



Rift Valley

Raise a glass to toast Earth's failure. About eight million years ago, by repeating the process it had successfully used to tear the ancient continent of Pangaea into seven shards, Mother Earth tried to rip Africa in two. Africa bent, Africa buckled, but Africa never gave in.

Africa's battle scar, stretching thousands of kilometres from Ethiopia to Mozambique, forms a stunning landscape. Some of the most attractive wounds are in Kenya's Rift Valley, where serrated escarpments and volcanoes tower over ochre soils, grassy plains and soda lakes. Steam and fluids spurt from its surface at Lake Bogoria and Hell's Gate National Park.

The valley's fertile floor, dotted with large freshwater and soda lakes, is alive with some of Kenya's most spectacular wildlife. Lake Nakuru's shores are often dyed pink with hundreds of thousands of fluorescent flamingos wading in the shallows, while its forested slopes host bigger treats such as rhinos, giraffes, buffaloes, antelopes and leopards. And if you walk or cycle unguided through the 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 dormant volcanoes are rewarding and offer tremendous views over the rift. Similar views without the peaceful solitude are also available from the viewpoints signposted on the Old Naivasha Rd as it drops into the valley from the town of Limuru.

After visiting, we're sure you'll thank Mother Earth for her royal botch-up!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Realising that you're not wearing rose-coloured spectacles and that wildlife at **Lake Nakuru National Park** (p243) is truly that brilliant
- Attempting to squeeze crocodiles, hippos, a hunting fish eagle and an amazing sunrise into one photograph at **Lake Baringo** (p247)
- Dancing along the crater rim of **Mt Longonot** (p231) to a glorious Rift Valley audience 1000m below
- Staring slack-jawed atop a precipice overlooking **Menengai Crater** (p242), a place of past volcanic and tribal hostility
- Gaining an entirely new respect for nature while walking through the wild-life and striking gorges of **Hell's Gate National Park** (p237)



Geography

Kenya's Rift Valley is actually part of the Afro-Arabian rift system that 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–Congo (Zaire) border, Kivu on the Congo (Zaire)–Rwanda border, and Tanganyika on the Tanzania–Congo (Zaire) border, which joins the main system at the northern tip of Lake Malawi. The East African section of the rift failed and now only the Red Sea rift continues, slowly separating Africa from the Middle East.

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 line the valley. While most are now extinct, no fewer than thirty 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.

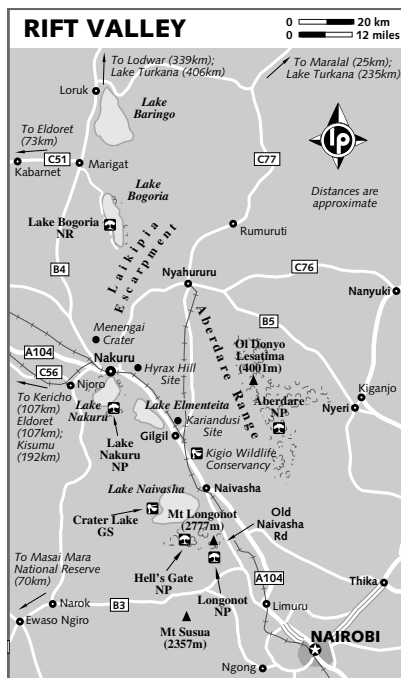
Besides providing fertile soil, the volcanic deposits have created alkaline waters in most Rift Valley lakes. These shallow soda lakes, formed by the valley's lack of decent drainage, experience high evaporation rates, which further concentrates the alkalinity. The strangely soapy and smelly waters are, 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).

Climate

Although slightly hotter than the Central Highlands, the Rift Valley enjoys a pleasant climate and temperatures typically don't surpass 28°C. Like the highlands, rain usually falls in two seasons: March to the beginning of June (the 'long rains') and October to the end of November (the 'short rains').

National Parks & Reserves

Lake Nakuru National Park (p243), with its sweeping pink shores of pecking flamingos,



regular rhino sightings and abundance of other wildlife, is the region's biggest hitter. While Hell's Gate National Park (p237) sees much fewer visitors, it does offer the unique opportunity to walk unguided through striking landscapes and among African plains wildlife in all their natural glory. Standing in stunning contrast to these two national parks is the harsh and desolate beauty of Lake Bogoria National Reserve (p246). Steam plumes rise from its hydrothermal shores, which play second home to Lake Nakuru's massive flamingo population.

