is available from the site's museum.

Archaeological excavations were conducted here from 1937 well into the 1980s, although the significance of the site was first mooted by Louis Leakey in 1926. Finds at the site indicate that three settlements were made here, the earliest possibly 3000 years ago, the most recent only 200 to 300 years ago.

From the museum at the northern end you can take a short stroll around the site, starting with the Northeast Village where 13 enclosures, or pits, were excavated. On the other side of the hill, you come to the Iron Age settlement and, just north of it, a series of burial pits where 19 skeletons were found (unfortunately, souvenir seekers have stolen the bones). Two Neolithic burial mounds were also discovered here, along with more Iron Age pits. Finally, if you follow the path back to the museum, there's a *bau* board carved in a large rock. This popular game is still played throughout East Africa.

You're free to wander the site, but it's rather cryptic and a guide is useful – a tip of KSh100 is plenty.

Lake Elmenteita

Its bleached shoreline often fringed in pink thanks to thousands of brilliant flamingos, Elmenteita is another of the major Rift Valley soda lakes. It's not a national park, so there are no entry fees and you can walk around parts of the shoreline that aren't privately owned. For some water action, Flamingo Camp hires canoes for a paltry KSh100.

Surrounded by lovely gardens and overlooking Lake Elmenteita, **Lake Elmenteita Lodge** (☎ 051-8508630; high season full board s/d US70/100, low season US\$120/155; 🏠) has bungalows with dated but well-maintained rooms. Horseback riding (KSh1500 per hour) and walks to the lake are offered.

Set right on shore, **Flamingo Camp** (☎ 0722-832001; camping KSh200, s/d KSh2000/4000) has small rooms spread between three stone rondavels. Although it's comfortable and the tiny terraces offer good views, it's overpriced. The camp site isn't bad but would be a more attractive option with some shade. A restaurant and bar are on site.

LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK

With a pink sea of flamingos lapping at its shores, rich areas of grassland, euphorbia and acacia forests, and rocky cliffs supporting a myriad of animal and bird species, there's little doubt why **Lake Nakuru National Park** (☎ 051-2217151; adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) is rivalling Amboseli as Kenya's second most visited park after the Masai Mara.

Sightings of grazing or lazing white rhinos at the lake's southern end now seem to

be commonplace since the species was re-introduced several years ago. The shy black rhinos, browsers by nature, are more difficult to spot. If you're very very lucky, you'll catch a glimpse of a rare tree-climbing lion. Warthogs are common all over the park, providing light relief from the 'serious' animals with their amusing gait and upright tails (known to locals as Kenyan antennas). Along the shore you'll come across waterbucks and buffaloes, while Thomson's gazelles and reedbucks can be seen further into the bush, where there's also a good chance of seeing leopards. Around the cliffs you may catch sight of hyraxes and birds of prey amid the countless baboons. A small herd of hippos generally frequents the lake's northern shore.

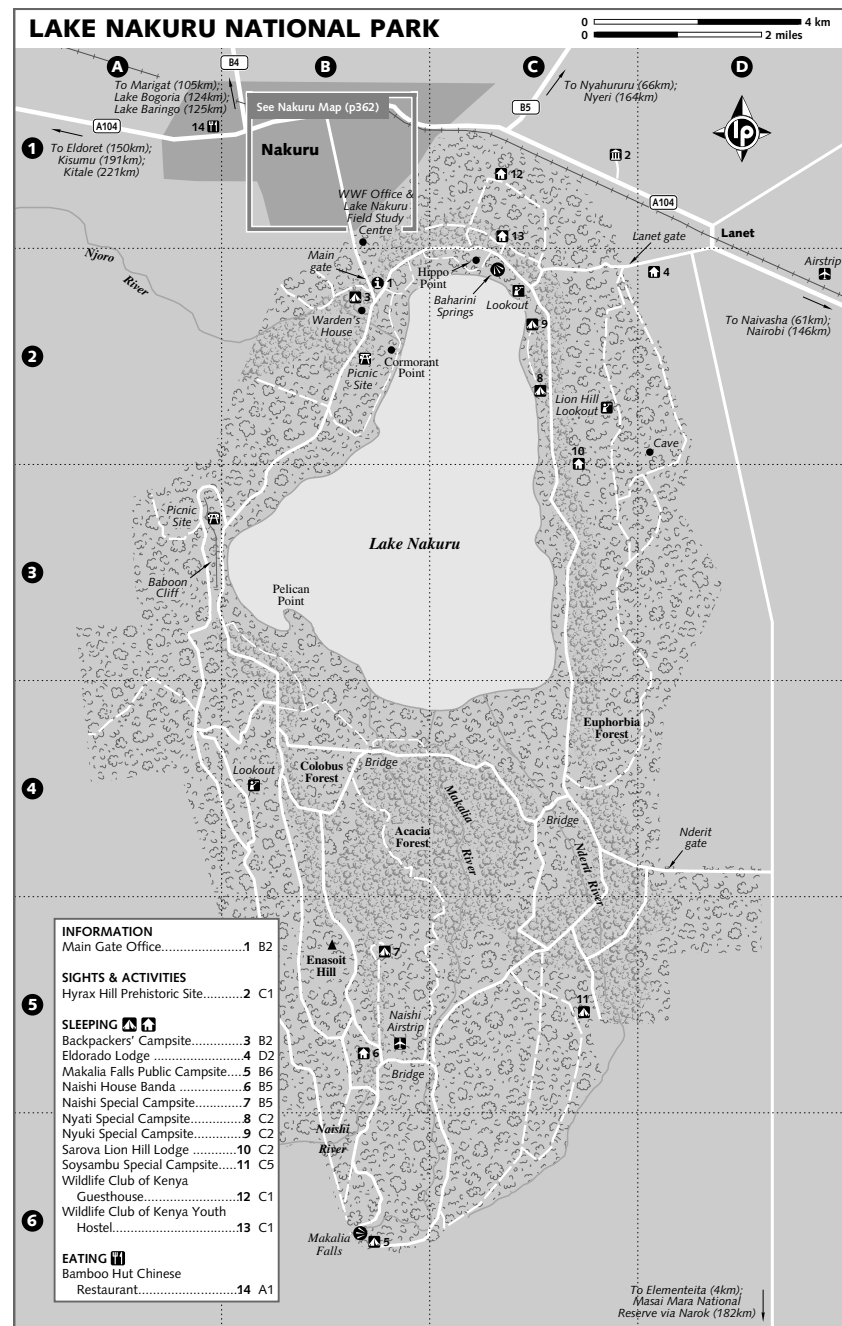
There's no better view of the park than that seen from atop **Baboon Cliff** as the afternoon sun casts a warm glow over the lake.

Since the 180-sq-km park's creation in 1961, the population of lesser and greater flamingos has risen and fallen with the soda lake's erratic water levels. When the lake dried up in 1962 (happy first birthday!), the population plummeted as it later did in the 1970s, when heavy rainfall diluted the lake's salinity affecting the lesser flamingo's food source (blue-green algae). Over much of the last decade healthy water levels have seen flamingo numbers blossom again. If future droughts or flooding make them fly the coop again, you'll probably find them at Lake Bogoria.

Sadly, not all is picture perfect, as in recent years pressures on the lake have increased. Pollution from Nakuru town, pesticide run-off from surrounding farms and massive deforestation within the water catchment area have all caused concern. A World Wildlife Fund (WWF) project is making considerable progress in countering these problems, and the local afforestation program continues to plant thousands of indigenous tree seedlings.

Walking in the park isn't permitted, so you'll have to hire a taxi, go on a tour or be lucky enough to hitch a ride. You can get out of your vehicle on the lakeshore and at certain viewpoints, but don't drive too close to the water's edge, as the mud is very soft!

The main gate is 2km south of the centre of Nakuru. KWS smartcards and official guidebooks (KSh750) are available here.



Sleeping

None of the budget or midrange options provide any meals, so you'll have to bring your own food. If camping, make sure your tents are securely zipped or monkeys and baboons will make a right mess.

BUDGET

Makalia Falls Public Campsite (adult/child US\$10/5) While it may be hard to get to and have cruder facilities than Backpackers', this is the best place to camp in the park. It's picturesque and sits next to the seasonal Makalia Falls.

Backpackers' Campsite (adult/child US\$10/5) This large public camp site sits inside the main gate and has very good camping facilities.

Special camp sites (adult/child US\$15/5, plus set-up fee KSh5000) These are dotted all over the park and have no facilities, but offer a true bush experience – just you and the animals!

Wildlife Club of Kenya Youth Hostel (☎ 051-850929; dm KSh150, s with shared bathroom KSh300, s/tw with private bathroom KSh500/1000) A nice, very friendly camp site with clean dorms, simple singles and two-bed *bandas*, complete with cooking areas.

MIDRANGE

Wildlife Club of Kenya Guesthouse (☎ 051-851559; PO Box 33, Nakuru; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh800/1600) This place is great: facilities include hot showers, TV lounge, and use of the kitchen's fridge, gas cooker and microwave. The rooms are clean and comfortable.

Eldorado Lodge (☎ 051-851263; camping KSh300, s/d KSh1000/1500; 🍷) Just outside the park's Lanet gate, this place is a viable option for camping if you roll up to closed park gates in the evening. Rooms are overpriced and the pool is a little too green for our liking.

TOP END

Naisi House Banda (bookings ☎ 051-2217151; 6-person cottage plus 2-person annexe Jan-Jun US\$200, Jul-Dec US\$250) Sit on the shady terrace and watch zebras and rhinos grazing on your very doorstep – no fences here! This charming self-catering cottage is very comfortable, complete with a lovely fireplace, sitting room and full kitchen. The annex was designed for safari drivers and is pretty basic. The park's main gate handles bookings and payments.

Sarova Lion Hill Lodge (☎ 020-2713333; www.sarovahotels.com; high season full board s/d from US\$160/220,

MAU FOREST EVICTIONS

In July 2005 Mwai Kibaki's Kenyan government forcibly evicted between 10,000 and 50,000 locals from their homes in the Mau Forest, which sits west of Nakuru and south of Molo. Citing Kenya's dismal forest cover (a mere 1.7%), the government claims the evictions are necessary to protect what's left of Kenya's fragile forest environment. The present government also believes that much of the land was illegally allocated by Moi's government during the run-up to the 2002 election. Like Moi, most of the displaced families are subclans of the Kalenjin tribe.

The force used during the removals and the lack of options given to the evictees has sparked outrage, with critics likening the situation to that of Zimbabwe. With evictions scheduled for the forests around Mt Kenya and Mt Elgon, the political firestorm will only heat up in the coming years.

low season US\$80/140; 🍷) Sitting high up the lake's eastern slopes, this lodge offers 1st-class service and comfort. The views from the open-air restaurant/bar and from most rooms are great. Rooms are understated but pretty, while the flashy suites are large and absolutely stunning.

Getting There & Away

If you don't have your own vehicle, the only way into the park from Nakuru is by taxi or on an organised tour. A taxi for a few hours should cost KSh2000, though you'll have to bargain hard.

More enjoyable options are **One World Tours & Safaris** (☎ 0733-621598; PO Box 13047, Nakuru), which charges KSh6000 for an open-topped eight-seat 4WD (about six hours), and **Crater Travel** (☎ 051-2215019; off Kenyatta Ave, Nakuru), which has three-seater jeeps for KSh4500 (also for six hours).

If you're driving, there's access from the main gate, just outside Nakuru; the Lanet gate, a few kilometres south on the Nairobi road; and the Nderit gate, near the southern end of the lake.

LAKE BOGORIA NATIONAL RESERVE

In the late 1990s this reserve's shallow soda lake achieved fame as 'the new home of the flamingo', with a migrant population of up to

two million birds. In 2000 it was designated a Ramsar site, establishing it as a wetland of international importance. While lesser flamingo numbers have dropped significantly now that Lake Nakuru has recovered from earlier droughts, this **reserve** (☎ 0722-377252; PO Box 64, Marigat; adult/child KSh1500/200) is still a fascinating place to visit and a world away from any other Rift Valley lake.

Backed by the bleak Siracho Escarpment, moss-green waves roll down Lake Bogoria's rocky, barren shores, while **hot springs** and **geysers** spew boiling fluids (keep your distance!) from the earth's insides nearby. Amazingly this inhospitable alien environment is a haven for birdlife and at **Kesubo Swamp**, just to the north, more than 200 species have been recorded. One lucky soul spotted 96 species in one hour – a Kenyan record.

The lack of dense brush also makes this one of the best places in Kenya to see the greater kudu. The isolated wooded area at the lake's southern end is also home to leopards, klipspringers, gazelles, caracals and buffaloes. Oh, you'll also see your fair share of donkeys and cattle, too.

While the odd Kenyan tourist visits the springs, few people venture further south, meaning you may well have the place to yourself. You now have the bonus of being able to explore on foot or bicycle, though stay clear of the small buffalo population. If you'd like a guide (half-/full day KSh500/1000), enquire at Lobo gate.

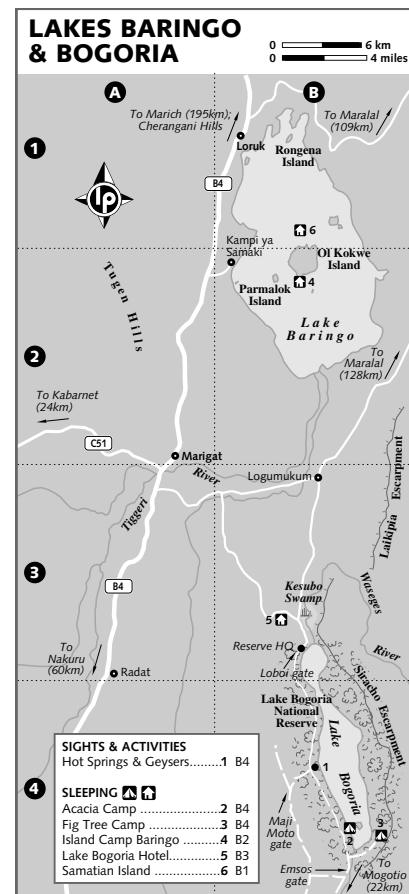
Sleeping & Eating

Camping is the only sleeping option within the reserve. If you'd prefer a roof, there's a top-end hotel nearby and various dives near the Lobo gate.

Fig Tree Camp (camping KSh500) Nestled beneath a stand of massive fig trees is this fantastic site. The loos lack doors and baboons can be a nuisance, but there are brilliant views down the lake and the 2km drive (4WD only) or hike from the main park road is worth the trip alone.

Acacia Camp (camping KSh500) A pretty lakeside site shaded by acacias, with some soft grass for pitching tents. You'll have to bring your own water.

Lake Bogoria Hotel (☎ 051-2216441; lakebogoria@wanachi.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$70/90; 🍷) Set in lovely grounds 2km before the Lobo gate, this is a quality option with two swimming



pools. Rooms in the hotel are large and bright, while those in the new cottages (same price) are more modern and much more comfortable. The restaurant (lunch/dinner buffets KSh600/KSh700, mains KSh100 to KSh350) serves a variety of dishes, including several vegetarian options.

Some cheap accommodation is available in the nearby town of Marigat. This area is also a good place to buy locally produced *asali* (honey), which is sold from countless roadside kiosks for around KSh150 a bottle.

Getting There & Away

There are three entrance gates to Lake Bogoria – Emsos in the south, Maji Moto in the west and Lobo in the north. The turn-off for

Emsons and Maji Moto gates is at Mogotio, 38km past Nakuru on the B4, but both these routes are inaccessible without a 4WD.

Loboi gate is a far more straightforward point of entry, reached by taking a turn-off shortly before Marigat. It's 20km from here to the actual gate along a good, sealed road. The sealed road continues to the hot springs, but is in horrendous shape.

Without your own vehicle, Loboi gate can be accessed by *matatu* from Marigat (KSh50, 30 minutes). Regular *matatus* serve Marigat from Nakuru (KSh180, two hours) and Kabarnet (KSh140, 1½ hours).

LAKE BARINGO

☎ 051

This rare freshwater Rift Valley lake, encircled by mountains and its surface dotted with picturesque islands and hippos batting their eyelids, is a spectacular sight indeed. Topping the scenic surrounds is an amazing abundance of birdlife, with over 450 of the 1200 bird species native to Kenya present. For years bird-watchers have come here from all over the world to glimpse the rare and beautiful feathered flyers.

Despite being listed as Kenya's fourth Ramsar site in January 2002, the lake has been plagued with problems over the past few years. Irrigation dams and droughts caused the water level to drop alarmingly; severe siltation due to soil erosion around the seasonal *luggas* (creeks) has meant the water is almost always muddy; and the lake has been overfished so badly that any *tilapia* caught these days are rarely more than 15cm long. The water level has risen again recently, but the situation is still very delicate, and with further droughts expected the ecosystem remains at risk.

Lake access is easiest from **Kampi ya Samaki** on the lake's western shore, some 15km north of Marigat. This small, quiet town used to be a fishing village, but now depends almost entirely on tourism. Sadly the recent problems have caused visitor numbers to drop, resulting in even tougher times for the community. It's still a lovely place to visit and locals would greatly appreciate the business.

Activities

The most popular activity around Lake Baringo and touted as competitively as the Masai Mara is in Nairobi are **boat rides** – there are

BARINGO WILDLIFE

Crocodiles and hippos apart, Lake Baringo's main attraction is the birdlife and the lake is the bird-watching centre of Kenya. Over 1200 different species of bird are native to the country, and more than 450 of them have been sighted here. People come from all over the world to try to catch a glimpse of something rare; Lake Baringo Club (opposite) even has a 'resident ornithologist' who leads bird-watching walks and gives advice to guests. A few years ago she set a world record for the number of species seen in one 24-hour period – over 300!

boat offices all over town, and literally everyone you talk to will claim to have access to a boat and be able to undercut anyone else's price. A speciality is a trip to see fish eagles feeding; the birds have learned to dive for fish at a whistle, making for great (if slightly contrived) photo opportunities.

There's a constant twittering, chirping and cooing of birds in the trees around the lake, and even if you're not an avid 'twitcher', it's hard to resist setting off on a dawn **bird walk**, when you have a good chance of seeing hornbills or a magnificent fish eagle in action. Lake Baringo Club (opposite) offers the most knowledgeable guides and charges KSh1100 per person for a 60- to 90-minute walk.

Cultural tours to Pokot, Tugen and Njemps villages close to the lake are also offered by the Lake Baringo Club (KSh 600); the Njemps are local cousins of the Maasai, mainly practising pastoralism and fishing. You'll usually be allowed to walk around freely and take photos, but in return you'll probably be hassled to buy handicrafts. There's an additional KSh500 charge for entering each village.

If nothing mentioned so far has floated your boat, there's even an uninhabited and uncharted '**Devil's Island**', with a fearsome reputation among the normally prosaic locals. The rock forming the cliffs outside of town are also apparently suitable for **technical rock-climbing**.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Bahari Lodge & Hotel (☎ 851425; Kampi ya Samaki; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh200/400) Bahari is

popular with the drivers of safari vehicles, which is generally a good sign! The rooms are a little shabby but OK. The toilets are rather odoriferous.

Weavers Lodge (☎ 0721-556153; Kampi ya Samaki; s/tw KSh350/700) Down a rocky alley off the town's main drag, Weavers has good-sized rooms that come with fans, mosquito nets and comfortable beds; sadly toilet paper, soap and hot water are often lacking, and the constant loud music from the bar can be a pain.

MIDRANGE

Roberts' Camp (☎ 851879; camping KSh350, bandas s/tw with shared bathroom KSh1000/2000, 4-person cottages KSh5000) Easily spotted off Kampi ya Samaki's main drag, this fantastic camp site is right on the lake, and offers great camping facilities, tents, comfortable cottages, cooking facilities and an open-air restaurant/bar. Campers need to exercise some common sense regarding the hippos, which may graze right outside your tent at night. Ideally you should stay at least 20m away from them when you can. No-one's been seriously hurt by a hippo in almost 15 years here, but some readers have had decidedly close calls!

TOP END

Lake Baringo Club (☎ 850880, Nairobi ☎ 020-650500; blockbaringo@africaonline.co.ke; Kampi ya Samaki; full board s/d low season US\$120/150, high season US\$150/180; 🍷) Set in sprawling lakeside gardens, this is a grand old place. The rooms are pleasant if uninspired, with angled wooden ceilings, comfortable beds, wee terraces and linoleum floors. Facilities include a swimming pool, games room, badminton court and library, all open to nonguests for KSh200. There's a nightly slide show featuring beautiful birds sighted around Lake Baringo.

Island Camp Baringo (bookings ☎ 020-4447151; full board s/d US\$220/295; 🍷) This luxury tented lodge sits on Ol Kokwe Island's southern tip and makes a perfect hideaway. It's beautifully conceived with 23 double tents set among flowering trees, all overlooking the lake. Facilities include two bars and water-sports equipment. Price includes transfers from town.

Samatian Island (bookings ☎ 020-4447151; Kampi ya Samaki; full board s/d US\$255/510) For a truly exclusive experience, this is the place to be. The three chalets on this tiny island are

rented as a unit, and the hefty price tag is worth it for the glorious isolation. Transfers from Kampi ya Samaki are included.

Eating & Drinking

Thirsty Goat (Roberts' Camp, Kampi ya Samaki; meals KSh300-450) This lovely open-air restaurant and bar serves a welcome variety of foreign fare. It's a bit pricey, but when your nose gets a whiff of the Moroccan meatballs, your taste buds will step on your whinging wallet's tongue.

Lake Baringo Club (Kampi ya Samaki; lunch/dinner buffets KSh1300/1460, mains KSh300-700) As you'd hope for this price, the food is mostly excellent. While you may shed a tear paying KSh120 for a large Tusker, one sip of it on the shady terrace or lakeside lawn and you'll soon be laughing again.

Self-caterers should remember that fresh vegetables and fruit are generally in short supply in Kampi ya Samaki. Bring much of what you need – Marigat usually has a good selection.

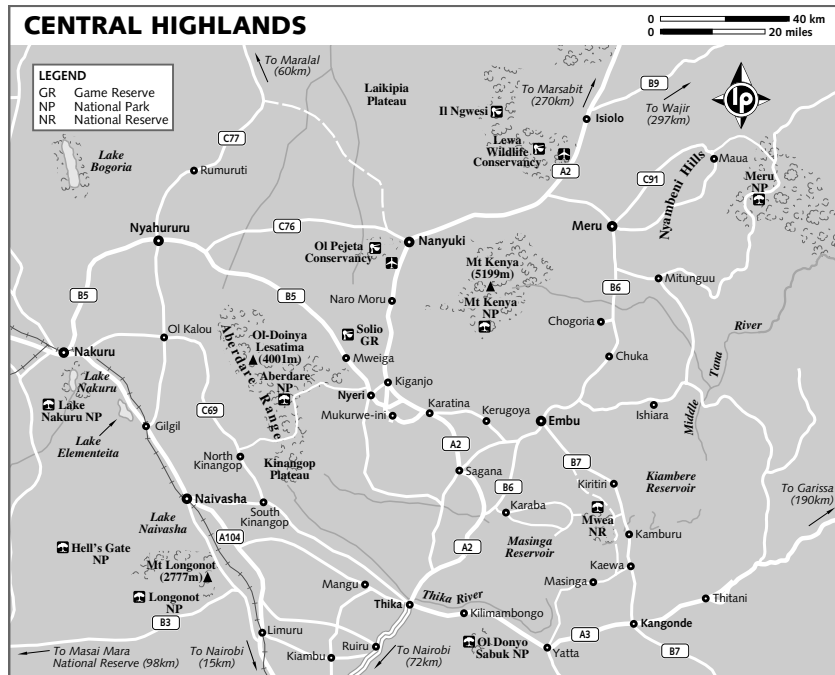
Getting There & Away

A 25-seater bus leaves Kampi ya Samaki for Nakuru each morning between 6.30am and 9.30am (KSh 200, 2½ hours). Failing that, hop on one of the regular pick-up trucks to Marigat (KSh50, 30 minutes) and catch more frequent *matatus* from there to Nakuru (KSh160, two hours) or Kabarnet (KSh140, 1½ hours).

A gravel track connects Loruk at the top end of the lake with the Nyahururu to Maralal road. If you have your own transport, it's a rough but bearable road; there's no public transport along it and hitching is extremely difficult. You can usually buy petrol at Lake Baringo Club; if you're heading northeast, it's worth noting that after Marigat, there's no reliable supply until Maralal.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Forming the eastern wall of the Rift Valley and climbing from the heat of the northern plains are the Central Highlands, Kenya's undisputed heartland. What better monument to the region's importance than Mt Kenya, the country's highest mountain and Africa's second-highest peak.



Densely populated and intensively cultivated, the Central Highlands are home to the Kikuyu people, Kenya's largest and most politically favoured group. Squeezed gloriously into the mix are the national parks of Mt Kenya, Aberdare and Meru, which hold an array of landscapes, wildlife, flora and fauna unseen elsewhere, as well as some amazing trekking possibilities.

The Central Highlands' Laikipia Plateau, which stretches into northern Kenya from Nanyuki, is also home to a pioneering conservation project that has communities and ranches working together to protect and foster wildlife outside national parks. This effort can only bode well for the region's future.

That said, the Central Highlands does have its problems, most of which are tied back to the purchase, division and distribution of many white farmers' lands to the Kikuyu after independence. This subdivision, with its frequent encroachment on one of Kenya's few remaining large forested areas, has led to frequent water crises and soil erosion. Although there's still a great

deal of forest remaining, demand for timber to be used as construction material and firewood (the most common form of fuel for cooking and heating) puts it at risk.

NYERI

☎ 061

A well-provisioned, lively place and one of the Central Highlands' largest towns, Nyeri is the administrative headquarters of Central Province and gateway to Aberdare National Park. In colonialism's early days Nyeri was a garrison town, but quickly became a trading and social centre for white cattle ranchers, coffee growers and wheat farmers. The verdant surrounds are intensively cultivated for vegetables, sugar cane, citrus fruits, bananas, tea, coffee and macadamia nuts.

On a clear morning you can see distant Mt Kenya in all its snowcapped glory. However, few travellers linger more than two nights.

Information

Barclays Bank (Kenyaatta Rd)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Kenyaatta Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank (Kenyaatta Rd)

Sights & Activities

SOLIO GAME RESERVE

This private 17,500-acre **reserve** (☎ 55271; B5 Hwy; adult/child/vehicle KSh1600/free/500), 22km north of Nyeri, plays a major part in preserving and breeding black rhinos in Kenya. Most of the hook-lipped horned beasts wandering national parks were actually born here. Its current population of rhinos would make some sub-Saharan countries blush!

The reserve also hosts animals like oryxes, gazelles, hartebeests, giraffes and buffaloes. While visiting you'll probably see the beautiful crowned crane and several varieties of paradise birds.

Self-drive safaris are permitted, with free maps available at the front gate. Allmendinger's guesthouse (p372) offers half-day trips for US\$60 per person (minimum two people, plus admission).

BADEN-POWELL MUSEUM

Sitting within the Outspan Hotel's beautiful grounds, this **museum** (admission KSh100; ☎ 8am-6pm) was the former cottage of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the international Scout Association. You'll find oodles of scouting paraphernalia and great mid-20th-century photos. The man himself is buried behind **St Peter's Church** (B5 Hwy).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Wildlife drives into Aberdare National Park are available through Nyeri's three top-end hotels. Outspan Hotel is the most reason-

able, charging KSh2500 per person (minimum two passengers) plus park fees for a two-hour drive.

If you fancy getting your head in the clouds, the **Gliding Club of Kenya** (Map p374; ☎ 0733-760331; gliding@afriiconline.co.ke; PO Box 926, Nyeri), based 2km south of Mweiga, fits the bill. A 10-minute flight costs US\$50.

Every Sunday and public holiday the **Green Hills Hotel** (Map p372; Bishop Gatimu Rd) hosts a day-long mini-festival of traditional dance, music and puppetry. It's free and great for kids. A dip in the swimming pool is KSh200.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Most of the cheap options will curl your toes, so here are some of the better picks.

Central Hotel (Map p372; ☎ 2030296; Kanisa Rd; s/tw incl breakfast KSh600/850) Central hosts bright, clean yet slightly cramped twins and more roomy singles, with many boasting balconies. Service is a step up from most.

Ibis Hotel (Map p372; ☎ 2034858; Kimathi Way; s/tw KSh500/800) Representing good value, Ibis has comfortable and clean rooms with brilliant power-showers.

Paresia Hotel (Map p372; ☎ 2032765; s/tw KSh300/500) With red cement floors and blue linoleum showers, Paresia is as colourful as it is cheap. Some rooms smell a bit musty, so sniff a few. It's off Gakere Rd.

Nyeri Star Restaurant & Board & Lodging (Map p372; ☎ 2031083; Gakere Rd; s/tw KSh300/500) Slightly

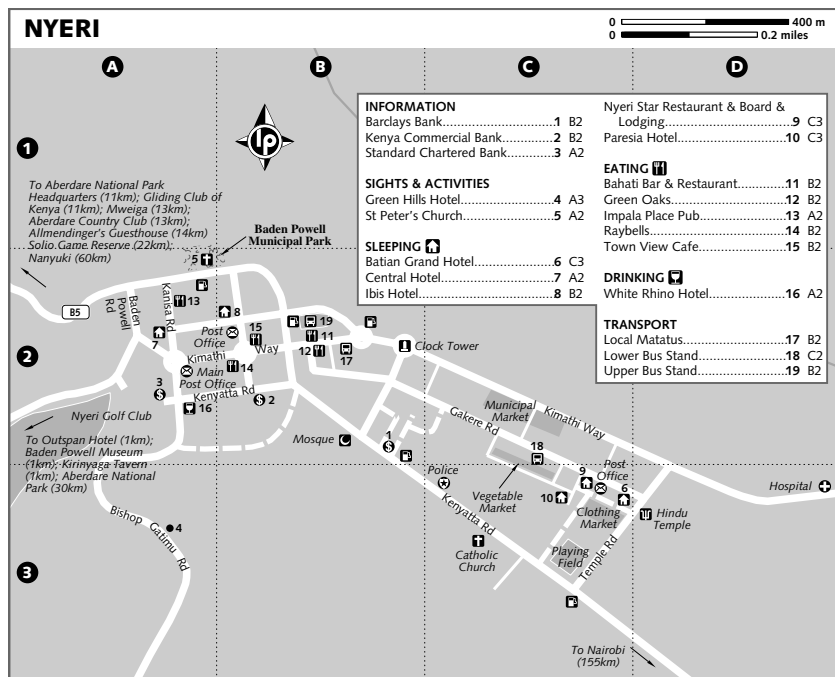
BEHIND THE BEANS

Kenya is a great place to buy coffee, and it is one thing you'll have no problem taking out of the country. However, next time you're sipping a frappuccino or demanding extra froth on your US\$4 skinny latte, spare a thought for Kenyan coffee farmers, who number among the planet's worst-exploited commodity producers.

Coffee became something of a cause célèbre in 2002 when Oxfam International launched its Make Trade Fair campaign, highlighting the huge gulf between farmers' earnings and the massive profits enjoyed by multinational 'roasters'. According to Oxfam, coffee prices had slumped to a 30-year low, with farmers worldwide receiving around US\$1 per kilogram, while the international industry, worth over US\$2 billion annually, charged consumers almost US\$15 per kilo.

The global market remains hugely oversupplied and buyers effectively force farmers to accept whatever price they offer. Kenyan growers receive as little as 4% of auction prices – a serious crisis for a country exporting up to 32,000 tonnes of coffee annually.

Thankfully the Make Trade Fair campaign has made gains and some major roasters now deal partially in Fair Trade Coffee, albeit an infinitesimal fraction of their business. The sooner you demand Fair Trade Coffee for your skinny latte, the sooner the unjust imbalance facing Kenyan farmers will be rectified. So get ordering – you can sleep later!



rougher around the edges than nearby Paresia, it still has hot showers and some sizable rooms. The upstairs outward-facing rooms are brightest and most quiet.

MIDRANGE

Batian Grand Hotel (Map p372; ☎ 2030743; batianhotel@wanachi.com; Gakere Rd; s/tw KSh700/1000) Front rooms face Mt Kenya at this well-appointed place with good facilities (when the boilers aren't leaking). The small inward-facing singles are darker than the larger carpeted twins and doubles. A coffee shop, restaurant and pub are downstairs.

TOP END

Outspan Hotel (Map p374; ☎ 2032424, Nairobi ☎ 020-4452103; www.aberdaresafarhotels.com; Apr–mid-Jul full board s/tw from US\$98/130, mid-Jul–Mar US\$130/160) Formerly part of Block Hotels, this lovely property has new owners, who are keen to up the standard while maintaining the historic character. The 'standard' rooms (15 to 21), with stone fireplace and doors opening onto beautiful gardens, have the most character.

Aberdare Country Club (Map p374; ☎ 2055620, Nairobi ☎ 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; low season full board s/tw US\$87/172, high season US\$162/230; 🚗) Surrounded by its own 500-hectare sanctuary east of Mweiga, this club sits atop a hill and has glorious views. Its new owners, Fairmont, plan on pumping millions into the place. The view and character should remain, but the rooms and service will be truly 1st class.

Allmendinger's Guesthouse (Map p374; ☎ 0733-760331; gliding@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 926, Nyeri; full board s/tw US\$98/148) Just west of the Aberdare Country Club, Allmendinger's comes highly recommended, although the road here can be difficult during the rains. Prices include walking, hiking and bird-watching.

Eating & Drinking

Green Oaks (Map p372; Gakere Rd; meals KSh80–220) A local favourite, with tasty curries and stews, a lively bar and a great vantage point from the balcony.

Raybells (Map p372; Kimathi Way; meals KSh90–220) An excellent Western-style 'family' restaurant and takeaway, serving everything from samosas to pizza.

Town View Cafe (Map p372; Kimathi Way; meals KSh60–180) A small but welcoming option for traditional Kenyan fare.

Impala Place Pub (Map p372; Kanisa Rd; lunch buffets KSh200; ☎ 12.30–4pm Mon–Fri) While aiming to please the business-lunch crowd, it should put a smile on your face, too.

Bahati Bar & Restaurant (Map p372; Kimathi Way; chicken & chips from KSh150) When we asked to see the menu, staff stated, 'We do chicken and chips.' Need we say more?

Kirinyaga Tavern (Outspan Hotel; Map p374) While located behind the posh hotel's gates, it is actually reasonable and separate from the hotel's bar. It has a bonfire and traditional dancing on Saturday nights.

White Rhino Hotel (Map p372; Kenyatta Rd) The bar is the only reasonable remnant of this old hotel. Look out for its ever-popular reggae nights.

Getting There & Away

The upper bus stand deals with big buses and sporadic *matatus* to most places, while the lower stand houses local buses and multitudes of *matatus* heading in all directions. Some local *matatus* are also found on Kimathi Way.

Matatus run to Nanyuki (KSh100, one hour), Nyahururu (KSh130, 1½ hours), Thika (KSh200, two hours), Nakuru (KSh250, 2½ hours), Nairobi (KSh250, 2½ hours) and Eldoret (KSh400, five hours). Buses duplicate most of these lines; you may occasionally have to change at Karatina for Nairobi.

ABERDARE NATIONAL PARK

Created in 1950, this park (☎ 061-2055024; adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) essentially encloses two different environments: the striking 60km stretch of moorland, peaks and forest atop the western Kinangop Plateau, and the eastern outcrop of dense rainforest known as the Salient.

The park has varieties of fauna, flora and scenery not found elsewhere. Elephants and buffaloes dominate, but other species, including black rhinos, giant forest hogs, black servals and rare black leopards, can also be seen. Look out for the few remaining lions (most were removed to protect endangered bongo antelopes) from the viewing platforms next to the dramatic **Chania Falls** and **Karura Falls**. **Gura Falls**, which drops a full 300m down into thick forest, is less accessible.

Viewing wildlife here isn't like on the open savanna of Amboseli and Masai Mara. The dense rainforest of the Salient provides excellent cover for the animals, so take your time and stay a few nights.

Thanks to rough terrain and minor roads turning into mud traps during the rains, KWS restricts entry to all but 4WD vehicles. If you're prepared to hire a vehicle, join the lodges' tours, or hoof it on foot, your efforts will be rewarded.

If you want to enter through the Tree-tops or Ark gates, simply ask permission at the park headquarters, between Mweiga and Nyeri on the B5 Hwy, where you can buy smartcards and excellent 1:25,000 maps (KSh450). Map proceeds go directly to the Rhino Ark Charitable Trust, which is constructing an electric fence around the perimeter of the Aberdare National Park and greater Aberdare Conservation Area.

Activities

KWS currently advises against trekking in the Salient, as the dense cover makes walking dangerous for visitors, but the high moorland and four main peaks (all 3500m to 4000m) are excellent trekking locations. As on Mt Kenya, heavy rain can arrive at any time, so you must be prepared. Mud and reduced visibility are two good reasons not to trek during the heavy rains (March to May). You'll need advance permission from the warden, who'll provide an armed ranger (KSh1000 per day) to guide you. Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* has full details of the walks.

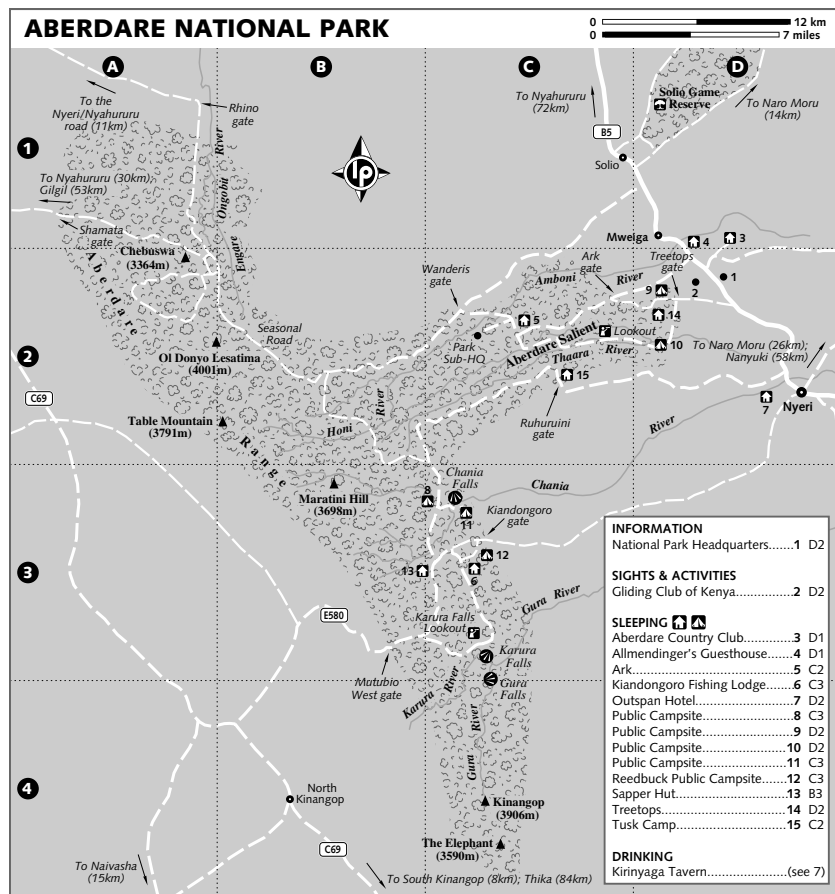
Trout fishing here is very popular, especially high up on the moors, but requires a permit from park headquarters (KSh100). Kiandongoro Fishing Lodge makes a good base and the Chania River is great for brown trout, but watch your back – there are tales of fishers being stalked by lions! Lions or not, best get an armed ranger to escort you.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Public camp sites and the following accommodation options must be booked through park headquarters.

Kiandongoro Fishing Lodge (Jan–Jun 7-person cottages US\$200, Jul–Dec US\$250) Sitting in an excellent spot on the high moor by the Gura River, these two large stone cottages offer



bathrooms, gas-powered kitchens, dining rooms and fireplaces.

Sapper Hut (exclusive use per night KSh2000) A simple *banda*, with an open fire, two beds and a hot-water boiler, overlooking a waterfall on the Upper Magura River.

Tusk Camp (exclusive use per night KSh6000) Near Ruhuruini gate, these four wee cottages provide beds for eight to 10 people.

TOP END

The following prices include transfers (self-drive isn't permitted). Children under seven are prohibited at both lodges.

Treetops (☎ 020-4452095; www.aberdaresafarihotels.com; mid-Jul–mid-Dec full board s/tw with shared bathroom US\$135/180, mid-Dec–mid-Jul US\$198/250) It

was at this floodlit waterhole in 1952 that a sleeping princess became Queen Elizabeth II. After the Mau Mau guerrillas turned the original into ashes, a much larger rendition was built. Today Treetops' exterior quite resembles a weathered shipwreck, but despite its quirks, the place reeks of charm.

Ark (☎ 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; low season full board s/tw US\$75/150, high season US\$185/250) What this modern upscale version of Treetops lacks in history and charm, it makes up for in comfort and wildlife viewing. Sitting higher in the Aberdares, Ark's floodlit waterhole is surrounded by grasses and mountain forest, which attracts a wider array of animals than Treetops.

Getting There & Away

Access roads from B5 Hwy to the Wanderis, Ark, Treetops and Ruhuruini gates are in decent shape, while the road from Nyeri to Kiangongoro gate is horrendous.

Regular Nyeri–Mweiga *matatus* (KSh50, 35 minutes) pass KWS headquarters and the main park gates. Since trekking the Salient is inadvisable, most trekkers use the Wanderis gate.

Nyeri's Outspan Hotel charges KSh2500 per person (minimum two people) for wildlife drives into the lower Salient, while the Aberdare Country Club charges US\$160 per vehicle.

NYAHURURU & THOMSON'S FALLS

☎ 065

Set next to Thomson's Falls, one of Kenya's most impressive waterfalls and the town's former namesake, is the town of Nyahururu. At 2360m, it is Kenya's highest major town and has a cool, invigorating climate. Besides the falls and some nice forested walks, most travellers find little reason to linger more than a day or two.

One of the last white settlements to be established in the colonial era, Nyahururu didn't take off until the arrival of the Gilgil railway spur in 1929, but the trains now carry only freight, and the town is once again becoming an agricultural backwater. The surrounding plateau is intensively cultivated with maize, beans and sweet potatoes.

The best approach to town is the amazingly scenic road from Nakuru, which snakes up and down through the Sukukia Valley's undulating farmlands and dense forests.

Information

Barclays Bank (cnr Sulukia & Sharpe Rds)

Clicks Cyber Cafe (Mimi Centre, Kenyatta Rd; per hr KSh180)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Sulukia Rd)

Post office (Sulukia Rd)

Sights

Located on the town's outskirts and formed by the waters of the Ewaso Narok River, **Thomson's Falls** plummets over 72m into a ravine and the resulting spray bathes the dense forest below in a perpetual mist. Get down, get close and get wet, we say! A series of stone steps leads to the bottom of the ravine – don't attempt to go down any other

way as the rocks on the side of the ravine are often very loose.

There are some fantastic **walks** downstream through the forested valley of the Ewaso Narok River and upstream a couple of kilometres to one of the highest hippo pools in Kenya. Take time to explore a little. Guides are fairly easy to find, especially around the souvenir shacks overlooking the falls, but you'll have to bargain hard.

The falls were named by Joseph Thomson, the first European to walk from Mombasa to Lake Victoria in the early 1880s.

Sleeping

Nyahururu has a couple of places with single rooms for KSh150, but that's really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Safari Lodge (Go Down Rd; s/tw KSh300/500) This massive new place is clean, bright and very affordable. Hot water is on demand and there are even sockets to charge your mobile.

County Hostel (s KSh200) Off Sulukia Rd behind the Nyandarua County Council headquarters, this place has quiet rooms with bathrooms and even toilet seats. At this price that's saying something!

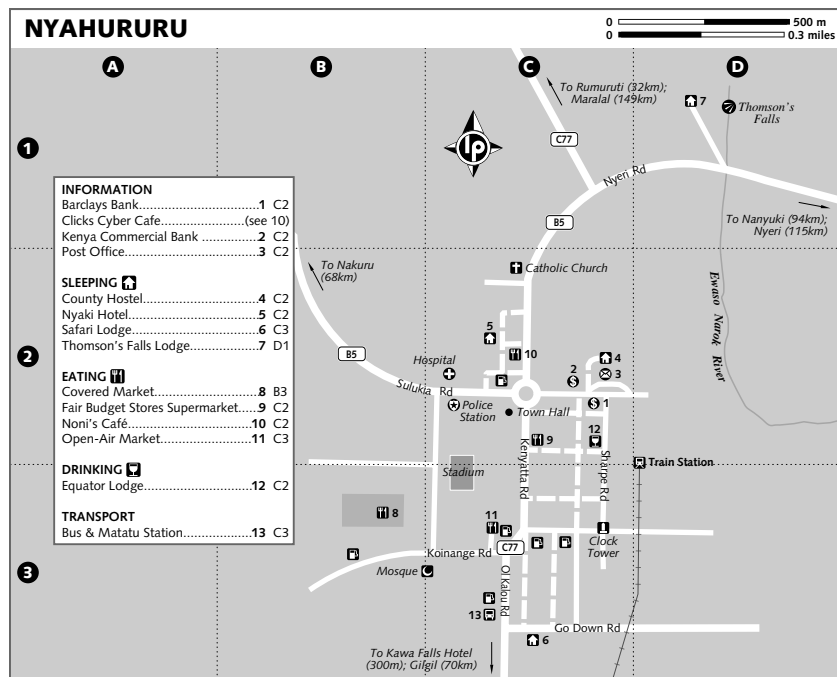
Nyaki Hotel (☎ 22313; s/tw KSh350/800) This relatively modern building hosts small but comfy singles and large clean twins that are essentially poor-man's suites. There are also hot-water showers and secure parking. It's off Kenyatta Rd.

Thomson's Falls Lodge (☎ 22006; tfalls@africaonline.co.ke; camping KSh300, s/tw incl breakfast KSh2200/2800) While the white planters are long gone, this nostalgic and cosy lodge overlooking the falls still has character to spare. The main building and cottages have rooms with log fireplaces and decent facilities. The grassy camping ground is a right bargain, with free firewood and hot showers. It's off B5 Hwy.

Eating

Thomson's Falls Lodge is the best (and only) place to go for a minor splurge. Stuff yourself at a buffet (KSh800), or delve into some Irish stew, mutton specialities and beef burgers (mains KSh150 to KSh500). The grounds are a great place for a picnic, though it will cost KSh50 per group.

Nomi's Cafe (Mimi Centre, Kenyatta Rd; meals KSh60-150) Easily the cleanest and most welcoming of Nyahururu's local eateries. It's a great spot for breakfast.



For those who want to prepare their own meals, there are fruit and vegetables at the open-air market (off Koinange Rd). The brave can also find meat at the covered market (off Koinange Rd). The **Fair Budget Stores supermarket** (Kenyatta Rd) is fairly well stocked.

Drinking & Entertainment

Equator Lodge (Sharpe Rd) We'll give this local bar an 'A' for effort regarding its kitschy forested façade. Inside it gets a 'C' for late night carnage.

Kawa Falls Hotel (Ol Kalou Rd; admission KSh100; ☎ weekends) This popular hotel disco occasionally hosts well-known Kenyan DJs.

Getting There & Away

Numerous *matatus* run to Nakuru (KSh100, 1½ hours) and Nyeri (KSh150, two hours) until late afternoon. Less plentiful are services to Naivasha (KSh200, 1½ hours), Nanyuki (KSh250, three hours) and Nairobi (KSh250, three hours). The odd morning *matatu* reaches Maralal (KSh300, three hours). Several early morning buses also serve Nairobi (KSh230 to KSh250, three hours).

MT KENYA NATIONAL PARK

Astoundingly, just 16km from the equator, 12 glaciers continue to shape the jagged roots of what was once Africa's tallest mountain. After seeing the 5199m worth of dramatic remnants that today comprise Mt Kenya (now Africa's second-highest mountain), it's easy to understand why the Kikuyu people deified it and still believe it's the seat of their supreme god Ngai.

Fortunately for the many travellers who try the ascent every year, Ngai doesn't seem to be concerned by trekkers. However, you'd be wise not to tempt fate, so treat Mt Kenya with the utmost respect (see Responsible Trekking, p437). Besides being venerated by the Kikuyu, Mt Kenya has the rare honour of being both a Unesco World Heritage Site and a Unesco Biosphere Reserve.

Mt Kenya's highest peaks, Batian (5199m) and Nelion (5188m), can only be reached by mountaineers with technical skills. However, Point Lenana (4985m), the third-highest peak, can be reached by trekkers and is the usual goal for most mortals, offering a fantastic experience without the risks of

technical climbing. As you might imagine, there are superb views over the surrounding country from Point Lenana, although the summit is often cloaked in mist from late morning until late afternoon. Above 3000m is mountain moorland, characterised by remarkable alpine flora.

As marvellous as the summit is, a common complaint from trekkers is that they didn't allow enough time to enjoy the entire mountain. Walks through the foothills, particularly those to the east and northeast of the main peaks, and the Summit Circuit around Batian and Nelion, are dramatic and tremendously rewarding. You won't regret setting aside a week or 10 days rather than just four days for a summit rush.

Information

The daily fees for the **national park** (☎ 061-55645; PO Box 253, Nyeri; adult/child US\$15/8) are charged upon entry, so you must estimate the length of your stay. If you overstay, you must pay the difference when leaving. You'll have to pay an additional KSh50 per day for each guide and porter you take with you. Always ask for a receipt.

Before you leave Nairobi, buy a copy of *Mt Kenya 1:50,000 Map & Guide* (1993) by Mark Savage and Andrew Wielochowski. It has a detailed topographical map, and full descriptions of the routes, mountain medicine, flora and fauna, and accommodation.

Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* has more information, details on wilder routes and some of the more esoteric variations that are possible on Mt Kenya.

Technical climbers and mountaineers should get a copy of **Mountain Club of Kenya's** (MCK; Nairobi ☎ 020-602330; www.mck.or.ke) *Guide to Mt Kenya & Kilimanjaro*, edited by Iain Allan. MCK also has up-to-date mountain information posted on its website.

Safety

Mt Kenya's accessibility and the technical ease with which Point Lenana is reached create their own problems for enthusiastic trekkers. Many people ascend much too quickly and end up suffering from altitude sickness. By spending at least three nights on the ascent, you'll enjoy yourself much more; with proper clothes and equipment, you stand a much better chance of making it back down as well.

Another problem can be unpredictable, harsh, cold, wet and windy weather. The trek to Point Lenana isn't easy and people do die on the mountain every year. The best time to go is from mid-January to late February or from late August to September.

Unless you're a seasoned trekker with high altitude experience and a good knowledge of reading maps and using a compass, you'd be flirting with death by not taking a guide or qualified companion. Even those with ample experience should take a guide if attempting the Summit Circuit.

Equipment Hire

Well-maintained hire gear is available at the Naro Moru River Lodge (p383), although it can't be reserved and is relatively expensive (US\$4 per day for a sleeping bag). Most guiding companies will have cheaper equipment for hire, although you'll have less choice and lower standards.

Guides, Cooks & Porters

Considerable effort has been made in recent years to regulate guides and porters operating on the mountain. The KWS now issues vouchers to all registered guides and porters, who should also hold identity cards; they won't be allowed into the park without them.

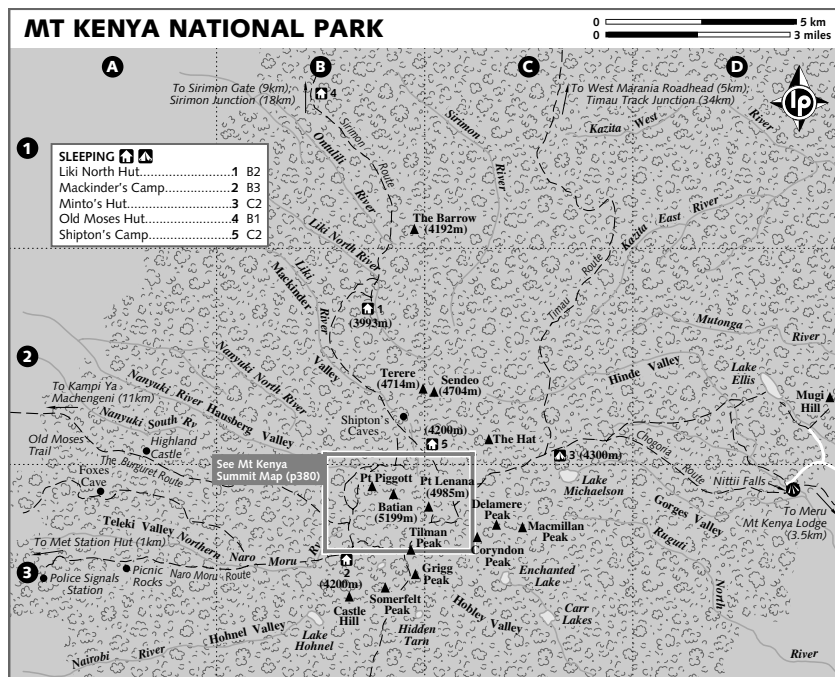
Female guides are becoming more common, and technical guides for climbing Batian and Nelion are widely available.

COSTS

Basic qualified guides and cooks will cost you KSh750 per day, while porters charge KSh650. More knowledgeable guides will set you back US\$15 per day, cooks and porters US\$12 per day. These fees don't include park entry fees and tips (budget around a day's wages per person as a tip, but make it clear it is only for good service).

If you ascend the mountain along one route and descend along a different one, you'll be responsible for arranging and paying to transport guides and porters back to your starting point. It is wise to sort this out before you start and agree on a price for return transport plus any additional costs.

Porters will carry up to 18kg for three-day trips or 16kg for longer trips, excluding the weight of their own food and equipment. If you want them to carry more, you'll have



to negotiate an added cost. A normal day's work is regarded as one stage of the journey; if you want to go further you'll have to pay two days' wages, even if porters don't do anything the following day.

Organised Treks

If time is limited or you'd prefer someone else to make all the trekking arrangements, there are plenty of possibilities. All-inclusive packages – which include park entry and camping fees, food, huts, a guide, cook and porters, and transfers to and from the mountain – can be a good deal, particularly if you don't have any equipment.

Picking the right company is even more important here than on a normal wildlife safari, as an unqualified or inexperienced guide could put you in real danger as well as spoil your trip.

Mountain Rock Safaris Resorts & Trekking Services (☎ 020-242133; www.mountainrockkenya.com; PO Box 15796-00100, Nairobi) is a real specialist at Mt Kenya climbs and runs the Mountain Rock Lodge (p383) near Naro Moru. Its day rates for all-inclusive trips start at US\$135 per per-

son per day, but drop as low as US\$80 for five or more people.

Naro Moru River Lodge (p383) also runs a range of all-inclusive trips. Its prices are more expensive than most (US\$135 to US\$220 per person per day), but it's the only company that can guarantee you beds in the Met Station Hut and Mackinder's Camp.

There are several safari companies in Nairobi that offer Mt Kenya treks, but many just sell other operators' treks. See p94 for listings. Local companies with their own treks: **KG Mountain Expeditions** (☎ 062-62403; www.kenyaexpeditions.com; PO Box 199, Naro Moru) Offers all-inclusive packages from US\$265 per day (depending on group size), as well as budget options for around US\$80. **Mountain View Tours & Trekking Safaris** (☎ 062-62088; PO Box 48, Naro Moru) Recommended by readers as being cheap and reliable. Prices are negotiable, but expect to pay around US\$60 to US\$70 per day.

Naro Moru Route

Although the least scenic, this is the most straightforward, popular route, and still a spectacular and very enjoyable trail. Allow a minimum of four days for the trek; it's

possible in three if you arrange transport between Naro Moru and the Met Station, but doing it this quickly risks serious altitude sickness.

GUIDES & PORTERS

Apart from the Naro Moru River Lodge in Naro Moru itself, guides, porters and cooks can be booked through Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club (p383). Its office is 5km along the road towards the Naro Moru gate, but staff also scout for business at hotels in town.

Mountain Rock Lodge (Map p382; ☎ 062-62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com) also provides guides/porters for this route at US\$15/12 per day.

THE TREK

Starting in Naro Moru town, the first part of the route takes you along a relatively good gravel road for some 13km to the start of the forest. Another 5km brings you to the park entry gate (2400m), from where it's 8km to the road head and the **Met Station Hut** (Map p382; 3000m), where you stay for the night.

On the second day set off up the Telesi Valley to the edge of the forest at about 3200m. From here you scale the so-called **Vertical Bog** onto a ridge, where the route divides into two. You can either take the higher path, which gives better views but is often wet, or the lower, which crosses the Naro Moru River and continues gently up to **Mackinder's Camp** (Map p378; 4160m). This part of the trek should take about 4½ hours. Here you can stay in the dormitories or camp.

On the third day you can either rest at Mackinder's Camp to acclimatise or aim for **Point Lenana** (4895m). This stretch takes four to five hours, so it is common to leave around 2am (you'll need a torch or flashlight) to reach the summit in time for sunrise. From the bunkhouse, continue up past the ranger station to a fork in the path. Keep right and go across a swampy area, followed by a moraine and then up a very long scree slope – this is a hard slog. **Austrian Hut** (Map p380; 4790m) is three to four hours from Mackinder's and about one hour below the summit of Lenana, so it's a good place to rest before the final push. Facilities are basic, although the hut has been recently refurbished.

The section of the trek from Austrian Hut up to Lenana takes you up a narrow rocky

path that traverses the southwest ridge parallel to the Lewis Glacier, which has shrunk more than 100m since the 1960s. A final climb or scramble brings you up onto the peak. In good weather it's fairly straightforward, but in bad weather you shouldn't attempt to reach the summit unless you're experienced in mountain conditions or have a guide.

From Point Lenana most people return along the same route; assuming you summit early, you can reach the Met Station on the same day. Alternatively, you can return to Austrian Hut, then take the Summit Circuit around the base of the main peaks to reach the top of one of the other routes before descending.

Sirimon Route

A popular alternative to Naro Moru, this route has more spectacular scenery, greater flexibility and a gentler rate of ascent, although it is still easy to climb too fast, so allow at least five days for the trek. It's well worth considering combining it with the Chogoria route for a six- to seven-day traverse that will really bring out the best of Mt Kenya.

GUIDES & PORTERS

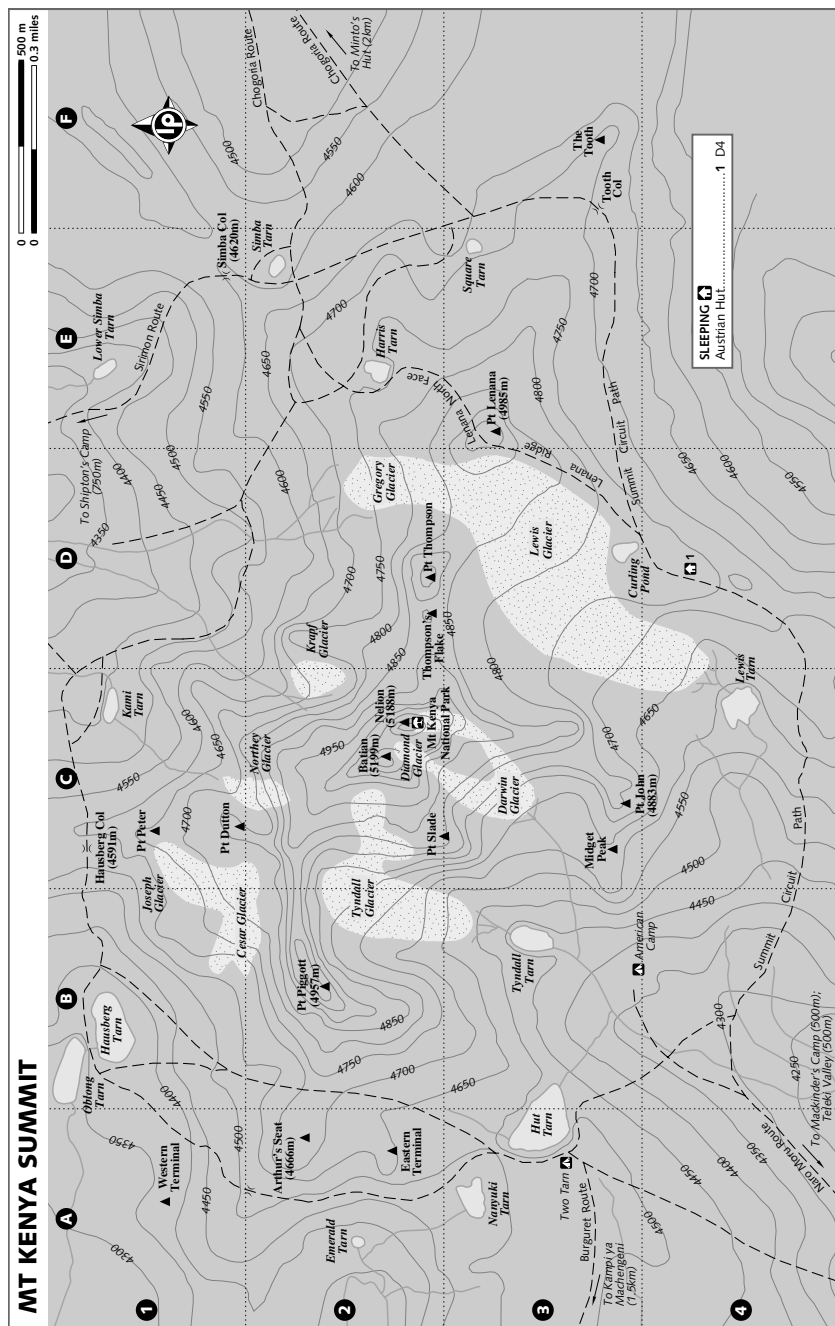
In Nanyuki guides operating out of **Mt Kenya Mountaineering Information Office** (Map p384; ☎ 0733-340849; Mt Kenya Paradise Hotel) are generally quite reliable, but ask to see their KWS registration and go over your planned route in detail. The people at **Montana Trek & Information Centre** (Map p384; ☎ 062-32731; Jambo House Hotel, Lumumba Rd, Nanyuki) seem to know their stuff.

Guides/porters are also available for hire from Mountain Rock Lodge for US\$15/12 per day.

THE TREK

It is 15km from Nanyuki to the Sirimon Gate, and transport is included with prebooked packages. Otherwise take a *matatu* towards Timau or Meru, or arrange a lift from town. From the gate it's about 9km through the forest to **Old Moses Hut** (Map p378; 3300m), where you can spend the first night.

On the second day you could head straight through the moorland for Shipton's Camp, but it is worth taking an extra day to go via **Liki North Hut** (Map p378; 3993m), a tiny place on the floor of a classic glacial



valley. The actual hut is a complete wreck and is only meant for porters, but it's a good camp site, with a toilet and stream nearby. You can also walk further up the valley to help acclimatise.

On the third day head straight up the western side of the Liki North Valley and over the ridge into Mackenzie's Valley, joining the direct route about 1½ hours in. After crossing the Liki River, follow the path for another 30 minutes to reach the bunkhouse at **Shipton's Camp** (Map p378; 4200m), set in a fantastic location right below Batian and Nelion and within sight of two glaciers, which can often be heard cracking.

From Shipton's you can push straight for **Point Lenana** (4895m), a tough three- to four-hour slog via Harris Tarn and the tricky north face approach, or take the Summit Circuit in either direction around the peaks to reach **Austrian Hut** (Map p380; 4790m), about one hour below the summit. The left-hand (east) route past Simba Col is shorter but steeper, while the right-hand (west) option takes you on the Harris Tarn trail nearer the main peaks.

From Austrian Hut take the standard southwest traverse up to Point Lenana. If you're spending the night here, it's worth having a wander around to catch the views up to Batian and down the Lewis Glacier into Teleki Valley, as well as the spectacular **ice cave** by the Curling Pond.

Chogoria Route

This route is justly famous for crossing some of the most spectacular and varied scenery on Mt Kenya, and is often combined with the Sirimon route (usually as the descent). The only disadvantage is the long distance between Chogoria village and the park gate. Allow at least five days for a trek here.

GUIDES & PORTERS

The best place to organise guides and porters is the **Mt Kenya Chogoria Guides & Porters Association** (Map p382; ☎ 064-22096) at the Transit Motel (p389) near Chogoria village. Guides and porters aren't available beyond Chogoria Forest Station.

If you want porters to walk the whole stretch between Chogoria and the park gate, you may be charged two extra days' wages – make sure you negotiate everything before you leave.

THE TREK

The main reason this route is more popular as a descent is the 29km bottom stage. While it is not overly steep, climbing up for that distance is much harder than descending it. Either way, it's a beautiful walk through farmland, rainforest and bamboo zones. You can camp near the **Forest Station** (Map p382), 6km out of town, but you'll still have 23km to walk the next day. Transport is available from the village, but it'll cost you, and even a Land Rover may struggle in the wet.

Camping is possible at the gate, or you can stay nearby in **Meru Mt Kenya Lodge** (Map p382; 3000m); with transport to town available and a small shop selling beer, it's a favourite with people coming down.

On the second day head up through the forest to the trailhead (camping is possible here). From here it's another 7km over rolling foothills to the Hall Tarns area and **Minto's Hut** (Map p378; 4300m). Like Liki North, this nasty hut is only intended for porters, but the area makes a decent camp site. It has a stream for water and a long-drop loo, which, incidentally, finally has a door (though it won't close!). Don't use the tarns here to wash anything, as they have already been polluted by careless trekkers.

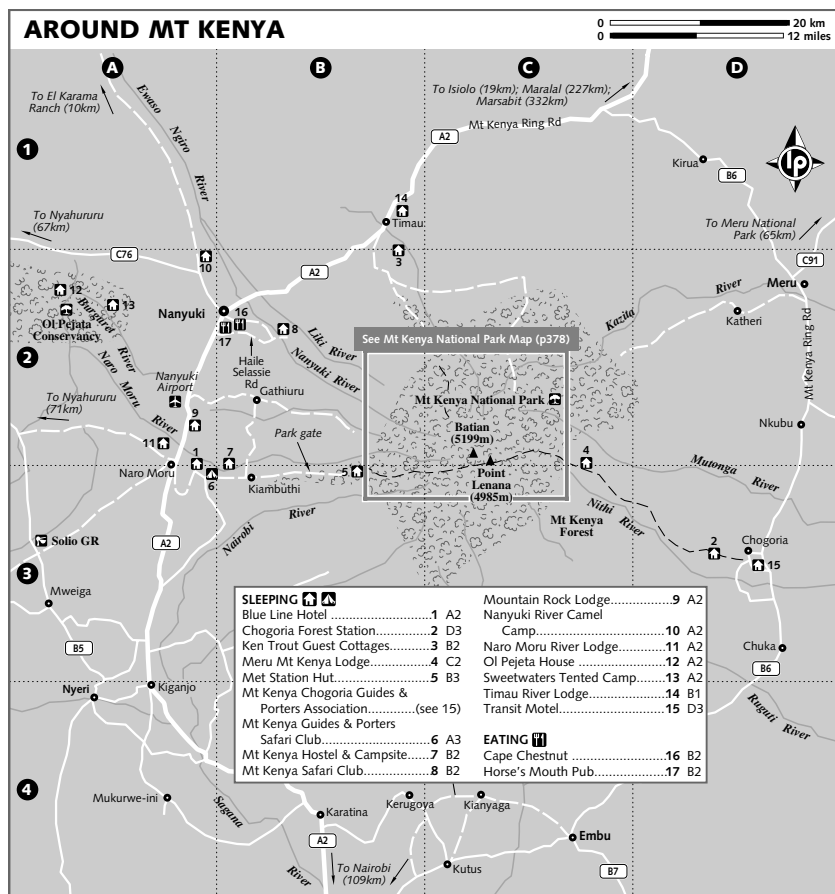
From here you follow the trail up alongside the stunning **Gorges Valley** (another possible descent route for the adventurous) and scramble up some steep ridges to meet the Summit Circuit, which can take you in either direction. It is possible to go straight for the north face or southwest ridge of Point Lenana, but stopping at Austrian Hut or detouring to Shipton's Camp is probably a better idea and gives you more time to enjoy the scenery.

Sleeping

You can **camp** (adult/child US\$10/5) anywhere on the mountain; the nightly fee is payable to KWS at any gate. Most people camp near the huts or bunkhouses, as there are often toilets and water nearby.

There are several huts on the mountain owned by MCK, but the only one that's in reasonable shape nowadays sits 5188m up on Nelion's summit – not for the typical punter!

Accommodation along the major trekking routes, whether in huts or larger bunkhouses, is described under each route.



Eating

The best range of food suitable for consumption on the mountain is to be found in Nairobi's supermarkets, especially Nakumatt and Uchumi. Elsewhere there's a good range in the towns around the mountain, but you'll find precious little at Naro Moru or Chogoria.

When you're buying dehydrated foods, get the precooked variety to cut down on cooking time – two-minute noodles are a good solution. It's a smart idea to bring these from home.

To avoid severe headaches caused by dehydration or altitude sickness, drink at least 3L of fluid per day and bring rehydration sachets.

NARO MORU

☎ 062

The village of Naro Moru, on the western side of the mountain, is little more than a dusty string of shops and houses, with a couple of very basic hotels and a market, but it's the most popular starting point for treks up Mt Kenya. There's a post office with Internet access, but no banks.

Sleeping & Eating

Although there are a number of basic hotels situated in Naro Moru town, the best options are to stay in the surrounding few kilometres. Eating options are incredibly slim, with only a very few hotels offering meals.

BUDGET

Note that the two top-end options both have great camp sites.

Mt Kenya Hostel & Campsite (Map p382; ☎ 62412; mtkenyahostel@wananchi.com; camping KSh250, dm KSh400) About 8.5km from town and 7.5km from the park gate, this place offers simple accommodation, a large camp site, kitchen facilities, and a restaurant and bar. It hires limited mountain gear as well as a 4WD vehicle. Mt Kenya treks can be arranged here, too.

Mountain View Hotel (☎ 62088; A2 Hwy; s KSh520) This is the best option in town and is very basic. Red cement floors host large single beds and the bathrooms have hot showers. Treks and equipment can be arranged here.

Blue Line Hotel (Map p382; ☎ 62420; camping KSh150, s/d KSh400/800) Similar to its sister hotel Mountain View, though hot showers are only available in the morning. Blue Line is 3km from town and 1.5km from the Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club office (convenient for organising guides), but 13km short of the park gate. The hotel is generally pleasant and quiet, and has a bar and restaurant (meals KSh180 to KSh280).

Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club (Map p382; ☎ 62015; camping KSh150) You may also camp here. The club can provide tents (two-person tent KSh600). The site is rather primitive and the loos are rather grim – showers come in buckets.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Naro Moru River Lodge (Map p382; ☎ 62212; Nairobi ☎ 020-4443357; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; camping US\$10, dm US\$8, low season half board s/tw from US\$55/82, high season from US\$90/120; 🚽) This relaxing lodge is about 1.5km north of town and is set on the sloping bank of the Naro Moru River in beautifully landscaped gardens. There's also a well-equipped camp site and a dormitory block. Campers can use all the hotel facilities, which include two bars and a restaurant (breakfast/dinner KSh500/KSh1000).

Mountain Rock Lodge (Map p382; ☎ 62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com; camping US\$5, standard s/tw US\$24/32, superior s/tw or tr US\$32/48) This place is 6km north of Naro Moru, tucked away in the woods less than 1km from the Nanyuki road. You can save a few dollars by renting a fixed tent (single/twin/triple US\$15/20/24) or using the camp site. It is friendly and reliable, with a spacious dining room, two bars and a lounge.

Getting There & Away

There are plenty of buses and *matatus* heading to Nanyuki (KSh60, 30 minutes), Nyeri (KSh80, 45 minutes) and Nairobi (KSh300, three hours).

NANYUKI

☎ 062

Founded by white settlers in 1907, Nanyuki is a small but very energetic country town. It is a popular and friendly place to base Mt Kenya treks, especially if taking on the Sirimom and Burguret routes, though you'll probably experience some initial hassle from the slew of guides, touts, hawkers and cheeky street kids.

Besides lapping against Mt Kenya's slopes, Nanyuki also sits on the edge of the massive Laikipia Plateau, which is currently one of Africa's most important wildlife conservation sites. Here local communities and ranches are being encouraged to share their space with local fauna, allowing wildlife to flourish while at the same time decreasing potential human-animal conflict.

Information

Barclays Bank (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave)

Mt Kenya Cyberworld (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave; per hr KSh60)

Post office (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave)

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave)

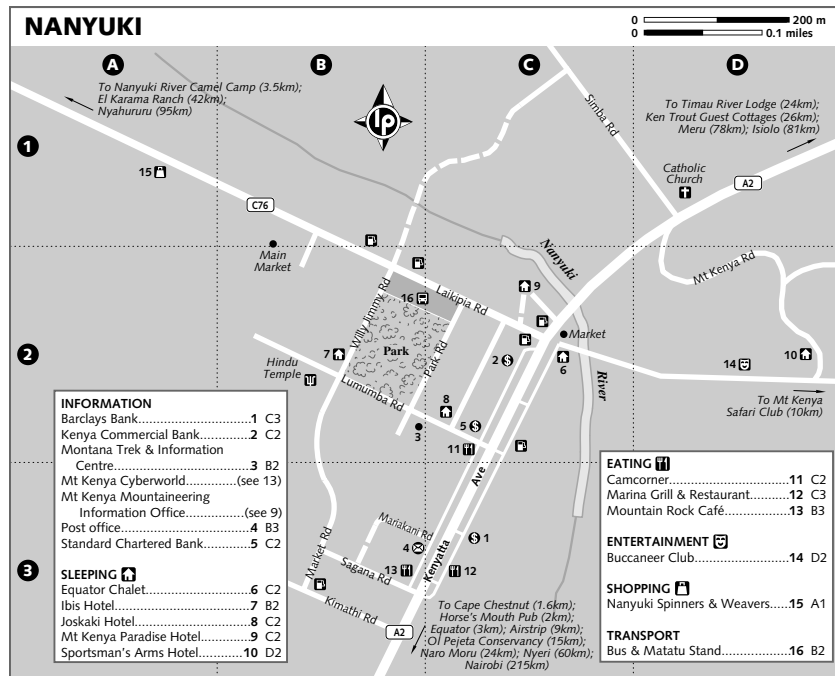
Sleeping

BUDGET

Nanyuki River Camel Camp (Map p382; ☎ 0722-361642; camellot@wananchi.com; camping US\$6, half-board huts with shared bathroom US\$22) The only camping near Nanyuki is at this fabulous place off C76 Hwy 4km out of town. Firewood is free and there are decent facilities. The woven huts are modelled on a traditional Somali nomadic village and are highly authentic – spending the night in one is an experience indeed. The food is excellent, and the 200 camels are available for hire.

Ibis Hotel (Map p384; ☎ 31536; Lumumba Rd; s/tw KSh500/900) Bright rooms and a brighter covered courtyard lurk behind the Ibis's fresh tiles and woodwork. Angle for a room with a Mt Kenya view.

Mt Kenya Paradise Hotel (Map p384; ☎ 0722-899950; s/tw KSh400/600) Formerly the Nanyuki Riverside Hotel, this place off Kenyatta Ave



on the Nanyuki River is a little dog-eared but has large clean rooms and is a good place to meet other travellers. Relax on the terrace to the sound of birds and gurgling water, but avoid weekends (the disco is *loud*).

Joskaki Hotel (Map p384; ☎ 31473; Lumumba Rd; s/tw/d KSh300/400/450) This is the best of the budget establishments. If you wander, you may hit the Joskaki jackpot: a room with some sun and a toilet seat!

MIDRANGE

Equator Chalet (Map p384; ☎ 31480; Kenyatta Ave; s/tw/d incl breakfast KSh800/1200/1450) This newish place in the centre of town gives substantial comfort bang for minimal buck. Rooms surround a breezy internal courtyard that opens onto two balcony areas and a roof terrace.

TOP END

Sportsman's Arms Hotel (Map p384; ☎ 32348; www.sportsmansarms.com; s/d/tw incl breakfast KSh3000/4000/4600, 4-person cottages KSh7000; 🍷) Set in landscaped gardens off Laikipia Rd east of town, this was once the white settlers' main ren-

dezvous, and is still popular with tourists and soldiers. The complex boasts a sauna, gym, Jacuzzi, tennis, squash, a restaurant and three bars (with table football).

Mt Kenya Safari Club (Map p382; ☎ 30000, Nairobi ☎ 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; full board s/d US\$270/390, 4-person cottages US\$995; 🍷 🍷) Originally the homestead of a white settler family, this club was founded in the 1950s by a group including the late actor William Holden. Already one of the flashiest top-class resorts in Kenya, it's recently been bought by Fairmont, which has big posh plans. If golf, tennis, croquet, snooker, fishing, bowls, an art gallery and a private wildlife sanctuary with a herd of rare bongo antelopes tickle your fancy, sign right up (though most cost extra).

Eating

You'll find that Nanyuki's best restaurants are attached to the hotels, though there are some independent options.

Camcorner (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh60-260) A delightful oddity serving the usual stews and steaks, as well as fiery curries and a se-

lection of camel products (including camel *biltong* – jerky).

Marina Grill & Restaurant (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh90-350) Sit on the rooftop and delve into a burger or steak. The pizza is tasty but very small.

Cape Chestnut (Map p382; off Kenyatta Ave; ☎ Mon-Sat) This is an excellent coffee garden and snack place catering mostly for white farmers, expats and tourists. It's off Kenyatta Ave, 1km south of town.

Horse's Mouth Pub (Map p382; Haile Selassie Rd; meals KSh150-400) This place near Cape Chestnut caters for a similar clientele.

Mountain Rock Café (Map p384; Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh60-200) Popular with locals, this is a good spot for cheap Kenyan fare.

Drinking & Entertainment

Cape Chestnut and the Horse's Mouth Pub are pleasant places to enjoy a daylight beer, while in the evening the rooftop of Marina Grill & Restaurant is a good choice.

Buccaneer Club (Map p384; Laikipia Rd; ☎ Wed & Sat evenings) May look like a UFO, but its disco is nothing out of this world.

Shopping

There are a number of souvenir stalls and shops around town.

Nanyuki Spinners & Weavers (Map p384; Laikipia Rd) For something less tacky. This is a women's craft cooperative that specialises in woven woollen goods. The product and pattern design is high quality and cheaper than the same work in Nairobi.

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights from Wilson Airport in Nairobi to Nanyuki with **AirKenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke). A return trip on AirKenya/Safarilink is US\$130/149, while one-way fares for northbound and southbound flights are US\$60/70 and US\$80/90 respectively.

There are daily buses and *matatus* to Nyeri (KSh100, one hour), Isiolo (KSh150, 1½ hours), Meru (KSh120, 1½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh350, three hours).

AROUND NANYUKI

The tiny town of **Timau** is a convenient stop between Isiolo and Nanyuki, and has a couple of interesting accommodation options

offering a range of activities. **Timau River Lodge** (Map p382; ☎ 062-41230; timauriverlodge@hotmail.com; camping KSh300, cottages incl breakfast per person KSh1400) is a wonderfully offbeat place, consisting of several lovely thatched cottages and a well-equipped camp site off the A2 Hwy. Three kilometres south of town, off the A2 Hwy, **Ken Trout Guest Cottages** (Map p382; ☎ 0720-804751; camping KSh300, half-board cottages per person KSh2500) is a more mainstream establishment, with an excellent restaurant and some very good fishing. Any *matatu* running between Nanyuki and Isiolo or Meru will drop you in Timau or at the turn-off to either sleeping option.

About 42km to the northwest of Nanyuki, **El Karama Ranch** (☎ 062-32526, Nairobi ☎ 020-340331; info@letsgosafari.com; bandas per person KSh2500) is on the Ewaso Ngiro River. Although still a working ranch, wildlife conservation is paramount and the 5668-hectares play home to rare northern species, like Grevy's zebras and reticulated giraffes. Billed as a 'self-service camp', accommodation is in basic but comfortable riverside *bandas*. Activities include wildlife walks, horse riding and camel safaris (see www.horsebackinkenya.com). Let's Go Travel (p284) in Nairobi provides a map with directions. During the rainy seasons you'll need a 4WD to get here; however, as driving around the ranch is discouraged and there's little public transport, it's usually better to phone and arrange to be picked up from Nanyuki.

OI Pejeta Conservancy

Formerly called the Sweetwaters Game Reserve, this impressive 97-sq-km (soon to be 300-sq-km) **wildlife conservancy** (Map p382; adult/child US\$25/13) is home to a wide variety of plains wildlife, including the Big Five, massive eland antelopes and a plethora of birdlife. There's also an important **chimpanzee sanctuary** (☎ 9-10.30am & 3-4.30pm), operated by the Jane Goodall Institute.

There are two top-end accommodation options in the reserve, both recently purchased by Serena Hotels. **Sweetwaters Tented Camp** (Map p382; ☎ 062-32409, Nairobi ☎ 020-2710511; sweetwaters@serena.co.ke; low season full board s/d US\$90/180, high season US\$235/310) is a collection of 30 luxury tents straddling the equator, while **OI Pejeta House** (Map p382; ☎ 062-32400, Nairobi ☎ 020-2710511; swtc@kenyawe.com; low season full board s/d US\$210/270, high season US\$270/390)

was once home to Lord Delamere and now-bankrupt international arms dealer Adnan Kashoggi.

The reserve can be visited independently if you have your own vehicle. Access is off the A2 Hwy south out of Nanyuki. Mt Kenya Safari Club runs half-day wildlife drives here for US\$55 per person (minimum two passengers); guests staying two or more nights at the club are entitled to free entry to the conservancy and lunch at Sweetwaters Tented Camp.

MERU

☎ 064

Stretched out along the eastern side of the Mt Kenya ring road, Meru is more of a travel hub than a base for Mt Kenya or Meru National Park. If you end up having to spend the night here or just stop to stock up on various commodities, it's worth a look around.

As it's a regional service centre and not a tourist destination, you'll rarely be hassled on the streets, despite them being alive with activity. The colourful main market is worth a stroll and if you ever thought of chewing *miraa* (see opposite), Meru is the epicentre of Kenyan production.

It's quite a climb up to Meru from either Isiolo or Embu, and in the rainy season you'll find yourself lost in the clouds. However, when the weather is clear there are superb views for miles over the surrounding lowlands, and you may catch glimpses of Mt Kenya.

Information

Café Candy (opposite) has Internet access for KSh180 per hour.

Barclays Bank (Tom Mboya St)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Njiru Ncheke St)

Meru County Council (Kenyatta Hwy) Bookings for Meru Mt Kenya Lodge on the Chogoria route.

Post office (Kenyatta Hwy)

Standard Chartered Bank (Moi Ave)

Sights

The small **Meru National Museum** (☎ 20482; adult/child KSh200/100; 🕒 9.30am-6pm, 1-6pm public holidays) off Kenyatta Hwy is worth visiting. The usual displays are present, with an explanation of evolution, and copious stuffed and mounted wildlife, but there's also a small, informative section concerning the clothing, weapons, and agricultural and initiation practices (including clitoridectomies) of the Meru people.

Sleeping

Goodnight Lodge (☎ 30057; Mosque Hill Rd; s incl breakfast KSh350) Probably the best budget option. Rooms and bathrooms (hot-water showers but no toilet seats) are clean and the upstairs options take in some sun.

Brown Rock Hotel (☎ 20247; Njiru Ncheke St; s/tw KSh350/450) Although the brown and white floor tiles are failing one by one, this is still your best bet for cheap twin-bed rooms. Hot water is sketchy at times.

Pig & Whistle (☎ 31411; s/tw incl breakfast KSh1000/1200) This place off Kenyatta Hwy has a dis-

MIRAA – MAKING MANY PLANS

The small twigs and leaves you'll see people chewing around Mt Kenya are *miraa*, also known as *khat*, the product of an evergreen tree native to East and southern Africa, Afghanistan and Yemen. Chewing *miraa* is an increasingly popular pastime in Kenya, but it's not nearly as important as in Somalia, where the drug is ingrained in the culture.

Some of the best *miraa* in the world is grown around Meru and it's a whopping US\$250-million export industry. Of course much of the demand is from Somalia, and since *miraa*'s potency is diminished 48 hours after picking, massively overlaiden pick-ups race nightly to Wilson Airport in Nairobi for the morning flight to Mogadishu.

Miraa is a mild stimulant, usually chewed in company to encourage confidence, contentment and a flow of ideas. Locals selling the stuff are often heard saying 'when you chew *miraa* you'll make many plans...' Make plans is right, though getting around to doing anything about them is another thing entirely! The active ingredient, *cathinone*, is closely related to amphetamine, and the euphoric effects can last for up to 24 hours depending on how much is chewed.

Chewing too much can be habit-forming and has serious consequences, known medically as 'khat syndrome'. Aggressive behaviour, nightmares and hallucinations are common mental side effects, while reduced appetite, constipation and brown teeth are common physical consequences. Even less pleasant are claims that *miraa* can cause spermatorrhoea (abnormal leakage of sperm – just delightful), leading to infertility.