Getting There & Away

While you can charter planes into Lake Nakuru National Park, the valley's close proximity to Nairobi means virtually everybody enters the region using the extensive road network. Regular buses and matatus (mini-buses) link the towns to Nairobi, western Kenya and the Central Highlands.

Getting Around

You'll have no trouble getting around this region. Convenient matatus and buses ply

all major (and most minor) routes. Most roads are in great shape, except the potholed A104 Nakuru–Naivasha section, though it's scheduled for resurfacing.

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 just a wee pup at 400,000 years of age.

Since the best vistas in the 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 (2776m) 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. Including time for gawking, this 11km trek should take about six hours.

Although security has improved and KWS (Kenya Wildlife Service) no longer require rangers to escort you, double-check the situation at the gate.

The basic **Oloongonot Campsite** (adult/child US\$8/5) sits just beyond the gate and has basic facilities (no water or firewood). The nearest roofed accommodation to the park is **Longonot Ranch** (☎ 050-50077; longonot@samawati.co.ke; full board s/d US\$250/370), which is a lovely old-style farmhouse and cottage built by one of Hemingway's wives. It's sublime, and even has a floodlit waterhole regularly patronised by giraffes, zebras and other plains animals.

The cheapest hotels are found in nearby Naivasha.

Getting There & Away

Driving, it's 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 (ask locals) to the park's access road. Continue south past Longonot village to the actual access road for a longer but more straightforward route. From there it's a 7km walk to the gate.

MT SUSUA

Less frequented than Longonot but more interesting, this unique volcano is well worth the effort of getting there. The steep outer

crater protects a second inner crater, whose rim peaks at 2357m and begs to be trekked. There's also a network of unexplored caves on the east side of the mountain.

There's no designated route and all land is owned by local Maasai, so you'll have to find someone to guide you in the nearby villages that dot the B3 Nairobi–Narok road. You'll need a 4WD to tackle the outer crater, although it's easy afterwards.

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 around nearby Lake Naivasha (p233) is more enjoyable.

The only conceivable reason to stop is for supplies en route to Lake Naivasha, as there are very limited stocks in the lakeshore road *dukas* (shops).

Information

Barclays Bank (Moi Ave) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh50 per leaf commission). With ATM.

Cyber Cafe (Kenyatta Ave; per hr KSh120) Slow connections, but open Sundays.

Kenya Commercial Bank (Moi Ave) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (1% commission, minimum charge KSh250). With ATM (Visa only).

Medical Clinic (Biashara Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Crude clinic and lab services.

Post office (Moi Ave) With card phones and Internet.

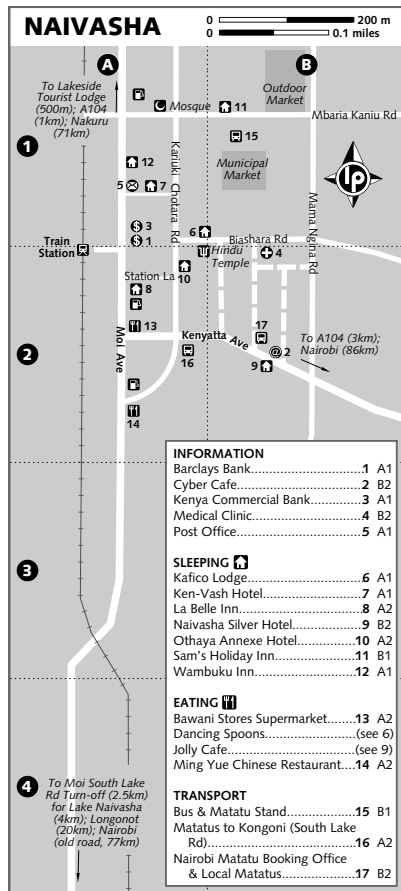
Sleeping BUDGET

We've punted the real dives (there were many) and chosen these.

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 the room after paying. The rooms are tattered and the toilets lack seats, but they're comfy enough. Security is good and if you use secure parking, you'll wake to a clean car (a KSh50 tip is appropriate).

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.

Othaya Annexe Hotel (☎ 0721-979916; Kariuki Chotara Rd; s KSh300) A bit brighter than Sam's,



but Othaya Annexe only has single rooms and lacks mozzie nets.

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.

Wambuku Inn (☎ 2030287; Moi Ave; s/d/tw KSh800/1200/1400) Although this place is better maintained than the Naivasha Silver Hotel, the rooms at the Wambuku are quite dark and overpriced.

MIDRANGE

Naivasha's midrange accommodation is pricier than average, but includes breakfast and secure parking.

La Belle Inn (☎ 2021007; Moi Ave; s/d KSh2500/2900) A classic colonial-style option, with rooms of various sizes sporting plank floors, local artwork and a level of cleanliness unseen anywhere else in town. Prices quoted include breakfast.

Ken-Vash Hotel (☎ 2030049; off Moi Ave; s/d/tw KSh1400/2000/2200) A large tourist-class place with slightly better-equipped rooms (with TVs) and thick shag carpets, but lacking La Belle's character.

Lakeside Tourist Lodge (☎ 2020856; Moi Ave; s/d/tw KSh1600/2500/3400) This newish lodge is so smart and clean that it ends up being entirely characterless – some balconies even boast truck park views – enjoy!

Eating & Drinking

Although most people seem to eat and drink at their hotels, some good options lurk outside.

La Belle Inn (Moi Ave; meals KSh180-400) Whether your stomach is rumbling for an Indian curry (veggie or non-veggie), steak, pork spare ribs, beef kebab, fresh tilapia from the lake or even apple pie, this great colonial veranda is for you. It's also a top place for drinks, despite occasional dust clouds from the road. The Happy Valley Bar inside is also worth a Tusker or two in the evenings.

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 like it for miles. We dare you to order 'whole fish looks like squirrel'.

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 overdone window treatments and fluorescent chairs, she wouldn't choke on their food. The menu is a good mix of Kenyan and Western dishes.

Bawani Stores Supermarket (Moi Ave) This is the perfect place for self-caterers to stock up.

There's a cluster of cheap bars and butcheries on Kariuki Chotara Rd, although you'd have to be pretty brave to venture into most of them.

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 places west. Advance tickets can be bought for Nairobi matatus at the matatu booking office on Kenyatta Ave. Some Nairobi matatus, and all those for Kongoni via Fisherman's Camp (KSh70, 45 minutes), leave from Kenyatta Ave.

LAKE NAIVASHA

☎ 050

With shores fringed with papyrus and yellow-barked acacias, and freshwater that supports protected hippo populations, fish eagles and a blossoming horticultural industry, Lake Naivasha's beauty is as undeniable as its importance to the region.

A vast range of plains animals and a plethora of birdlife have long called the verdant shoreline home, as have the Maasai, who considered it prime grazing land. Unfortunately for the Maasai, the splendour of the surroundings wasn't lost on early settlers either and it was one of the first areas they settled, eventually becoming the favourite haunt of Lord Delamere and the decadent Happy Valley set in the 1930s. Amazingly between 1937 and 1950 the lake was Kenya's main airport, with BOAC's Empire and Solent flying-boats landing here after their four-day journey from Southampton. Lake Naivasha is still one of the largest settler and expat communities in Kenya, and can have a

resort-like feel to it in high season, when it essentially becomes Kenya's St Tropez.

Not only does Lake Naivasha's fresh water bestow it with a unique ecosystem in comparison with the vast majority of Rift Valley lakes, which are highly alkaline, but it also means the lake can be used for irrigation purposes. While the surrounding countryside has historically been a major production area for beef cattle and fresh fruit and vegetables, today the flower industry rules the roost. Shade houses have proliferated in the hills recently, and Lake Naivasha is now the centre of Kenya's US\$360-million flower industry. Astoundingly, flowers that are picked here in the early morning can be at Europe's flower auctions the same day. One flower grower alone produced a million rose stems for Valentine's Day in 2005!

However, the success of the agricultural and horticultural industry is threatening the very survival of the source of their creation, as pesticides and fertilizers are seeping into the lake and reeking havoc with the ecosystem. Irrigation has further destabilised erratic water levels, which had seen the lake almost dry up in the 1890s before rebounding to cover almost 1000 sq km in the early 20th century. The lake is currently receding again, and now only spreads over 170 sq km.

The lake's ecology has been interfered with on a number of other occasions, notably with the introduction of foreign fish (for sports and commercial fisheries), crayfish, the South American coypu (an aquatic rodent that initially escaped from a fur farm) and various aquatic plants, including the dreaded water hyacinth.