Miraa is illegal in the USA, but is legally imported into several European countries. In Kenya it's sold in handfuls known as *kilos* or *gizas* for KSh100 to KSh300, depending on size. Meru is a good place for curious travellers to give it a go, but the taste is unlikely to prove enticing. The texture is rather unpleasant, too – funnily enough, it's just like chewing twigs.

tinctly ramshackle charm to it, with nice quiet grounds and a colonial-style bar/restaurant and lounge. Most cottages are uninspiring concrete blocks, but TV, phone and a dining area go some way towards compensating. More memorable stays are to be had in the 1934-vintage wooden cabins.

Meru County Hotel (☎ 20432; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast from KSh1000/1500) This is the other midrange contender in town, with less style but a few more creature comforts. The 'studio' suites, with balconies and TV, are well worth the extra KSh100.

Meru Safari Hotel (☎ 31500; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw KSh600/800) Considering hot water comes from the kitchen in buckets, this place is overpriced. The terrace bar is its greatest asset.

Eating & Drinking

The Pig & Whistle and Meru County Hotel have the best bar-restaurants in town.

Royal Hotel (Tom Mboya St; meals KSh80-150) Deep pots ensure it still has food late in the evenings when most places are coming up empty. The bar is packed on weekends.

Café Candy (Tom Mboya St; meals around KSh50-180) A very popular place with locals, this is a good place for cheap vegetarian curries, stews and fish during the day.

Angie's Café (Kenyatta Hwy; meals KSh50-150) Seated goldfish patrol the aquarium and watch over some simple menus. Locals recommend the biryani.

Getting There & Away

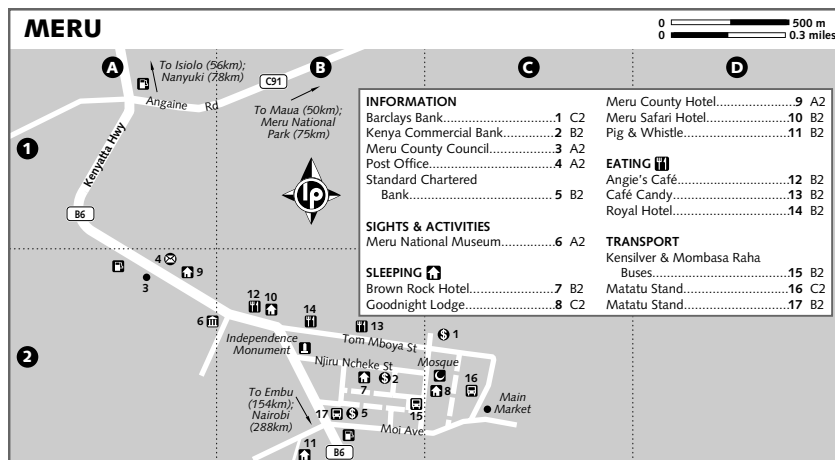
There are 13 daily departures from 6.45am onwards with **Kensilver** (Mosque Hill Rd) to Embu (KSh250, two hours), Thika (KSh280, 3½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh300, 4½ hours). **Mombasa Raha** (Mosque Hill Rd) has a daily 5pm service to Mombasa (KSh900, 10 hours).

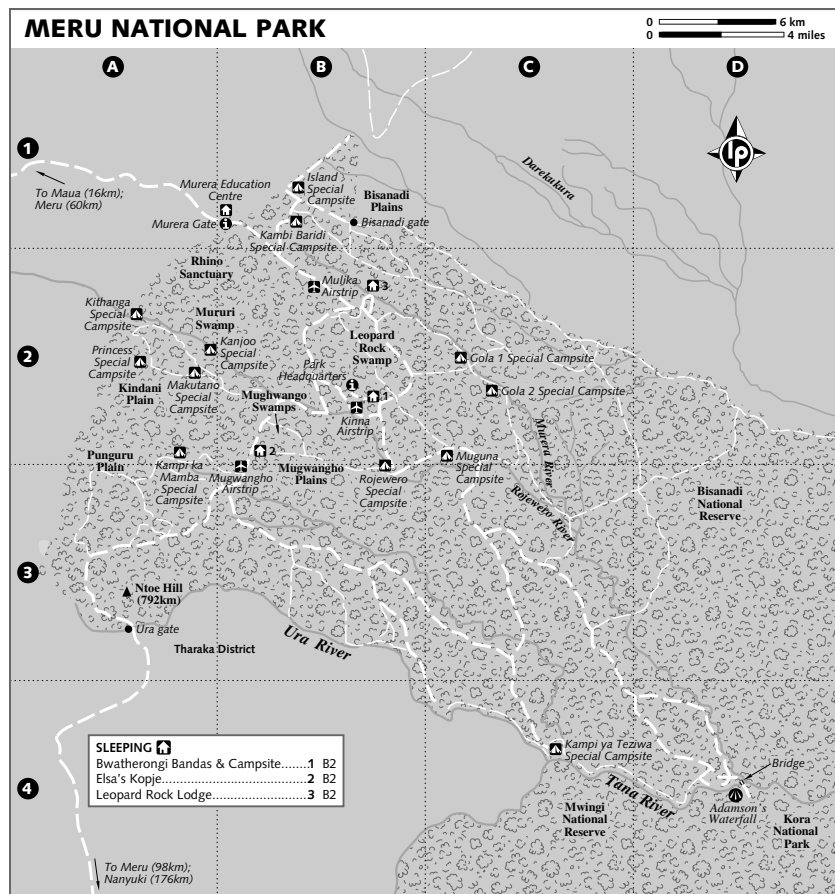
Regular *matatus* serve the same destinations for similar costs and leave from the main stand, near the main market, and from opposite the Shell petrol station. *Matatus* also serve Nanyuki (KSh120, 1½ hours) and Isiolo (KSh120, 1½ hours).

MERU NATIONAL PARK

This **park** (☎ 062-21320; adult/child US\$27/10) is the cornerstone of the Meru Conservation Area, a 4000-sq-km expanse that also includes the adjacent Kora National Park, and Bisanadi, Mwingi and North Kitui National Reserves (which are closed), covering the lowland plains east of Meru town.

KWS has big plans for this park. In the 1970s the huge populations of elephants and





rhinos could pull in up to 40,000 visitors a year, but banditry and poaching during the 1980s effectively put paid to tourism here, wiping out the white rhinos and leaving the area almost abandoned until the late 1990s. Today substantial foreign investment has enabled a flurry of rehabilitation projects: a new rhino sanctuary opened in 2001 and now houses 25 rhinos (24 white), a new sealed access road is half completed and all the main park roads have been upgraded.

Now that security is settled, these improvements are starting to pay off and visitor numbers are steadily climbing from the meagre 1000 in 1997 to well over 10,000 in 2004. With two luxury lodges and some of the best budget options in any of Kenya's

national parks, Meru's fortunes should soon be on the up again.

This resurgence is definitely a good thing, as the park is a complete contrast to the nearby savanna reserves of Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba. Abundant rainfall and numerous permanent watercourses support a luxuriant jungle of forest, bush, swamp and tall grasses, which, in turn, provide fodder to a wide variety of herbivores, and shelter to them and their predators. This is one of the most geographically diverse parks in Kenya and a favourite with the safari cognoscenti; you need to spend a few days here to fully appreciate what the park has to offer.

While on the rise, wildlife is still not as abundant here as in other parks. To make

things more challenging, the limited elephant numbers have led to an increase in vegetation cover, making it difficult to spot those species that do exist. However, with a little patience you can see elephants, leopards, lions and cheetahs, along with lesser kudus, elands, waterbucks, gazelles and oryxes. Buffaloes, reticulated giraffes and Grevy's zebras are common, while monkeys, crocodiles and a plethora of bird species, including the palm nut vulture and Marsh eagle, can be found in the dense vegetation along the watercourses.

Sleeping

Elsa's Kopje (☎ 020-604053; safaris@chelipecock.co.ke; full board low season s/d US\$320/600, high season US\$520/920; 🍽️) Wake to glorious panoramic views and sweet breezes in these gorgeous open-fronted thatched cottages that blend seamlessly into the upper reaches of Mughwango Hill. This place is the definition of sensitively designed luxury. Hefty prices include three wildlife drives (one at night), walking safaris, fishing and transfers.

Leopard Rock Lodge (☎ 020-600031; leopardmico@wananchi.com; Apr-Jun full board s/d from US\$285/440, Jul-Mar US\$340/515; 🍽️) With landscaped gardens, a stilted restaurant on the Murera River and comfortable cottages, this lodge would shine anywhere else in Kenya, but here it's entirely outmatched by Elsa's Kopje.

Bwatherongi Bandas & Campsite (adult/child US\$10/5, bandas per person US\$15; 🍽️) Perhaps the best KWS camp in Kenya, this site has great showers, toilets, barbecue pits, a swimming pool and an *askari* in attendance. There are also four excellent thatched *bandas*.

Special camp sites (adult/child US\$15/5, plus set-up fee KSh5000) There are about a dozen of these seasonal bush camp sites (no facilities) located throughout the park.

Getting There & Away

Simply put, there's no point reaching the park without a vehicle. If you don't want to join a tour, your cheapest option is to acquire a 4WD (and driver) from a local in the village of Maua, 31km from the gate. Regular *matatus* service Maua from Meru town (KSh100, one hour).

On Wednesday, Friday and Sunday **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) connects Meru to Nairobi (one way/return US\$150/300) and Samburu (one way/return US\$60/120).

A one-way ticket from Nairobi to Samburu with a stopover in Meru is US\$190.

CHOGORIA

☎ 064

The only reason to come to this small town on the lower eastern slopes of Mt Kenya is to access one of the mountain's most scenic climbs – the Chogoria route (p381). Sadly Chogoria has quite a reputation for hassle, with every man and his dog offering to take you up the mountain. On arrival, it's much better to bypass the village altogether, get yourself sorted at the Transit Motel, then head back if you need basic supplies.

The well-signposted **Transit Motel** (Map p382; ☎ 22096; PO Box 190, Chogoria; camping per tent KSh500, s/tw incl breakfast KSh1000/1600) is as great for arranging Mt Kenya treks as it is for flaking out when the enjoyable slog is over. The rooms are clean, and sport hot-water showers, mosquito nets and balconies. There's also a decent bar and restaurant (meals KSh100 to KSh300). It is a 1.5km walk from the signposted turn-off just south of Chogoria. Don't believe rival touts claiming the motel has burnt down – it's a cement structure!

Regular buses and *matatus* ply the road heading north to Meru (KSh60, 30 minutes) and south to Embu (KSh150, 1½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh280, four hours).

EMBU

☎ 068

Surrounded by intensively cultivated hills on the fringes of Mt Kenya's southeastern slopes is Embu, the unlikely capital of the Eastern Province. Given that this agricultural backwater town barely sits in the province, our best guess is that it was chosen as capital because of its agreeable climate.

Despite its local significance, there's not a lot to detain travellers here, and it's a long way from the mountain. However, it can make a good stopover on the way to Thika.

Information

Barclays Bank (B6 Hwy)

Cyberlink (per hr KSh120) Off Kenyatta Hwy.

Embu Provincial Hospital (Kenyatta Hwy)

Post office (Kenyatta Hwy)

Sleeping

Kenya Scouts Training Centre (☎ 30459; Kenyatta Hwy; camping KSh100, dm KSh250) This spotless place

has great facilities and is a bargain. Four- or five-bed dorms are only rented to one group at a time, so if you're alone you'll get the room to yourself for only KSh250.

Embu Motel (☎ 0722-462277; s/d incl breakfast from KSh700/900) Quietly set back off the B6 Hwy, this is another great option. Cleanliness pervades throughout and the toilets even have seats. The motel has a comfy TV room, a spartan dining area and a safe spot to park your metal steed.

Highway Court Hotel (☎ 20046; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw from KSh400/800) While the rooms are clean, they don't gleam like those at the Embu Motel. It's a comfortable place, with hot-water showers, mosquito nets and TVs (only in the large twins, KSh1200). The only drawback is noise from the lively bar and restaurant.

Izaak Walton Inn (☎ 20128; izaakwalton@winnet.co.ke; Kenyatta Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from US\$32/50) About 1.5km north of town is this well-known place set in fantastic old colonial grounds. Some standard rooms have a cabin feel, with wood-lined walls, while others are more contemporary. All rooms have TV and there's a great cosy bar.

Prime Lodge (☎ 30692; s/tw KSh650/1050) Prices have jumped, but quality clearly hasn't. On the upside, it's clean and most rooms catch some sun. It's off the B6 Hwy.

Eating

If you want the full treatment, head for the restaurant at Izaak Walton Inn.

Eastern Inn (Mama Ngina St; meals KSh40-150) Fronted by a shady awning, this Christian restaurant serves sandwiches, samosas, fried chicken and fish.

Kamuketha Hotel (B6 Hwy; meals KSh80-200) It says that it fries up the best *tilapia* in town – many locals would agree.

Getting There & Away

Regular Kentsilver buses to Meru (KSh250, two hours) and Nairobi (KSh250, three hours) leave from the BP petrol station in town. Mombasa Raha heads for Mombasa (KSh700, 10 hours) at 7.30am daily.

Numerous *matatus* serve Chogoria (KSh150, 1½ hours), Meru (KSh250, two hours), Thika (KSh200, two hours), Nyeri (KSh150, two hours), Nanyuki (KSh220, 2½ hours), Nyahururu (KSh300, three hours), Nairobi (KSh250, three hours) and Nakuru (KSh400, 4½ hours).

OL DONYO SABUK NATIONAL PARK

This tiny **park** (adult/child US\$15/5) was gazetted in 1967 and covers an area of just 20.7 sq km. The focus of the park is the summit of **Ol Donyo Sabuk** (2146m), surrounded by an oasis of dense primeval forest that supports a huge variety of birds and numerous primates, including black and white colobus and blue monkeys. The Kikuyu call the mountain Kilimambongo (buffalo mountain) and buffaloes are indisputably the dominant animals here. Below the picnic site and communications tower on the summit is a salt lick that attracts regular herds.

It's possible to explore on foot if accompanied by a ranger (per half-/full day KSh500/KSh1000). It's a 9km hike (three or four hours) to an amazing 360-degree view at the summit.

There's a pretty **camp site** (adult/child US\$10/5) just before the main gate, with soft grass and shady trees. Facilities include one long-drop toilet, a rusty tap and free firewood.

Getting There & Away

From Thika take a *matatu* to the village of Ol Donyo Sabuk (KSh70, 50 minutes), from where it's a 2km walk along a straight dirt road to the gate. You could also take a *matatu* heading to Kitui and hop off at Kilimambongo (KSh50, 45 minutes), which is 6km from Ol Donyo Sabuk village.

THIKA

☎ 067

Thika isn't much more than a busy little agricultural service town, and there aren't many of those famous flame trees to be seen. That said, it's a leafy place and quite pleasant for a stroll. The only true 'attractions' are **Chania Falls** and **Thika Falls**, about 1km to the north of town on the busy Nairobi–Nyeri road.

Information

Barclays Bank (Kenyatta Hwy)

Cyber Cafe (Uhuru St; per hr KSh60)

Post office (Commercial St)

Sleeping & Eating

December Hotel (☎ 22140; Commercial St; s/d KSh600/800) The best and brightest of the budget bunch. The large rooms and bathrooms are well kept. Some rooms see more sun than others.

Thika Inn (☎ 31590; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast KSh650/1200) Just south of town, behind the Cal-tex petrol station, Thika Inn has reasonable rooms. While the bedding is fresh and clean, the bathrooms are slightly grungy. Thankfully the rooms are sheltered from their lively Vybestar Club restaurant (meals KSh150 to KSh350) and disco.

Blue Post Hotel (☎ 22241; blueposthotel@africaonline.co.ke; s/d KSh1600/1900; ☑) Set among lovely gardens and next to the Chania River 2km north of town, this pleasant place has very comfortable rooms with four-poster canopy beds, polished wooden floors and TV. Room numbers 101 to 106 offer shady balconies and glimpses of Chania Falls. It has a great bar and a decent restaurant (meals KSh120 to KSh240) serving Western selections.

Primos Hotel (Kame Nkrumah; meals KSh50-220) With comfy seats and views over the street, Primos prepares Kenyan dishes, burgers and basic sandwiches. It also takes a stab at beef stroganoff.

Getting There & Away

There are plenty of *matatus* heading to Nairobi (KSh70, 45 minutes), Embu (KSh200, two hours) and Nyeri (KSh200, 1¾ hours). The odd service reaches Naivasha (KSh200, 1½ hours).

WESTERN KENYA

Imagine western Kenya and you'd be forgiven for only thinking of Masai Mara's beloved savanna and plethora of exciting wildlife. After all, the Mara is astounding and the only part of this region most travellers ever see.

For those few who conjured up images of craggy 4000m peaks, thick rainforests crawling with birdlife and rare primates, rolling hills draped in aromatic tea plantations, and small fishing boats dotting Lake Victoria's endless horizon, well done! You've probably already experienced some of what this amazing region has to offer.

Western Kenya's highlands climb steeply out of the Rift Valley and sit atop the striking Elgeyo and Mau Escarpments. Incredibly verdant, the north is a heavily cultivated patchwork of family farms and the south an abode to countless tea plantations. Kakamega Forest Reserve and Saiwa

Swamp National Park are two bastions of pristine wilderness and wildlife amid this agricultural heartland. With massive Mt Elgon and the Cherangani Hills rising skyward from the highland's northern reaches, unique trekking possibilities are also on the menu.

Sitting in the long morning shadows of the highlands are Lake Victoria's captivating lowlands, home to the friendly city of Kisumu, Ruma National Park, Mfangano Island and numerous diminutive fishing villages.

The Luo, the third-largest tribe in Kenya, live around Lake Victoria, while the Luyha, Gusii and Kalenjin call the cool highlands home. With the exception of the Mara's Maasai, who've been inundated with tourists, western Kenya is your best opportunity to truly get to know the locals.

NAROK

☎ 050

Two hours west of Nairobi, this small, ramshackle provincial town is Masai Mara's main access point. It is not great for independent travellers, as prices reflect the heavy tourist traffic, and Narok is rife with transport touts and rip-off merchants – enjoy!

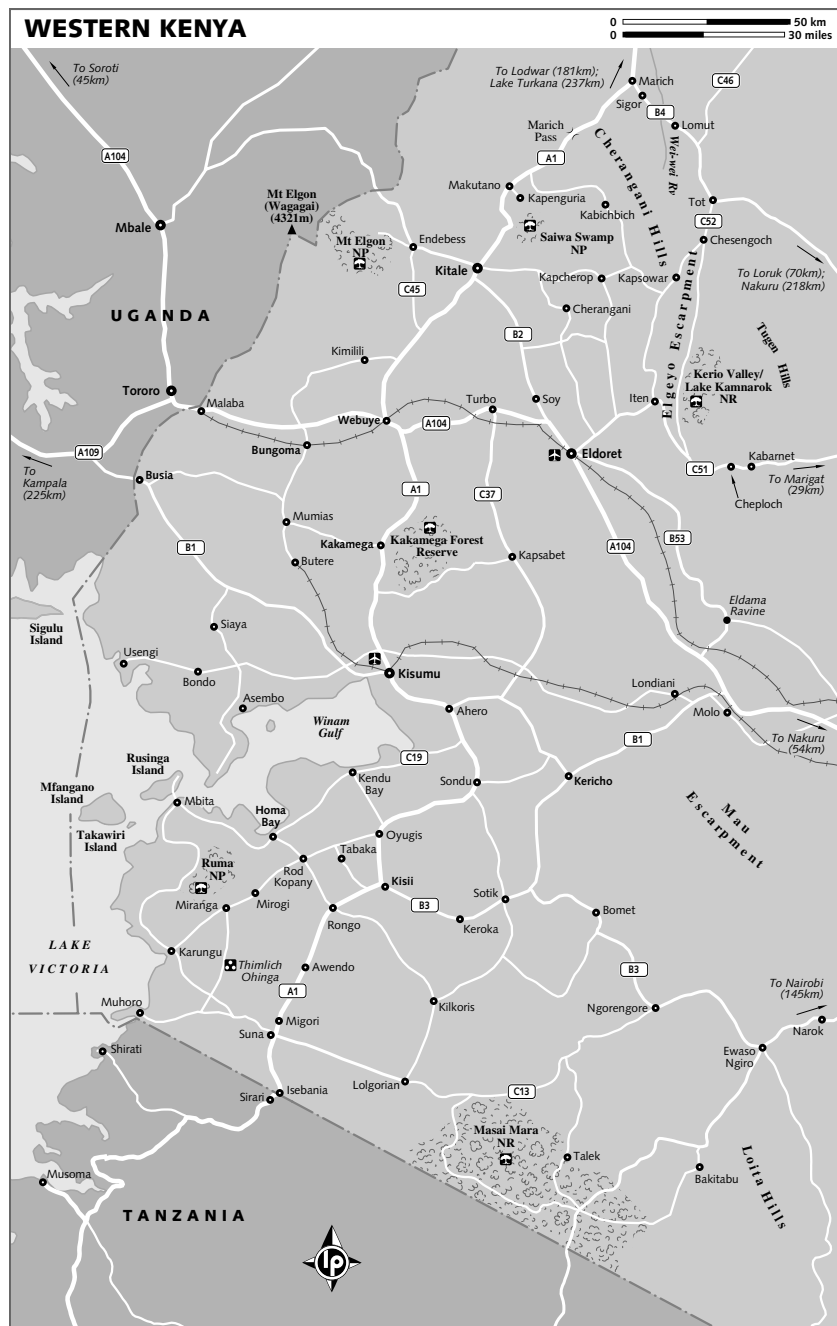
Kenya Commercial Bank is the town's only bank and has an unreliable ATM (Visa only). Cardphones are found at the post office (with Internet).

Sleeping & Eating

Kim's Dishes Hotel (☎ 22001; s/d/tw KSh500/800/1000) With secure parking, great bathrooms, 24-hour hot water and new mosquito nets, Kim's is Narok's best-value option. The restaurant (meals KSh80 to KSh200) downstairs serves tasty Kenyan dishes.

Spear Hotel (☎ 22035; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh250/500, with private bathroom KSh400/750) The rooms are spacious and have mosquito nets, but some mattresses are better than others. Hot water only flows in the morning. Locals love the restaurant (meals KSh100 to KSh200), and you may see traditionally dressed Maasai gathered to watch Oprah!

Chambai Hotel (☎ 22591; s KSh650, super s/tw KSh1000/1400) Simple standard rooms, plus new 'super' rooms with balconies, large TV and huge bathrooms. The bar and restaurant (meals KSh250, buffets KSh350) are civilised and worth trying.



Getting There & Away

Frequent *matatus* run between Narok and Nairobi (KSh250, 2½ hours), with other departures to Naivasha (KSh200, three hours) and Kisii (KSh300, three hours). There is also usually daily transport to Sekenani and Talek gates for around KSh350.

Petrol is much cheaper here than in the reserve.

MASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE

Backed by the spectacular Esoit Oloololo (Siria) Escarpment, watered by the Mara River and littered with an astonishing amount of wildlife is this world-renowned **reserve** (adult/child US\$30/10). Its 1510 sq km of open rolling grasslands, the northern extension of the equally famous Serengeti Plains, are actually the agglomeration of the Narok (managed by Narok County Council) and Transmara National Reserves (managed by Mara Conservancy).

Although concentrations of wildlife are typically highest in the swampy area around the reserve's western edge, superior roads draw most visitors to the eastern side. Of the big cats, lions are found in large prides everywhere and it is not uncommon to see them hunting. Cheetahs and leopards are less visible but still fairly common. Elephants, buffaloes, zebras and hippos also exist in large numbers.

Of the antelopes, the black-striped Thomson's gazelle and larger Grant's gazelle are most prevalent, although the numbers of impalas, topis, Coke's hartebeests and wildebeests aren't far behind. Other common animals include Masai giraffes, baboons, warthogs, jackals, bat-eared foxes and matriarchal clans of spotted hyenas. The few dozen black rhinos are rarely seen.

The ultimate attraction is undoubtedly the annual wildebeest migration in July and August, when millions of these ungainly beasts move north from the Serengeti seeking lush grass before turning south again around October. While you're more likely to see endless columns grazing or trudging along rather than dramatic TV-style river fordings, it is nonetheless a staggering experience.

During the migration there seem to be as many minibuses as animals, and many tend to take off, making new tracks wherever they feel fit. This shouldn't be encouraged.

Wherever you enter, make sure you ask for a receipt: it is crucial for passage between the reserve's Narok and Transmara sections and your eventual exit.

Sights & Activities

WILDLIFE DRIVES & WALKS

Whether bouncing over the plains in pursuit of elusive elephant silhouettes or parked next to a pride of lions and listening to their bellowed breaths, wildlife drives are *the* highlight of a trip to the Mara.

All top-end places offer wildlife drives, which can usually be negotiated into the rate while booking. Guided walks and other activities, such as **horse riding** and **bush dinners**, are typically booked during your stay.

If you've arrived by *matatu*, you can organise drives with most lodges, as they're fairly friendly towards independent travellers. Basecamp Masai Mara (p395) is easiest because it is outside the park and only a 1.5km walk from Talek. Two-hour drives (day or night) typically cost US\$35 per person plus park fees.

Alternatively, walk with a Maasai *moran* (warrior) outside the park, where there is still a large amount of wildlife. This can be a wonderful experience, but be aware that local Maasai groups may charge you a fee for crossing their land.

BALLOONING

If you can afford US\$390, balloon safaris are superb and worlds away from the minibus circuit. Trips can be arranged through top-end lodges. See p435 for more details.

MAASAI VILLAGE

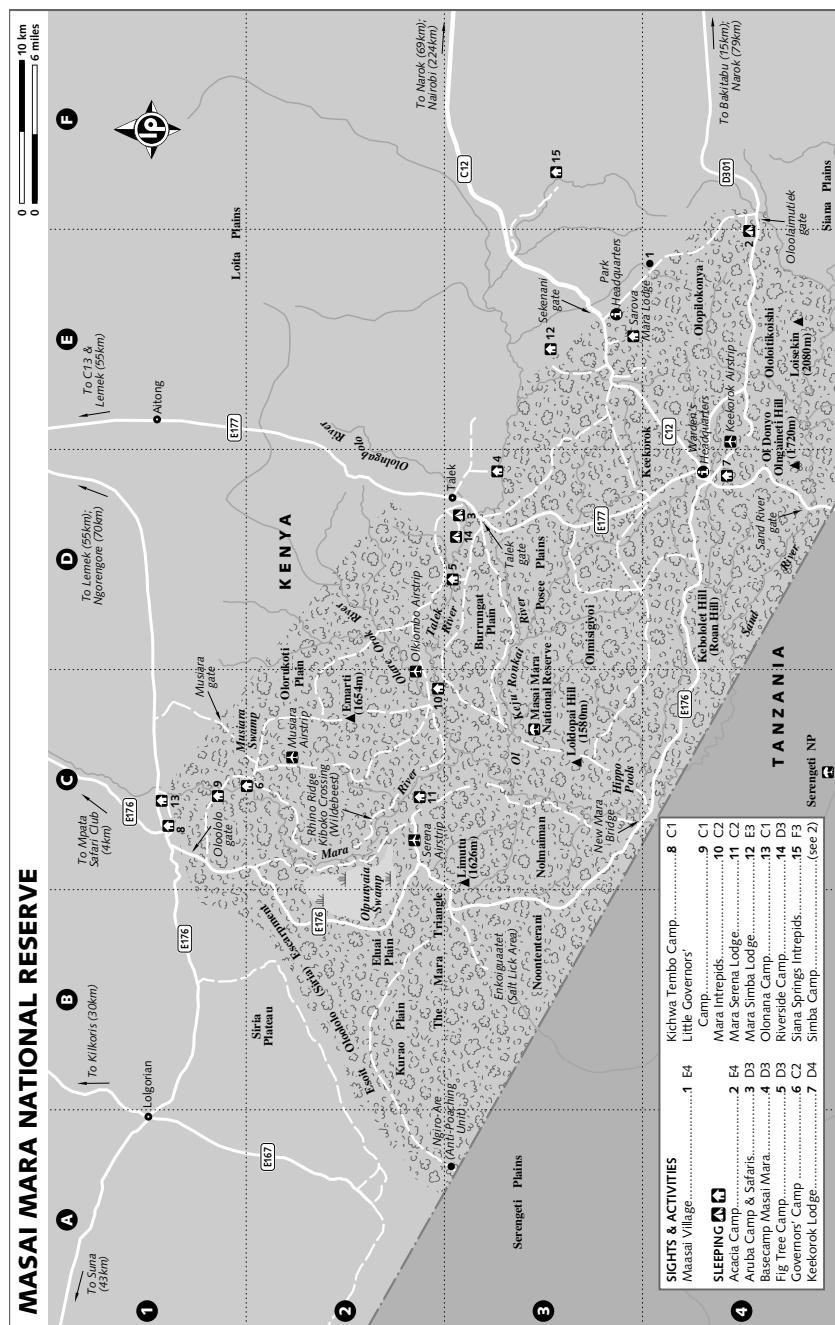
The Maasai village between Oloolaimutiek and Sekenani gates welcomes tourists, though negotiating admission can be fraught – prices start as high as US\$20 per person! If you're willing to drop this kind of cash for free rein with the camera, go ahead, but don't expect a genuine cultural experience.

Sleeping

OLOOLAIMUTIEK & SEKANANI GATES

While outside the Oloolaimutiek gate, these camps are within the reserve and sleeping here will incur park fees.

Acacia Camp (☎ 020-210024; camping US\$5, s/tw with shared bathroom US\$35/40) Thatched roofs shelter



THE HARD SELL

A common complaint among travellers, particularly in the Mara, is that Maasai can be incredibly hard-nosed in business, and 'cultural' visits to villages often become high-pressure sales ventures the moment you arrive.

While it would be unfair to generalise, it's certainly true that some Maasai, especially in high-density tourist areas, will treat you as a cash cow. Favourite techniques include dropping wares in your lap and refusing to take them back; coming into camp sites to offer dances at non-negotiable rates; and charging for absolutely everything, from camping to crossing their land. While this behaviour isn't limited to Maasai, their aggressive and unapologetic attitude upsets more travellers than day-to-day hassle elsewhere.

If you feel you're being taken for a ride, Maasai or otherwise, stand up for yourself. But ask yourself, if your people had been consistently dispossessed for over a century and were now subjected to streams of gawping foreigners with seemingly bottomless pockets, wouldn't you do the same?

closely spaced, spartan semipermanent tents in this quaint camp. They're slightly cheaper (single/twin US\$30/35) without bedding. There are numerous cooking areas, a bar and a campfire pit, but no restaurant. Bathrooms are clean and hot water flows in the evening. The only downside for campers is the lack of shade.

Siana Springs Intrepids (☎ 020-4446651; siana@africaonline.co.ke; low season full board s/d US\$150/210, high season US\$260/350;) This tented camp offers comfort without luxury intruding on the African bush experience. The best tents dot the edge of a beautiful clearing (bamboo group) or nestle in the forest (palm group); spacing is generous, so privacy is guaranteed.

Keekorok Lodge (bookings ☎ 020-4447151; low season full board s/d US\$140/180, high season US\$200/250;) This has always been a great option, with bungalows, cabins and cottages to choose from. After major renovations were completed in mid-2005, it's now better than ever. It has the usual top-end facilities, with the added attraction of a hippo pool.

Mara Simba Lodge (☎ 020-4343961; enquiries@marasimba.com; low season full board s/d US\$100/150, high season US\$180/250;) Large log-sided cabins house comfortable rooms with plank floors, balconies and fans; ask for upstairs rooms as they boast better views.

Simba Camp (per tent KSh800) Next to Acacia Camp, this dishevelled camp site has tin-shack toilets and no running water. Dog-eared tents (some with beds, some without) are for rent at KSh900. Prices include a farcical security fee.

TALEK GATE

Basecamp Masai Mara (☎ 020-577490; www.basecampexplorer.com; low season full board s/d US\$90/140, Nov-Mar US\$120/190, Jul-Oct US\$140/200) Masai Mara's only ecolodge is an incredibly friendly place. Solar panels provide power, organic waste is composted and dirty water is reused to water the grounds. One of the superb observation towers has a small exhibition space where local conservationists give informal lectures. The 16 individually designed permanent tents have thatched roofs, beautiful outdoor showers and large verandas with day beds.

Aruba Camp & Safaris (☎ 0723-997524; gerdj.simon@web.de; camping KSh300) Just outside the reserve, on the Talek River's scenic north bank, is this up-and-coming option. Joining the bare-bones camp site will soon be Masai Mara's first midrange tented safari camp. For less than US\$100 per person, you will get full-board accommodation and wildlife drives.

Riverside Camp (☎ 0720-218319; camping KSh350, bandas per person KSh2000) Run by Maasai, this camp site has good facilities, like running water, hot showers and a kitchen area. Trees provide shade for campers, while simple *bandas* provide shelter for the tentless.

Fig Tree Camp (☎ 020-605328; sales@madahotels.com; Jan-Jun full board s/d US\$80/120, Jul-Dec US\$165/220;) Vegetate on your tent's veranda, watching the Talek's waters gently flow by. Cabins with equally basic interiors cost the same but lack the river views. There's also a small but scenic pool and a trendy treetop bar.

Mara Intrepids (☎ 020-4446651; maraintrepids@heritagehotels.co.ke; low season full board incl wildlife drives s/d US\$245/370, high season US\$450/615;) The 30 permanent tents offer comfort, four-poster canopy beds and stone bathrooms. A lovely pool, with diving board, sits riverside.

MUSIARA & OLOOLOLO GATES

Mara Serena Lodge (☎ 020-22059; mara@serena.co.ke; low season full board s/d US\$80/160, high season US\$210/260; 🍷) Built to resemble a futuristic Maasai village, Serena is the most colourful lodge in the reserve. Hip rooms, with vibrant curved walls and Juliet balconies, line a ridge and overlook the grassy plains below. Blending beautifully with its surroundings and offering 1st-class service, it's justifiably popular.

Kichwa Tembo Camp (☎ 020-3740920; alice@cons.org.co.ke; low season full board s/d US\$120/240, Mar & Nov–mid-Dec US\$155/310, rest of year US\$185/370; 🍷) Just outside the northern boundary, Kichwa has permanent tents with grass-mat floors, stone bathrooms and tasteful furnishings. Hop in a hammock and take in spectacular savanna views. The food has an excellent reputation.

Olonana Camp (☎ 020-6950244; kenya@sanctuarylodges.com; low season full board per person US\$225, Oct–mid-Dec US\$340, rest of year US\$450; 🍷) Twelve tents with thatched shelters, large decks, wooden floors and beautiful stone bathrooms call this camp home.

Mpata Safari Club (☎ 020-310867; mpata4@africaonline.co.ke; Mar–May s/d US\$240/380, Jun–Feb US\$340/480; 🍷) Up the Esoit Oloololo Escarpment, Mpata offers Mara's grandest views and most luxurious accommodations. With brave contemporary styling, spiralling roofs, circular skylights, glass walls and quirky furniture, you will be talking about more than just animals.

Governors' Camp (☎ 020-2734000; www.governorscamp.com; low season full board s/d US\$165/330, high season US\$370/550; 🍷) and **Little Governors' Camp** (low season full board s/d US\$180/360, high season US\$405/600; 🍷) have tents similar to those at Kichwa, and offer great service, pleasing riverside locations and activities aplenty. The hefty rates include three wildlife drives.

Eating & Drinking

If you can't afford to sleep at the lodges, drop in for drinks or a meal. Lovely lunches/dinners will set you back US\$15/25, but the views and ambience are free.

A tiny shop, eatery and lively Maasai market are in Talek village.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Daily flights are available with **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) to Masai Mara.

Return flights on Airkenya/Safarilink are US\$191/201.

You must state which Mara airstrip you require, and be early when leaving as the aeroplane doesn't wait for latecomers.

MATATU, CAR & FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE

Although it's possible to arrange wildlife drives independently, there are few savings in coming here without transport. That said, Talek and Sekenani gates are accessible from Narok by *matatu*. From Kisii a *matatu* will get you as far as Kilkoris or Suna on the main A1 Hwy, but you will have problems after this.

For those driving, the first 52km west of Narok on the B3 and C12 are smooth enough, but after the bitumen runs out it gets bumpy. The C13, which connects Oloololo gate with Lolgorian in the west, is very rough, rocky and poorly signposted – a highway it's not.

Expensive petrol is available at Mara Savrova, Mara Serena and Keekorok Lodges.

LAKE VICTORIA

Spread across 70,000 sq km and gracing the shores of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, Lake Victoria is East Africa's most important geographical feature. Amazingly, despite its massive girth, the lake is never more than 80m deep, compared to 1500m in smaller Rift Valley lakes.

The lake's 'evolving' ecosystem has proved to be both a boon and a bane for those living along its shores. For starters, its waters are a haven for mosquitos and snails, making malaria and bilharzia too common here. Then there are Nile perch (introduced 50 years ago to combat mosquitos), which eventually thrived, growing to over 200kg in size and becoming every small fishing boat's dream. Sadly, now it's only large commercial fishing vessels thriving. Horrifyingly, the ravenous perch have wiped out over 300 species of smaller tropical fish unique to the lake.

Last and not least is the ornamental water hyacinth. First reported in 1986, this 'exotic' pond plant had no natural predators here and quickly reached plague proportions, covering 17,230 hectares and confining many large ships to port. Millions of dollars have been ploughed into solving the problem; the investment seems to be paying off and the most recent satellite photos show hyacinth covering just 384 hectares.

Despite the ecological and economic turmoil, the lives of Kenyans living along the shore go on, and a peek into their world is as fascinating as ever.

KISUMU

☎ 057

Set on the sloping shore of Lake Victoria's Winam Gulf, Kisumu is the third-largest town in Kenya. Declared a city during its centenary celebrations in 2001, it still doesn't feel like one; its relaxed atmosphere is a world away from that of Nairobi and Mombasa. Amazingly, like much of western Kenya, Kisumu receives relatively few travellers.

Until 1977 the port here was one of the busiest in Kenya, but decline set in with the demise of the East African Community (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), and it sat virtually idle for two decades. Although increasing cooperation between these countries (now known as Comesa) has established Kisumu as an international shipment point for petroleum products, surprisingly the lake plays no part – raw fuel for processing is piped in from Mombasa and the end products are shipped out by truck. With Kisumu's fortunes again rising, it is hoped Lake Victoria will once more start contributing to the local economy.

If you've arrived from the higher country east, you will immediately notice the humidity. Kisumu is a few degrees hotter than the highland cities, and the steamy conditions add to the generally languid air.

Orientation

Kisumu is a fairly sprawling town, but everything you will need is within walking distance. Most shops, banks, cheap hotels and other facilities can be found around Oginga Odinga Rd, while the train station and ferry jetty are short walks from the end of New Station Rd.

Jomo Kenyatta Hwy is the major thoroughfare, connecting town with the main market and the noisy bus and *matatu* station.

The most pleasant access to the lake itself is at Dunga, a small village about 3km south of town along Nzola Rd.

Information

Pel Travels (p400) is the most helpful travel agent in town.

Abacus Cyber Cafe (Al-Imran Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; per hr KSh60; ☎ 8am–8pm)

Aga Khan Hospital (☎ 2020005; Otiena Oyoo St; ☎ 24hr) A large hospital with modern facilities and 24-hour emergency room.

Barclays Bank (Kampala St)

Crystal Communications (Mega Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; per hr KSh60; ☎ 8am–6pm) Internet access.

Immigration office (1st fl, Reinsurance Plaza, cnr Oginga Odinga Rd & Jomo Kenyatta Hwy) Visa extensions.

Kenya Commercial Bank (Jomo Kenyatta Hwy)

Police station (Uhuru Rd)

Post office (Oginga Odinga Rd)

Sanhedrin Cyber Joint (Swan Centre, Accra St; per hr KSh60; ☎ 8am–10pm)

Standard Chartered Bank (Oginga Odinga Rd)

Dangers & Annoyances

While open storm drains and steep curbs are probably your biggest worry when walking around at night, it's still best not to do it too often, as robberies do occur.

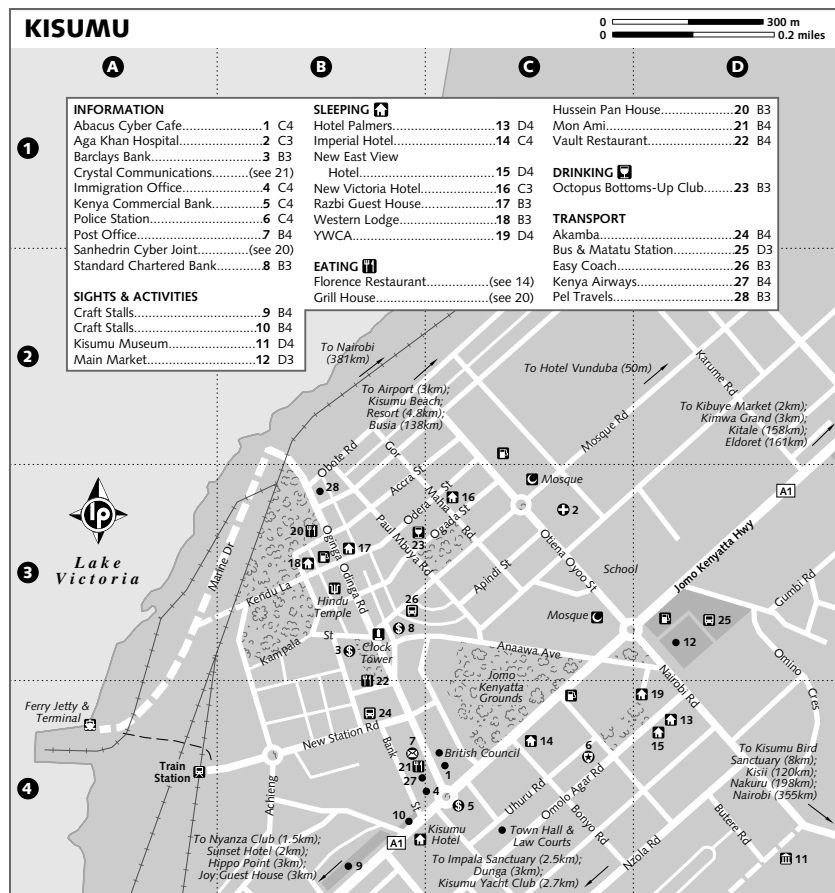
Sights & Activities

Unlike many local museums, **Kisumu Museum** (Nairobi Rd; admission KSh200; ☎ 8am–6pm) is an interesting and often informative place. There is a very good collection of traditional everyday items, including agricultural implements, bird and insect traps, food utensils, clothing, furniture, weapons and musical instruments. There is also a fairly motley array of stuffed birds and animals, including an amazing airborne lion mauling a wildebeest. Outside, a traditional Luo homestead has been constructed.

On the road to Dunga is the 1-sq-km **KWS Impala Sanctuary** (adult/child US\$5/2; ☎ 6am–6pm). Besides being home to a small impala herd, it also provides important grazing grounds for local hippos. You will find a pleasant nature trail and a not so pleasant animal orphanage.

Covering a large area of swampland, **Kisumu Bird Sanctuary** (☎ 6am–6pm), off A1 Hwy, 8km southeast of town, is an important breeding ground for herons, storks, cormorants and egrets. The best time to visit is in April or May. Transport is easy along the A1, but you will have a 3km walk from the turn-off. Visitor fees may be implemented in the near future.

Gazetted in 1986, **Ndere Island National Park** (adult/child US\$15/5) is a very beautiful forested 4.2-sq-km island housing a variety of bird



species, plus hippos, impalas (introduced) and spotted crocodile, a lesser-known cousin of the larger Nile crocodile. Tsetse flies can be problematic after the rains. Unfortunately tourism hasn't taken off here; there is nowhere to stay and chartered boats are your only transport option. Kisumu Beach Resort (opposite) charters 20 passenger boats for KSh3000 per hour, with typical return trips taking five hours.

Kisumu's **main market** (off Jomo Kenyatta Hwy) is one of Kenya's most animated, as is the huge **Kibuye Market** (Jomo Kenyatta Hwy), which draws people from all around the district each Sunday. Everything from second-hand clothes to furniture and food can be found. The various **craft stalls** near Kisumu

Hotel are among the best places in Kenya for soapstone carvings.

Sleeping BUDGET

Western Lodge (☎ 2023707; Kendu Lane; s or d KSh500) This lodge has a number of smallish singles (or cosy doubles) with mosquito nets and bathroom. There is a nice common balcony with plants, tables and a slice of lake view.

Razbi Guest House (☎ 2025488; Kendu Lane; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh400/500, s with private bathroom KSh600) A secure place, with small, mosquito-net-clad rooms, some decidedly brighter than others. The shared toilets pass the nostril test and there is a private TV lounge/restaurant upstairs.

Kisumu Beach Resort (☎ 0733-749327; camping KSh300, s/tw KSh1250/1500) This scruffy lakeside 'resort' is set across the bay from town. With loads of space, wicker loungers, a pool table, volleyball, a decent restaurant and well-stocked bar, it's easy to see why it's popular with overlanders and campers. To get here, take a 'Pipeline' *matatu* (KSh20) from the main station to the airport, from where you can hire a *boda-boda* (bicycle taxi; KSh10) or walk the remaining 1.8km.

YWCA (☎ 0733-992982; dm KSh300, full board KSh500) Bare-bones bunks in airy rooms for bottom dollar here. The shared bathrooms look clean, but are rather pungent. It's off Anaawa Ave.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Palmers (☎ 2024867; Omolo Agar Rd; s/tw KSh1000/1400) An understated place with a perceptible warmth to its atmosphere. The rooms are on the small side, but they see some sun, have decent bathrooms and are home to breezy fans. The hotel also has a comfortable lounge, an outdoor restaurant and secure parking.

New Victoria Hotel (☎ 2021067; Gor Mahia Rd; s with shared bathroom KSh600, s/tw/tr with private bathroom KSh850/1050/1550) Bright on the outside and gleaming green on the inside, this hotel has some good options. Rooms have fans, mosquito nets and comfy foam mattresses, while a few boast balconies with lake views.

Hotel Vunduba (☎ 2020043; Mosque Rd; s/tw/stw KSh800/1300/2500) Rooms in this place surround a sunny courtyard and offer good value. The singles are small but squeaky clean, while the twins are more sizable and comfy. The suites are perfect for families, and the courtyard is an ideal spot for weary vehicles to snooze.

New East View Hotel (☎ 0722-556721; Omolo Agar Rd; s/tw KSh1200/1600) Although less atmospheric than its neighbour, Hotel Palmers, this hotel's rooms offer more character. The bathrooms are rather aged.

Joy Guest House (☎ 0720-272037; Dunga; tw with shared bathroom KSh800, with private bathroom KSh1000) Located 3km south of town near Hippo Point's turn-off, this welcoming place has a homey feel. Cooking facilities, solid-rock sofas (sit slowly or risk a broken arse) and cramped rug-clad rooms, with fans and the odd balcony, call Joy's home. Sadly, prices don't include breakfast.

TOP END

Imperial Hotel (☎ 2022211; www.imperialkisumu.com; Jomo Kenyatta Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from US\$75/85, ste US\$175; ☎ ☎ ☎) Offering friendly 1st-class service, this old dame is Kisumu's most luxurious hotel. Full-length windows afford grand views and, if opened, heavenly breezes. Weekend rates are a bargain, and the Florence Restaurant is rated the best in town.

Nyanza Club (☎ 2022433; s/tw incl breakfast KSh2500/3000; ☎) While this blindingly white option off Jomo Kenyatta Hwy is slightly past its prime, its leafy and sporty surrounds make for an entertaining stay. The rooms are huge and those upstairs have lovely shaded balconies with lake views. There is a plethora of activities available, but since they're strictly for members, you will have to become a temporary member (per day KSh100).

Eating

If you want an authentic local fish fry, there is no better place than the dozen tin-shack restaurants sitting on the lake's shore at the end of Oginga Odinga Rd. Open flames, a lot of smoke and boisterous locals all add to the experience. Dive in from 11am to 6pm and a 1.5kg fish will set you back KSh150.

Florence Restaurant (☎ 2022211; Jomo Kenyatta Hwy; mains KSh200-450) Housed within the glam Imperial Hotel, the Florence is renowned as Kisumu's best restaurant. The poached Nile perch is lovely, as are the chicken Kiev and mutton masala.

Kisumu Yacht Club (☎ 2022050; Dunga; meals KSh200-300) Sitting on the lake's edge, just past the Impala Sanctuary, is this fine choice with a lovely patio and teak furnishings. The menu ranges from delicately stuffed fish to Indian selections, such as chicken biryani, butter chicken and *palak paneer*. A temporary membership is necessary to indulge (KSh200).

Grill House (Swan Centre, Accra St; meals KSh100-450; ☎ Tue-Sun) Wicker and shady umbrellas sit street-side at this German-owned eatery. The menu is a bit of a cultural hotchpotch – the spring rolls are quite nice.

Hussein Pan House (Swan Centre, Accra St; meals KSh150-300; ☎ 6-11pm) Smoky stoves grace the pavement here each evening and pump out amazing Asian selections, like chicken tikka and mutton pilau. The boneless chicken *mushkati* is divine.

Mon Ami (Mega Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; meals KSh150-350) A favourite expat pit stop, with Western standards, such as hamburgers, pasta and pizza.

Vault Restaurant (meals KSh300-600) Pizza (with real cheese), pasta and even veal grace this Italian restaurant's menu. Housed in a former bank off Oginga Odinga Rd, the massive vault still lurks in the shadows.

Follow the local crowds and descend into the subdued interior of the brightly coloured New Victoria Hotel (p399) for a filling feed in the morning (meals KSh150 to KSh300).

Drinking & Entertainment

Kisumu's nightlife has a reputation for being even livelier than Nairobi's, but thanks to many of the best parties and live Congolese bands cropping up at various venues, such as the **Kimwa Grand** (Jomo Kenyatta Hwy), along the roads out of town, it's harder to find; check flyers and ask locals who are plugged into the scene.

Easy to find and always good for a drink, Mon Ami (above) is a lively bar with a pool table, welcoming expat crowd and satellite TV, which blasts European footy in the evenings.

Octopus Bottoms-Up Club (Ogada St) A short stroll from Oginga Odinga Rd, this popular bar has two pool tables, a foosball table, its own disco (admission KSh100) and more Michael Jackson posters than we're comfortable with. Women travelling alone may not find it the most appealing of places.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are daily morning flights with **Kenya Airways** (☎ 2020081; Alpha House, Oginga Odinga Rd) to Nairobi (KSh7500, one hour), and an extra evening flight on Friday and Sunday. Hopefully the fact that its model Kenya Airways plane has lost its starboard engine won't put you off!

BUS & MATATU

Most buses, *matatus* and Peugeots to destinations within Kenya leave from the large bus and *matatu* station just north of the main market.

Matatus offer the only direct services to both Kakamega (KSh120, one hour) and Eldoret (KSh250, 2½ hours). Plenty of other *matatus* serve Busia (KSh250, two

hours), Kericho (KSh200, two hours), Kisii (KSh200, two hours), Homa Bay (KSh250, three hours), Nakuru (KSh300, 3½ hours), Nairobi (KSh550, 5½ hours) and Isebania (KSh350, four hours), on the Tanzanian border.

There are very few direct services to Kitale (KSh300, four hours); head to Kakamega or Eldoret and change there.

Akamba (off New Station Rd) has its own depot in the town's centre. Besides four daily buses to Nairobi (KSh500, seven hours) via Nakuru (KSh300, 4½ hours), there are daily services to Busia (KSh200, three hours) and Kampala (KSh750, seven hours). Easy Coach (off Mosque Rd) serves similar destinations with some added comfort and cost.

TRAIN

After being shut down for years, the train service to Nairobi (KSh1415/720 in 1st/2nd class, 13 hours) is once again on the roll. Trains are scheduled to depart on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday at 6.30pm, though they usually leave late.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A taxi is probably the easiest way to get into town from the airport, and should cost KSh500. Pipeline *matatus* (KSh20) pick up and drop off passengers outside the airport gate.

CAR

Your only option for a hire car is with **Pel Travels** (☎ 2022780; travels@pel.co.ke; Oginga Odinga Rd), which charges KSh4000 per day, including insurance. Excess is set at KSh35,000.

MATATU

Matatus 7 and 9 (KSh20), which run north along Oginga Odinga Rd before turning up Anaawa Ave and continuing east down Jomo Kenyatta Hwy, are handy to reach the main *matatu* station, main market and Kibuye Market – you can just wave an arm to stop them and hop on anywhere you see one.

TAXI

A taxi around town costs KSh100 to KSh200, while trips to Dunga or Kisumu Beach Resort range from KSh200 to KSh300.

AROUND LAKE VICTORIA

Homa Bay

☎ 059

This section of lakeshore, blanketed with green and dotted with intriguing, conical volcanic plugs (the plumbing of ancient volcanoes exposed through erosion) makes for an interesting visit and a handy base for nearby attractions.

Climb nearby Mt Homa (one hour) for a panoramic vista, take in the bustling harbour or just wander the dusty streets to the Caribbean beats radiating from various *dukas*. It is also a great place to find tapes of traditional Luo music.

INFORMATION

The Co-operative Bank of Kenya exchanges US dollars, while Post Bank offers Western Union. The new Kenya Commercial Bank should be open by the time you read this. The post office has Internet and telephone services. The **warden's office** (☎ 22544) for Ruma National Park is found up the hill in the district commissioner's compound.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bay Lodge (☎ 22568; s with shared bathroom KSh250, s/tw with private bathroom KSh300/450) An aquamarine sanctuary of simplicity nestled between the bus station and the post office. It is tidy, quiet, has secure parking, and the staff are lovely and helpful.

Little Nile Guest House (☎ 0720-997718; s/tw incl breakfast KSh800/1200) On the hill leading into town, this shiny new option is bright, comfortable and houses colourful murals.

Ruma Tourist Lodge (☎ 0734-590868; s/d KSh600/900) Lurking behind a messy entrance, Ruma's bungalows offer comfy rooms and great bathrooms. Unfortunately the town's best bar, with cold beers, decent tunes, pool table and restaurant (meals KSh150 to KSh230), also lives here, so noise can be problematic. It is signposted behind the Total petrol station.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Akamba's office is just down the hill from the bus station. Its buses serve Nairobi (KSh550, 8½ hours, 7am and 7.30pm) via Kericho (KSh300, four hours) and Nakuru (KSh450, six hours). Several other companies and *matatus* (operating from the bus station) also ply these routes, as well as Mbita

(KSh150, 1½ hours) and Kisumu (KSh250, three hours).

Ruma National Park

Bordered by the dramatic **Kanyama Escarpment**, and home to Kenya's only population of roans (one of Africa's rarest and largest antelopes), is the surprisingly seldom-visited **Ruma National Park** (adult/child US\$15/5). While hot and often wet, it's beautiful, and comprises 120 sq km of verdant riverine woodland and savanna grassland within the Lambwe Valley.

Besides roan, other rarities like Bohor's reedbuck, Rothschild's giraffe, Jackson's hartebeest and the tiny oribi antelope can be seen. Birdlife is prolific, with 145 different bird species present, including the mighty fish eagle and white egret. Tsetse flies can be a problem after the rains.

The park is set up for those with vehicles, but contact the **warden** (☎ 059-22544; PO Box 420, Homa Bay) in Homa Bay and you may be able to organise a hike, though you will have to pay a ranger to accompany you (KSh500/1000 per half-/full day).

There are two simple **camp sites** (adult/child US\$8/5) near the main gate, and the guest-house will soon be rebuilt.

To get here, head south from Homa Bay and turn right onto the Mbita road. About 12km west is the main access road and from there it's another 11km. The park's roads are in decent shape, but require a 4WD in the rainy season.

Rusinga & Mfangano Islands

Set on the sandy shoreline of Lake Victoria and marking Winam Gulf's entrance is Mbita, a lonely village with a palpably warm frontier feel. A short causeway connects it to **Rusinga Island**, which is a great place for a day's wander – the craggy hill makes an attractive viewpoint. On the island's north side is **Tom Mboya's mausoleum**. A child of Rusinga and former sanitary inspector in Nairobi, Mboya was one of the few Luos ever to achieve any kind of political success in the government of Kenya, and was widely tipped to become Kenya's second president before he was assassinated in 1969. He's still well remembered today.

Mfangano Island, to the southwest, is also well worth a day or two, accommodating monitor lizards, curious locals, intriguing

rock paintings and the imposing but assailable **Mt Kwitutu** (1694m). Thanks to a refreshing absence of vehicles, only footpaths crisscross the island – a guide is invaluable (KSh500 per day is fair).

It is about a 1½- to two-hour climb from the Sena village jetty to the sublime vista atop Kwitutu, on the southeastern side of the island. The rock paintings, both revered and feared by locals, are found northwest of Kwitutu towards the village of Ukula.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lake Victoria's Safari Village (☎ 0721-912120; www.safarikenya.net; s/d incl breakfast US\$35/55) A Lake Victoria beachfront haven if there ever was one. Lovely traditionally thatched roofs tower over comfy beds and impressive bathrooms in each of the pretty cottages.

Mbuta Campsite (☎ 0722-617953; per tent KSh100) Located 2.5km south of Mbita, this grassy camp site is set on a small section of beach and is a perfect place to laze away a day or two. Look for the small camping sign en route to the well-signposted Lake Victoria's Safari Village.

Elk Guest House (s/tw with shared toilet KSh300/400, tw KSh600) Backing the bus stand in Mbita, this place will do perfectly for a night's kip. Besides being clean, it has mosquito nets and private showers.

Rusinga Island Club (bookings ☎ 020-340331; info@letsgosafari.com; full board incl all activities s/d US\$410/700) This is an exclusive place on the northern side of Rusinga Island. Fishing is the dominant activity, but if you're not a keen worm-dangler there are various water sports available and the birdlife is prolific.

Mfangano Island Camp (bookings ☎ 020-2734000; governors@reservation.com; full board s/d US\$370/550; ☎ Jun-Mar) The only formal accommodation on Mfangano island. Built in traditional Luo style (albeit with modern amenities), this is primarily a fishing resort.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Four daily buses run from Mbita to Kisumu (KSh200, five hours) each morning between 6am and 11am. *Matatus* to Homa Bay are far more frequent (KSh100, 1½ hours). The odd *matatu* heads to Rusinga Island and past the mausoleum (KSh50).

Until the ferries get their act together, sporadic 10m canoes are the only transport to Mfangano Island (per person KSh150)

from Mbita. If you don't want to wait for passengers, you will have to fork out KSh4000 for the entire boat.

WESTERN HIGHLANDS

Benefiting from reliable rainfall and fertile soil, the Western Highlands make up the agricultural heartland of Kenya, separating Kisumu and Lake Victoria from the rest of the country. The south is cash-crop country, with vast patchworks of tea plantations covering the region around Kisii and Kericho, while further north, near Kitale and Eldoret, insanely dense cultivation takes over.

The settlements here are predominantly agricultural service towns, with little of interest unless you need a chainsaw or water barrel. For visitors, the real attractions lie outside these places: the rolling tea fields around Kericho, the tropical beauty of Kakamega Forest, trekking on Mt Elgon, the prolific birdlife in Saiwa Swamp National Park and exploring the dramatic Cherangani Hills.

KISII

☎ 058

Whether inspired by nearby soils (some of the most fertile in Kenya) or by the growing non Bantu-speaking tribes around them (Maasai to the south, Luo to the west and north, and Kipsigis to the east), the Bantu-speaking Gusii people of this region are producing offspring at one of the world's fastest rates. An amazing 50% of the 1.5 million Gusii are below the age of 15! With all those new mouths to feed, the rapidly expanding town of Kisii is bursting with activity.

Besides being the region's transport hub and hosting a variety of facilities, this hilly city has little to offer travellers besides muddy, rubbish-laden streets, noise and an entertaining nightlife (its saving grace).

While the fêted Kisii soapstone does obviously come from this area, it's not on sale here. Quarrying and carving go on in the village of **Tabaka**, 23km northwest of Kisii, where you can usually visit the workshops. Since most carvings are sold to dealers and shops in Nairobi at rock-bottom prices, they'll happily accept a fair price from you.

Information

Barclays Bank (Moi Hwy)

Cyber Cafe (Hospital Rd; per hr KSh90)

Postbank (Hospital Rd) Western Union services.

Post office (Moi Hwy)

Sleeping & Eating

Kisii Hotel (☎ 30254; off Moi Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast KSh750/950) Double the price, but triple the pleasure. This is a relaxed place with large gardens and sizable rooms, each with decent bathrooms. The restaurant (meals KSh150 to KSh300) is deservedly popular.

Mwalimu Hotel (Moi Hwy; d/ste KSh800/1500) Set in its own compound opposite the Mobile petrol station at the southeastern end of town, this hotel isn't atmospheric but provides good value and secure parking. The rooms are bright, average sized and have mosquito nets. The hotel has a popular bar and terrace, as well as a restaurant (meals KSh80 to KSh230) that serves a mix of Kenyan, Western and Indian dishes.

Sabrina Lodge (s/tw with shared bathroom KSh300/500) Just up from Postbank, Sabrina has clean, concrete Santa specials, with rooms boasting red floors and bright green walls. The toilets (missing seats) are clean enough, but there is no running water. Hot bucket showers are available in the morning. The beds aren't great, but they do have mosquito nets.

Zonic Hotel (☎ 30298; Hospital Rd; s/d US\$25/40, ste from US\$65; ☎) Although bizarre, Zonic is home to the town's most comfortable rooms, each large, clean and sporting a balcony. There is a rooftop swimming pool and a cavernous restaurant (meals KSh250 to KSh350), which produces some tasty Asian curries and a good beef tenderloin.

Blues Restaurant (Hospital Rd; meals KSh150-250) Feeling more like a modern pub, this friendly restaurant cooks up some great Chinese stir-fries, complete with fresh ginger. The chicken stew isn't bad either.

Kawanji's Cafe (Ogemba Rd; meals KSh120-180) Lurking behind a wall of foliage, this pleasant restaurant serves the best Kenyan dishes in Kisii.

Drinking & Entertainment

To compensate for its other shortcomings, Kisii has plenty of evening venues and some of the cheapest beer around (KSh60 for a large Tusker).

Blues Restaurant (Hospital Rd) A good spot for a beer, with a balcony overlooking the market and proper cable TV to catch up on the world outside.

Jazz Pub (Hospital Rd) A similar crowd (Kenyan yuppies) to Blues, this place has a warm vibe and an odd absence of jazz music.

Pub dotCom (Ogemba Rd) Reggae cuts radiate through this tiny, welcoming bar.

Satellite Bar (Sansora Rd) Rain doesn't even seem to dampen the late night spirits at this rooftop bar. Thankfully there is a shelter over the pool table.

Club Backyard (Hospital Rd) The best nightclub in town, this place gets packed Friday and Saturday nights. It usually hosts well-known DJs; look for posters throughout town.

Getting There & Away

Matatus line the length of Moi Hwy; look for the destination placards on their roofs. Regular departures serve Homa Bay (KSh100, one hour), Kisumu (KSh200, two hours), Kericho (KSh180, two hours) and Isebania (KSh150, 1¾ hours) on the Tanzanian border.

Tabaka *matatus* leave from the Victoria Cafe, while local *matatus* (and additional Kericho services) leave from the stand at the end of Sansora Rd.

Akamba (Moi Hwy) has a daily bus to Nairobi (KSh550, eight hours) via Nakuru (KSh290, 5½ hours) departing at 7.30am; it's wise to book a day in advance. International bus departures for Mwanza in Tanzania also leave from here.

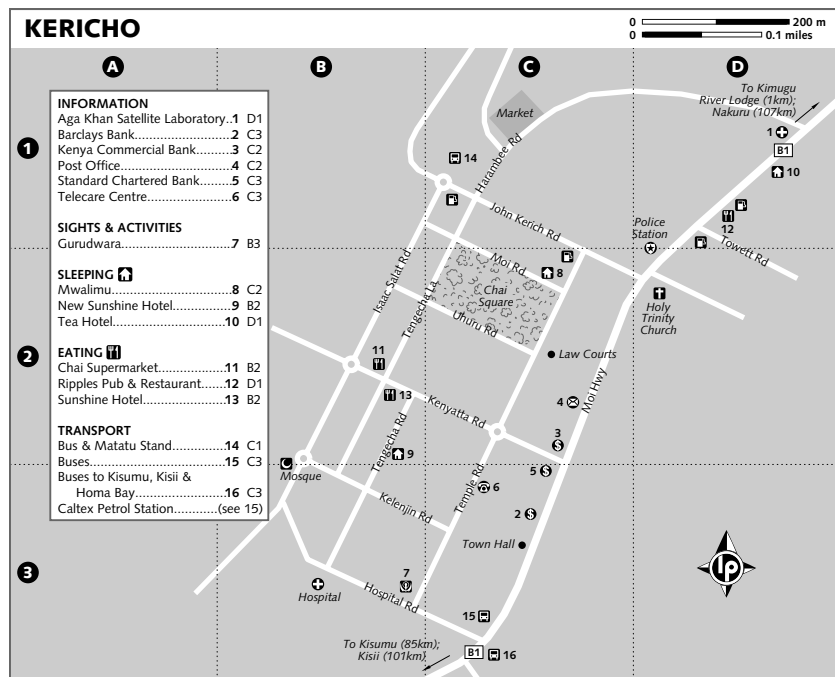
KERICHO

☎ 052

In comparison to Kisii, Kericho is a haven of tranquillity. Its surrounds are blanketed by an undulating patchwork of manicured tea plantations, each seemingly hemmed in by distant stands of evergreens. While there is little to do in Kericho, it's a pleasant place to wander among the shade cast by leafy trees.

There is little doubt why Kericho is the tea capital of western Kenya: the soil is perfect, the climate consistent and afternoon rain falls almost daily. Luckily these downpours are generally too brief to be a nuisance, and the atmosphere is cool enough to keep it fresh instead of humid.

Settlers attribute the town's name to John Kerich, a herbalist and early tea planter who lived here at the turn of the 20th century, while locals believe it's derived from the Maasai chief Ole Kericho, killed here by the Gusii during an 18th-century territorial battle. Who's right is anyone's guess.



Information

The Tea Hotel has Internet access for KSh1200 per hour.

Aga Khan Satellite Laboratory (Moi Hwy) Malaria and other blood tests.

Barclays Bank (Moi Hwy)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Moi Hwy)

Post office (Moi Hwy)

Standard Chartered Bank (Moi Hwy)

Tea Hotel (Moi Hwy; per hr KSh1200) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

Organised **tea plantation tours** are surprisingly uncommon in Kericho, but if you ask at Kimugu River Lodge it can usually set something up. The Tea Hotel can do the same, although you will pay through the nose.

If you're only interested in seeing the fields up close, it's an easy walk to the nearest plantation, which sits behind the Tea Hotel. Head through the hotel grounds and follow the path out the back gate, which leads through the tea bushes to the hotel workers' huts. If you're lucky, there may be picking in progress. You can also arrange

hikes through tea estates and **guided river walks** at Kimugu River Lodge.

Africa's largest **Gurudwara** (Sikh place of worship) is found on Hospital Rd.

Sleeping & Eating

New Sunshine Hotel (☎ 30037; Tengecha Rd; s/tw/d KSh600/900/1000) Boasting faux-wood paintwork that's almost funny enough to be charming, this place is worth a look. A bamboo roof and cheesy artificial waterfall grace the restaurant (meals KSh80 to KSh190), which serves Western snacks, sandwiches and burgers.

Mwalimu (☎ 30656; Moi Rd; s/tw KSh400/550) A secure place for a night's kip. The rooms are much brighter than the gloomy corridors and host soft foam mattresses. The bathrooms are dark and dreary, but hot water flows in the morning and evening.

Kimugu River Lodge (☎ 0733-504942; camping KSh150; s/d/tr from KSh1000/1500/2000) Set off Moi Hwy on the scenic bank of the Kimugu River, which runs behind the Tea Hotel, this lodge is a good option for campers (if you can handle cold showers). Unfortunately,

the **bandas** are unreasonably expensive. Enjoy the bar and devour a spicy south Asian meal at the restaurant (meals KSh160 to KSh300).

Tea Hotel (☎ 30004; teahotel@africaonline.co.ke; Moi Hwy; camping KSh300, s/d US\$60/84, ste US\$102-108; 🚗) Glorious gardens envelop this grand property, built in the 1950s by the Brooke Bond company. Ask for a room in the stone cottages – they've aged more gracefully than the hotel rooms and cost not a penny more. All rooms have TVs, fireplaces and dated bathrooms.

Ripples Pub & Restaurant (Moi Hwy; meals KSh130-350; 🚗 Tue-Sun) Despite being part of the Kobil petrol station, it's definitely Kericho's most colourful restaurant. There is a good range of pizza, sandwiches and Indian dishes, like spicy chicken tikka.

Sunshine Hotel (Kenyatta Rd; meals KSh60-160) Locals pile in to devour fried **tilapia** (its speciality) and other Kenyan selections.

Chai Supermarket (Kenyatta Rd) Perfect for self-caterers to stock up.

Getting There & Away

While most buses and **matatus** use the main stand in the town's northwest corner, many also pick up passengers on the Moi Hwy near the Caltex petrol station. Buses to Nairobi (KSh450, 4½ hours) are frequent, as are **matatus** to Kisumu (KSh150, two hours), Kisii (KSh180, two hours), Eldoret (KSh250, 3½ hours) and Nakuru (KSh200, two hours).

THE KINDEST CUT

The Bungoma/Trans-Nzoia district goes wild in August with the sights and sounds of the **Bukusu Circumcision Festival**, an annual jamboree dedicated to the initiation of young boys into manhood.

The tradition was apparently passed to the Bukusu by the Sabao tribe in the 1800s, when a young hunter cut the head off a troublesome serpent to earn the coveted operation (too symbolic to be true?). The evening before the ceremony is devoted to substance abuse and sex; in the morning the fortunate youngsters are trimmed with a traditional knife in front of their entire village.

Unsurprisingly, this practice has attracted a certain amount of controversy in recent years. Health concerns are prevalent, as the same knife can be used for up to 10 boys, posing a risk of AIDS and other infections. The associated debauchery also brings a seasonal rush of underage pregnancies and family rifts that seriously affect local communities.

Education and experience now mean that fewer boys undergo the old method, preferring to take the safe option at local hospitals. However, those wielding the knife are less likely to let go of their heritage. To quote a prominent circumciser: 'Every year at this time it's like a fever grips me, and I can't rest until I've cut a boy'. It seems that in Bukusuland some traditions die hard.

KAKAMEGA

☎ 056

This small but busy town is spread out along the A1 Hwy north of Kisumu. There is no real reason to stay here, but if you arrive late in the day it can be convenient to sleep over and stock up with supplies before heading to nearby Kakamega Forest Reserve, one of western Kenya's star attractions. The region is part of the traditional Bungoma district (see the boxed text, below) and home to the Luyha people, who are quite Westernised and unobtrusive as a community.

Information

Barclays Bank (A1 Hwy)

Kenya Commercial Bank (Kenyatta Ave)

KWS Area Headquarters (☎ 30603; PO Box 88, Kakamega) Kakamega Forest information.

Post office (A1 Hwy)

Telkom Kenya (A1 Hwy) Calling cards and cardphones.

Sights & Activities

Perched on a ridge south of town is the **Crying Stone of Ilesi**, a local curiosity that has become a regional emblem. The formation, looking like a solemn head resting on weary shoulders, consists of a large boulder balanced atop an 8m column of rock. While legend has it that tears never stop flowing down its length, it was dry during our visit – perhaps it was just happy to see us! Still, stains from years of eerie weeping are evident and it's worth a look. Maybe it won't be so happy to see you...

Sleeping & Eating

Bendera Hotel (Sudi Rd; d KSh350) Consistently the best budget hotel in town. It was closed for renovations during our visit, so it should be better than ever when you arrive.

Golf Hotel (☎ 30150; Khasakhala Rd; s/d incl breakfast US\$60/75; 🍷) While the large rooms, each with a balcony and garden view (some even glimpse Mt Elgon), are bright and pleasant, this hotel is seriously overpriced. On a positive note, readers rave about the swimming pool and fish dishes in the restaurant (meals KSh180 to KSh350).

Snack Stop Cafe (Cannon Awori Rd; meals KSh65-130) The restaurant of choice for most locals, offering simple Kenyan standards, including *ugali wimbi* (sorghum porridge, reputed to slow ageing).

Getting There & Around

Easy Coach (off Kenyatta Ave) serves Kisumu (KSh150, one hour), and has early morning and evening buses to Nairobi (KSh650, 7½ hours) via Nakuru (KSh450, five hours). Nearby, Akamba (off Kenyatta Ave) has one evening bus to Nairobi (KSh600, 8pm).

Behind the Total petrol station on the town's northern edge, *matatus* leave for Kisumu (KSh120, one hour), Kitale (KSh190, 2½ hours) and Eldoret (KSh180, 2½ hours).

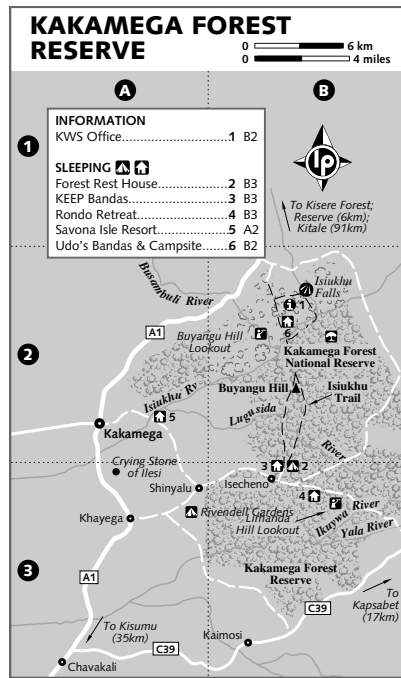
KAKAMEGA FOREST RESERVE

☎ 056

This superb small slab of virgin tropical rainforest is the only Kenyan vestige of the unique and once mighty Guineo-Congolian forest ecosystem. It is so wild here trees actually kill each other – really! Parasitic fig trees grow on top of unsuspecting trees and actually strangle their hosts to death. Potential victims include the lovely Elgon teak.

Less murderous and more exciting is the forest's array of wildlife. An astounding 330 species of birds, including casqued hornbill, Ross's turaco and great blue turaco, have been spotted here. During darkness hammerheaded fruit bats and flying squirrels take to the air. The best viewing months are June, August and October, when many migrant species arrive. The wildflowers are also wonderful in October, supporting around 400 species of butterfly.

Dancing in the canopy are no less than seven different primate species, including the exceedingly rare De Brazza's monkey,



the red-tailed monkey, blue monkey, and thumbluss black and white colobus.

The northern section of the forest around Buyangu is more accessible and comprises the **Kakamega Forest National Reserve** (adult/child US\$10/5, vehicle KSh300). Maintained by the KWS, this area has a variety of habitats but is generally very dense, with considerable areas of primary forest and regenerating secondary forest; there is a total ban on grazing, wood collection and cultivation in this zone. Isolated a few kilometres north, but still part of this reserve, is the small **Kisere Forest Reserve**. An excellent guide to the forest is available at the KWS office (KSh300) and Rondo Retreat (KSh500).

The southern section, centred around Isecheno, forms the **Kakamega Forest Reserve** and is looked after by the Forest Department. This region supports several communities, and is under considerable pressure from farming and illegal logging.

Tribal practices in the forest persist: *mu-gumu* trees are considered sacred, circumcisions are sometimes performed in the forest, and bullfights are still held on Sunday in

Khayega and Shinyalu. Intervillage wrestling also used to be common, but was eventually banned, as the prize (the victor's pick of the young women present) tended to provoke more fights than the match itself.

Sights & Activities

The best way to appreciate the forest is to walk, and trails radiate from Buyangu and Isecheno areas. It is possible to drive, but the roads are pretty tough going, and the engine noise will scare off any wildlife nearby as well as annoying everyone else present.

Official **guides** (per person for short/long walk KSh200/600), trained by the Kakamega Biodiversity Conservation and Tour Operators Association, are well worth the money. Not only do they prevent you from getting lost (many of the trail signs are missing), but most are excellent naturalists who can recognise birds by call alone and provide information about numerous animals.

Rangers state that trails vary in length from 1km to 7km, but the enjoyable **Isiukhu Trail**, which connects Isecheno to **Isiukhu Falls**, seems much longer. Short walks to **Buyangu Hill** in the north or **Lirhandia Hill** in the south for sunrise or sunset are highly recommended. As ever the early morning and late afternoon are the best times to view birds, but night walks can also be a fantastic experience.

Sleeping & Eating

Udo's Bandas & Campsite (☎ 30603; PO Box 879, Kakamega; camping adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person US\$10) Named after Udo Savalli, a well-known ornithologist, this place is run by KWS. It is a tidy, well-maintained camp site with seven simple thatched *bandas*; mosquito nets are provided, but you will need your own sleeping bag and other supplies. There are long-drop toilets, bucket showers, and a communal cooking and dining shelter.

KEEP Bandas (keeporg@yahoo.com; s/tw KSh500/1000) Opened in May 2005 by the Kakamega Environmental Education Programme, these *bandas* are a more comfortable option than the rest house and have more facilities, including a nice dining area.

Forest Rest House (☎ 30603; PO Box 88, Kakamega; camping KSh150, s/tw KSh350/700) Beds are housed in four rudimentary twin rooms, while bare-bones bathrooms (no hot water) are in a rickety stilted wooden building that looks

directly out over the forest. You will need your own sleeping bag, food and preferably something to cook on. You can get basic supplies from the *dukas* about 2km back towards Shinyalu.

Rondo Retreat (☎ 30268; tfrondo@multitechweb.com; full board s/tw KSh9000/11,600) Originally built as a sawmiller's residence in the 1920s, this charming choice is about 3km east of Isecheno. Seven cottages, each with striking traditional fittings and large verandas, sit in gorgeous gardens through which plenty of wildlife passes. The main house oozes atmosphere (ask for Bob & Betty's room), though some of its rooms share a bathroom.

Savona Isle Resort (☎ 31095; d/tw/tr KSh1500/1500/5000; 🍷) This resort is too far from the forest to make a walking base, but is a fine option if you have a car. Rooms are in slightly aged thatched *bandas*, each with a balcony backing onto the bamboo-lined river. Meals (KSh200 to KSh400) are available in the atmospheric restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Matatus heading north towards Kitale can drop you at the access road for the main Buyangu area of the reserve, about 18km north of Kakamega town (KSh50). It is a well signposted 2km walk from there to the park office and Udo's. Regular *matatus* link Kakamega with Shinyalu (KSh60), but few continue to Isecheno. Shinyalu is also accessed by rare *matatu* service from Khayega. Odd vehicles ferry between Shinyalu and Isecheno (KSh30 to KSh60).

The improved roads are still treacherous after rain and you may prefer to walk once you've seen the trouble vehicles have. To Shinyalu it's about 7km from Khayega and 10km from Kakamega. From Shinyalu it is 5km to Isecheno.

ELDOR ET

☎ 053

Mmmmm...cheese! While the pull of a fine Gouda, Gruyère, Stilton, Brie or Cheddar can vary depending on how long you've been on your African safari, a stop in Eldoret is a must for all cheese lovers.

Dairy haters and the lactose-intolerant will find little else in this large service town besides banking facilities and a good night's sleep before venturing into the nearby Kerio Valley and Kamnarok National Reserves.

EDUCATION FOR ALL!

After the 2002 elections the new government managed to create a long-awaited provision guaranteeing free primary education for all Kenyans, a move applauded by parents across the nation. One great-grandfather by the name of Kimani Nganga Maruge clapped a little louder than most.

On the first day of class this cane-wielding knobbly kneed 84-year-old, dressed in school uniform – shorts, knee socks and all – was right there with the kids, sitting in the front row (he is hard of hearing, after all). What ran through the teacher's mind is anyone's guess!

Mr Maruge was there to start collecting his long-overdue education, and wouldn't let anyone say otherwise. Besides basic maths, he was keen on learning to read. This would allow him to study the Bible and confirm his suspicions that his local preacher wasn't actually following it!

Not only does Mr Maruge continue to attend classes in the Eldoret area, but he's also been made prefect and his teacher is said to rave about his influence over the students. The venerable scholar is also a fast learner and has some of the top marks in his class. Perhaps he's being tutored by his grandchildren, who attend the same school.

President Moi hailed from the area, and during his presidency the city controversially received many beneficial developments, such as Moi University and the international airport. Simultaneous construction of a munitions factory next to the airport also raised many eyebrows – critics wondered what exports were intended.

Information

Barclays Bank (Uganda Rd)

Cyber Hawk Internet Café (Nandi Arcade, Nandi Rd; per hr KSh60)

Eldoret Hospital Off Uganda Rd. One of Kenya's best hospitals, with 24-hour emergency service.

Kenya Commercial Bank (Kenyatta St)

Post office (Uganda Rd)

Safari Forex Bureau (KVDA Plaza, Oloo Rd) Exchanges cash and travellers cheques (no commission). Western Union services.

Standard Chartered Bank (Uganda Rd)

Telkom Kenya (cnr Kenyatta & Elija Cheruhota Sts)

Sights

An odd but tasty attraction, the **Dorinyo Lessos Creameries Cheese Factory** (Kenyatta St; ☎ 8am-6pm) produces over 30 different types of cheese. You can taste most for free and the average price is KSh500 per kilogram, with a minimum purchase of 250g. The company also makes yummy ice cream (KSh23 for 100ml).

Sleeping BUDGET

New Lincoln Hotel (☎ 0723-676699; Oloo Rd; s/d KSh600/800) The most comfortable of the budget options, this pleasant place has decent rooms spread around its courtyard. The bathrooms and hot-water plumbing are slightly disfigured but seem to do the job.

Mountain View Hotel (☎ 0720-486613; Uganda Rd; s/tw KSh450/550) While a little noisy and small, these bright clean rooms have mosquito nets, reasonable bathrooms and balconies, complete with potted plants. Taking a cell-like inside-facing single without a balcony only saves 50 bob. Security is distinctly prisonlike (you have to be let out as well as in). It also has a respectable terrace bar and restaurant.

Naiberi River Campsite (☎ 2063047; campsite@afriacaonline.co.ke; camping KSh250, dm KSh500, cabins KSh1200; ☎) This place, 22km southeast of town on the C54 to Kaptagat, is your best option for camping, as it has tonnes of facilities, although it is very popular with overland companies. Phone for directions.

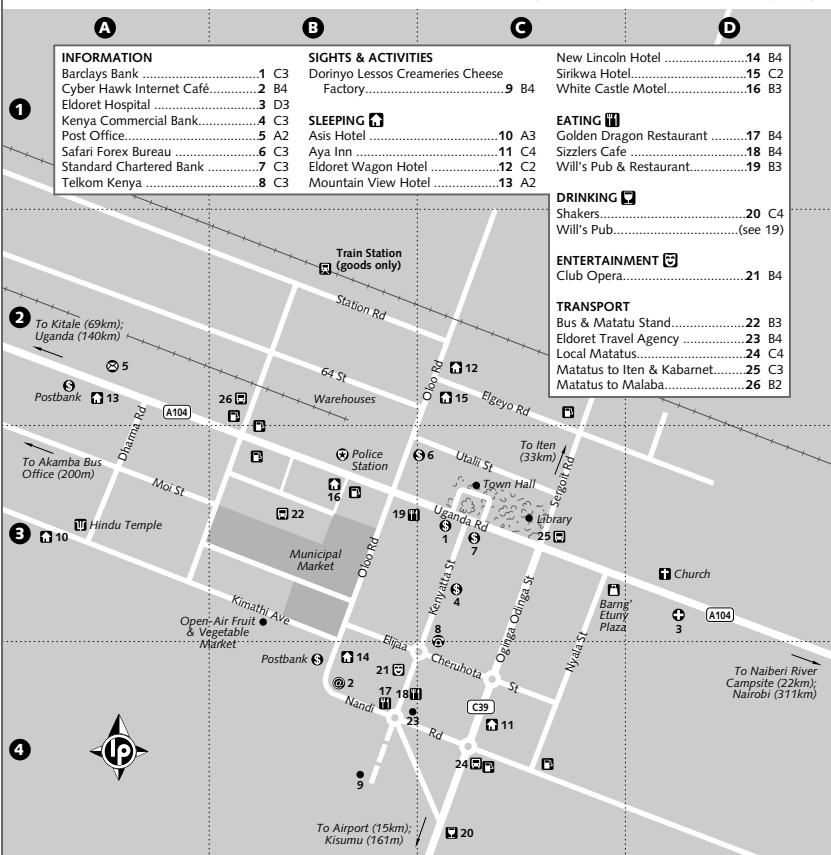
Aya Inn (Oginga Odinga St; s/tw incl breakfast KSh500/1000) With clean rooms, large beds (some what saggy), hot-water showers and a courtyard for vehicles, this place is a reasonable option. There are some cheaper singles (KSh400) with shared bathrooms.

MIDRANGE

Eldoret Wagon Hotel (☎ 2062270; Oloo Rd; s/d incl breakfast KSh1550/2250) This option has a certain amount of colonial charm. It is overpriced, but retains some suitably eccentric memorabilia, and there is a casino to make you feel like a high roller.

White Castle Motel (☎ 2033095; Uganda Rd; s/d KSh850/1550) Lonely beds sit strangely away from all the walls in these sizable austere rooms. Some rooms have decent views and all have aged but clean bathrooms. The expensive special singles are not worth the money.