For these reasons Naivasha has been the focus of conservation efforts and in 1995, after years of lobbying from the Lake Naivasha Riparian Association (LNRA), the lake was designated a Ramsar site, officially recognising it as a wetland of international importance. Besides educating the locals dependent on the lake about the environmental issues involved, the LNRA, Elsamere Conservation Centre and other organisations work to establish a code of conduct among the local growers that will maintain the lake's biodiversity. The results are promising, but much work remains to be done.

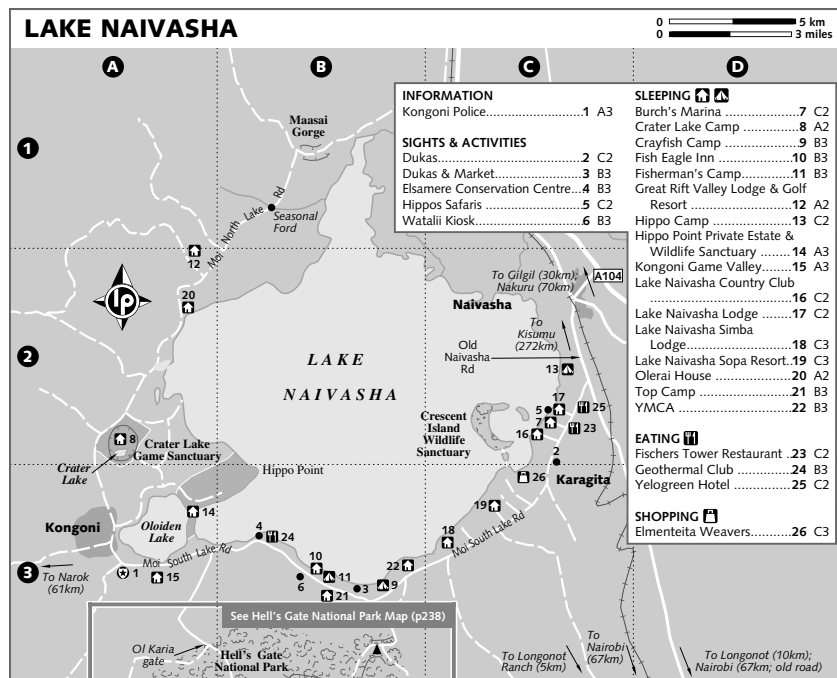
ME, A DELAMERE?

You'd think being repeatedly mistaken for Lord Delamere's great-grandson would have some fringe benefits...sadly not. Especially when the great-grandson in question has just had murder charges controversially dropped after shooting a Maasai KWS agent on his ranch.

People stared. People chased. People yelled. For the first time in my Lonely Planet career I was hoping to be recognised as an author! While I could only muster, 'I am Canadian!', my driver, who I'd hired to visit the parks and the remote north, had it down to a tee: 'Not Tom! Not Tom! He's not the killer!'

Fringe benefits my arse!

Matt Phillips



Sights

CRATER LAKE GAME SANCTUARY

Surrounding a beautiful volcanic crater lake, on the western side of Lake Naivasha and north of the village of Kongoni, is this small **sanctuary** (admission KSh100), with many trails including one for hikers along the steep but diminutive crater rim. Besides the impressive 150 bird species recorded here, giraffes, zebras and other plains wildlife are also regular residents. While walking, remember that buffaloes lurk in the woods. The tiny jade-green crater lake is held in high regard by the local Maasai, who even believe its water helps soothe ailing cattle.

CRESCENT ISLAND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The protruding rim of a collapsed volcanic crater forms this island on the eastern side of Lake Naivasha. It's a private **sanctuary** (adult/child US\$14/7), where you can walk beneath yellow-barked acacias (yellow fever trees) in search of giraffes, Thomson's and Grant's gazelles, elands, waterbucks and countless bird species. Oh, and there are some rather gigantic pythons too!

Almost all accommodation options rent boats for island trips (around KSh2500 per hour). The best is **Hippos Safaris** (☎ 0733-813100; off Moi South Lake Rd) as they charge a flat rate of KSh2000 per boat, which includes waiting time. It's technically possible to drive here along a small causeway, but the land owner is now charging extortionate fees for crossing his property.

ELSAMERE CONSERVATION CENTRE

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. She bought the house in 1967 with a view to retiring here with her husband, George. Adamson did much of her writing from Elsamere right up until her murder in 1980.