ELDORET



Asis Hotel (☎ 2061807; Kimathi Ave; s/tw incl breakfast KSh750/1250) Alone on the west side of town, this conference-class place is very clean and comfortable. From some rooms farsighted guests will enjoy countryside views, while nearsighted guests will glare at the litter outside.

TOP END

Sirikwa Hotel (☎ 2063614; hotelsirikwa@multitechweb.com; Elgeyo Rd; s/tw incl breakfast KSh4000/5000, ste from KSh8500; ☎) This is Eldoret's only top-end hotel and boasts a long list of facilities, including a lovely swimming pool and beautiful terrace. Hopefully planned renovations won't touch the suites, which scream '70s velvet chic.

Eating

Slide onto Sirikwa Hotel's grand terrace and sample some sumptuous selections. Local well-to-do's rave about the marinated lamb and chicken curry (KSh250 to KSh400).

Will's Pub & Restaurant (Uganda Rd; meals KSh200-450) The burgers and shoestring fries will leave you smiling. Thanks to the fried fish and lamb stew also being justifiably popular, tables come at a premium.

Golden Dragon Restaurant (Kenyatta St; meals KSh300-400; ☎; Wed-Mon) A tad pricey, but Chinese food will give your taste buds something new to sing about.

Sizzlers Cafe (Kenyatta St; meals KSh100-235) Grab a curry and get stuffed for minimal coinage at this undeniable favourite.

Drinking & Entertainment

Shakers (Oginga Odinga Rd) An atmospheric, albeit isolated (take a taxi) place just waiting for introductions... Arse, meet wicker. Eyes, meet European footy. Beer, meet throat.

Will's Pub (Uganda Rd) A tame but lively place for a cold drink or three. It is a friendly spot for female travellers.

Club Opera (Kenyatta St) Day-Glo paint, black lights and occasional live bands grace this raucous nightclub.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are daily flights between Eldoret and Nairobi (KSh5700, one hour) with the little-known Aero Kenya. Bookings are handled by **Eldoret Travel Agency** (☎ 2062707; Kenyatta St).

BUS & MATATU

The main bus and *matatu* stand is in the centre of town, by the market. Regular *matatus*/Peugeots serve Kitale (KSh150/200, 1¼ hours), Kisumu (KSh250/300, 2½ hours), Kericho (KSh250/300, 3½ hours), Nakuru (KSh200/400, 2¾ hours) and Nairobi (KSh400/700, six hours). Buses duplicate these routes.

Local *matatus* and more Kericho services leave from Nandi Rd. Irregular *matatus* to Iten and Kabarnet leave opposite Paradise Bar on Uganda Rd. Further west on Uganda Rd, *matatus* leave for Malaba (KSh300, 2½ hours) on the Uganda border.

Akamba (Moi St) buses to Nairobi (KSh500, 10.30am and 9pm) via Nakuru (KSh250) leave from its depot. There is also a noon (KSh1000, six hours) and a midnight (KSh1150) service to Kampala.

Getting Around

A *matatu* from the airport costs KSh50, and a taxi will cost KSh1000. *Boda-bodas* are rare, though some linger near the bus stand.

LAKE KAMNAROK & KERIO VALLEY NATIONAL RESERVES

These two little-visited national reserves lie in the heart of the beautiful Kerio Valley, sandwiched between the **Cherangani Hills** and the **Tugen Hills**, and are divided by the Kerio River. Prolific birdlife, crocodiles, wonderful landscapes and the chance to get totally off the beaten track are the main attractions.

Lake Kamnarok, on the river's eastern side, is the most accessible of the two reserves,

although there are absolutely no facilities. Bush camping is possible by the lake and no park fees are currently charged by the KWS. At present you can walk anywhere on foot, but it is best to ask rangers and locals if there have been any recent wild dog attacks in the area.

It is possible to cross into Kerio Valley National Reserve from Kamnarok during the dry season, but you will have to wade across the river north of the lake. To the south of the reserve is the beautiful **Cheploch Gorge**.

The rest of the Kerio Valley begs to be explored and there is still talk of two other national reserves being created: one around Kapkut (2799m), a beautiful mountain close to Eldama Ravine, and another in the Tugen Hills.

To reach Lake Kamnarok, head 25km north up the rough dirt track from the village of Cheploch, which sits just east of the Kerio River on the Kabarnet–Iten road. A 4WD is required in the dry season – don't even think about it during the rains.

CHERANGANI HILLS

Northeast of Kitale and forming the western wall of the spectacular **Elgeyo Escarpment** are the Cherangani Hills. This high plateau has a distinctly pastoral feel, with thatched huts, patchwork *shambas* (plots of land) and wide rolling meadows cut by babbling brooks. You could easily spend weeks exploring here and never come across a single tourist.

You won't be alone though, as the plateau is home to the interesting Marakwet people (part of the greater Kalenjin grouping), who migrated here from the north. They settled here because the area was secure, and the consistent rainfall and streams were ideal for agriculture.

There are a couple of great five-day **treks**, namely from Kabichbich to Chesengoch and Kapcherop to Sigor. These two treks are both detailed in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*. Sirikwa Safaris (p412) and Marich Pass Field Studies Centre (p430) can both arrange rewarding day and multiday treks in the region.

Kabichbich is best accessed from Kapenguria on a *matatu* (KSh100, 1¼ hours), while Kapcherop is accessible from Kitale with some patience and a *matatu* change in Cherangani.

KITALE

☎ 054

Kitale is considerably smaller than its nearest neighbour Eldoret and has more of an agricultural feel, although there are more street kids than in most normal service towns. Although it has an interesting museum, Kitale's main function for travellers is as a base for explorations further afield – Mt Elgon and Saiwa Swamp National Parks – and a take-off point for a trip up to the western side of Lake Turkana. As such, Kitale is a pleasant enough town and can be an enjoyable place to pass through.

Information

Barclays Bank (Bank St)

Mt Elgon Northwest Ecotourism (Menowecto; ☎ 30996; Kitale Museum, A1 Hwy) Nonprofit organisation providing tourist information.

MultiTech (Askari Rd; per hr KSh60)

Post office (Post Office Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank (Bank St)

Telkom Kenya (Post Office Rd)

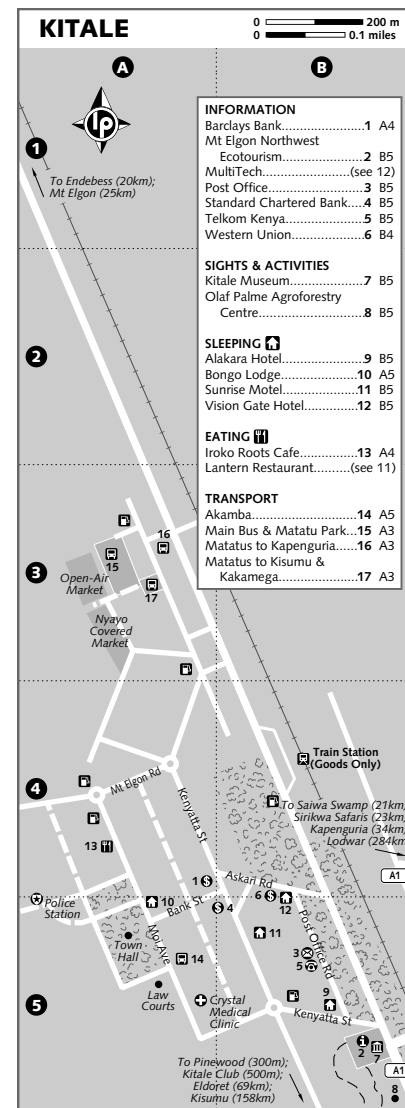
Western Union (Askari Rd) Money transfer services.

Sights & Activities

The **Kitale Museum** (☎ 30996; A1 Hwy; adult/child KSh200/20; ☎ 8am–6pm) was founded on the collection of butterflies, birds and ethnographic memorabilia left to the nation in 1967 by the late Lieutenant Colonel Stoneham. The more recent ethnographic displays of the Pokot, Akamba, Marakwet and Turkana peoples are a bit more interesting than the rows of dead things (although the stuffed cheetah is comical). The outdoor exhibits include some traditional tribal homesteads, as well as the inevitable snakes, crocodiles and tortoises, plus an interesting 'Hutchinson Biogas Unit'.

The best thing here is the small **nature trail** that leads through virgin rainforest at the back of the museum and links with the arboretum of the Olaf Palme Agroforestry Centre. The forest is teeming with birdlife, insects, and the odd colubus monkey.

Next to the museum along the highway is the **Olaf Palme Agroforestry Centre** (A1 Hwy; admission free; ☎ 8am–5pm), a Swedish-funded program aimed at educating local people about protection and rehabilitation of the environment by integrating trees into farming systems. The project includes a small demonstration farm and agroforestry plot,



an information centre and an arboretum containing 46 rare species of indigenous trees; it's well worth a visit.

Sleeping

Alakara Hotel (☎ 31554; Kenyatta St; s with shared bathroom KSh500, s/tw/d with private bathroom KSh700/1000/1500) This is about the best value in town. The

comfortable rooms have phones, the staff are friendly and prices include breakfast. It has a good bar, restaurant, TV room and parking facilities.

Sunrise Motel (☎ 31841; Kenyatta St; s KSh700-850, tw KSh900-1000) Rooms have a little more flair than Alakara's, with hardwood floors, rugs and splashes of colour. The slightly more expensive options are larger and include bright balconies.

Bongo Lodge (☎ 30972; Moi Ave; s/tw KSh500/600) Good-value rooms surround a bright courtyard and offer hot showers. It is similar to the pricier Alakara, but is a little more aged.

Vision Gate Hotel (☎ 0734-894177; Askari Rd; s/d incl breakfast from KSh1000/1250) While these spotless rooms are smaller and less decorated than those at Sunrise, they have slightly more comfortable beds. It also offers discounted rates for children.

Kitale Club (☎ 31330; A1 Hwy; s KSh1200-2700, tw KSh2000-3700; 🍷) The 'standard' rooms are rather bland and overpriced, while the 'executive' options are brighter and more comfortable. The large cottages are perfect for families, and offer a TV lounge, fireplace and baby cot. There's a KSh500 temporary membership charge, which also gives you access to the pool, sauna, tennis and squash courts, and darts and snooker rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Lantern Restaurant (Sunrise Motel, Kenyatta St; meals KSh190-300; 🍷 6pm-midnight) With meals ranging from English fish and chips to Indian specialties and some delicious vegetarian selections, this is *the* place to eat. The cocktail bar adds to the fantastic atmosphere.

Iroko Roots Cafe (Moi Ave; meals KSh50-110) Feeling more like a coffee shop in the Rocky Mountains, this spotless, unique place serves the best Kenyan dishes in town and is perfect for breakfast.

Pinewood (A1 Hwy; meals KSh180-480) A great new place for Indian or Chinese fare (complete with fresh ginger). Sit outside with views of Mt Elgon or head inside to the plethora of pine. The pub here is also great.

Getting There & Away

Matatus, buses and Peugeot are grouped by destination in and around the chaotic main bus and *matatu* park. Regular *matatus* run to Endebess (KSh70, 45 minutes), Kapenguria (KSh80, 45 minutes), Eldoret (KSh150,

1¼ hours) and Kakamega (KSh180, two hours). Less regular services reach Mt Elgon National Park (KSh80, one hour), Nakuru (KSh350, 3½ hours) and Kisumu (KSh300, four hours).

Most bus companies have offices around the bus station and serve Eldoret (KSh150, one hour), Nakuru (KSh350, 3½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh500, six hours). Akamba's buses leave for Nairobi at 9am (KSh550) and 9pm (KSh600) from its office on Moi Ave.

Several buses now run up to Lodwar (KSh700, 8½ hours) each day.

SAIWA SWAMP NATIONAL PARK

This **park** (adult/child US\$15/5) northeast of Kitale is a delight. Originally set up to preserve the habitat of the *nzohe* (sitatunga antelope), the 3-sq-km reserve is home to blue, vervet and De Brazza's monkeys, and some 370 species of birds. The fluffy black and white colobus monkey and the impressive crowned crane are both present, and you may see the Cape clawless and spot-throated otters.

The best part is that this pint-sized park is only accessible on foot. Marked walking trails skirt the swamp, duckboards go right across it and there are some extremely rickety observation towers (number four is the best placed). For an eyeful, come first thing in the morning.

Thanks to a new and energetic warden Saiwa Swamp is seeing better days. A new perimeter fence is protecting the sought-after trees, and rangers are working to protect wild sage (sitatunga's typical food) from the suffocating growth of tall grasses that have blossomed thanks to fertilizers from nearby fields. Education programs are also having success encouraging local people to get involved in the protection of the park.

Sleeping

Sirikwa Safaris (☎ 0733-793524; camping KSh415, s/d tent KSh1240/1650, farmhouse with shared bathroom s/d KSh2750/3850) Owned and run by the family that started Saiwa, Sirikwa Safaris is a treasure-trove of information and activities. While camping costs are typical, the basic furnished tents and two cosy farmhouse rooms are pretty steep for what you get. Various excursions can be arranged from here, including ornithological tours of the Cherangani Hills and Saiwa Swamp (bird guides KSh825 per half-day).

Getting There & Away

The park is 18km northeast of Kitale; take a *matatu* towards Kapenguria (KSh60, 30 minutes) and get out at the signposted turn-off, from which it is a 5km walk.

MT ELGON NATIONAL PARK

With its deep volcanic crater straddling the Kenya-Uganda border and its forested flanks extending well into both countries, massive Mt Elgon is a sight indeed. With the dramatic 7km-wide caldera dotted with several peaks – including the basalt column of Koitoboss (4187m), Kenya's second-highest, and Wagagai (4321m) in Uganda – this extinct volcano offers some of the best treks in Kenya. The **national park** (adult/child US\$15/5) extends from the lower slopes right up to the border.

Despite its lower altitude making conditions less extreme than Mt Kenya, it sees a fraction of its bigger cousin's visitors. This is due in part to its greater distance from Nairobi, its wetter weather and the fact that most visitors are more interested in claiming they've climbed Kenya's tallest mountain. While this lack of interest is a shame, it only means those not concerned about bragging rights will have far fewer people to share the mountain with.

Although rarely seen, the mountain's most famous attractions are the elephants known for their predilection for digging salt out of the lower eastern slopes' caves. The elephants are such keen excavators that some people have been fooled into believing they are totally responsible for the caves. Sadly, the number of these saline-loving creatures has declined over the years, mainly due to incursions by Ugandan poachers.

Four main lava tubes (caves) are open to visitors: **Kitum**, **Chepnyalil**, **Mackingeny** and **Rongai**. Mackingeny, with a waterfall cascading across the entrance, is the most spectacular. A good flashlight is essential and you should be wary of rock falls – the bones of a crushed elephant stand as evidence.

The mountain's fauna and flora are also great attractions. Starting with rainforest at the base, the vegetation changes as you ascend, to bamboo jungle and finally alpine moorland with the bizarre giant groundsel and giant lobelia plants. Commonly sighted

animals include buffaloes, bushbucks, olive baboons, giant forest hogs and duikers; De-fassa waterbucks are also present. The lower forests are the habitat of the black and white colobus, and the blue and De Brazza's monkeys (most likely seen near waterways).

There are more than 240 species of birds here, including red-fronted parrots, Ross's turacos and casqued hornbills. On the peaks you may even see a lammergeyer raptor gliding through the thin air. The **Elephant Platform** and **Endebess Bluff** viewpoints are good places to survey the scene on the way up.

Mt Elgon is wet much of the year, but driest between December and February. As well as bringing waterproof gear, you will need warm clothes, as it gets cold up here at night. Altitude may also be a problem for some people.

Access to the 169-sq-km national park is now permitted without a vehicle. Even if you have a 4WD, walking is the best way to get around as the roads are treacherous. Get a ranger to guide you (KSh500/1000 per half-/full day), wherever you walk. For the higher slopes you will need a tent and all your own camping gear.

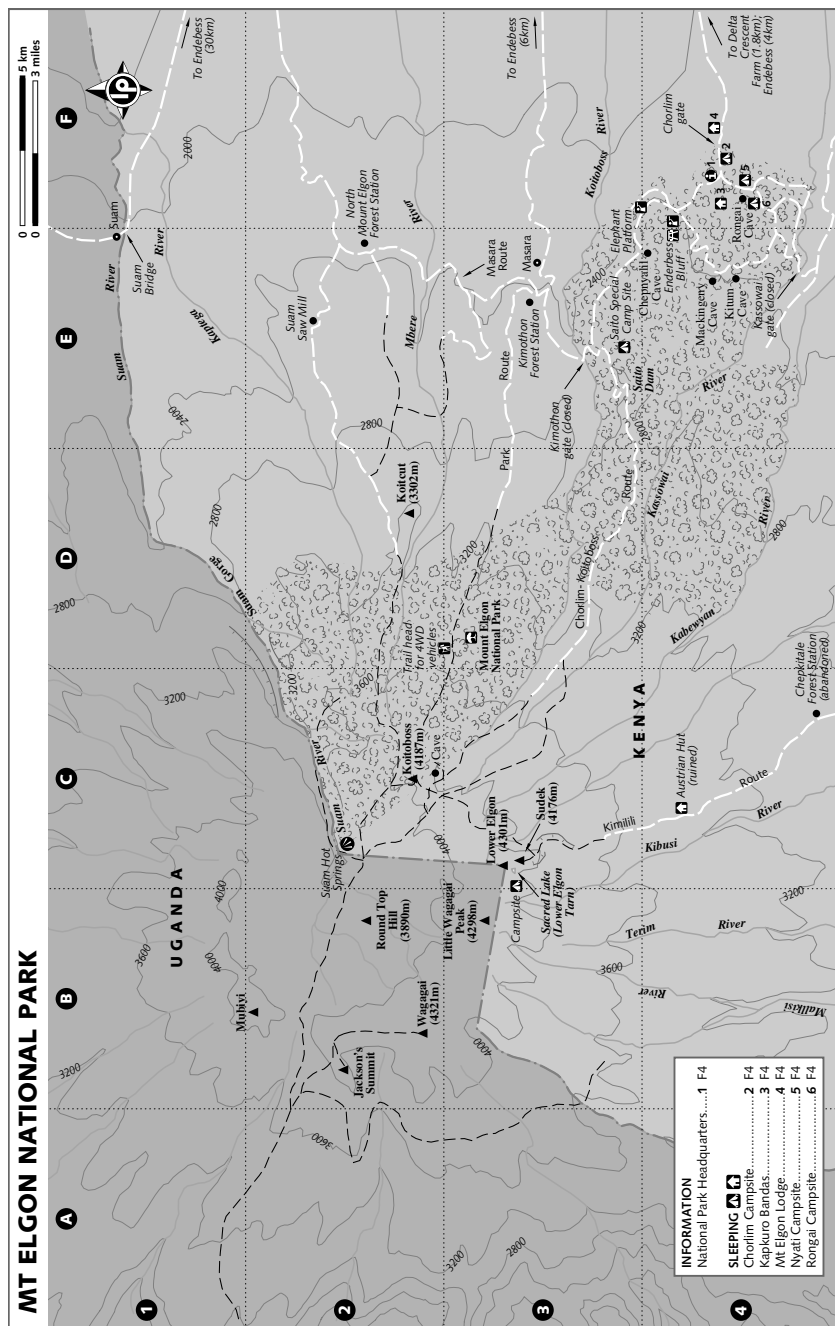
Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* has more juicy details on the various trekking and walking routes, and Andy Wielechowski's *Mt Elgon Map & Guide* is an essential purchase.

Trekking

Trekkers are encouraged to stay within the park boundaries, as security has previously been a problem. Check the situation with **KWS headquarters** (☎ 020-600800; kws@kws.org; PO Box 40241, Nairobi) in Nairobi or **Mt Elgon National Park** (☎ 054-31456; PO Box 753, Kitale) before you plan anything. Crossing into Uganda isn't currently permitted, but ask for the latest at the gate.

Allow at least four days for any round trip and two or three days for any direct ascent of **Koitoboss** if you're walking from the Chorlim gate. It is best to arrange any guiding requirements at the park headquarters in advance.

The **Park Route** offers some interesting possibilities, and there is a well-worn route from Chorlim gate up to Koitoboss peak that requires one or two overnight camps. If you have a vehicle, you can drive up to



3500m, but the current state of the road means the 32km drive can take half a day, and then it's a two- to three-hour walk up to the peak.

Descending, you have a number of options. Firstly you can descend northwest into the crater to **Suam Hot Springs**. Alternatively, if the security situation improves, you could go east around the crater rim and descend the **Masara Route**, which leads to the small village of Masara on the eastern slopes of the mountain (a trek of about 25km) and then returns to Endeless. Lastly, you can head southwest around the rim of the crater (some very hard walking) to **Lower Elgon Tarn**, where you can camp before ascending **Lower Elgon Peak** (4301m). To return you simply head back the way you came.

Sleeping & Eating

If you're trekking your only option is to **camp** (adult/child US\$8/5). This fee is the same wherever you pitch your tent. Chorlim Campsite has the park's best facilities but is less scenic than the other public sites, Nyati and Rongai.

Kapkuro Bandas (US\$30) These excellent stone *bandas* can sleep three people in two beds, and have simple bathrooms and small kitchens. Hot water is provided by a wood stove, while solar panels provide electricity. Bring food, as there's only one small shop nearby.

Delta Crescent Farm (☎ 0722-2489317; camping KSh200, tw with shared bathroom incl breakfast KSh2000) Conveniently located between Endeless and Chorlim gate, this farm has three huge areas for campers along with three basic, clean *bandas*. Four-person and 12-person rental tents are also available for KSh800 and KSh2000 respectively (plus camping fees). Transfers to Chorlim Gate and Kitale are available (KSh1500 per vehicle), as are 4WD tours of the park.

Mt Elgon Lodge (☎ 0722-866480; PO Box 7, Endeless; s/tw incl breakfast KSh3500/5000) Despite the mountain views, huge fireplaces and some colonial charm, this tattered lodge is severely overpriced, though after a few days of trekking a meal in its restaurant (meals KSh350 to KSh450) is a godsend.

Getting There & Away

Sporadic *matatus* and Peugeot taxis now reach the Chorlim gate from Kitale (KSh80, one hour). More regular services reach Endeless (KSh70, 45 minutes), a 9km walk from the

gate. If you want to break up the walk, make for Delta Crescent Farm, spend the night there and then walk the remaining 5.5km to the gate the next morning (you'll need time to organise guides in any case). Locals will happily point you in the right direction.

If you're driving, the road up to the park is OK, but once inside a 4WD is essential.

NORTHERN KENYA

Northern Kenya is more an experience than a series of destinations. There's constantly something catching your eye, whether it's enthralling Gabbra tribespeople walking the desolate, shattered lava fields, extinct volcanos rising from desert seas or simply the road tracking across the plains. The complete and utter beauty of the 'Jade Sea' (Lake Turkana), the baking, barren shores of which stretch over the horizon to a distant Ethiopia some 250km away, can't be overstated.

The Turkana, Samburu, Rendille, Gabbra, Boran and El-Molo tribes of northern Kenya are some of the most fascinating people on earth – a respectful glimpse into their world is priceless. Many choose to have little contact with the modern world, preferring centuries-old traditional lifestyles that bind members of the tribe together.

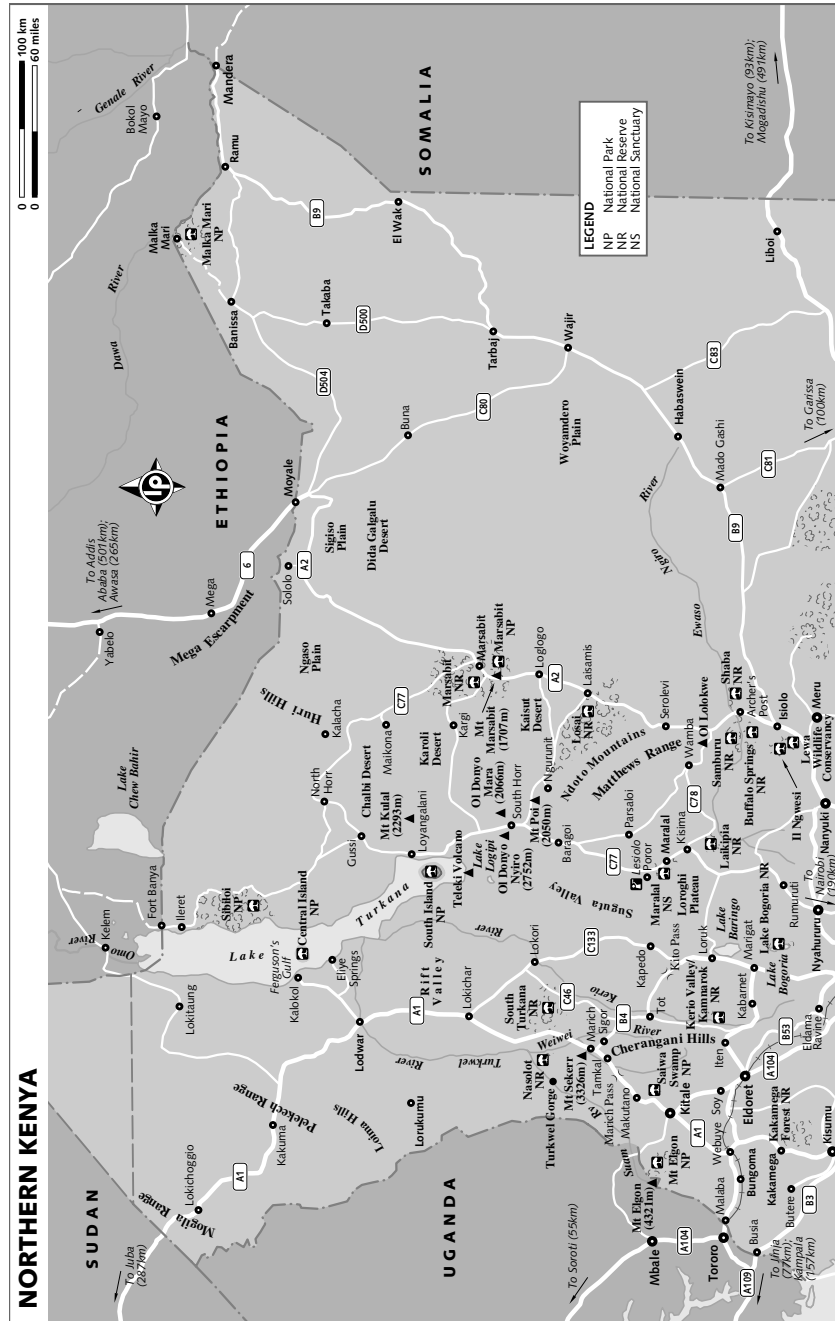
Unique wildlife, like the reticulated giraffe and endangered Grevy's zebra, also call northern Kenya home, mixing with the likes of lions, elephants and oryxes in the varied landscapes of Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba National Reserves.

For those with extra energy to burn, there's great hiking potential around Marich, Maralal and Marsabit. If walking isn't your thing, it's also the perfect place for a camel safari.

Where there's reward, there's usually some risk and northern Kenya is no exception; see p418. The heat will fry your brain and your 4WD will beg for mercy. Don't worry, you'll love every minute of it!

ISIOLO TO ETHIOPIA

Besides being a gateway to Ethiopia's riches, this route offers northern Kenya's best wildlife viewing along with some incredible culture and landscapes. New hiking possibilities in the Ndoto Mountains and several pioneering community wildlife-conservation projects only add to the region's appeal.



Isiolo
☎ 064

Isiolo is a vital pit stop on the long road north, as it's the last place with decent facilities until Maralal or Marsabit.

How you interpret this frontier town depends on which direction you're coming from. Arrive from the south and you'll get your first taste of the remote northeast (hopefully not a mouthful of dirt blown up by late-afternoon squalls!). Besides arid conditions, you'll undoubtedly notice the large Somali population (descendants of WWI veterans who settled here), and the striking faces of Boran, Samburu and Turkana people walking the streets. Pull in from the north and you'll notice little other than the verdant Central Highlands and omnipresent Mt Kenya towering in the distance. Your mind will wander to thoughts of crisp air and cool nights – heaven ahead indeed!

In respect of Isiolo's strong Muslim community, women should avoid wearing shorts or short skirts.

INFORMATION

Banks are scarce in the north, so plan ahead.

Consolidated Bank of Kenya (A2 Hwy) No ATM.

Changes cash and AmEx travellers cheques.

District Hospital (Hospital Rd; ☎ 24hr)

Isiolo Telephone Exchange (Hospital Rd) Calling cards and cardphones.

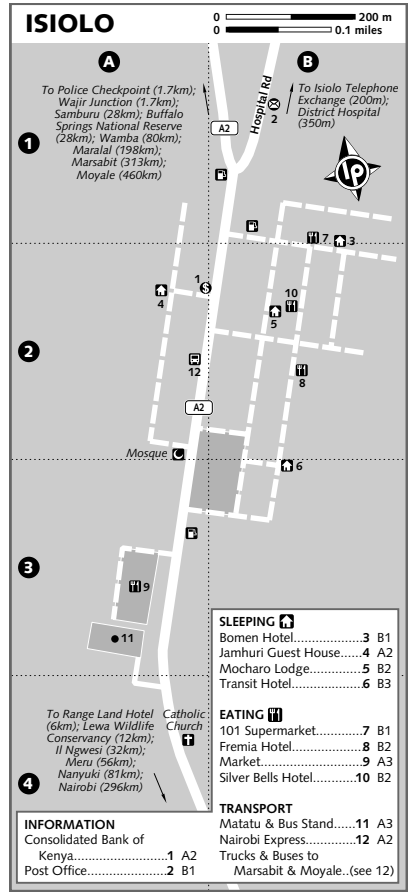
Post office (Hospital Rd)

SLEEPING

Mocharo Lodge (☎ 52385; s/tw KSh350/450) Sizable clean rooms proffer mosquito nets, comfy beds and hot water (morning only). Some toilets are seatless, so if you don't want to be a porcelain jockey check out a few rooms. There's also secure parking, a decent restaurant and TV room.

Range Land Hotel (☎ 0721-434353; A2 Hwy; camping KSh200, tw cottage per person KSh1000) About 6km south of town, this is a nice option for campers and families. Shade is rare, but there's now grass to plant your tent on and one of the stone cottages, with a nice bathroom, chairs and TV, is set aside for your use.

Jamhuri Guest House (s/tw with shared bathroom KSh120/200, s with private bathroom KSh250) Popular with budget travellers in the past, it's simple, clean enough and has secure parking.



Transit Hotel (☎ 52083; s/tw KSh500/900) It's dropped its rates substantially, but rooms are still just more expensive versions of Mocharo Lodge's.

Bomen Hotel (☎ 52389; s/tw/ste KSh900/1500/2500) NGO's favourite home, the Bomen has the town's brightest (ask for one facing outward) and most comfortable rooms. Prices are steep, especially since some toilets are seatless, but some rooms have TV and shared terraces with views.

EATING

Transit Hotel is a rare place serving more than the local usuals, with fried *tilapia*, pepper steak, vegetable cutlets and curries up for grabs (meals KSh120 to KSh250). The

WARNING

Unfortunately, security problems have plagued northern Kenya for years. In the 1990s a massive influx of cheap guns from the many conflict zones just outside Kenya dramatically altered traditional balances of power. Minor conflicts stemming from grazing rights and cattle rustling, formerly settled by compensation rather than violence, quickly escalated into ongoing gun battles and authorities had trouble restoring order.

While travellers rarely witnessed intertribal conflict, the abundance of guns led to increases in banditry that posed a significant risk to anyone moving through the region. However, the new government has clamped down on lawlessness, and security in the north has turned for the better. Convoys and armed guards are no longer used between Marich and Lodwar and between Isiolo and Moyale on the Ethiopian border. Although the notoriously dangerous conditions on the road between Lodwar and Lokichoggio, near the Sudanese border, have improved enough for local trucks and *matatus* to travel unguarded, the UN and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) still travel in large convoys.

Sadly, all isn't on the mend and sporadic bloody tribal conflicts still arise, like in July 2005 when 44 people (including 27 children) were killed in Marsabit district's remote Turbi region. The whole northeastern region around Garsen, Garissa, Wajir and Mandera is still *shifita* (bandit) country and you should avoid travelling here. Thanks to a 1999 conflict between the Ethiopian government and Oromo Liberation Front (fighting for independence in southern Ethiopia) spilling over into Kenya around Moyale, landmines have been reported – stick to well-marked paths outside of town.

Improvements or not, security in northern Kenya is a dynamic entity and travellers should seek local advice about the latest developments before travelling and never take unnecessary risks.

Bomen Hotel is similar to the Transit Hotel, with nicer seats and elevated prices (meals KSh130 to KSh380).

Fremia Hotel (meals KSh50-100) Like most places, it will have little left on the menu after 8pm. However, staff will actually run out and buy supplies to prepare your meal of choice – smile and be patient!

Silver Bells Hotel (meals KSh 60-150) A good spot for cheap and greasy predeparture breakfasts.

Northbound self-caterers should hit 101 Supermarket and the market near the mosque to purchase food and drink, as there's very little available beyond here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Although convoys are no longer being used north to Marsabit, check the security situation thoroughly with locals and the police checkpoint north of town before leaving.

Bus & Matatu

The best option to Nairobi is **Nairobi Express** (A2 Hwy), operating daily buses (KSh500, 4½ hours) at 6.45am. The bus north to Marsabit (KSh600, 8½ hours) and Moyale (KSh1200, 17 hours) picks up passengers at Nairobi Express between 11pm and midnight.

For Maralal take an early *matatu* to Wamba (KSh300, 2½ hours), and then the midday Maralal *matatu* (KSh300, 2½ hours). Regular *matatus* leave from a chaotic stand around the market, and also serve Archer's Post (KSh80, 45 minutes), Meru (KSh120, 1½ hours), Nanyuki (KSh150, two hours) and Nairobi (KSh450, five hours). Peugeot also service Meru (KSh150, 1¼ hours).

Four-Wheel Drive

Isiolo marks the Tarmac's northern terminus and the start of the corrugated dirt and gravel, which will shake the guts out of you and your vehicle. There are several petrol stations, so top up as prices climb and supply diminishes northward. If you're heading south, Central Highlands petrol is cheaper.

Hitching

Trucks are filthy and uncomfortable, but a viable option for the northbound adventurous. Although they pick up passengers at the police checkpoint north of town, better seats are available if you board when they stop near Nairobi Express. Drain your bladder, purchase enough food, water and sunscreen, and hop aboard.

Around Isiolo**LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY**

While the massive 263-sq-km **Lewa Wildlife Conservancy** (LWC; ☎ 064-31405; www.lewa.org; admission incl in accommodation rates) could boast about its luxury lodges, stunning scenery, astounding wildlife activities and repeatedly hosting Prince William, staff would rather talk about their community and conservation projects. Founded in 1995, LWC now spends an amazing 30% of its budget on healthcare and education for surrounding villages, 40% towards community projects, with the rest funding conservation and security.

Their conservancy effort has been astounding and 20% of the world's Grevy's zebras, 8% of Kenya's black rhinos, a rare population of aquatic sitatunga antelopes, and sizable populations of white rhinos, elephants, buffaloes, leopards, lions and cheetahs now call this magical place home.

Wildlife drives in private vehicles aren't permitted and only guests of the LWC's lodges are allowed into the conservancy. A plethora of activities, ranging from drives and walks to camel rides and conservation outings, are available at most lodges.

Sleeping & Eating

Lewa House (☎ 064-31405; c.moller@lewa.org; exclusive use per night incl wildlife drives US\$840; 📶) Six sublime thatched-roof African chalets, comfortably sleeping 12 people, form Lewa House. Privacy is guaranteed since it's rented exclusively to one group at a time. For full board, add US\$120 per person per night.

Lewa Safari Camp (☎ 064-31405; www.lewasafari.com; full board s/d incl wildlife drives US\$285/570; 📶 closed Nov) Twelve luxurious octagonal tents hang beneath charming thatched roofs, offering privacy and a slice of the African safari dream. The lounge, dining room, food and service are all top-notch.

Getting There & Away

LWC is only 12km south of Isiolo and is well signposted on A2 Hwy. **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) have daily 'request stop' flights to LWC from Nairobi. Return fares on Airkenya/Safarilink are US\$199/222.

IL NGWESI

Il Ngwesi is a pioneering project linking wildlife conservation and community de-

velopment. The Maasai of Il Ngwesi, with substantial help from their neighbour LWC, have transformed this undeveloped land, previously used for subsistence pastoralism, into a prime wildlife conservation area hosting the likes of white and black rhinos, waterbucks, giraffes and many other plains animals. It's truly fitting that Il Ngwesi translates to 'people of wildlife'.

The community now supplements its herding income with tourist dollars gained from its award-winning ecodge, **Il Ngwesi Group Ranch** (☎ 020-340331; info@letsgosafari.com; full board s/d US\$209/418; 📶). Six open-fronted thatched cottages boast views from a dramatic escarpment that will have you smiling yourself to sleep and shaking your head when the sun rises (especially in cottages one and five, where the beds roll out beneath the stars). Natural materials are used throughout and you'll never be so in love with twisted, crooked wood – who likes straight lines anyway? The best part is that profits go straight to the Maasai community. Advance reservations are essential and getting here requires a serious 4WD.

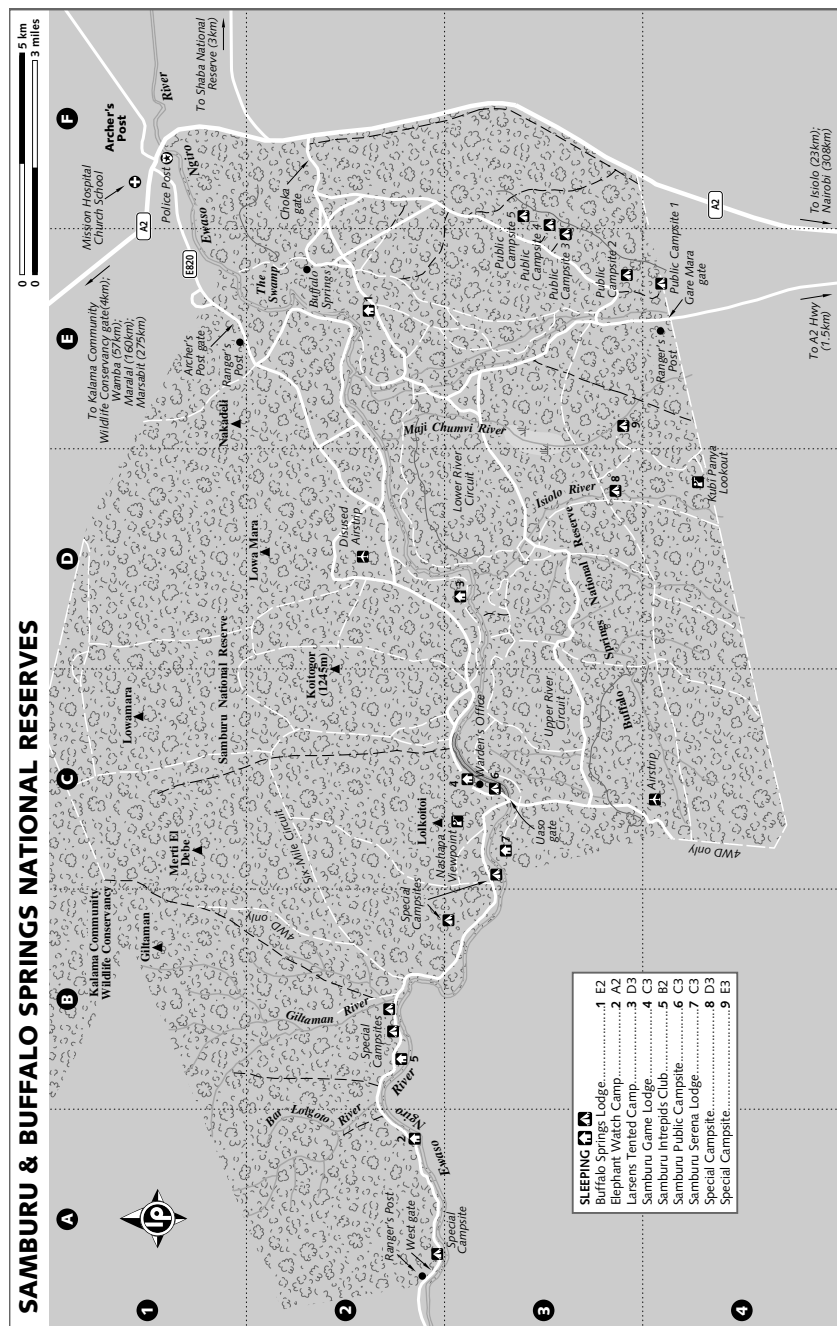
SAMBURU, BUFFALO SPRINGS & SHABA NATIONAL RESERVES

These three **national reserves** (adult/child US\$30/10), comprising some 300 sq km, straddle the Ewaso Ngiro River and include a breadth of wildlife, vegetation and landscapes. Shaba, with its great rocky *kopjes* (isolated hills), natural springs and doum palms, is the most physically beautiful, while open savannas, scrub desert and verdant river foliage in Samburu and Buffalo Springs virtually guarantee close encounters with elephants, reticulated giraffes, Grevy's zebras, Somali ostriches, Beisa oryxes and the elegant giraffe-necked gerenuks.

After brazen lodge hold-ups in Samburu several years ago, security has improved, with ranger and KWS lookouts at vantage points throughout the reserve. However, this didn't stop poachers killing 25 elephants in early 2002. Things have been quiet since, and visitor numbers are steadily increasing.

Information

Conveniently, admission for Buffalo Springs, Shaba and Samburu is transferable, so you only pay once, even if you're visiting all three in one day.



If you're driving, Survey of Kenya's map *Samburu & Buffalo Springs Game Reserves* (SK 85) is helpful, but hard to find. Getting around isn't difficult, but some minor roads are 4WD only and the maze of wayward minibus tracks can be confusing.

Petrol is available at Shaba Sarova Lodge and Samburu Game Lodge.

Sleeping & Eating

Each reserve is blessed with at least one luxury lodge and several camp sites. For campers and day visitors, all the luxury lodges have buffet meals (around KSh1825).

BUFFALO SPRINGS NATIONAL RESERVE

Samburu Serena Lodge (☎ 064-30800, Nairobi ☎ 020-2710511; cro@serena.co.ke; full board low season s/d US\$80/160, high season US\$200/260; 🚗) Though not as extravagant as Shaba Sarova Lodge, it's still lovely and offers plenty of activities, like slide shows, bird walks, hikes up L'Olgotoi Hill and camel rides. Comfy cottages, with breezy verandas, reed-lined ceilings and canopy beds, line the riverbank.