Now a conservation centre focused on lake ecology and environmental awareness programs, the site is open to the public and entry includes afternoon tea on the lawn (with a chance to see eastern black-and-white

WARNING

There's been a sad turn for the worse with regards to security around Lake Naivasha in the past few years. With the flower industry paying decent wages, thousands have flocked here expecting jobs and streets paved with gold. In reality there isn't enough work to go around and people desperate for money have turned to crime.

Several lodges have been held up by armed thieves, and the owner of one prominent lodge was murdered in July 2005. In response, most of the top-end lodges have increased security personnel and are surrounding their properties with electric fences.

While the vast majority of visitors enjoy their time here without incident, it's wise to take some precautions – ask what your lodge has in the way of security and always be back in camp before dark.

The nearest police station is found in Kongoni on Moi South Lake Rd.

colobus monkeys), a visit to the memorial room and a showing of the weathered 40-minute *Joy Adamson Story*.

Book ahead for a meal – lunch costs KSh650/800 on weekdays/weekends, and dinner is KSh1000 – and you can visit the centre for free.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

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. While hippo movements have been restricted by electric fences for safety reasons, you still stand a real chance of seeing one of these great beasts grazing at night. The site is huge, thus 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. The tin-shack toilets and showers are pass-

able, but are the site's weakest point. You can also rent tents (KSh200 per person) and bikes (KSh500 per day). Nonguests are charged KSh100 admission.

Top Camp (☎ 2030276; camping KSh200, s/tw bandas from KSh500/1000, 5-person cottages KSh5000) It lacks Fisherman's lakeside location, but 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). There are also cooking utensils, plates and a charcoal burner available for self-caterers. The large cosy cottage has a full kitchen and books a-plenty.

Crayfish Camp (☎ 2020239; craycamp@africaonline.co.ke; camping KSh250, s with shared bathroom KSh750, s/d KSh2500/3000; ☎) Following Fisherman's lead, the 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. While the communal bathrooms would make Fred Flintstone smile, you may not be so happy – very cavemanish. It has a restaurant and two bars, kitchen facilities, pool tables and tent, bedding, bicycle and boat hire (same rates as Fisherman's). Horseback riding is also offered (KSh500 per hour).

YMCA (camping KSh250, dm KSh250, bandas per person KSh300-450) For basic roofed accommodation, you'll do no better than the Y. It's also convenient for walks into Hell's Gate. There are two dorms and a number of Spartan bandas; firewood and bedding can be provided for a small charge. Meals are also available (lunch KSh150, dinner KSh200). It's popular with Kenyans and gets busy with school groups during holidays.

Burch's Marina (☎ 0733-660372; camping KSh200, 2-person rondavels KSh600, cottages d/tr/q KSh2200/2600/3000) About 1km past Hotel Yelogreen is this idiosyncratic place, ideal for those fleeing the noise of Fisherman's Camp and its ilk. There's a store with basic provisions and a range of accommodation. The campsite is pleasant and well-shaded, with hot showers, a communal cooking area and well. It has basic twin-bed rondavels or thatched four-bed family cottages (bedding isn't normally supplied, but can be requested). It's pretty busy here, especially on Tuesdays and weekends, so advance booking is mandatory.

Hippo Camp (off Old Naivasha Rd; camping KSh200) Run by KWS, this is a reasonable site with

some slightly shabby permanent tents for rent (five-person tent KSh500, plus camping fees). There's a path down to the lake for some free wildlife viewing.

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 creature comforts like satellite TV and canopy beds. Even numbered rooms 302 to 312 also have pleasant balconies. Swimming for those camping or in dorms is KSh100.

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 farm house for utter African safari charm. Wander the house and soak up the atmosphere before sinking into some wicker with a cup of tea on the sweeping veranda – the views will leave you spellbound. Most rooms surround the house's lovely courtyard and boast hardwood floors, rich rugs, comfortable beds and bear-claw bathtubs. The Pili Pili stone cottage, with its three bedrooms, lovely sitting room and fireplace is also fabulous. The farmhouse sits within a private wildlife reserve, so sightings are plentiful and everything from horseback riding to safari walks and drives can be arranged. Package rates, including all activities and trips to Hell's Gate National park, are US\$300 per person.

Olerai House (☎ 020-891112; www.olerai.com; Moi North Lake Rd; full board s/d US\$240/320) Rose petals dust the beds and floors of these five sublime suites, each unique and a mix of Kenyan and Mediterranean influences. Despite being rather luxurious, the old wood timbers, grass mats and warm personal atmosphere make it feel more homelike than other luxury lodges. Spend evenings outside with your back to a cushion and your face to the campfire. Prices are slightly negotiable.