Buffalo Springs Lodge (Box 71, Isiolo; s/tw KSh1000/2000) The state of the swimming pool speaks volumes – it's half-empty, or is it half-full? On the positive side, the wood, reed-lined cottages are rather charming and easily the best value around. On the negative side, there's no food available, the thatched cement cottages are dreary and have lumpy beds, and let's not forget the pool!

Special campsites (camping KSh825) While scenically located by freshwater springs along the Isiolo and Maji ya Chumvi Rivers, there are no facilities.

SAMBURU NATIONAL RESERVE

Elephant Watch Camp (☎ 020-891112; www.elephantwatchesafaris.com; full board incl guided walks s/d Apr & Nov US\$320/640, rest of year US\$360/720) Undoubtedly the most unique and memorable stay in the reserves. Massive thatched roofs cling to crooked acacia branches and tower over cosy, palatial eight-sided tents and large terraces. Natural materials pervade and the bathrooms are stunning.

Samburu Game Lodge (☎ 020-559529; wilderness@mitsuminet.com; full board s/tw low season US\$130/165, high season US\$200/250; 🚗) Several thatched log cottages and one large apartmentlike block sit riverside in this perennial favourite. The bright cottages are much better value, offer-

THE CALL OF THE WILD

Just when you thought that everyone and their dog already had a mobile phone, **Save the Elephants** (☎ 020-891673; www.savetheelephants.com) in Samburu National Reserve has given them to pachyphants! Each hour, without the mighty pachyderms having to bat an ear, GSM collars send text messages to each scientist's phone with their current location. This allows Save the Elephants to track elephants in real time, something never possible before.

By studying elephants' movements, scientists can discover important migration corridors between reserves and work to protect them. If these routes became denuded and migration ceased, the sheer magnitude of elephants' appetites would destroy their immediate environment and threaten their survival.

Interested visitors are welcome; call in advance, but don't expect the elephants to answer...

ing more privacy, tasteful décor, modern bathrooms and larger verandas.

Larsens Tented Camp (☎ 020-559529; wilderness@mitsuminet.com; full board low season s/tw US\$169/226, high season US\$251/320) Sitting beneath acacias and spread along the riverbank are spacious and oh so very comfortable semipermanent tents. Each boasts scenic verandas, rugs, modern bathrooms and king-size beds, complete with headboards resembling colonial-style leather chests. Two tents are wheelchair accessible.

Samburu Intrepids Club (☎ 064-30453, Nairobi ☎ 020-446651; www.heritage-eafrica.com; full board s/d US\$300/450; 🚗) Grab a G&T, sink into the bar's teak loungers and gaze over the Ewaso Ng'iro. While thatched roofs and canopy beds in the luxurious tents scream Africa, the refined furniture unfortunately shrieks Fortune 500. The friendly service is unmatched.

Samburu Public Campsite (camping KSh440) Spread along the Ewaso Ng'iro River's northern bank, this site is blessed with new bathroom blocks and some secluded spots for tents.

SHABA NATIONAL RESERVE

Shaba Sarova Lodge (☎ 020-713333; reservations@sarova.co.ke; full board s/d Mar-Jun US\$87/135, Jul-Sep

US\$130/185; 🍷) This spectacular, almost over-the-top place nestles on the Ewaso Ng'iro River. Next to the magnificent pool, natural springs flow through the gorgeous open-air bar and beneath the lofty 200-seat restaurant. The rooms? They're pretty lavish, too!

Special camp sites (camping KSh825) Of the several special camp sites (no facilities) here, Funan, set in Shaba's core, takes the cake. Shaded by acacias, it's next to a semipermanent spring, which provides water for visitors and wildlife alike. A ranger must accompany you to these camp sites; the cost is included in the fee but a tip is appropriate.

Getting There & Away

Daily flights from Nairobi to Samburu are available with **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke). Return fares on Airkenya/Safarilink are US\$199/222. The vehicle-less can probably rustle up a 4WD and local driver for about KSh6000 per day.

MATTHEWS RANGE

West of the remarkable flat-topped mountain **Oi Lolokwe** and north of **Wamba** is the **Matthews Range**. Its thick evergreen forests support elephants, lions, buffaloes and Kenya's most important wild dog population. These dramatic mountains (highest peak 2285m) offer great opportunities to explore the depths of Kenya's wilds. With few roads, only those willing to go the extra mile on foot will be rewarded with the spoils.

In 1995 local Samburu communities collectively formed the **Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust**, now one of Kenya's most successful community conservation programs. The trust is unique because it's run by a democratically elected board, each community having one trustee. Now endorsed by KWS, it oversees 750 sq km and has substantially increased animal populations by successfully combating poaching.

To capitalise on its wildlife resources and fund community projects, the trust built **Sarara Tented Camp** (☎ 020-600457; info@bush-and-beyond.com; full board s/d incl conservancy fee US\$490/780; 🍷 closed May & Nov; 🍷). With its grand, thatched open-fronted lounge, enveloping comfort, sublime surrounds and natural rock pool, guests benefit as much as the cause.

For budgeteers, the basic **El-Moran** (s with shared bathroom KSh150, with private bathroom KSh250)

in Wamba is the only option besides bush camping. If it's full, you could try the local mission (which incidentally has northern Kenya's best hospital, a fact worth remembering while in the bush).

While *matatus* from Isiolo and Maralal reach Wamba, there's no point in coming without a vehicle. Getting to Sarara Camp isn't easy, even with a 4WD – it's probably best to arrange a transfer or get detailed directions when booking.

NDOTO MOUNTAINS

Climbing from the Korante Plain's sands are the magnificent rusty bluffs and ridges of the Ndotos Mountains. Kept a virtual secret from the travelling world by their remote location, the Ndotos abound with hiking, climbing and bouldering potential. **Mt Poi** (2050m), which resembles the world's largest bread loaf from some angles, is a technical climber's dream, its sheer 800m north face begging to be bagged. If you're fit and have a whole day to spare, it's a great hike to the summit and the views are extraordinary.

The tiny village of Ngurunit is the best base for your adventures and is interesting in its own right, with captivating, traditionally dressed Samburu people living in simple, yet elegantly woven grass huts.

Ngurunit is best accessed from Loglogo, 47km south of Marsabit and 233km north of Archer's Post. It's a tricky 79km drive (1¼ hours), with many forks, through the Kaisut Desert.

MARSABIT

☎ 069

Approach Marsabit in fading light and you'll undoubtedly rub your weary eyes in disbelief. Scattered across the plains, surrounded by desert and strangely reminiscent of Egyptian pyramids (we did say weary eyes!) are fields of dramatic cinder cones (volcanic vents). Climbing towards town, the bleached yellows and browns turn to rich shades of green and the mercury takes a heavenly dip downward, adding pleasure to your continued feelings of astonishment.

The entire area surrounding Marsabit is actually a behemoth 6300-sq-km shield volcano, whose surface is peppered with no less than 180 amazing cinder cones and 22 volcanic craters (*gofs* or *maars*), many housing lakes. Mt Marsabit's highest peak,

Karantin (1707m), is a rewarding 5km hike from town through lush vegetation and moss-covered trees. The view from Karantin is astounding.

While the town is less attractive than its lush surrounds, which comprise the 1500-sq-km Marsabit National Reserve, it's interesting due to an intriguing migrant population and a (sometimes volatile) mixture of local tribes. The best place to take in the cornucopia of culture is the lively market.

Information

Kenya Commercial Bank Off Post Office Rd. No ATM. Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Medical clinic (Post Office Rd; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun)

Post office (Post Office Rd)

Sleeping

JeyJey Centre (☎ 2296; A2 Hwy; s/tw/tr with shared bathroom KSh250/400/600, s with private bathroom KSh400) Owned by government MP JJ Falana, this is the best lodge in town. Clean rooms with mosquito nets surround a colourful courtyard, and bathrooms (even shared ones) sport on-demand hot water. There's also a TV room, a decent restaurant and an unattractive camp site (per person KSh150). Spot the guard 50 bob and your vehicle will sleep safely.

Diku's Complex Lodge (☎ 2465; A2 Hwy; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh300/600) North of JeyJey and tucked behind a wholesale store is this simple and slightly overpriced place. The spartan rooms (four walls and a bed) are spacious, but lack mosquito nets. The shared showers are clean, while the cement-block squat toilets could use a wee wash.

Eating & Drinking

Five Steers Hotel (A2 Hwy; meals KSh70-130) It's easily the best local eatery. The half-Federation meal (a bulging pile of rice, spaghetti, beef, vegetables and chapati) is filling and surprisingly tasty.

Mamba Cafe (A2 Hwy; meals KSh50-100) This small shack next to JeyJey Centre is perfect for breakfast and its *chai* is spot on.

If you're short of food or supplies check out the market and **Nomads Shopping Store** (Post Office Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat).

Thanks to a strong Muslim influence, beer can be hard to find. The best spot for a cold one is **New Saku Bar** (Post Office Rd), which has a lively interior and relaxed outdoor section.

Getting There & Away

Although improved security meant convoys and armed guards weren't being used to Moyale or Isiolo during our research, it's still wise to get the latest security and Ethiopian border information from locals and the police station before leaving town.

BUS

With security on the mend, a bus now connects Marsabit to Moyale (KSh600, 8½ hours). There's no designated stop; simply flag it down on the A2 Hwy as it comes through town around 5pm each day (en route from Nairobi!). The same service heads south to Isiolo (KSh600, 8½ hours) at 9am.

FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE

You'll find the Moyale road less corrugated than that to Isiolo, but its sharp stones will devour your tyres and the deep ruts will give your undercarriage a good scrub. The only fuel north is in Moyale, so stock up here. As a rule, if buses and trucks travel in a convoy or take armed soldiers on board, you should too! For advice on travel to Loyangalani, see p428.

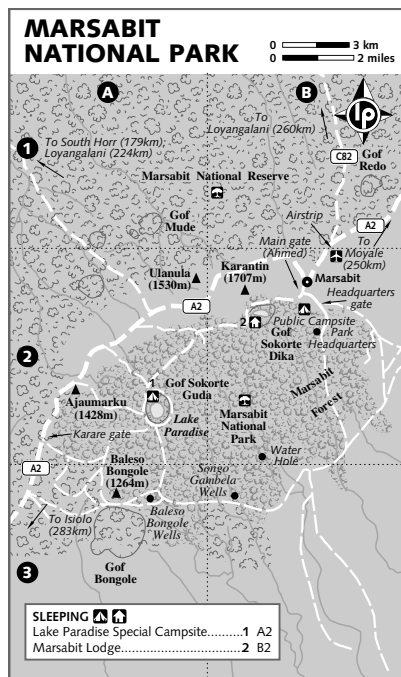
HITCHING

Trucks regularly ply the bus routes for about KSh100 less, but balancing your malnourished butt on a metal bar above discontented cows for eight hours, while simultaneously battling the sun, wind and dust, is one tricky, tiring act! On the flip side, you'll have a lifetime of memories. One or two trucks a week also leave Marsabit for Loyangalani (KSh700, seven hours) via Kargi. Most trucks pick up opposite JeyJey Centre.

MARSABIT NATIONAL PARK

This relatively small **park** (adult/child US\$15/5), nestled on Mt Marsabit's upper slopes, hosts thick forests and a variety of wildlife, including lions, leopards, elephants and rhinos. During our visit we were lucky enough to see a large cobra at close range, with its neck spread into the infamous 'hood'. We say lucky because we were in our truck at the time!

You won't get to see much big wildlife on a quick drive-through of the park, so stick around and camp at **Lake Paradise**. This small lake, which occupies the Gof Sokorte Guda's crater floor, is lovely and the views



from the escarpment above are simply stunning.

Although there's nothing except lake water and firewood, the picturesque **Lake Paradise Special Campsite** (adult/child US\$10/5, plus set-up fee KSh5000) is easily the best place to stay in the park. Thanks to roaming buffaloes and elephants, a ranger must be present when you camp here.

The **Marsabit Lodge** (☎ 0735-555747; s/tw/tr ind breakfast KSh5500/5900/6950) has long shingle-roofed bungalows around the Gof Sokorte Dika lake, and offers fine views. Even with the location, the spartan rooms are overpriced. With its gargantuan fireplace and comfy chairs, the lounge is the lodge's most redeeming feature.

Despite it being a short walk to the park gate from town, you need your own 4WD to explore. In the wet season you may find some park roads closed.

MOYALE

Let's be honest, nobody comes to Moyale to see Moyale; people come because it's the gateway to one of the world's most

fascinating countries, Ethiopia. The drive from Marsabit is long and hard (on you and your 4WD), with the Dida Galgalu Desert's seemingly endless black shattered lava fields stretching out before you, and the imposing Mega Escarpment seemingly climbing ever higher as you approach near Sololo.

In stark contrast to the solitary journey here, Moyale's small, sandy streets burst with activity. The town's Ethiopian half is more developed, complete with sealed roads, and there's a palpable difference in its atmosphere.

It's possible to enter Ethiopia for the day without a visa, but Ethiopian officials will hold your passport until you return. The border closes at 6pm – don't be late! The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, 2km from the border, changes travellers cheques (0.5% commission), as well as US dollars and euros. While it doesn't exchange Kenyan Shillings, the Tourist Hotel will swap them for Ethiopian Birr (10KSh to Birr1).

There are a few simple places to stay and eat on both sides of the border: **Sherif Guest House** (s/tw with shared bathroom KSh150/200) and **Baghdad Hotel II** (meals KSh80-150) fly the Kenyan flag, while the **Tourist Hotel** (s with shared toilet Birr15) and **Ethio-Kenya** (breakfast Birr3-6) keep up the Ethiopian end.

A bus leaves daily for Marsabit (KSh600, 8½ hours) and Isiolo (KSh1200, 17 hours) at 9.30am. Trucks servicing the same destinations pick up passengers near the main intersection. Drivers should note that petrol on the Ethiopian side of Moyale is half the cost of that in Kenya.

MARALAL TO TURKANA'S EASTERN SHORE

With vibrant Samburu and Turkana tribes, treks along lush cliffs dropping from the Loroghi Plateau, desert camel safaris, mesmerising barren volcanic landscapes and the north's jade jewel, Lake Turkana, this region of northern Kenya has it all.

The 130km drive from Nyahururu to Maralal along the C77 is bumpy but straightforward, despite the tarmac running out at Rumuruti (we hope you said goodbye, because you won't see it any time soon!). Punctures on this route are common and the scenery is ummm...well, let's just say that once you've set eyes on the Jade Sea, you'll have forgotten all about it.

If you're not in a hurry, **Bobong Camp** (☎ 062-32718; olmaisior@africanonline.co.ke; PO Box 5, Rumuruti; camping KSh250, 4-person bandas KSh3000) offers some of Kenya's cheapest self-catered **camel safaris** (per camel per day KSh1000) and **cultural visits** (per group KSh5000) to Turkana and Samburu communities. Nyahururu–Maralal *matatus* (KSh60, 45 minutes) can drop you here, but may charge full fare (KSh300).

Maralal

☎ 065

Tin roofs poke from the forested Loroghi Hills overlooking Maralal's wide tree-lined boulevards below. Sounds pretty, but it's not. Where Maralal's charm lies is in its frontier rough-and-ready atmosphere, with colourful Samburu people wandering the dusty streets and weathered characters sitting beneath shabby street-side verandas. It all seems eerily reminiscent of the classic Wild West.

Maralal has gained an international reputation for its fantastically frenetic **International Camel Derby** (see p426) and a visit over its duration is truly unforgettable. Less

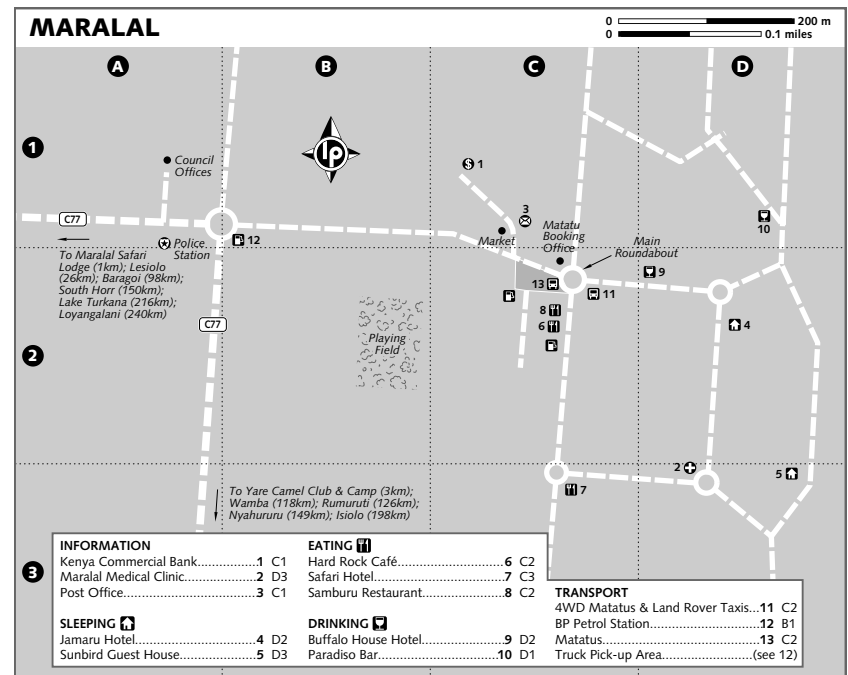
crazy but almost as memorable are the year-round camel safaris and trekking that are offered here.

Sadly, most self-drivers don't delve into Maralal, stopping only for a night en route to Lake Turkana. The opposite is true for independent travellers, who end up spending more time here than planned, simply because transport north is erratic at best. Let's face it though, there are worse places to get stuck!

People here are generally friendly, but you'll quickly encounter Maralal's own professional tout posse. You'll be offered everything from bangles to guiding services, friendly 'advice' and Samburu weddings, and their persistence can be truly astounding – use your best judgment and keep your wits about you.

INFORMATION

Yare Camel Club & Camp (p426) can exchange travellers cheques, but at low rates. Maralal Safari Lodge (p426) changes travellers cheques outside banking hours, also at low rates.



Kenya Commercial Bank Behind the market. Changes cash and travellers cheques. No ATM.

Maralal Medical Clinic (☎ Mon-Sat)

Post office Next to market.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Featuring some of Kenya's most astounding vistas, **trekking** the Loroghi Hills Circuit takes a rewarding five days and covers 78km. This trek is detailed in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*.

Yare Camel Club & Camp organises guides and camels for independent **camel safaris** in the region. Self-catered day/overnight trips cost US\$20/35 per person. Fully catered overnight trips are US\$95.

Surrounding town is the **Maralal National Sanctuary**, home to zebras, impalas, hyenas, elephants, elands, buffaloes and other varieties of plains wildlife, which you can see for free from the road leading into Maralal from the south.

SLEEPING

Sunbird Guest House (☎ 62015; PO Box 74, Maralal; s/tw/d KSh350/450/600) Easily the best budget option in town, this shiny and friendly new place has quiet, clean and comfortable rooms with nice linen, mosquito nets, sparkling bathrooms, 24-hour hot water, power points, toilet paper and secure parking.

Yare Camel Club & Camp (☎ 62295; yare@africaonline.co.ke; camping KSh200, s/tw/tr US\$20/28/35) This place is justifiably popular with campers and sits on the Isiolo–Nyahururu road, 3km south of town. You can stay in cosy wooden *bandas*, which boast bathrooms, towels and free hot-water buckets for bathing. Yare's facilities include a well-stocked bar and lounge, a restaurant, *nyama choma* on Wednesday and Saturday, and a games room.

Jamaru Hotel (☎ 62093; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh200/350, s/tw/tr with private bathroom KSh300/600/1000) Behind this fancy façade lurk simple rooms with interesting but functional plumbing, as well as some cheaper options with less-pleasant shared facilities.

Maralal Safari Lodge (☎ 62220, Nairobi ☎ 020-211124; full board s/d Oct–Jun US\$120/185, Jul–Sep & Christmas US\$150/225; 🍷) Large dark wooden chalets, with vaulted ceilings, private balconies and a small loft for children to snooze, call this lodge home. It's extremely cosy, but we'd expect more for this price. The best feature is the wildlife water hole fronting the bar,

MARALAL INTERNATIONAL CAMEL DERBY

Inaugurated by Yare Safaris in 1990, the annual Maralal International Camel Derby held in early August is one of the biggest events in Kenya, attracting riders and spectators from the world's four distant corners. The races are open to anyone and the extended after-parties at Yare Camel Club & Camp (left) are notorious – you're likely to bump into some genuine characters here!

Not interested in parties and just want some fast-moving camel action? Then you'll be overjoyed that the derby's first race is an amateur event, open to all comers. Ante up KSh1500 for your entry and KSh2500 for your slobbering steed and get racing. It's a butt-jarring 11km journey. Don't even start complaining about your glowing cheeks – the professional riders cover 42km!

For further information contact **Yare Safaris** (☎ 065-62295; yare@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 63006, Nairobi) or Yare Camel Club & Camp in Maralal.

which nearly justifies paying KSh125 for a beer there. The gate is 1km west of the BP petrol station along the road to Baragoi.

EATING

Hard Rock Café (meals KSh60-170) While the Hard Rock Café chain would cringe at its name's use, this Somali-run restaurant is the town's best restaurant. Enjoy its chapo-fry (spiced beef with chapatti and side plate of diced tomatoes, onions and beans) while listening to Rick Astley, and being peered over by mugs of the Spice Girls and 2Pac.

Samburu Restaurant (meals KSh80-200) A popular place, with the menu sporting the usual suspects and decent curries.

Safari Hotel (meals KSh80-150) If the lighting and wallpaper don't ruin your appetite, you'll get a good Kenyan meal here.

DRINKING

Some years ago the district commissioner ordered Maralal's discos closed due to the region's insecurity. Apparently no-one here has thought of fighting for their right to party, as this order is still in place.

Buffalo House Hotel, with a pool table out the back, is probably the most popular

boozier in town. Another place to shoot some stick and down a Tusker is Paradiso Bar. The bars at Yare Camel Club & Camp and Maralal Safari Lodge are much nicer, but transport back to town may pose a problem!

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Matatus serve Nyahururu (KSh300, three hours), Rumuruti (KSh250, 2½ hours) and Wamba (KSh350, 3½ hours) on a daily basis, usually in the mornings and early afternoons. Reaching Isiolo involves overnighting in Wamba to catch the early-morning southbound *matatu*. There are no direct services to Nairobi; take a *matatu* or bus (KSh300, three hours) to Nyahururu and transfer there.

During the dry season a few 4WD *matatus* and Land Rover taxis head north weekly to Baragoi (KSh300, three hours). If you're intending to head to Lake Turkana, you'll have to wait a few days to a week for a truck (KSh800 to KSh1000, nine to 12 hours). To shorten your wait, inquire around the town's petrol stations and its transport hub (the main roundabout) when you arrive instead of waiting until you want to leave. While breaking the truck journey in Baragoi or South Horr may seem like a good idea, remember that you may have to wait there for a week before another truck trundles through.

Most transport leaves from the main roundabout, while trucks usually pick up passengers at the **BP petrol station** (C77 Hwy).

The BP petrol station is the most reliable. Petrol is KSh10 more per litre here than in Nyahururu, but cheaper than you'll find it further north.

Baragoi

The long descent off the Loroghi Plateau towards Baragoi serves up some sweet vistas, but none can compare with the sheer magnitude of **Lesiolo** or World's View, which perches atop an escarpment at the plateau's dramatic end, offering an outrageous 120km panoramic view over the Rift Valley and serrated Tiati Hills. Lesiolo is part of the Malasso Ecotourism Project and a viewing fee (adult/child US\$5/3) is now charged – pricey, but worth every penny!

When you reach the foot of the plateau, the road ahead is laid out before you; it meanders across the acacia-dotted plains before disappearing into jagged hills that

seemingly erupt from the horizon. Reaching Baragoi itself is a bit of an anticlimax as the dusty, diminutive town is clearly outdone by its surroundings.

Treks through the Suguta Valley to Lake Turkana are possible from Baragoi, and there are several English-speaking guides here to remind you! Make sure you get a good appraisal of the security situation before attempting this trek.

Be careful not to take photographs in town, as it's supposedly forbidden and police are keen to enforce the rule.

The **Mt Ngiri General Shop** (C77 Hwy) sells pricey petrol from the barrel, and the **Morning Star Guest House** (C77 Hwy; s/tw with shared bathroom KSh200/400) provides a decent place for a night's kip. Just south of the post office, it offers secure parking, decent rooms and mosquito nets. Fine dining (spot blatant overstatement) is found at **Al-Mukaram Hotel** (C77 Hwy; meals KSh60).

Those with bulging wallets can stay at **Desert Rose** (☎ 0722-638774; www.desertrosekenya.com; full board incl activities low season s/d US\$400/600, high season US\$450/700; 🍷), a stunning ecolodge nestled on the southern slopes of Ol Donyo Nyiro. Each cottage is truly unique and blends into the stunning natural surrounds. The Desert Rose turn-off is 18km north of Baragoi, marked by a gas canister.

The dirt track from Maralal to Baragoi is much improved but still very rocky in places. The drive takes between 2½ and four hours.

Approaching the Lake

The road between Baragoi and South Horr, the next town along, is in reasonable shape and consists of compacted sand and bumpy rocky sections. Almost 23km north of South Horr, when the valley opens to the northern plains, you'll see massive Mt Kulal in the distance and Devil's Hand, a large rock outcrop resembling a fist, to your immediate right. Just north is the eastern turn-off to Marsabit via Kargi, so if you're heading for Turkana keep left. If you get mixed up, just remember that Mt Kulal on your right is good and that Mt Kulal on your left is very, very bad (unless, of course, you're heading to Marsabit!).

Further north, the scrub desert suddenly scatters and you'll be greeted by vast volcanic armies of shimmering bowling ball-size

boulders, cinder cones and reddish-purple hues – if they could talk they'd welcome you to Mt Kulal's shattered lava fields. If this arresting and barren Martian landscape doesn't take your breath away, the first sight of the sparkling Jade Sea a few kilometres north certainly will.

As you descend to the lake, South Island stands proudly before you, while Teleki Volcano's geometrically perfect cone lurks on Turkana's southern shore. Before you jump in the water, remember that Turkana has a large crocodile population.

Loyangalani

An oasis of doum palms, natural springs and vivid Turkana tribespeople, Loyangalani is one of northern Kenya's most fascinating places. It overlooks Lake Turkana and is surrounded by small ridges of pillow lava (evidence that this area used to be underwater) peppered with Turkana families' traditional stick and palm dwellings. Other than the post office and the Catholic mission (which occasionally sells petrol at exorbitant prices), there's little in the way of services.

The El-Molo tribe, one of Africa's smallest, lives on the lakeshore just north of here in the villages of **Layeni** and **Komote**. Although outwardly similar to the Turkana, the El-Molo are linguistically linked to the Somali and Rendille. Unfortunately the last speaker of their traditional language died before the turn of the millennium.

As with the Maasai, tourism has wrought inevitable changes in the El-Molo and Turkana peoples' lifestyles and many travellers feel that the tribal issue has been overly commercialised. You'll certainly pay handsomely for taking any photographs.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Opened as a public reserve in 1983 and made a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1997, the 39-sq-km volcanic island of **South Island National Park** (adult/child US\$15/5) is completely barren and uninhabited apart from large populations of crocodiles, poisonous snakes and feral goats. Spending the night at a **special camp site** (adult/child US\$8/5) makes for an even more eerie trip. All the sites lack water, firewood (there are no trees on the island) and toilets. The southern site is the most sheltered from the wind, so your tent is less likely to take flight here.

In calm weather a speedboat can reach the island in 30 minutes and circumnavigate it in another hour. If winds crop up, trip times can easily double. You can hire a boat from Oasis Lodge (per hour KSh2500) or from a local, but always check the vessel's seaworthiness and the impending weather.

Dominating Lake Turkana's eastern horizon, **Mt Kulal's** forested volcanic flanks offer some hiking possibilities. No matter what local guides tell you, trekking up to the summit (2293m) from Loyangalani in a day isn't feasible. Plan on several days for a return trip, or part with substantial sums of cash (KSh8000 to KSh12,000) for a lift up Mt Kulal to the villages of Arapal or Gatab. From there you can head for the summit and spend a long day (eight to 10 hours) hiking back down to Loyangalani. The volcano's view over Lake Turkana and Chalbi Desert are sublime.

SLEEPING & EATING

Palm Shade Camp (camping KSh350, s/tw rondavel with shared bathroom KSh500/1000) Drop your tent on some grass beneath acacias and doum palms or crash in the simple domed rondavels. The huts have simple wooden beds with foam mattresses, and unique walls with meshed cutouts that let light and heavenly evening breezes in. Throw in the town's best toilets and showers, a cooking shelter and electricity until 10pm, and your decision is easy.

Oasis Lodge (☎ 020-503267; willtravel@swiftkenya.com; full board/s/tw US\$150/200; 🍷) This overpriced lodge offers simple bungalows with dated bathrooms. The food, spring-fed swimming pools (KSh300 for nonguests) and view from the open-air bar are its best assets.

New Saalama Hotel (meals KSh50-110) Although it lacks any signage (ask a local to point it out), this little shack with wooden benches, crooked tables and candlelight is the best place for a local meal. It's usually out of food soon after sunset.

Cold Drink Hotel (meals KSh50-110) Run by a local Somali family, this hotel serves Kenyan dishes and a version of Ethiopian *injera* (a thin, spongy pancake). Its smoky *chai* is worth skipping.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are one or two trucks a week that stop in Loyangalani en route to Maralal

(KSh1000, 10 to 12 hours) from Marsabit. Trucks heading in any other direction are even more rare.

If you're travelling in your own vehicle, you have two options to reach Marsabit: continue northeast from Loyangalani across the dark stones of the Chalbi Desert towards North Horr, or head 67km south towards South Horr and take the eastern turn-off near Devil's Hand (see p427). The 270km Chalbi route (seven to eight hours) is OK in the dry season but can be treacherous after rain. Make sure you're carrying adequate food and water with your spare tyres, compass and fuel when you set out. It's also wise to ask for directions every chance you get, otherwise it's easy to take the wrong track and not realise until hours later. The 241km southern route (six to seven hours) via Devil's Hand, the Karoli Desert and Kargi is composed of compacted sands and is less difficult in the rainy season.

For those with money to burn, Oasis Lodge can arrange air transport and hires vehicles for KSh5000 per day plus KSh100 per kilometre.

Sibilo National Park

A Unesco World Heritage Site and probably Kenya's most remote **national park** (www.sibilo.com; adult/child US\$15/5), Sibilo is located far up the eastern shore of Lake Turkana and covers an area of 1570 sq km. It was here that Dr Richard Leakey discovered the skull of a *Homo habilis* believed to be 2½ million years old, and where others have unearthed evidence of *Homo erectus*. Despite the area's fascinating prehistory, fossil sites and wonderful arid ecosystem, the difficulties involved in getting this far north tend to discourage visitors, which is a real shame. It seems slightly ironic that the so-called 'Cradle of Mankind' is now almost entirely unpopulated.

Today it's possible to see fossils of a giant tortoise that lived three million years ago, an ancient species of crocodile (*Euthecodon brumpti*) that grew up to 15m long, and a big-tusked behemoth (*Elephas recki*), a predecessor of today's elephant. The petrified forest south of these sites is evidence that the area was lush and densely forested seven million years ago. Every year the rains and the wind expose more fossils, so many that the most impressive are simply ringed

with stones. When visiting these sites, never remove any fossils as future research may be compromised.

The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) maintains a small museum and **Koobi Fora** (www.kfpp.com), a research base that is often home to permanent researchers, visiting scientists and students. It's usually possible to sleep in one of the base's **bandas** (per person KSh1000) or to pitch a tent in the **KWS camp sites** (adult/child US\$8/5).

It's best to come in July and August, when the ferocious temperatures break slightly and when activity increases at Koobi Fora. Contact both **KWS** (kws@kws.org; PO Box 219, Lodwar) and **NMK** (☎ 020-3742131; www.museums.or.ke; PO Box 40658, Nairobi) before venturing in this direction.

In the dry season it's a tricky seven-hour drive north from Loyangalani to Sibilo. Make sure you get precise directions from locals in Loyangalani, as well as from the KWS and NMK, before heading north. In the wet season your only real option is to fly.

MARICH TO TURKANA'S WESTERN SHORE

Despite boasting some of northern Kenya's greatest attributes, like copious kilometres of Jade Sea shoreline, striking volcanic landscapes and vivid Turkana tribes, this remote corner of the country has seen relatively few visitors. With security on the mend there's now a unique opportunity for independent travellers to explore here, thanks to regular public transport currently covering the breadth of the region. The only downside is that you can't get your vehicle across the lake or into Sudan, which makes for a lot of backtracking.

Marich

The spectacular descent from Marich Pass through the lush, cultivated Cherangani Hills leads to arid surroundings, with saisoil plants, cactus trees and acacias lining both the road and the chocolate-brown Morun River. Just north, the minuscule village of Marich, near the A1's junction with the B4 Kerio Valley road, marks your entrance into northern Kenya.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Although the northern plains may beckon, it's worth leashing the 4WD and heading

into the hills for some eye-popping and leg-loving trekking action. **Mt Sekerr** (3326m) is a few kilometres northwest of Marich and can be climbed comfortably in a three-day round trip via the agricultural plots of the Pokot tribe, passing through forest and open moors. The views from the top are magnificent in clear weather.

The Marich Pass Field Studies Centre (below) offers English-speaking Pokot and Turkana guides for half-day (KSh450), full-day (KSh550) and overnight (KSh1000) treks. The guides can also help you explore the numerous small **caves** dotted around the hills, most of which have special significance for the local Pokot.

If you'd rather explore with your vehicle, you can head southeast from Marich past Sigor and check out the **Elgeyo Escarpment**, which rises above the Kerio Valley to more than 1830m in places, and offers spectacular views and waterfalls. At the foot of the escarpment (and accessible by *matatu*) is **Lomut** and its fascinating Saturday market, which brings together the pastoral Pokot from the northern plains and the farming Pokot from the southern hills.

About 15km north of Marich along the A1 Hwy to Lokichar is the turn-off for **Nasolot National Reserve** (admission adult/child US\$15/5) and **Turkwel Gorge** (admission incl with Nasolot NR). Although the reserve is home to elephants, lesser kudus, lions and leopards, you'll likely only spot the diminutive dik-diks bounding by the roadside. The main attraction is the gorge itself, with towering rock walls and plenty of pretty precipices. The imposing hydroelectric dam sits about 23km from the reserve gate, which is 6km off the A1. Those without vehicles are allowed to hike in the park with an escort (free with reserve admission). With security back under control, the KWS is hoping to soon reopen the camp sites.

Just when you're getting to like the feel of the scrub desert en route to Lokichar, a sudden and all-too-brief burst of green and heavenly cool envelop the road and act as a stark reminder of the lushness you've left behind.

SLEEPING & EATING

Marich Pass Field Studies Centre (www.gg.rhul.ac.uk/MarichPass; PO Box 564, Kapenguria; camping KSh300, dm KSh350, s/tw/tr/q with shared bathroom KSh700/950/

1425/1900, with private bathroom KSh1100/1500/2250/3000) The only reasonable accommodation between Marich and Lokichar is at this centre, which is well signposted just north of Marich and the A1's junction with the B4. Essentially a residential facility for visiting student groups, it's also a great place for independent travellers to base their adventures. The centre occupies a beautiful site alongside the Morun River, and is surrounded by dense bush and woodland. The birdlife here is prolific, monkeys and baboons have the run of the place, and warthogs, buffaloes, antelopes and elephants are all occasional visitors. Facilities include a secure camp site, with drinking water, toilets, showers and firewood, as well as dorm beds and simple, comfortable *bandas*. There's a restaurant (meals KSh220 to KSh350) with vegetarian options, but all meals should be ordered in advance. It also offers self-catering facilities, though there are few supplies in the area. Besides guides for trekking, it offers guided walks discussing ethnobotany (KSh500) and birds (KSh600) for groups of up to five people.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The easiest way to get to Marich is from Kitale via Makutano and Marich Pass on the oh-so-scenic A1 Hwy, which is often described as Kenya's most spectacular Tarmac road. The buses plying the A1 between Kitale and Lodwar can drop you anywhere along the route, whether at Marich, the field studies centre or at the turn-off to Nasolot National Reserve. You may be asked to pay the full fare to Lodwar (KSh700), but a smile and some patient negotiating should reduce the cost.

The other route is extremely rough (4WD only), and approaches Marich along the B4 from Lake Baringo through the Kito Pass and across the Kerio Valley to Tot; it's tough going with little in the way of signs, but it allows you to visit the hot waterfalls at Kapedo. From Tot, the track skirts the northern face of the Cherangani Hills and may be impassable after heavy rain.

Between Marich and Lokichar the A1 is a bumpy mess of corrugated dirt and lonely islands of Tarmac. The first 40km north of Lokichar is better, but you'll still spend more time on the shoulder than on the road. The opposite is true for the remaining

60km to Lodwar, where patches outnumber potholes and driving is straightforward.

If security takes a turn for the worse, the police checkpoint just north of Marich may again start requiring vehicles to travel in convoy to Lodwar. Another thing to keep an eye out for on this stretch are the flash floods that periodically fill the odd dry river bed with churning chocolate milk – be patient and remember that the water can drop as quickly as it rose.

Lodwar

☎ 054

Besides Lokichoggio near the Sudan border, Lodwar is the only town of any size in the northwest (although that's not saying much). Barren volcanic hills skirted by traditional Turkana dwellings sit north of town and make for impressive early morning sunrise spots. Lodwar has outgrown its days as just an isolated administrative outpost of the Northern Frontier District, and has now become the major service centre and tourist hub for the whole region. If you're visiting Lake Turkana, you'll find it convenient to stay here for at least one night.

INFORMATION

The Kenya Commercial Bank (no ATM) changes cash and charges 1% commission (minimum KSh250) for travellers cheques. The post office has Lodwar's only Internet connection.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There's little to do in the town itself, but the atmosphere is not altogether unpleasant if you can stand the heat, and just listening to the garrulous locals is entertainment in itself. The small market is a good place to watch women weaving baskets, and there's an endless stream of Turkana hawkers who wander around town selling the usual souvenirs.

You're bound to be approached by several sharp young businessmen calling themselves the Lodwar Tour Guides Association. They'll offer to escort you to Lake Turkana, into the hills and local communities, or even to Central Island National Park. They try hard to please and are a useful source of information, although their prices are a bit steep for the services provided – KSh1500 just for a trip to the lake!

SLEEPING

Unless you're cold-blooded and thick-skinned, it's worth spending more for a room with a fan and mosquito net. The cheaper places are hellishly hot and the mosquitoes can be something fierce.

Nawoitorong Guest House (☎ 21208; camping KSh200, s/tw with shared bathroom KSh400/600, s/tw cottages from KSh700/900) Built entirely out of local materials and run by a local women's group, Nawoitorong is an excellent option, and the only one for campers. Thatched roofs alleviate the need for fans and all rooms have mosquito nets. There's a pleasant restaurant, and the shared-bathroom prices include breakfast. The one-bedroom Ekaato cottages are cheap, but not nearly as charming as the two-bedroom Nadoua cottage, which also has a cooking area. The Napekitoi cottage is perfect for families.

Hotel Splash (☎ 21099; PO Box 297, Lodwar; s KSh450) Well signposted and west of the main crossroads, Hotel Splash has great, smallish singles with fans, mosquito nets, sitting chairs, reading lamps and decent bathrooms. The foam mattresses are pleasantly firm and there's secure parking to boot.

Turkwel Lodge (☎ 21099; s/tw KSh350/700, cottages s/d KSh800/1350) Turkwel offers spacious rooms containing fans and mosquito nets, but lacks the crisp, clean feel of the Splash. Some beds are a bit of an Ikea experiment gone horribly wrong – not so comfy. There's secure parking, and quiet, roomy cottages at the rear.

EATING

Turkwel Hotel (meals KSh60-210) Its green lentil curry is particularly good, but get your order in about three hours early, and don't forget to order the chapatis at the same time! Its local dishes require less waiting and are some of the best in town.

Nawoitorong Guest House (meals KSh160-225) Burgers and toasted sandwiches join local curries and various meaty fries on its menu.

Africana Silent Lodge (meals KSh40-110) A popular eatery with locals for cheap Kenyan fare and fried fish.

If you're self-catering, there's a well-stocked Naipa Supermarket next to the Kobil petrol station.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Several companies, including Kenya Witness, have daily buses to Kitale (KSh500, 8½ hours)

each night at 7.30pm (most services pick up passengers near the New Salama Hotel), while erratic *matatus* serve Kalokol (KSh150, one hour) and Lokichoggio (KSh500, three hours).

While UN vehicles were still travelling in armed convoys along the sublimely sealed 210km stretch of Tarmac to Lokichoggio at the time of research, the security situation had improved enough that local trucks and *matatus* weren't feeling the need to travel in convoy or to take armed escorts. Always check with locals and police to ascertain the latest security situation before travelling on this road.

Drivers will find several petrol stations here, though it's almost KSh20 more per litre than in Kitale.

Eliye Springs

Spring water percolates out of crumbling bluffs and brings life to this remote sandy shore of Lake Turkana, some 66km north-east of Lodwar by road. Growing from the moist sloping sands are oodles of doum palms that give this usually barren environment a downright tropical feel, albeit incongruous. Down on the slippery shore children play in the lake's warm waters, while Central Island lurks magically on the distant horizon. These lake views are almost as spellbinding as the stars that occupy the dark night sky.

On arrival you'll encounter an instant small crowd of colourful Turkana women selling trinkets, ranging from bracelets and fish-backbone necklaces to fossilised hippo teeth. As only a few vehicles visit each week, it's a real buyer's market and prices are absurdly low. It's worth a look because the same items in Lodwar cost much more, despite most of them being made here!

Beneath the bluff the skeleton of an old beach resort sits half eaten by its surroundings and makes for an interesting place to drop your tent. Locals now manage the leftovers and charge KSh200 for camping and KSh250 for sleeping beneath one of the remaining thatched roofs. Besides the spring water there are no facilities, so you'll have to be entirely self-sufficient. Note that more than the odd scorpion and carpet viper also call this place home, so shoes are a good idea!

The turn-off for Eliye Springs is signposted about halfway along the Lodwar-Ka-

kolok road. The gravels are easy to follow until they suddenly peter out and you're faced with a fork in the road – stay left. The rest of the way is a mix of gravel, deep sand and dirt tracks (4WD only), which can turn into a muddy nightmare in the wet season.

If you don't have your own vehicle, you can usually arrange a 4WD in Lodwar to drop you off and pick you up at a predetermined time later for about KSh4500.

Ferguson's Gulf

While a more accessible part of Lake Turkana than Eliye Springs, Ferguson's Gulf has none of its southern neighbour's tropical charm. Fishing boats in various states of disrepair litter its grubby western beach and a definite feeling of bleakness pervades. The gulf's eastern shore (accessible by boat only) is just as desolate, but has an inexplicably attractive air about it.

Birdlife is prolific, particularly in March and April, when thousands of European migratory birds stop here on their way north. There are also hippos and crocodiles (and bilharzia), so seek local advice before diving in.

If you're planning on visiting Central Island National Park (opposite) or Sibilo National Park (p429), this is the best place to arrange a boat.

Set on the eastern shore, **Lake Turkana Lodge** (☎ 0722-703666; turkana@hillbarrett.com; camping US\$10, s/tw US\$25/40) is the only official accommodation in the area. Sixteen large timber cabins, each with their own bathroom and scenic veranda, provide sleeping quarters, but lighting is limited at best – bring a torch! The skeleton staff can provide meals (with advance warning) or for a small fee you can use the kitchen. The bar is an excellent place to absorb the scenery, and is usually well stocked with beer, water and soft drink. Boat transfers across the gulf are an additional US\$10.

Ferguson's Gulf is accessed from the village of Kalokol, which is reachable by *matatu* from Lodwar along a good 75km stretch of Tarmac. From Kalokol, follow the Tarmac north for a few kilometres before turning left onto the dirt road next to the fading Italian fishing project sign. This leads towards a substantial building before veering to the right and dropping you in the middle of the gulf's fishing fleet.

Central Island National Park

Rising from the depths of Lake Turkana and climbing 170m above its surface is the Central Island Volcano, which was last seen belching molten sulphur and steam just over three decades ago. Today the island is quiet, but its stormy volcanic history is told by the numerous craters scarring its weathered façade. Several craters have coalesced to form two sizeable lakes that are almost 1km wide and 80m deep.

Both a **national park** (adult/child US\$15/5) and Unesco World Heritage Site, Central Island is an intriguing place to visit and the view atop the cinder cones is well worth the short scramble. But no matter how tempting, stay clear of the lakes as the island is famous for its 14,000 or so Nile crocodiles, some of which are massive in proportion! Like Ferguson's Gulf, the island boasts countless numbers of migratory birds in March and April.

Camping (adult/child US\$8/5) is possible and unlike South Island National Park, there are trees to tie your tent to. However, there's no water available or any other facilities, so come prepared.

Hiring a boat from Ferguson's Gulf is the only real option to get here. Depending on what you drive up in, locals can ask anywhere from KSh10,000 to KSh50,000 for the trip. A fair price is KSh6000 for a motorboat – don't even think about being cheap and taking a sailboat! The 10km trip and sudden squalls that terrorize the lake's waters aren't to be taken lightly, so ensure the craft is sound before boarding.

LOKICHOGGIO

Although the A1 Hwy from Lodwar to Lokichoggio via the UN refugee camps at Kakuma has been off limits to everyone but armed aid convoys for the last several years, improved security has meant that the odd intrepid traveller is now able to taste this remote north-west corner of Kenya. Remember that it's imperative to check with locals, NGOs and police in Lodwar before heading off.

The perfect Tarmac between Lodwar and Lokichoggio is almost a sight in itself – simply transcendent! As you head northwest from Lodwar, you'll wind through some rocky bluffs before dropping into a vast valley resembling a lush lawn in wet season and a white sea during drier periods. After passing through the Pelekech Range's stratified

slopes that mark the valley's western side, you'll see a dramatic and seemingly fictitious horizon of sharp mountainous peaks beyond the numerous refugee camps at Kakuma. In reality your eyes are making mountains out of mole hills, as the seemingly large peaks are only 100m- to 200m-high volcanic cinder cones.

Along the entire route you'll encounter rather marvellous Turkana people in striking tribal attire, either walking the roadside, selling sacks of charcoal or resting in the shade of lonely trees. Your steady gaze at these colourful souls will only be broken by the odd termite mound mystifyingly giving you the middle finger.

Despite being backed by the impressive Mogila Range, Lokichoggio itself is rather unattractive. However, what it lacks in looks it makes up for in aid activity, with the World Food Program (WFP), UN and other NGOs basing their Sudanese operations here.

Lokichoggio has a post office, but no banks. The need to house NGO workers has resulted in some pretty plush accommodation options being added to the mix; **Track-mark Camp** (☎ 054-32245; lokicamp@yahoo.com; full board tents s US\$50, bandas s/d US\$55/80; 🚻 🚰 🚰) is an absolute haven despite the junkie name, while **Makuti Bar** (☎ 0722-257262; A1 Hwy; d with shared bathroom KSh400-500) is the only reasonable budget option in town.

Petrol is readily available and costs KSh10 less per litre than in Lodwar. Road conditions and transport options between Lokichoggio and Lodwar are discussed on p431. The border with Sudan was closed at the time of writing – check for updates at Lodwar's military post.

KENYA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Kenya has a good range of accommodation options, from basic cubicle hotels overlooking city bus stands to luxury tented camps hidden away in the national parks. There are also all kinds of camp sites, budget tented camps, simple *bandas* (often wooden huts) and cottages scattered around the parks and rural areas.

During the low season many companies offer excellent deals on accommodation on the coast and in the main wildlife parks,

often working with airlines to create packages aimed at the local and expat market. The website of **Let's Go Travel** (www.lets-go-travel.net) displays almost all the major hotels and lodges in Kenya, giving price ranges and descriptions, while www.kenyalastminute.com is a good port of call for discounted bookings at some of the more expensive camps, lodges and hotels, particularly on the coast.

Where appropriate we have split accommodation options into budget, midrange and top-end categories for ease of reference. In general, a budget double room is defined as anything under KSh1000. Surprisingly, bedding, towels and soap are almost always provided however much you pay.

In most of the country, midrange accommodation falls between KSh1000 and KSh3500 for a double room; the major exception to this is Nairobi, where you can pay anything up to KSh6000 for the same standard. In this bracket you'd usually expect breakfast, private bathroom, telephone and good-size double beds with proper mattresses; the more you pay the more facilities you get.

Everything over KSh3500 (or US\$80 in Nairobi) counts as top end, and what you get for your money varies enormously. Once you hit the US\$100 mark you should certainly count on breakfast, TV, phone, air-con (on the coast), room service and toiletries as standard, and in the upper realms of the price range the extras can include anything from complimentary minibars to casinos, Jacuzzis and a range of free activities.

Although most midrange and top-end places quote prices in US dollars, payment can be in local currency. Note that most places have separate rates for residents, and these are often much less than the nonresident rates. All prices quoted in this book are nonresident rates.

Many midrange and (especially) top-end options also change their prices according to season, which can be confusing as very few places use exactly the same dates. In principal there are high, low and shoulder seasons, but some hotels can divide their year into five or more distinct pricing periods! For lodges in the national parks, the norm is to charge high-season prices from July to March, with low-season prices only

PRACTICALITIES

- Major newspapers and magazines in Kenya include the *Daily Nation*, the *East African Standard*, the *East African*, the *Weekly Review* and the *New African*.
- KBC Radio broadcasts across the country on various FM frequencies. Most major towns also have their own local music and talkback stations, and the BBC World Service is easily accessible.
- KBC and NTV are the main national TV stations; the CNN, Sky and BBC networks are also widely available on satellite or cable (DSTV).
- Kenyan televisual equipment uses the standard European NISTC video system.
- Kenya uses the 240V system, with square three-pin sockets as used in the UK. Bring a universal adaptor if you need to charge your phone or run other appliances.
- Kenya uses the metric system; distances are in kilometres and most weights are in kilograms.

applicable from April to June. On the coast, where things are much more seasonal, peak times tend to be July to August and December to March.

In this book, 'high season' refers to rates quoted for the longest peak period and 'low season' refers to the lowest prices available out of season – any other variations should fall between these two guidelines.

African Safari Club

Although it's package tourism at its most developed, the UK-based **African Safari Club** (UK ☎ 020-8466 0014; www.africansafariclub.com) has some splendid properties on the coast and in several of the national parks. Rates are typical for upmarket resorts, but are quoted as part of holiday packages so few offers are for less than a week or so.

Bandas

Bandas are basic huts and cottages, usually with some kind of kitchen and bathroom, that offer excellent value for budget travellers. There are KWS *bandas* at Shimba Hills, Tsavo West, Meru and Mt Elgon, and near

the marine reserves at Malindi and Shimoni. Some are wooden huts, some are thatched stone huts and some are small brick bungalows with solar-powered lights; facilities range from basic dorms and squat toilets to kitchens and hot water provided by wood-burning stoves. The cost varies from US\$10 to US\$20 per person. You'll need to bring all your own food, drinking water, bedding and firewood.

Camping

There are many opportunities for camping in Kenya and it is worth considering bringing a tent with you, although gear can also be hired in Nairobi and around Mt Kenya. There are KWS camp sites in just about every national park or reserve, though these are usually very basic. There will be a toilet block with a couple of pit toilets, and usually a water tap, but very little else.

As well as these permanent camp sites, KWS also runs so-called 'special' camp sites in most national parks; these temporary sites have even fewer facilities than the standard camps, but cost more because of their wilder locations and set-up costs. A reservation fee of KSh5000 per week is payable on top of the relevant camping fee.

Private sites are few and far between, but they do offer more facilities and may hire out tents if you don't have your own.

Hostels

The only youth hostel affiliated with Hostel International (HI) is in Nairobi. It has good basic facilities and is a pleasant enough place to stay, but there are plenty of other cheaper choices that are just as good. Other places that call themselves 'youth hostels' are not members of HI and standards are very variable.

Hotels & Guesthouses

Real budget hotels (often known as 'board and lodgings' to distinguish them from '*hotels*', which are often only restaurants) are widely used as brothels and tend to be very rundown. Security at these places is virtually nonexistent; the better ones are set around courtyards and are clean if not exactly comfortable.

Proper hotels and guesthouses come in as many different shapes and sizes as the

people who stay in them. As well as the top-end Western companies, there are a number of small Kenyan chains offering reliable standards across a handful of properties in particular towns or regions, and also plenty of private family-run establishments. At the top end of the scale are the all-singing, all-dancing beach resorts along the coast.

Self-catering options are common on the coast, where they're often the only mid-priced alternative to the top-end resorts, but not so much in other parts of the country. A few fancier places offer fully fitted modern kitchens, but more often than not the so-called kitchenettes will be a side room with a small fridge and a rusty portable gas hob.

Terms you will come across frequently in Kenya include 'self-contained', which just means a room with its own private bathroom, and 'all-inclusive', which differs in exact meaning from place to place – generally all meals, certain drinks and possibly some activities should be included in the room rate.

Safari Lodges & Tented Camps

Hidden away inside or on the edges of national parks are some fantastic safari lodges. These are usually visited as part of organised safaris, and you'll pay much more if you just turn up and ask for a room. Some of the older places trade heavily on their more glorious past, but the best places feature five-star rooms, soaring *makuti*-roofed bars and restaurants overlooking waterholes full of wildlife. Staying in at least one good safari lodge is recommended, if only to see how the other half live! Rates tend to come down a lot in the low season.

As well as lodges, many parks contain some fantastic luxury tented camps. These places tend to occupy wonderfully remote settings, usually by rivers or other natural locations, and feature large, comfortable, semipermanent safari tents with beds, furniture and bathrooms. The really exclusive properties occupy locations so isolated that guests fly in and out on charter planes.

ACTIVITIES Ballooning

Balloon trips in the wildlife parks are an absolutely superb way of seeing the savanna

plains and, of course, the animals. The almost ghostly experience of floating silently above the plains with a 360-degree view of everything beneath you is incomparable, and it's definitely worth saving up your shillings.

The flights typically set off at dawn and go for about 1½ hours, after which you put down for a champagne breakfast. You'll then be taken on a wildlife drive in a support vehicle and returned to your lodge. Flights are currently available in the Masai Mara for around US\$390.

Cycling

An increasing number of companies offer cycling and mountain-biking trips in Kenya. Popular locations include the edge of the Masai Mara, Hell's Gate National Park, the Central Highlands and the Kerio Valley. The best specialist operator is **Bike Treks** (☎ 020-446371; www.biketreks.co.ke).

Many local companies and places to stay around the country can arrange cheap bicycle hire, allowing you to cycle through places such as Arabuko Sokoke Forest Reserve and Hell's Gate National Park. Hire usually costs KSh300 to KSh500 per day. See p451 for more information on cycling in Kenya. For details of companies offering cycling safaris, see p94.

Diving & Snorkelling

There is a string of marine national parks spread out along the coast between Shimoni and Malindi (see p309 for further details), with plenty of opportunities for snorkelling and scuba diving. The better marine parks are those further away from Mombasa. The Lamu archipelago (p356) also has some fine reefs off the islands of Manda Toto and Kiwayu.

There are distinct seasons for diving in Kenya. October to March is the best time; during June, July and August it's often impossible to dive due to poor visibility caused by heavy silt flow from some of the rivers on the coast. This doesn't necessarily mean that no companies will take your money for trips during this period! In 1997 there was a huge coral die-off as part of a warming of the ocean attributable to El Niño and global warming. However, the coral is slowly recovering, and there are thousands of colourful fish species and even marine mammals.

If you aren't certified to dive, almost every hotel and resort on the coast can arrange an open-water diving course. By international standards, they aren't cheap – a five-day PADI certification course will cost US\$330 to US\$450. Trips for certified divers, including two dives, go for around US\$90.

Nairobi Sailing & Sub Aqua Club (Map p296; ☎ 020-501250; Nairobi Dam, Langata Rd, Nairobi) offers British Sub Aqua Club diver training, and runs diving trips to the coast between September and April.

If you're going to scuba dive on the coast, note that the only decompression chamber in the region is in Mombasa and is run by the Kenyan navy.

Fishing

The **Kenya Fisheries Department** (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-3742320; Museum Hill Rd, Nairobi), opposite National Museums of Kenya, operates a number of fishing camps in various parts of the country. However, they're difficult to reach without your own vehicle and directions from the Fisheries Department, from which you'll also need to get a fishing licence.

The deep-sea fishing on the coast is some of the best in the world, and various private companies and resorts in Shimoni, Diani Beach, Watamu and Malindi can arrange fishing trips. Boats cost US\$250 to US\$500 and can usually fit four or five anglers. You'll pay the same price if it's just you in the boat. The season runs from August to April.

For freshwater fishing, there are huge Nile perch as big as a person in Lakes Victoria and Turkana, and some of the trout fishing around the Aberdares and Mt Kenya is quite exceptional. Fishing licences for Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Aberdare National Parks cost KSh100 per day.

Gliding & Flying

The **Gliding Club of Kenya** (Map p374; ☎ 0733-760331; gliding@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 926, Nyeri), near Nyeri in the Central Highlands, offers silent glides over the Aberdares.

Flying lessons are easily arranged in Nairobi, and are much cheaper than in Europe, the USA and Australasia. Contact the **Aero Club of East Africa** (☎ 020-608990) and **Ninety-Nines Flying Club** (☎ 020-500277), both at Wilson Airport.

Sailing

Kilifi, Mtwapa and Mombasa all have sailing clubs, and smaller freshwater clubs can also be found at Lake Naivasha and Lake Victoria, which both have excellent windsurfing and sailing. If you're experienced, you may pick up some crewing at the various yacht clubs, although you'll need to become a temporary member. While it isn't hands-on, a traditional dhow trip out of Lamu is an unforgettable experience.

Trekking & Climbing

For proper mountain trekking Mt Kenya (p376) is the obvious choice, but other promising and relatively unexplored walking territory includes Mt Elgon (p413) on the Ugandan border, the Cherangani Hills and Kerio Valley (p410) east of Kitale, the upper reaches of the Aberdares (p373) and even the Ngong Hills (p297), close to Nairobi.

For more trekking information refer to the relevant chapters in this book, get hold of a copy of Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* or contact the **Mountain Club of Kenya** (MCK; ☎ 020-602330; www.mck.or.ke). Its website has good advice on Mt Kenya, as well as on technical climbing and trekking throughout Kenya.

Savage Wilderness Safaris (☎ 020-521590; www.whitewaterkenya.com; Sarit Centre, PO Box 1000, Westlands, Nairobi) offers mountaineering trips to Mt Kenya and rock climbing at sites around the country, as well as some more unusual options, like caving.

Water Sports

Conditions on Kenya's coast are ideal for windsurfing – offshore reefs protect the waters, and winds are usually reasonably strong and constant. Most resort hotels south and north of Mombasa have sailboards for hire; rates vary from KSh400 to KSh800 per hour, and instruction is also available. The sheltered channel between Lamu and Manda Islands (p355) is one of the best places to windsurf on the coast.

As well as the ubiquitous windsurfing, diving and snorkelling on offer, some of the larger resorts have water-sports centres giving visitors the opportunity to try out everything from jet skis and banana boats to bodyboarding and traditional surfing. Kitesurfing is the latest craze to catch on, with tuition available. Diani Beach (p323), south of Mombasa, is the best place to go for all these activities.

White-Water Rafting

The Athi/Galana River has substantial rapids, chutes and waterfalls, and there are also possibilities on the Tana River and Ewaso Ngiro River near Isiolo. The most exciting times for a white-water rafting trip are from late October to mid-January and from early April to late July, when water levels are highest.

The people to talk to are **Savage Wilderness Safaris** (☎ 020-521590; www.whitewaterkenya.com; Sarit Centre, PO Box 1000, Westlands, Nairobi), run by the charismatic Mark Savage. Depending on water levels, rafting trips of up to 450km

RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Trekking can place great pressure on the environment in popular areas. You can help preserve the countryside by taking note of the following information.

- Carry out all your rubbish. Never ever bury it.
- Where there's no toilet, at lower elevations bury your faeces in a 15cm-deep hole (consider carrying a lightweight trowel for this purpose). At higher altitudes soil lacks the organisms needed to digest your faeces, so leave your waste in the open where UV rays will break it down – spreading it facilitates the process. Always carry out your toilet paper (Ziplock bags are best). With either option make sure your faeces is at least 50m from any path, 100m from any watercourse and 200m from any building.
- Don't use detergents or toothpaste within 50m of watercourses, even if they're biodegradable.
- Stick to existing tracks and avoid short cuts that bypass a switchback. If you blaze a new trail straight down a slope, it will erode the hillside with the next heavy rainfall.
- Avoid removing plant life, as it keeps topsoil in place.

and three weeks' duration can be arranged, although most trips last one to four days and cover up to 80km. The company also offers a wide range of other land- and water-based activities, including kayaking and sailing.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices are open Monday to Friday from 8am or 8.30am to 1pm and from 2pm to 5pm. Post offices, shops and services open roughly from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 9am to noon on Saturday. Internet cafés generally keep longer evening hours and may open on Sunday.

Banking hours are 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 11am Saturday; some smaller branches may only open on the first and last Saturday of the month. Barclays Bank at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport is open 24 hours and is the only bank in the country open on a Sunday.

Restaurant opening hours vary according to the type of establishment: as a rule cafés and cheap Kenyan canteens will open at around 6am or 7am and close in the early evening, while more expensive ethnic restaurants will be open from 11am to 10pm daily, sometimes with a break between lunch and dinner. Bars that don't serve food are open from around 6pm until late, while nightclubs open their doors around 9pm and can keep going until 6am or later on weekends!

In this book we have only given specific opening hours where they differ significantly from these broad guidelines.

CHILDREN

Many parents regard Africa as just too dangerous for travel with children, but it is possible if you're prepared to spend a little more and take comfort over adventure for the core of the trip. The coast is the best region to aim for, with most resorts offering European-standard kids' facilities and dedicated staff to take them off your hands once in a while.

Local attitudes towards children vary in Kenya just as they do in the West: screaming babies on *matatus* elicit all the usual sighs and tuttings, but usually kids will be welcomed anywhere that's not an exclusively male preserve, especially by women with families of their own.

For invaluable general advice on taking the family abroad, see Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan.

CLIMATE

Kenya's diverse geography means that temperature, rainfall and humidity vary widely, but there are effectively four distinct zones.

The hot, rainy plateau of western Kenya has rainfall throughout the year, the heaviest usually during April when as much as 200mm may be recorded, and the lowest in January with an average of 40mm. Temperatures range from a minimum of 14°C to 18°C to a maximum of 30°C to 36°C throughout the year.

In the temperate Rift Valley and Central Highlands, average temperatures vary from a minimum of 10°C to 14°C to a maximum of 22°C to 28°C. Rainfall varies from a minimum of 20mm in July to 200mm in April, falling in essentially two seasons – March to the beginning of June (the 'long rains') and October to the end of November (the 'short rains'). Mt Kenya and the Aberdare mountains are the country's main water catchments, with falls of up to 3000mm per year.

In the semiarid bushlands of northern and eastern Kenya, temperatures vary from highs of up to 40°C during the day to less than 20°C at night. July is usually the driest month, and November the wettest. The average annual rainfall varies between 250mm and 500mm.

The consistently humid coast region has rainfall averages from 20mm in February to around 300mm in May. The average annual rainfall is between 1000mm and 1250mm (less in drought years). Average temperatures vary little during the year, ranging from 22°C to 30°C.

For the latest local weather forecasts online, visit the **Kenya Meteorological Office** (www.meteo.go.ke).

COURSES

If you intend to spend considerable time in Kenya, learning Swahili is an excellent idea. The best language school is run by the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). Taking a language course (or any course) also entitles you to a 'Pupils' Pass', an immigration permit allowing continuous stays of up to 12 months. The following language schools offer courses:

ACK Language & Orientation School (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-2723200; www.ackenya.org; Bishops Rd, Upper Hill, PO Box 47429, Nairobi) Full-time courses (US\$450) last 14 weeks and take up five hours a day. More flexible is

private tuition, which costs US\$4 per hour. Study materials will cost around US\$40.

Language Center Ltd (Map p298; ☎ 020-570610; Ndemi Close, off Ngong Rd, PO Box 40661, Nairobi) This is a good cheaper option; classes cost KSh250 per hour in a group or KSh450 for one-on-one tuition, and you can study two, three or seven days a week.

CUSTOMS

There are strict laws about taking wildlife products out of Kenya. The export of products made from elephant, rhino and sea turtle are prohibited. The collection of coral is also not allowed. Ostrich eggs will also be confiscated unless you can prove you bought them from a certified ostrich farm. Always check to see what permits are required, especially for the export of any plants, insects and shells.

The usual regulations apply to items you can bring into the country: 50 cigars, 200 cigarettes, 250g of pipe tobacco, 1L of alcohol, 250ml of perfume and other personal items, such as cameras, laptop computers and binoculars. Obscene publications are banned, which may extend to some lads' magazines.

You are allowed to take up to KSh100,000 out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While Kenya is a safe destination in African terms, there are still plenty of pitfalls for the unwary or inexperienced traveller, from everyday irritations to more serious threats. A little street sense goes a long way here, and getting the latest local information is essential wherever you intend to travel.

Banditry

Wars in Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia have all had their effect on the stability and safety of northern and northeastern Kenya. AK-47s have been flowing into the country for many years, and the newspapers are filled with stories of hold-ups, shoot-outs, cattle rustling and general lawlessness. Bandits and poachers infiltrating from Somalia have made the northeast of the country particularly dangerous, and with the American 'War on Terror' shutting down the funding for many warring factions within Somalia, these problems are only going to get worse.

In the northwest, the main problem is armed tribal wars and cattle rustling across the Sudanese border. There are Kenyan *shif*

too, of course, but cross-border problems seem to account for most of the trouble in the north of the country.

Despite all the headlines, tourists are rarely targeted, as much of the violence and robberies take place far from the main tourist routes. Security has also improved considerably in previously high-risk areas, such as the Isiolo–Marsabit, Marsabit–Moyale and Malindi–Lamu routes. However, you should check the situation locally before taking these roads, or travelling between Garsen and Garissa or Thika.

The areas along the Sudanese and Ethiopian borders are very risky, although most visitors are very unlikely to have any reason to go there in the first place.

Crime

Even the staunchest Kenyan patriot will readily admit that the country's biggest problem is crime. It ranges from petty snatch theft and mugging to violent armed robbery, carjacking and, of course, white-collar crime and corruption. As a visitor you needn't feel paranoid, but you should always keep your wits about you, particularly at night.

Perhaps the best advice for when you're walking around cities and towns is not to carry anything valuable with you. Most hotels provide a safe or secure place for valuables, although you should be cautious of the security at some budget places. Cheap digital watches and plastic sunglasses can be bought in Kenya for under KSh100 and you won't miss them if they get taken.

While pickpocketing and bag-snatching are the most common crimes, armed muggings do occur in Nairobi and on the coast. However, they usually happen at night or in remote areas, so always take taxis after dark or along lonely dirt roads. Conversely, snatch-and-run crimes happen more in crowds. If you suddenly feel there are too many people around you, or think you are being followed, dive straight into a shop and ask for help.

In the event of a crime, you should report it to the police, but this can be a real procedure. You'll need to get a police report if you intend to make an insurance claim. In the event of a snatch theft, think twice before yelling 'Thief!'. It's not unknown for people to administer summary justice on the spot, often with fatal results for the criminal.

STREET KIDS

Nairobi in particular has huge problems with street children, many of whom are AIDS orphans, who trail foreigners around asking for food or change. It's up to you whether you give, but if you do, the word will go around and you won't get a moment's peace. It's also debatable how much your donations will help, as the older boys operate like a minifamily, extorting money from the younger kids.

If you want to help out, money might be better donated to the charity **Homeless Children International** (☎ 020-573013; www.hcikeny.org), which works to improve conditions for these children.

Although crime is a fact of life in Kenya, it needn't spoil your trip. Above all, don't make the mistake of distrusting every Kenyan just because of a few bad apples – the honest souls you meet will far outweigh any crooks who cross your path.

Scams

At some point in Kenya you'll almost certainly come across people who play on the emotions and gullibility of foreigners. Nairobi is a particular hot spot, with 'friendly' approaches a daily if not hourly occurrence (see p285 for examples of favourite tricks). It's OK to talk to these people if they're not actively hassling you, but you should always ignore any requests for money.

Be sceptical of strangers who claim to recognise you in the street, especially if they're vague about exactly where they know you from – it's unlikely that any ordinary person is going to be *that* excited by seeing you twice. Anyone who makes a big show of inviting you into the hospitality of their home also probably has ulterior motives. The usual trick is to bestow some kind of gift upon the delighted traveller, who is then emotionally blackmailed into reciprocating to the order of several hundred shillings.

Tourists with cars also face a whole set of potential rip-offs. Don't trust people who gesticulate wildly to you as you are driving along, indicating your front wheels are wobbling; if you stop, chances are you'll be relieved of your valuables. Another trick is to splash oil on your wheels, then tell you the

wheel bearings, differential or something else has failed, and direct you to a nearby garage where their friends will 'fix' the problem – for a substantial fee, of course.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Travelling in Kenya is not easy for physically disabled people, but it's not impossible. Very few tourist companies and facilities are geared for disabled travellers, and those that are tend to be restricted to the expensive hotels and lodges. However, if you're polite you're likely to get assistance from people wherever you need it. Visually or hearing-impaired travellers, however, will find it very hard to get by without an able-bodied companion.

In Nairobi, only the ex-London taxis are spacious enough to accommodate a wheelchair, but many safari companies do regularly take disabled people out on safari. The travel agency **Travel Scene Services** (☎ 020-215404; travelscene@insightkenya.com) has lots of experience with disabled travellers.

Many of the top-end beach resorts on the coast have facilities for the disabled, whether it's a few token ramps or fully equipped rooms with handrails and bathtubs. Many of the hotels owned by **Lonrho Hotels** (Nairobi ☎ 020-216940; www.lonrho-hotels.com) can make provisions for disabled people – Mount Kenya Safari Club has its own wheelchair for guests' use. In Amboseli National Park, **Oi Tukai Lodge** (Nairobi ☎ 020-4445514; oitukai@mitsuminet.com) has two disabled-friendly cottages.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Kenyan Embassies & Consulates

Australia (☎ 02-6247 4788; kenrep@dynamite.com.au; QBE Bldg, 33-35 Ainslie Ave, Canberra, ACT 2601)

Canada (☎ 613-563 1773; www.kenyahighcommission.ca; 415 Laurier Ave, East Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6R4)

Ethiopia (☎ 01-610033; kenya.embassy@telecom.net.et; Fikre Miriam Rd, PO Box 3301, Addis Ababa)

France (☎ 01 56 62 25 25; kenparis@wanadoo.fr; 3 Rue Freycinet, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-25922660; embassy-kenya.bn@wwmail.de; Markgrafenstr 63, 10969 Berlin)

Israel (☎ 03-57546333; kenya04@ibm.net; 15 Rehov Abba Hillel Silver, Ramat Gan 52522, PO Box 52136, Tel Aviv)

Italy (☎ 396-8082714; www.embassyofkenya.it; Via Archimede 165, 00197 Rome)

Japan (☎ 03-3723 4006; www.embassy-avenue.jp/kenya; 3-24-3 Yakumo, Meguro-Ku, Tokyo 152)

Netherlands (☎ 070-350 42 15; kenre@dataweb.nl; Nieuwe Parklaan 21, 2597 The Hague)

South Africa (☎ 012-362 2249; kenp@pta.lia.net; 302 Brooks St, Menlo Park, 0081 Pretoria)

Sudan (☎ 011-460386; Street 3Amarat, PO Box 8242, Khartoum)

Tanzania (☎ 022-2112955; khc@raha.com; NIC Investment House, Samora Ave, PO Box 5231, Dar es Salaam)

Uganda (☎ 041-258235; Plot No 41, Nakasero Rd, PO Box 5220, Kampala)

UK (☎ 020-7636 2371; www.kenyahighcommission.com; 45 Portland Place, London W1N 4AS)

USA (☎ 202-387-6101; www.kenyaembassy.com; 2249 R Street NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Kenya

A selection of countries that maintain diplomatic missions in Kenya are listed below.

Australia (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-445034; www.embassy.gov.au/ke.html; ICIPE House, Riverside Dr, Nairobi)

Canada (☎ 020-3663000; www.nairobi.gc.ca; Limuru Rd, Nairobi)

Ethiopia (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-2732050; State House Ave, Nairobi)

France (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-316363; www.ambafrance-ke.org; Barclays Plaza, Loita St, Nairobi)

Germany (☎ 020-4262100; www.nairobi.diplo.de; 113 Riverside Dr, Nairobi)

Ireland (☎ 020-5566647; irconsul@swiftkenya.com; Masai Rd, Nairobi)

Israel (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-2722182; Bishops Rd, Nairobi)

Italy Mombasa (Map p314; ☎ 041-314705; Jubilee Bldg, Moi Ave, Mombasa); Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-319198; cooperazione@utlnairobi.org; International Life House, Mama Ngina St, Nairobi)

Japan (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-315850; embjap@wananchi.com; ICEA Bldg, Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi)

Netherlands (☎ 020-4447412; Riverside Lane, Nairobi)

South Africa Nairobi (☎ 020-2827100; Roshanmaer Pl, Lenana Rd, Nairobi)

Spain (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-246009; embespe@mail.mae.es; International House, Mama Ngina St, Nairobi)

Sudan (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-2720883; sudanemb@wananchi.com; AON-Minet Bldg, Mamlaka Rd, Nairobi) At the time of research, this embassy did not issue visas.

Tanzania (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-311948; Reinsurance Plaza, Aga Khan Walk, Nairobi)

Germany Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-311814; Uganda House, Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi); Riverside Paddocks, Nairobi (☎ 020-4445420; www.ugandahighcommission.co.ke; Riverside Paddocks, Nairobi)

UK (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-2844000; www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk/kenya; Upper Hill Rd, Nairobi)

USA (☎ 020-3636000; http://nairobi.usembassy.gov; United Nations Ave, Nairobi)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Major events around Kenya include the following:

Maulid Festival Falling in March or April for the next few years, this annual celebration of the prophet Mohammed's birthday is a huge event in Lamu town, drawing hundreds of visitors (see p353).

Tusker Safari Sevens (www.safarisevens.com) International rugby tournament held every June near Nairobi (see p286).

Kenya Music Festival (☎ 020-2712964) The country's longest-running music festival, held over 10 days in August (p286).

Mombasa Carnival (zainab@africaonline.co.ke) November street festival, with music, dance and other events (see p316).

East Africa Safari Rally (www.eastafricansafarirally.com) Classic car rally now in its 50th year, covering Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda using only pre-1971 vehicles. Held in December.

FOOD

You can eat well in Kenya, though outside the major towns variety isn't always a priority; see p277 for a full rundown of the restaurant scene. In general you should be able to snack for KSh10 to KSh100 on the street and fill up for under KSh200 in any cheap Kenyan cafeteria; an Indian or standard Western meal will cost around KSh500, a Chinese meal anything up to KSh1000, and a top-flight meal in a classy restaurant with wine and all the trimmings can easily exceed KSh2000 per person.

In this book we have organised restaurants by type of food where appropriate, for ease of reference.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Even today there is still a widespread perception across Africa that homosexuality is somehow an un-African phenomenon, introduced to the continent by degenerate European colonials. It goes on covertly, of course, but under Kenyan law homosexuality is still punishable by up to 14 years in prison. There are very few prosecutions under this law, but it's certainly better to be discreet; some local connen do a good line in blackmail, picking up foreigners then threatening to expose them to the police!

Although there are probably more gays and lesbians in Nairobi, the coast is more tolerant of gay relationships, at least privately.

The closest Kenya has to a 'scene' is the tolerant Gypsy's Bar (p291) in Westlands,

Nairobi, though as of September 2005 the organisation **Gay Kenya** (www.gaykenya.com) has introduced an official bimonthly gay night, also in Westlands; call ☎ 020-4452691 for details.

The **Purple Roofs travel directory** (www.purple.roofs.com/africa/kenyata.html) lists a number of gay or gay-friendly tour companies in Kenya and around the world who may be able to help you plan your trip. For luxury all-inclusive packages, the travel agents **Atlantis Events** (www.atlantisevents.com) and **David Tours** (www.davidtours.com) can arrange anything from balloon safaris to luxurious coastal hideaways, all with a gay focus. For information, **Behind the Mask** (www.mask.org.za) is an excellent website covering gay issues and news from across Africa.

HOLIDAYS

All government offices and banks close on public holidays, and most shops and businesses will either close or run according to their usual Sunday opening hours. Popular events can cause a run on accommodation at the lower end of the budget scale, and transport may run less frequently or be more crowded than usual.

Muslim festivals are significant events along the coast. Many places to eat in the region close until after sundown during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which will run from 24 September 2006, 13 September 2007 and 2 September 2008. The Maulid Festival (p353), marking the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, is also widely celebrated, especially on Lamu. This will take place on 20 March 2007 and 20 March 2008.

Public Holidays

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter (Good Friday and Easter Monday) March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Madaraka (Self-Rule) Day 1 June

Moi Day 10 October

Kenyatta Day 20 October

Independence Day 12 December

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Email is firmly established in Kenya, although connection speeds fluctuate wildly, even in Nairobi. Most towns have at least one Internet café where you can surf freely and access webmail accounts or instant messenger

programs. In Nairobi or Mombasa you can pay as little as KSh1 per minute for access, but in rural areas and top-end hotels the rate can be as high as KSh20 per minute.

With the increasing popularity of Internet cafés, the national Posta network has stepped in and virtually revolutionised the industry by offering Internet access at almost every main post office in the country. The real beauty of this is that every branch charges the same fixed rate of KSh1.16 per minute (KSh1 plus VAT). It's run on a prepay system: you pay KSh100 for a card with a PIN code, which you can then use to log in at any branch as often as you like until the money runs out. While the service can't often compete with the flashier private offices in big cities like Nairobi and Mombasa, it's well worth investigating if you're further afield.

LEGAL MATTERS

All drugs except *miraa* are illegal in Kenya. Marijuana (commonly known as *bhang*) is widely available but highly illegal, and possession carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison. Dealers are common on the beaches north and south of Mombasa, and frequently set up travellers for real or phoney coins to extort money. African prisons are unbelievably harsh places; don't take the risk.

Note that *miraa* is illegal in Tanzania, so if you do develop a taste for the stuff in Kenya you should leave it behind when heading south.

MAPS

Bookshops, especially the larger ones in Nairobi, are the best places to look for maps in Kenya. The *Tourist Map of Kenya* gives good detail, as does the *Kenya Route Map*; both cost around KSh250. Marco Polo's 1:1,000,000 *Shell Euro Karte Kenya* and Geocenter's *Kenya* (1:1,000,000) are useful overview maps that are widely available in Europe. For those planning a longer trip in southern and East Africa, Michelin's 1:4,000,000 map 955 (Africa Central and South) is very useful.

Macmillan publishes a series of maps to the wildlife parks and these are not bad value at around KSh250 each (three are available in Europe – *Amboseli, Masai Mara* and *Tsavo East & West*). Tourist Maps also publishes a national park series for roughly the same price. They might look a bit flimsy

LEGAL AGE

- Age of majority: 18 years
- Voting age: 18 years
- Age of consent (heterosexual): 16 years
- Age of criminal responsibility: 8 years
- Drinking age: 18 years

on detail, but they include the numbered junctions in the national parks.

The most detailed and thorough maps are published by the Survey of Kenya, but the majority are out of date and many are out of print. Better bookshops in Nairobi usually have copies of the most important maps, including *Amboseli National Park* (SK 87), *Masai Mara Game Reserve* (SK 86), *Meru National Park* (SK 65), *Tsavo East National Park* (SK 82) and *Tsavo West National Park* (SK 78).

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Kenyan shilling (KSh), which is made up of 100 cents. Notes in circulation are KSh1000, 500, 200, 100, 50 and 20, and there are also new coins of KSh40, 20, 10, 5 and 1 in circulation. Old coins are much bigger and heavier, and come in denominations of KSh5 (seven-sided) and KSh1. The old 50¢, 10¢ and 5¢ coins are now pretty rare, as most prices are whole-shilling amounts. Note that most public telephones accept only new coins. Locally the shilling is commonly known as a 'bob', after the old English term for a 1-shilling coin.

The shilling has been relatively stable over the last few years, maintaining fairly constant rates against a falling US dollar and a strong British pound. Both these currencies are easy to change throughout the country, as is the euro, which is rapidly replacing the US dollar as the standard currency quoted for hotel prices on the coast. Cash is easy and quick to exchange at banks and foreign exchange bureaus, but carries a higher risk of theft, while travellers cheques are replaceable, but not as widely accepted and often carry high commission charges. Carrying a combination of these and a Visa ATM card will ensure you're never stuck for cash.

ATMs

Virtually all banks in Kenya now have ATMs at most branches, but their usefulness to travellers varies widely. Barclays Bank has easily the most reliable ATMs for international withdrawals, with a large network of ATMs covering most major Kenyan towns. They support MasterCard, Visa, Plus and Cirrus international networks.

Standard Chartered and Kenya Commercial Bank ATMs also accept Visa but not the other major providers, and are more likely to decline transactions. Whichever bank you use, the international data link still goes down occasionally, so don't rely on being able to withdraw money whenever you need it.

Cash

While most major currencies are accepted in Nairobi and Mombasa, once away from these two centres you'll run into problems with currencies other than US dollars, British pounds and euros. Away from the coast, you may even struggle to change euros. Play it safe and carry US dollars – it makes life much simpler.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are becoming increasingly popular, with old fraud-friendly, fully manual swipe machines slowly being replaced by electronic systems that dial up for every transaction. While there's less chance of someone making extra copies of chits this way, the connections fail with tedious regularity. Visa and MasterCard are now widely accepted, but it would be prudent to stick to upmarket hotels, restaurants and shopping centres to use them.

Be aware that credit-card companies will not post cards to Kenya, so you'll have to arrange a courier.

Moneychangers

The best places to change money are foreign exchange or 'forex' bureaux, which can be found everywhere and usually don't charge commission. Watch out for differing small bill (US\$10) and large bill (US\$100) rates; the larger bills usually get the better rates.

Banks also change money, but they charge large commissions and there's a fee per travellers cheque, so you're better off carrying larger denominations. Travellers cheque

rates may be better than at the bureaux, and you'll have the added bonus of being able to put your money away in the secure setting of the bank foyer. AmEx has offices in Mombasa and Nairobi, where you can buy and sell AmEx travellers cheques.

INTERNATIONAL TRANSFERS

Postbank, a branch of the Kenyan Post Office, is the regional agent for Western Union, the global money-transfer company. Using its service is an easy way (if the phones are working) of receiving money in Kenya. Handily, the sender pays all the charges and there's a Postbank in most towns, often within the post office itself or close by. Senders should contact **Western Union** (www.westernunion.com; Australia ☎ 1800-501500; New Zealand ☎ 0800-270000; UK ☎ 0800-833833; USA ☎ 1800-3256000) to find out the location of their nearest agent.

Tipping

Tipping is not common practice among Kenyans, but there's no harm in rounding up the bill by a few shillings if you're pleased with the service in a cheap restaurant. In tourist-oriented businesses a service charge of 10% is often added to the bill, along with the 16% VAT and 2% catering levy. Most tourist guides and all safari drivers and cooks will expect some kind of gratuity at the end of your tour or trip. As fares are negotiated in advance, taxi drivers do not need to be tipped unless they provide exceptional service.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Photographing people remains a sensitive issue in Kenya. Some tribal groups request money for you to take their photo.

You should never get your camera out at border crossings or near government or army buildings; even bridges can sometimes be classed as sensitive areas.

Film & Equipment

You'll find Kodak and Fuji 100, 200 and 400 ASA (ISO) print and slide film widely available in Nairobi, but even 100 ISO slide film is hard to find in Mombasa. If you plan to use 64 or 800 ASA film, bring it from home. As an indication of price, 36-exposure slide film in Nairobi costs about KSh400; 36-exposure colour print film is

cheaper at KSh250 to KSh350. Watch out for out-of-date batches.

Both VHS and Hi-8 video film is available in Nairobi and Mombasa, but it's relatively expensive. You may also be able to find memory cards and other accessories for digital and DV cameras, but again prices are high and quality is not guaranteed.

Film Processing

Shops and booths offering film processing are popping up in small towns and villages all over Kenya. In addition, there are plenty of one-hour film-processing labs in Nairobi, and at least one in all other major towns. They can handle any film speeds, but results can vary. Depending on the print size, processing and printing costs about KSh480 to KSh650 for a 36-exposure film. E6 slide processing can only be done in Nairobi and costs around KSh450 for a 36-exposure film.

POST

The Kenyan postal system is run by the government Postal Corporation of Kenya, now rebranded as the dynamic-sounding Posta. Letters sent from Kenya rarely go astray, but can take up to two weeks to reach Australia or the USA. Incoming letters to Kenya take anywhere from four days to a week to reach the poste-restante service in Nairobi.

The following table lists airmail rates (in KSh) for items posted from Kenya:

Item	East Africa	Europe	USA & Australia
letter	55	75	95
small postcard	30	40	55
large postcard	55	75	95
aerogram	35	45	45

Note that there are different prices for large and small postcards – if in doubt, go with the large postcard price.

Parcels

If sent by surface mail, parcels take three to six months to reach Europe, while airmail parcels take around a week. As a rough guide, a 1kg parcel sent by air/surface mail would cost KSh1160/940 to East Africa, KSh1270/1030 to Europe and KSh1330/1070 to the rest of the world.

Most things arrive eventually, although there is still a problem with theft within the system. Curios, clothes and textiles will be OK, but if your parcel contains anything of obvious value, send it by courier. Posta has its own courier service, EMS, which is considerably cheaper than the big international courier companies.

Receiving Mail

Letters can be sent care of poste restante in any town. Make sure your correspondents write your name in block capitals and also underline the surname.

Some travellers use the **American Express Clients Mail Service** Mombasa (Map p314; ☎ 041-315405; Nairobi Express Kenya Ltd, PO Box 90631, Nkrumah Rd); Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-222906; Express Kenya Ltd, PO Box 40433, Hilton Hotel, Mama Ngina St) and this can be a useful, and more reliable, alternative. You'll need to have an AmEx card or be using its travellers cheques to avail yourself of this service.

TELEPHONE

The Kenyan fixed-line phone system, run by **Telkom Kenya** (www.telkom.co.ke), is more or less functional, but has been overtaken by the massive popularity of prepaid mobile phones.

International call rates from Kenya have come down recently, but are still relatively expensive, charged at a flat rate of US\$0.90 per minute during peak periods and US\$0.64 per minute off-peak to any destination. Operator-assisted calls are charged at the standard peak rate but are subject to a three-minute minimum. You can always dial direct using a phonecard. All phones should be able to receive incoming calls (the number is usually scrawled in the booth somewhere). Reverse-charge (collect) calls are possible, but only to countries that have set up free direct-dial numbers allowing you to reach the international operator in the country you are calling. Currently these include: the **UK** (☎ 0800-220441), the **USA** (☎ 0800-111, 0800-1112), **Canada** (☎ 0800-220114, 0800-220115), **New Zealand** (☎ 0800-220641) and **Switzerland** (☎ 0800-220411).

The minimum charge for a local call from a payphone is KSh5 for 97 seconds, while long-distance rates vary depending on the distance. When making a local call from a public phone, make sure you put a

coin into the slot first. Calls to Tanzania and Uganda are priced as long-distance calls, not international.

For the international dialling code, see Quick Reference inside the front cover of this book.

Mobile Phones

An estimated 80% of all calls here are now made on mobile phones, and coverage is good in all but the furthest rural areas. Kenya uses the GSM 900 system, which is compatible with Europe and Australia but not with the North American GSM 1900 system. If you have a GSM phone, check with your service provider about using it in Kenya, and beware of high roaming charges. Remember that you will generally be charged for receiving calls abroad as well as for making them.

If your phone isn't locked into a network, you can pick up a prepaid starter pack from one of the Kenyan mobile-phone companies; the main players are **Safaricom** (www.safaricom.co.ke) and **CelTel** (www.ke.celTel.com). A SIM card will cost about KSh100, and you can then buy top-up 'scratchcards' from shops and booths across the country. An international SMS costs around KSh10, and voice charges vary according to tariff, time and destination of call.

You can easily buy a handset anywhere in Kenya, generally unlocked and with SIM card. Prices start around KSh2500 for a very basic model.

Mobile-phone numbers have a four-digit prefix beginning with 07.

Phonecards

With the new Telkom Kenya phonecards, any phone can now be used for prepaid calls – you just have to dial the **access number** (☎ 0844), and enter in the number and passcode on the card. There are booths selling the cards all over the country. Cards come in denominations of KSh200, KSh500, KSh1000 and KSh2000, and call charges are slightly more expensive than for standard lines (peak/off-peak US\$1/70¢).

TIME

Time in Kenya is GMT/UTC plus three hours year-round. You should also be aware of the concept of 'Swahili time', which perversely is six hours out of kilter with the rest of the world. Noon and midnight are

6 o'clock (*saa sitta*) Swahili time, and 7am and 7pm are 1 o'clock (*saa moja*). Just add or subtract six hours from whatever time you are told; Swahili doesn't distinguish between am and pm. You don't come across this often unless you speak Swahili, but you still need to be prepared for it.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local Tourist Offices

Considering the extent to which the country relies on tourism, it's incredible to think that, at the time of writing, there was still no tourist office in Nairobi. There are a handful of information offices elsewhere in the country, ranging from helpful private concerns to underfunded government offices; most can at least provide basic maps of the town, and brochures on local businesses and attractions.

i-Point Diani Beach (Map p323; ☎ 040-3202234; Barclays Centre)

Lamu (Map p342; ☎ 042-633449) Off Kenyatta Rd.

Malindi (Map p337; ☎ 042-20689; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd)

Mombasa (Map p312; ☎ 041-225428; mcta@ikenya.com; Moi Ave)

Tourist Offices Abroad

The Ministry of Tourism maintains a number of overseas offices.

Canada (☎ 905-891 3909; www.kcocanada.org; 1599 Hurontario St, Ste 100, Mississauga, Ontario L5G 4S1)

Germany (☎ 089-23662194; think@magnum.de; c/o The Magnum Group, Herzogspitalstrade 5, D-80331 Munich)

Italy (☎ 02-481 02 361; kenya@adams.it; c/o Adam & Partner Italia, Via Salaino 12, 20144 Milano)

Netherlands (☎ 020-421 26 68; kenia@travelmc.com; Leliegracht 20, 1015 DG Amsterdam)

Spain (☎ 93-292 06 55; kenya@ketal.com; c/o Tuset 10, 304a, 08006 Barcelona)

UK (☎ 020-7836 7738; kenya@iituk.co.uk; 69 Monmouth St, London WC2H 9JW)

USA (☎ 1-866-44-53692; infousa@magicalkenya.com; Carlson Destination Marketing Services, PO Box 59159 Minneapolis, MN 55459-8257)

VISAS

Visas are now required by almost all visitors to Kenya, including Europeans, Australians, New Zealanders, Americans and Canadians, although citizens from a few smaller Commonwealth countries are exempt. Visas are valid for three months from the date of entry and can be obtained on

arrival at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. The visa fee is UK£35 or US\$50 for a single-entry visa, and UK£70 or US\$100 for multiple entries. If you have any other currencies, you'll have to change them into Kenyan shillings. Tourist visas can be extended for a further three-month period, but seven-day transit visas (US\$20) cannot.

It's also possible to get visas from Kenyan diplomatic missions overseas, but you should apply well in advance, especially if you're doing it by mail. Visas are usually valid for entry within three months of the date of issue. Applications for Kenyan visas are simple and straightforward in Tanzania and Uganda, and payment is accepted in local currency. Visas can also be issued on arrival at the land borders with Uganda and Tanzania.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be renewed at immigration offices during normal office hours, and extensions are usually issued on a same-day basis. Staff at the immigration offices are generally friendly and helpful, but the process takes a while. You'll need two passport photos and KSh2200 for a three-month extension. You also need to fill out a form registering as an alien if you're going to be staying more than 90 days. Immigration offices are only open Monday to Friday; note that the smaller offices may sometimes refer travellers back to Nairobi or Mombasa for visa extensions.

Local immigration offices:

Kisumu (Map p398; 1st fl, Reinsurance Plaza, cnr Jomo Kenyatta Hwy & Gginga Odinga Rd)

Lamu (Map p342; ☎ 042-633032) Off Kenyatta Rd.

Malindi (Map p337; ☎ 042-30876; Mama Ngina Rd)

Mombasa (Map p312; ☎ 041-311745; Uhuru ni Kari Bldg, Mama Ngina Dr)

Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-222022; Nyayo House, cnr Kenyatta Ave & Uhuru Hwy)

Visas for Onward Travel

Since Nairobi is a common gateway city to East Africa and the city centre is easy to get around, many travellers spend some time here picking up visas for other countries that they intend to visit. If you are going to do this, you need to plan ahead of time and call the embassy to confirm the hours that visa applications are received (these change

frequently in Nairobi). Most embassies will want you to pay visa fees in US dollars (see p441 for contact details).

Just because a country has an embassy or consulate here, it doesn't necessarily mean you can get that country's visa. The borders with Somalia and Sudan are both closed, so you'll have to go to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia if you want a Sudanese visa, and Somali visas are unlikely to be available for the foreseeable future.

For Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, three-month visas are readily available in Nairobi and cost US\$50 for most nationalities. Two passport photos are required for applications and visas can usually be issued the same day.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Within Kenyan society, women are poorly represented in positions of power, and the few high-profile women in politics run the same risks of violence as their male counterparts. However, in their day-to-day lives, Kenyans are generally respectful towards women, although white women in bars will attract a lot of interest from would-be suitors. Most are just having a go and will give up if you tell them you aren't interested. The only place you are likely to have problems is at the beach resorts on the coast, where women may be approached by male prostitutes as well as local romances. It's always best to cover your legs and shoulders when away from the beach so as not to offend local sensibilities.

With the upsurge in crime in Nairobi and along the coast, women should avoid walking around at night. The ugly fact is that while men are likely just to be robbed without violence, rape is a real risk for women. Lone night walks along the beach or through quiet city streets are a recipe for disaster, and criminals usually work in gangs, so take a taxi, even if you're in a group.

Regrettably, black women in the company of white men are often assumed to be prostitutes, and can face all kinds of discrimination from hotels and security guards, as well as approaches from Kenyan hustlers offering to help rip off the white 'customer'. Again, the worst of this can be avoided by taking taxis between hotels and restaurants etc.

WORK

It's difficult, although by no means impossible, for foreigners to find jobs. Apart from voluntary and conservation work, which you usually pay to participate in, the most likely areas for gainful employment are the safari business, teaching, advertising and journalism. As in most countries, the rule is that if an African can be found to do the job, there's no need to hire a foreigner.

Work permits and resident visas are not easy to arrange. A prospective employer may be able to sort out the necessary paperwork for you, but otherwise you'll find yourself spending a lot of time and money at the **immigration office** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-222022; Nyayo House, cnr Kenyatta Ave & Uhuru Hwy) in Nairobi.

TRANSPORT IN KENYA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Unless you are travelling overland from southern Africa or Egypt, flying is by far the most convenient way to get to Kenya. Nairobi is a major African hub, and flights between Kenya and the rest of Africa are easy to come by and relatively cheap. Most overland routes pass through several war zones and should only be considered after some serious planning and preparation.

For information on getting to Kenya from outside East Africa, see the Transport in East Africa chapter (p631).

Entering Kenya

Entering Kenya is generally straightforward, particularly at the international airports, which are no different from most Western terminals. Visas are typically available on arrival for most nationalities (passport photos required), but you should contact your nearest Kenyan diplomatic office to get the most up-to-date information. Exchange offices or moneychangers are always present, and visa fees can be paid in local currency or US dollars. If you enter Nairobi with no onward or return ticket, you may run foul of immigration and be forced to buy one on the spot – an expensive exercise.

Passport

There are no restrictions on which nationalities can enter Kenya. Citizens of Tanzania, Uganda, the Republic of Ireland, Rwanda,

Scandinavia, Sudan and certain Commonwealth countries did not require visas at the time of writing; see p446 and check the latest situation before travelling.

Air

Most international flights to and from Nairobi are handled by **Jomo Kenyatta International Airport** (NBO; ☎ 020-825400; www.kenyaairports.co.ke), 15km southeast of the city. By African standards it's a pretty well-organised place, with two international terminals, a smaller domestic terminal, and an incredible number of shops offering duty-free and expensive souvenirs, snacks and Internet access.

Some flights between Nairobi and Kilimanjaro International Airport or Mwanza in Tanzania, as well as many domestic flights, use **Wilson Airport** (WIL; ☎ 020-501941), which is 6km south of the city on Langata Rd. The other arrival point in the country is **Moi International Airport** (MBA; ☎ 041-433211) in Mombasa, 9km west of the city centre, but apart from flights to Zanzibar this is mainly used by charter airlines and domestic flights.

Kenya Airways is the main national and regional carrier, and has a generally good safety record. There are good connections from Nairobi to most regions of Africa: Kenya Airways and the relevant national airlines serve everywhere from Abidjan to Yaoundé at least a few times a week.

Airlines flying to and from Kenya, with offices in Nairobi except where otherwise indicated:

Air India (airline code AI; Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-340925; www.airindia.com) Hub: Mumbai.

Air Malawi (airline code QM; ☎ 020-240965; www.airmalawi.net) Hub: Lilongwe.

Air Zimbabwe (airline code UM; ☎ 020-339522; www.airzim.co.zw) Hub: Harare.

Airkenya (airline code QP; ☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) Hub: Wilson Airport, Nairobi. Kilimanjaro only.

British Airways (airline code BA; Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-244430; www.british-airways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

Daallo Airlines (airline code D3; ☎ 020-317318; www.daallo.com) Hub: Hargeisa.

Egypt Air (airline code MS; Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-226821; www.egyptair.com.eg) Hub: Cairo.

Emirates (airline code EK; Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-211187; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai.

Ethiopian Airlines (airline code ET; Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-330837; www.ethiopianairlines.com) Hub: Addis Ababa.

Gulf Air (airline code GF; ☎ 020-241123; www.gulfairco.com) Hub: Abu Dhabi.

Kenya Airways (airline code KQ; Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-32074100; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi.

KLM (airline code KL; Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-32074100; www.klm.com) Hub: Amsterdam.

Oman Air (airline code WY; Map p314; ☎ 041-221444; www.oman-air.com) Hub: Muscat. Office in Mombasa.

Precision Air (airline code PW; ☎ 020-602561; www.precisionairtz.com) Hub: Dar es Salaam.

Rwandair (airline code WB; ☎ 0733-740703; www.rwandair.com) Hub: Kigali.

Safarilink Aviation (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) Hub: Wilson Airport, Nairobi. Kilimanjaro only.

SN Brussels Airlines (airline code SN; ☎ 020-4443070; www.flysn.com) Hub: Brussels.

South African Airways (airline code SA; ☎ 020-229663; www.saakkenya.com) Hub: Johannesburg.

Swiss International Airlines (airline code SR; ☎ 020-3744045; www.swiss.com) Hub: Zurich.

Land

BUS

Entering Kenya by bus is possible on several major routes, and it's generally a breeze: while you need to get off the bus to sort out any necessary visa formalities, you'll rarely be held up for too long at the border. That said, arranging your visa in advance can save you time and a few angry glares from your fellow passengers.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Crossing land borders with your own vehicle is straightforward as long as you have the necessary paperwork; see p452 for details on requirements and general road rules. Petrol, spare parts and repair shops are readily available at all border towns, though if you're coming from Ethiopia you should plan your supplies carefully, as stops are few and far between on the rough northern roads.

If you're planning to ship your vehicle to Kenya, be aware that port charges in Kenya are very high. There are numerous shipping agents in Nairobi and Mombasa willing to arrange everything for you, but check all the costs in advance.

TO/FROM ETHIOPIA Border Crossings

With the ongoing problems in Sudan and Somalia, Ethiopia offers the only viable overland route into Kenya from the north.

The security situation around the main entry point at Moyale is changeable, and although the border is usually open, security problems have forced its closure several times. Cattle- and goat-rustling are rife in the area, triggering frequent cross-border tribal wars, so check the security situation carefully before attempting this crossing.

From immigration on the Ethiopian side of town it's a 2km walk to the customs posts. Be aware that a yellow-fever vaccination is required to cross either border at Moyale. Unless you fancy being vaccinated at the border, get your jabs in advance and keep the yellow-fever certificate with your passport. A cholera vaccination may also be required. If you're travelling in the other direction, through Ethiopia to Sudan, you'll have to go to Addis Ababa to get your Sudanese visa.

Those coming to Kenya with their own vehicle could also enter at Fort Buna, on the northeastern tip of Lake Turkana (just a point on the map). However, it's a risky route and fuel stops are few and far between. There is no border post, so you must already possess a Kenyan visa and get it stamped on arrival in Nairobi; immigration officials are quite used to this, although not having an Ethiopian exit stamp can be a problem if you want to re-enter Ethiopia.

Addis Ababa

If you don't have your own transport to Moyale, lifts can be arranged with the trucks from Isiolo for around KSh1000.

On the Ethiopian side of the border, a bus leaves for Addis Ababa (Birr78.6) each morning around 5.30am. The two-day journey is broken with a night's sleep at Awasa or Shashemene.

TO/FROM SUDAN

Recent progress in the Sudanese peace process has raised many people's hopes for the future, but Kenya's neighbour to the north is still far from untroubled. If things continue to improve, the Kenya-Sudan border may reopen, but at time of writing it was still only possible to travel between the two countries by air or via Ethiopia.

TO/FROM TANZANIA

Border Crossings

The main land borders between Kenya and Tanzania are at Namanga, Taveta, Isebania

and Lunga Lunga, and can be reached by public transport. There is also a crossing from the Serengeti to the Masai Mara, which can only be undertaken with your own vehicle, and one at Loitokitok, which is closed to tourists.

Main bus companies serving Tanzania:

Akamba (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-340430; akamba_prs@skyweb.co.ke; Nairobi)

Davanu Shuttle (☎ 057-8142; Arusha) Arusha/Moshi shuttle buses.

Easy Coach (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-210711; easycoach@wananchi.com; Nairobi)

Riverside Shuttle Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-229618); Arusha (☎ 057-2639) Arusha/Moshi shuttle buses.

Scandinavia Express (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-247131; Nairobi)

Arusha & Moshi

From Nairobi, there are frequent services to Moshi, travelling via Arusha in Tanzania. Most leave from the hectic River Rd area in Nairobi; thefts are common there so watch your baggage. Easy Coach is a good option, as services leave from its office compound near Nairobi railway station. Buses from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam (see p450) also travel via Arusha, and small local buses leave from Accra Rd every morning. The average cost of these services is KSh700 to KSh1000 to Arusha and KSh1000 to KSh1200 to Moshi, more for the real luxury liners.

It's also easy, though less convenient, to do this journey in stages, since the Kenyan and Tanzanian border posts at Namanga are right next to each other and regularly served by public transport.

If you're coming from Mombasa, there are a number of rickety local buses to Arusha and Moshi that leave every evening from in front of the Mwembe Tayari Health Centre on Jomo Kenyatta Ave (Map p314). Fares are around KSh500 to Moshi (six hours) and KSh800 to Arusha (7½ hours). These buses cross the border at Taveta, which can also be reached by *matatu* from Voi (see p308).

Mwanza

A sealed road runs all the way from Kisumu to just short of Mwanza in Tanzania, offering a convenient route to the Tanzanian shore of Lake Victoria. From Nairobi, probably the most comfortable way to go is with Scandinavia Express or Akamba; prices cost

around KSh1000 to KSh2000, and the journey should take roughly 12 hours.

From Kisumu, regular *matatus* serve the Tanzanian border at Isebania/Sirari (KSh350, four hours); local services head to Mwanza from the Tanzanian side. Buses going direct to Mwanza (KSh500, four hours) leave frequently from Kisii.

Tanga & Dar es Salaam

Several Kenyan companies have buses from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam. Scandinavia Express and Akamba both have reliable daily services from their offices in the River Rd area, with prices ranging from KSh1600 to real luxury coaches at KSh3000. Journey time is around 16 to 18 hours with stops.

Numerous buses run along the coast road from Mombasa to Tanga and Dar, crossing the border at Lunga Lunga/Horohoro. Most people travel on through buses from Mombasa, but it's easy enough to do the journey in stages by local bus or *matatu* if you'd rather make a few stops along the way.

In Mombasa, buses to Dar es Salaam leave from around Jomo Kenyatta Ave, near the junction with Mwembe Tayari Rd (Map p314). The average cost is around KSh1000 to Dar (eight hours) and KSh500 to Tanga (two hours), depending on the company you travel with and the standard of the buses.

In Dar es Salaam, buses leave from the Mnazi Mmoja bus stand on Bibi Titi Mohamed Rd, near Uhuru and Lindi Sts, along the southeast side of Mnazi Mmoja Park.

If you want to do the journey in stages, there are frequent *matatus* to Lunga Lunga from the Mombasa ferry jetty at Likoni. A *matatu* can then take you the 6.5km between the two border posts. On the Tanzanian side, there are regular *matatus* from Horohoro to Tanga (TSh200).

TO/FROM UGANDA Border Crossings

The main border post for overland travellers is Malaba, with Busia an alternative if you are travelling via Kisumu. Numerous bus companies run between Nairobi and Kampala, or you can do the journey in stages via either of the border towns.

Main bus companies serving Uganda:

Akamba (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-340430; akamba_prs@skyweb.co.ke)

Falcon (Map p314; ☎ 020-229692)

Scandinavia Express (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-247131)

Kampala

Various companies cover the Nairobi to Kampala route. From Nairobi, and at the top end of the market, Scandinavia Express and Akamba have buses at least once daily, ranging from ordinary buses at around KSh1000 to full-blown luxury services with drinks and movies, hovering around the KSh2000 mark. All buses take about 10 to 12 hours and prices include a meal at the halfway point. Akamba also has a service to Mbale in Uganda (KSh800, 10 hours).

Various other companies have cheaper basic services leaving from the Accra Rd area in Nairobi. Prices start at around KSh800 and journey times are more or less the same as the bigger companies, with a few extra allowances for delays and general tardiness.

If you want to do the journey in stages, Akamba has morning and evening buses from Nairobi to Malaba, and a daily direct bus from here to Kampala (KSh450, 4½ hours). There are also regular *matatus* to Malaba (KSh650) from Cross Rd, Nairobi.

The Ugandan and Kenyan border posts at Malaba are about 1km apart, so you can walk or take a *boda-boda*. Once you get across the border, there are frequent *matatus* until the late afternoon to Kampala, Jinja and Tororo.

Buses and *matatus* also run from Nairobi or Kisumu to Busia, from where there are regular connections to Kampala (KSh500, four hours) and Jinja.

Tours

It's possible to get to Kenya as part of an overland truck tour originating in Europe or other parts of Africa (many also start in Nairobi bound for other places in Africa). See p83 for more details on tours and safaris.

Most companies are based in the UK or South Africa, but Flight Centres is a good local operator, with offices in Nairobi, Cape Town and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Trips can last from just a few days to epic grand tours of up to 13 weeks.

Acacia Expeditions (UK ☎ 020-7706 4700; www.acacia-africa.com)

African Routes (South Africa ☎ 031-569 3911; www.africanroutes.co.za)

Dragoman (UK ☎ 01728-861133; www.dragoman.co.uk)

Explore Worldwide (UK ☎ 01252-760000; www.explore-worldwide.com)

Flight Centres Cape Town (☎ 021-385 1530; cpt@africa-travel.co.com); Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-210024; www.flightcentres-kenya.com); Victoria Falls (☎ 013-40172; vfa@africa-travel.co.com)

Gametrackers Ltd (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-338927; www.gametrackersafaris.com)

Guerba Expeditions (UK ☎ 01373-826611; www.guerba.co.uk)

GETTING AROUND

Air

Four domestic operators of varying sizes, including the national carrier Kenya Airways, now run scheduled flights within Kenya. All appear to have a clean slate safetywise. Destinations served are predominantly around the coast and the popular southern national parks, where the highest density of tourist activity takes place.

Book well in advance (essential during the tourist high season) with all these airlines. You should also remember to reconfirm return flights 72 hours before departure, especially when connecting with an international flight.

Airlines flying domestically:

AirKenya (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) Amboseli, Kiwayu, Lamu, Lewa Downs, Masai Mara, Malindi, Meru, Nanyuki, Samburu.

Kenya Airways (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-3274100; www.kenya-airways.com) Kisumu, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa.

Mombasa Air Safari (☎ 041-433061; www.mombasa-air-safari.com) Amboseli, Lamu, Malindi, Masai Mara, Mombasa, Tsavo, Ukunda.

Safarilink (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) Amboseli, Chyulu Hills, Kiwayu, Lamu, Lewa Downs, Masai Mara, Naivasha, Nanyuki, Samburu, Tsavo West.

Bicycle

Loads of Kenyans get around by bicycle, and while it can be tough for those not used to the roads or the climate, plenty of hardy visiting cyclists do tour the country every year. If you intend to cycle here, do as the locals do and get off the road whenever you hear a car coming. No matter how experienced you are, it would be suicidal to attempt the road from Nairobi to Mombasa on a bicycle.

The hills of Kenya are not particularly steep but can be long and hard. You can expect to cover around 80km per day in the hills of the Western Highlands, somewhat

more where the country is flatter. Hell's Gate National Park, near Naivasha, is particularly popular for mountain biking.

It's possible to hire road and mountain bikes in an increasing number of places, usually for less than KSh500 per day. Few places require a deposit, unless their machines are particularly new or sophisticated. Several tour operators now offer cycling safaris (see p88 for details).

Boat

DHOW

Sailing on a traditional Swahili dhow along the East African coast is one of Kenya's most memorable experiences, and unlike Lake Victoria certain traditional routes are very much still in use.

Dhows are commonly used to get around the islands in the Lamu archipelago (p356) and the mangrove islands south of Mombasa (p326). For the most part, these operate more like dhow safaris than public transport. Although some trips are luxurious, the trips out of Lamu are more basic.

Most of the smaller boats rely on the wind to get around, so it's quite common to end up becalmed until the wind picks up again. The more commercial boats, however, have been fitted with outboard motors so that progress can be made even when there's no wind. Larger dhows are all motorised and some of them don't even have sails.

LAKE VICTORIA

There has been speculation for years that ferry transport will start again on Lake Victoria, but for the foreseeable future the only regular services operating are motorised canoes going to Mfangano Island from Mbita Point, near Homa Bay. An occasional ferry service runs between Kisumu and Homa Bay.

Bus

Kenya has an extensive network of long- and short-haul bus routes, with particularly good coverage of the areas around Nairobi, the coast and the western regions. Services thin out the further away from the capital you get, particularly in the north, and there are still plenty of places where you'll be reliant on *matatus*.

Fares start around KSh80 for an hour-long journey between nearby towns. At the other end of the scale, you'll seldom pay more

than KSh500 for a standard journey, but so-called 'executive' services on the overnight Nairobi–Mombasa route can command prices of up to KSh1500, almost as much as the equivalent international services.

Buses are operated by a variety of private and state-owned companies that offer varying levels of comfort, convenience and roadworthiness. They're considerably cheaper than taking the train or flying, and as a rule services are frequent, fast and often quite comfortable. However, many travellers are put off taking buses altogether by the diabolical state of Kenyan roads.

In general, if you travel during daylight hours, buses are a fairly safe way to get around, and you'll certainly be safer in a bus than in a *matatu*, simply due to its size. The best coaches are saved for long-haul and international routes, and offer DVD movies, drinks, toilets and reclining airline-style seats. On the shortest local routes, however, you may find yourself on something resembling a burnt-out prison bus.

Whatever kind of conveyance you find yourself in, don't sit at the back (you'll be thrown around like a rag doll), or right at the front (you'll be the first to die in a head-on collision, plus you'll be able to see the oncoming traffic, which is usually terrifying).

KBS, the government bus line, runs the local buses in Nairobi and also offers long-haul services to most major towns around the country. Its buses tend to be slower than those of the private companies, but are probably safer for this reason. Of the private companies, Akamba has the most comprehensive network, and has a good, but not perfect, safety record. Easy Coach is another private firm quickly establishing a solid reputation for efficiency and comfort.

There are a few security considerations to think about when taking a bus in Kenya. Some routes, most notably from Malindi to Lamu and Isiolo to Marsabit, have been prone to attacks by *shifitas* in the past; check things out locally before you travel. Another possible risk is drugged food and drink: if you want to reach your destination with all your belongings, politely refuse any offers of drinks or snacks from strangers.

Main bus companies operating in Kenya: **Akamba** (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-340430; akamba_prs@skyweb.co.ke) Eldoret, Kakamega, Kericho, Kisii, Kisumu, Kitale, Machakos, Mombasa, Nairobi, Namanga.

Busscar (☎ 020-227650) Kilifi, Kisumu, Malindi, Mombasa, Nairobi.

Coastline Safaris (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-217592; coastpeee@kenya.com) Kakamega, Kisumu, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Voi.

Easy Coach (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-210711; easycoach@wananchi.com) Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisumu, Kitale, Nairobi.

Eldoret Express (☎ 020-6766886) Busia, Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Kitale, Malaba, Nairobi.

Falcon (Map p314; ☎ 020-229662) Kilifi, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Nairobi.

KBS (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-229707) Busia, Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Kitale, Malaba, Mombasa, Nairobi.

Mombasa Metropolitan Bus Services (Metro Mombasa; ☎ 041-2496008) Kilifi, Kwale, Malindi, Mombasa, Mtwapa.

Car & Motorcycle

Many travellers bring their own vehicles into Kenya as part of overland trips and, expense notwithstanding, it's a great way to see the country at your own pace. Otherwise, there are numerous car-hire companies who can hire you anything from a small hatchback to Toyota Land Cruiser 4WDs, although hire rates are some of the highest in the world.

A few expats have off-road (trail) motorcycles, but they aren't seen as a serious means of transport, which is a blessing considering the lethal nature of the roads.

DRIVING LICENCE

An International Driving Permit (IDP) is not necessary in Kenya, but can be useful. If you have a British photocard licence, be sure to bring the counterfoil, as the date you passed your driving test – something car-hire companies here may want to know – isn't printed on the card itself.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

At the time of research in Nairobi regular petrol was KSh70 per litre, super KSh75 and diesel KSh65. Rates are generally lower outside the capital, but can creep up in remote areas, where petrol stations are often scarce and you may end up buying supplies out of barrels from roadside vendors.

Anyone who is planning to take their own vehicle with them needs to check in advance what spare parts are likely to be available. Even if it's an older model, local suppliers in Kenya are very unlikely to have every little part you might need.

HIRE

Hiring a vehicle to tour Kenya (or at least the national parks) is an expensive way of seeing the country, but it does give you freedom of movement and is sometimes the only way of getting to the more remote parts of the country. However, unless you're sharing with a sufficient number of people it's likely to cost more than you'd pay for an organised camping safari with all meals included.

Unless you're just planning on travelling on the main routes between towns, you'll need a 4WD vehicle. None of the car-hire companies will let you drive 2WD vehicles on dirt roads, including those in the national parks, and if you ignore this proscription and have an accident you will be personally liable for any damage to the vehicle.

A minimum age of between 23 and 25 years usually applies for hirers. Some companies prefer a licence with no endorsements or criminal convictions, and most require you to have been driving for at least two years. You will also need acceptable ID, such as a passport.

It's generally true to say the more you pay for a vehicle, the better condition it will be in. The larger companies are usually in a stronger financial position to keep their fleet in good order. Whoever you hire from, be sure to check the brakes, tyres (including the spare), windscreen wipers and lights before you set off.

The other factor to consider is what the company will do for you (if anything) if you have a serious breakdown. The major hire companies *may* deliver a replacement vehicle and make arrangements for recovery of the other vehicle at their expense, but with most companies you'll have to get the vehicle fixed and back on the road yourself, and then try and claim a refund.

Costs

Starting rates for hire almost always sound very reasonable, but once you factor in mileage and the various types of insurance you'll be lucky to pay less than KSh6000 per day for a saloon car or KSh8000 per day for a small 4WD. As elsewhere in the world, rates come down rapidly if you take the car for more than a few days.

Vehicles are usually hired with either an allowance of 100km to 200km per day (in

which case you'll pay an extra fee for every kilometre you go over), or with unlimited kilometres, which is often the best way to go. Rates are usually quoted without insurance, and you'll be given the option of paying around KSh900 to KSh1500 per day for insurance against collision damage and theft. It would be financial suicide to hire a car in Kenya without both kinds of insurance. Otherwise, you'll be responsible for the full value of the vehicle if it's stolen or damaged.

Even if you have collision and theft insurance, you'll still be liable for an excess of KSh2000 to KSh150,000 (depending on the company) if something happens to the vehicle. Always check this before signing. You can usually reduce the excess to zero by paying another KSh900 per day for an Excess Loss Waiver. Note that tyres, damaged windscreens and loss of the tool kit are always the hirer's responsibility.

Most companies can provide drivers for around KSh1000 per day; the big advantage of this is that the car is then covered by the company's own insurance, so you don't have to pay any of the various waivers and will not be liable for any excess in the case of an accident. In addition, having someone in the car who speaks Swahili, knows the roads and is used to Kenyan driving conditions can be absolutely priceless, especially in remote areas.

The deposit required on hired vehicles can vary significantly. It can be as much as the total estimated hire charges plus whatever the excess is on the Collision Damage Waiver (CDW). You can cover this with cash, signed travellers cheques (returnable) or credit card.

If you want to hire a vehicle in one place and drop it off in another there will be additional charges. These vary depending on the vehicle, the company, and the pick-up and drop-off locations. In most cases, count on paying KSh10,000 between Nairobi and Mombasa and about KSh5000 between Mombasa and Malindi.

As a final sting in the tail, you'll be charged 16% VAT on top of the total cost of hiring the vehicle. Any repairs that you end up paying for will also have VAT on top, and if you don't return the vehicle with a full tank of petrol, the company will charge you twice the going rate to fill up.

Hire Agencies

At the top end of the market are some international companies. All have airport and/or town offices in Nairobi and Mombasa. Of these, Budget is the best value, though it's well worth paying for the Excess Loss Waiver.

Central Rent-a-Car is probably the best of the local firms, with a well-maintained fleet of fairly new vehicles and a good back-up service. Its excess liability is also the lowest (KSh2000), but vehicles are self-drive only, with no drivers available. Apart from Central, all of these companies have steep excesses.

Most safari companies will also hire out their vehicles, though you have few of the guarantees that you would with the companies listed here. **Let's Go Travel** (☎ 020-340331; www.letsgosafari.com) organises reliable car hire at favourable rates through partner firms.

On the coast, it is possible to hire motorcycles, scooters and quads at Diani Beach and Bamburi Beach.

Local and international hire companies:

Avenue Car Hire (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-313207; www.avenuecarhire.com)

Avis (Map pp280-1; ☎ 020-316061; www.avis.co.ke)

Budget (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-223581; www.budget-kenya.com)

Central Rent-a-Car (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-222888; www.carhirekenya.com)

Glory Car Hire (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-225024; www.glorycarhire.com)

Hertz (☎ 020-248777; www.hertz.co.ke)

PARKING

In small towns and villages parking is usually free, but there's a pay-parking system in Nairobi, Mombasa and other main towns. Attendants issue one-day parking permits for around KSh70, valid anywhere in town. If you don't get a permit you're liable to be wheel-clamped, and getting your vehicle back will cost you at least KSh2000. It's always worth staying in a hotel with secure parking if possible.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Road conditions vary widely in Kenya, from flat smooth highways to dirt tracks and steep rocky pathways. Many roads are severely eroded at the edges, reducing the carriageway to a single lane, which is usually occupied by whichever vehicle is bigger in

any given situation. The roads in the north and east of the country are particularly poor. The main Mombasa–Nairobi–Malaba road (A104) is badly worn due to the constant flow of traffic.

Roads in national parks are all *murram* (dirt) and have been eroded into bone-shaking corrugations through overuse by safari vehicles. Keep your speed down and be careful when driving after rain. Although some dirt roads can be negotiated in a 2WD vehicle, you'll be much safer in a 4WD.

ROAD HAZARDS

The biggest hazard on Kenyan roads is quite simply the other vehicles on them, and driving defensively is essential. Ironically, the most dangerous roads in Kenya are probably the well-maintained ones, which allow drivers to pick up enough speed to do really serious damage in a crash. On the worse roads, potholes are a dual problem: driving into them can damage your vehicle or cause you to lose control, and sudden erratic avoidance manoeuvres from other vehicles are a constant threat.

On all roads, be very careful of pedestrians and cyclists – you don't want to contribute any more to the death toll on Kenya's roads. Animals are another major hazard in rural areas.

If you're driving in remote areas, acacia thorns are a common problem, as they'll pierce even the toughest tyres. The slightest breakdown can leave you stranded for hours in the bush, so always carry drinking water, emergency food and, if possible, spare fuel.

Certain routes have a reputation for banditry, particularly the Garsen–Garissa–Thika road, which is still essentially off limits to travellers, and the dirt track from Amboseli National Park to Tsavo West National Park, where you're usually required to join a convoy. The roads from Isiolo to Marsabit and Moyale and from Malindi to Lamu have improved considerably securitywise in the last few years, but you're still advised to seek local advice before using any of these routes.

ROAD RULES

You'll need your wits about you if you're going to tackle driving in Kenya. Driving practices here are some of the worst in the world and all are carried out at breakneck speed. Indicators, lights, horns and hand

signals can mean absolutely anything, and should never be taken at face value.

Kenyan drivers habitually drive on the wrong side of the road whenever they see a pothole, an animal or simply a break in the traffic – flashing your lights at the vehicle hurtling towards you should be enough to persuade the driver to get back into their own lane. Never drive at night unless you absolutely have to, as few cars have adequate headlights and the roads are full of pedestrians and cyclists. Drunk driving is also very common.

Note that foreign-registered vehicles with a seating capacity of more than six people are not allowed into Kenyan national parks and reserves. Jeeps should be fine, but camper vans may have problems.

Hitching

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk; it's safer to travel in pairs and let someone know where you are planning to go. Also, beware of drunken drivers.

On the other side of the wheel, foreign drivers will be approached all the time by Kenyan hitchhikers demanding free rides, and giving a lift to a carload of Maasai is certainly a memorable cultural experience.

Local Transport

BOAT

The only local boat service in regular use is the Likoni ferry between the mainland and Mombasa island, which runs throughout the day and night, and is free for foot passengers (vehicles pay a small toll).

BODA-BODA

Boda-bodas are common in areas where standard taxis are harder to find, and also operate in smaller towns and cities, such as Kisumu. There is a particular proliferation on the coast, where the bicycle boys also double as touts, guides and drug dealers in tourist areas. A short ride should never cost more than KSh20.

BUS

Nairobi is the only city with an effective municipal bus service, run by KBS. Routes cover all the suburbs and outlying areas dur-

ing daylight hours, and generally cost no more than KSh40.

MATATU

Local *matatus* are the main means of getting around for local people, and any reasonably sized city or town will have plenty of services covering every major road and suburb. Fares start at KSh10 and may reach KSh40 for longer routes in Nairobi.

Minibus transport is not unique to Kenya, but the *matatu* has raised it into a cultural phenomenon, and most Kenyans use them regularly for both local and intercity journeys. The vehicles themselves can be anything from dilapidated Peugeot 504 pick-ups with a taxi on the back to big 20-seater minibuses. The most common are white Nissan minibuses (many local people prefer the name 'Nissans' to *matatus*).

In the bad old days *matatus* were notorious for dangerous driving, overcrowding and general shady business, but in 2003 then Transport Minister John Michuki banned all *matatus* from the roads until they complied with a new set of laws, ensuring amazingly speedy results. *Matatus* must now be fitted with seatbelts and 80kph speed governors, conductors and drivers must wear clearly identifiable red shirts, route numbers must be clearly displayed and a 14-person capacity applies to vehicles that used to cram in as many as 30 people. Frequent police checks have also been brought in to enforce the rules.

The changes are immediately noticeable and represent an improvement of sorts, but it hasn't taken operators long to find loopholes. Many drivers still also chew *miraa* leaves to stay awake beyond what is a reasonable or safe time.

Apart from in the remote northern areas, where you'll rely on occasional buses or paid lifts on trucks, you can almost always find a *matatu* going to the next town or further afield, so long as it's not too late in the day. Simply ask around among the drivers at the local *matatu* stand or 'stage'. *Matatus* leave when full and the fares are fixed.

Wherever you're going, remember that most *matatu* crashes are head-on collisions – under no circumstances should you sit in the 'death seat' next to the *matatu* driver. Play it safe and sit in the middle seats away from the window.

SHARED TAXI (PEUGEOT)

Shared Peugeot taxis are less common but make a good alternative to *matatus*, though they're not subject to the same regulations. The vehicles are usually Peugeot 505 station wagons (hence the local name) that take seven to nine passengers and leave when full.

Peugeots take less time to reach their destinations than *matatus* as they fill quicker and go from point to point without stopping, and so are slightly more expensive. Many companies have offices around the Accra, Cross and River Rds area in Nairobi, and serve destinations mostly in the north and west of the country.

TAXI

Even the smallest Kenyan towns generally have at least one banged-up old taxi for easy access to outlying areas or even remoter villages, and you'll find taxis on virtually every corner in the larger cities, especially in Nairobi and Mombasa, where taking a taxi at night is virtually mandatory. Fares are invariably negotiable and start at around KSh200 for short journeys.

Train

The Uganda Railway was once the main artery of trade in East Africa, but these days the network has dwindled to two main routes, Nairobi–Kisumu and Nairobi–Mombasa. Both are night services of around 13 hours, much slower and less frequent than going by air or road but considerably more comfortable and significantly safer. The trip between Nairobi and Mombasa is still considered one of the great rail journeys in Africa.

CLASSES

There are three classes on Kenyan trains, but only 1st and 2nd class can be recommended. Note that passengers are divided up by gender.

First class consists of two-berth compartments with a washbasin, wardrobe, drinking water and a drinks service. Second class consists of plainer, four-berth compartments with a washbasin and drinking water. No

compartment can be locked from the outside, so remember not to leave any valuables lying around if you leave it for any reason. You might want to padlock your rucksack to something during dinner and breakfast. Always lock your compartment from the inside before you go to sleep. Third class seats only and security can be a real problem.

Passengers in 1st and 2nd class on the Mombasa line are treated to the full colonial experience, including a silver-service dinner in an old-fashioned dining car. Meals typically consist of stews, curries or roast chicken served with rice and vegetables, all dished up by uniformed waiters. There's always a vegetarian option. Tea and coffee is included; sodas (soft drinks), bottled water and alcoholic drinks are not, so ask the price before accepting that KSh1500 bottle of wine! Cold beer is available at all times in the dining car and can be delivered to your compartment.

COSTS

The only downside to the train is the price of tickets, over KSh3000 for 1st class on the Nairobi–Mombasa route, including meals (dinner and breakfast) and bedding. You can reduce this considerably by just paying for the seat, though you're missing out on the fun half of the experience that way. The Kisumu route is much less fancy, and 1st-class tickets cost around KSh1500. Reduced rates apply for children aged three to 11.

RESERVATIONS

You must book in advance for both 1st and 2nd class, otherwise you'll probably find there are no berths available; two to three days is usually sufficient. Visa credit cards are accepted for railway bookings. If you book by phone, you'll need to arrive early to pay for your ticket and make sure you're actually on the passenger list. Compartment and berth numbers are posted up about 30 minutes prior to departure.

There are **booking offices** (Mombasa ☎ 041-312220; Nairobi ☎ 020-221211) in major cities and at Kisumu railway station.

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