Elsamere Conservation Centre (☎ 2021055; elsa@africaonline.co.ke; full board s/d US\$85/140) Small bungalows, each with its own diminutive veranda, dot the lovely lawn and offer great lake views. Although lacking the 'wow' factor of others, it's comfortable, extremely friendly and a relative bargain. Trips to Hell's Gate National Park and Mt Longonot are available upon request.

Hippo Point Private Estate & Wildlife Sanctuary (☎ 2021295; www.hippo-pointkenya.com; per person US\$500; 📍 📍) We could try and tell you about the absolute lavishness of the main house and the tower, but you'd never believe us – we still can't believe it, and we saw it! Perhaps the most luxurious accommodation in Kenya, the entire estate is rented out exclusively to one group at a time (minimum four people). Rates include food, drinks, wildlife drives, water skiing...you name it.

Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort (☎ 2050358, Nairobi 020-3750235; full board s/d US\$188/250; 📍) Towering cacti and manicured gardens front the massive luxury cottages at this new resort that opened in 2004. Upstairs suites boast balconies, king-sized beds, modern bathrooms, TVs and pure comfort, while downstairs options only differ in that they have twin queen-sized beds and spill right into the gardens. Besides the pool, there's also a gym, sauna and lakeside path. The arch-shaped bar and restaurant, with massive vaulted ceilings, is gorgeous.

Crater Lake Camp (☎ 2020613; crater@africaonline.co.ke; full board low season s/d KSh4930/8925, high season KSh5880/10500) A luxury tented camp nestled among trees and overlooking the tiny jade-green crater lake. The food is good and the service excellent, and you can explore the whole of the sanctuary on foot. This place is a gem, but we're not sure how the owner's recent tragic death will affect the sanctuary and camp.

Lake Naivasha Lodge (☎ 2030298; fax 2020611; camping KSh200, full board low season s/d US\$55/80, high season US\$85/120) It's pleasant, but the cottage-style rooms and bathrooms are much more dated than other lodges. Another drawback is its lack of lake frontage.

Other luxurious recommendations:

Great Rift Valley Lodge & Golf Resort (☎ 2050048; rvlgolf@heritagehotels.co.ke; high season s/d US\$133/180, low season US\$222/300; 📍)

Lake Naivasha Country Club (☎ 020-650500; blocknaivasha@africaonline.co.ke; half board high season s/d US\$131/162, low season US\$161/212; 📍)

Lake Naivasha Simba Lodge (☎ 020-4343960; enquiries@marasimba.com; full board s/d US\$180/250; 📍)

Eating & Drinking

Since food and drinks can be had at most of the accommodation options mentioned above, there's little in the way of independent wining and dining.

Fisherman's Camp (meals KSh250-425) Everything from fruit smoothies and chicken tikka to burgers and chilli con carne make their way onto plates at this atmospheric restaurant and bar.

Geothermal Club (meals KSh140-270) Set in a beautiful spot looking down over the lake about 45 minutes' walk from Fisherman's Camp, this relaxed restaurant caters for KenGen thermal power plant's employees but will happily serve visitors. Cold beer (KSh65) is always available.

A small market and some *dukas* (shops) are found near Fisherman's Camp for basic supplies.

The following local restaurants serve cheapish meals:

Fischers Tower Restaurant (meals KSh150-200)

Yelogreen Hotel (meals KSh150-400)

Shopping

Visit **Elementeita Weavers** (off Moi South Lake Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm) and you'll see weavers producing hand-woven rugs, carpets, *kangas* (printed cotton wraparounds), baskets and the like. Prices reflect the high quality.

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 as there have been recent muggings.

There's one daily matatu along Moi North Lake Rd, leaving from the Total petrol 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 rent reasonable boats for lake trips (KSh2500 per hour). Top-end lodges charge between KSh3000 and KSh4000 per hour for similar rides.

If you'd like to row row row your boat, Fisherman's Lodge 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 – Hell's Gate is an experience indeed. The park is truly unique, as it allows you to walk or cycle unguided across its breadth. Sure you can still drive, but why would you? Senses are heightened tenfold when you're face to face with grazing zebras, towering giraffes, galloping gazelles and massive eland antelopes. The knowledge that cheetahs, lions and leopards aren't unheard of here only adds to the excitement of it all! And be sure to give buffaloes plenty of room.

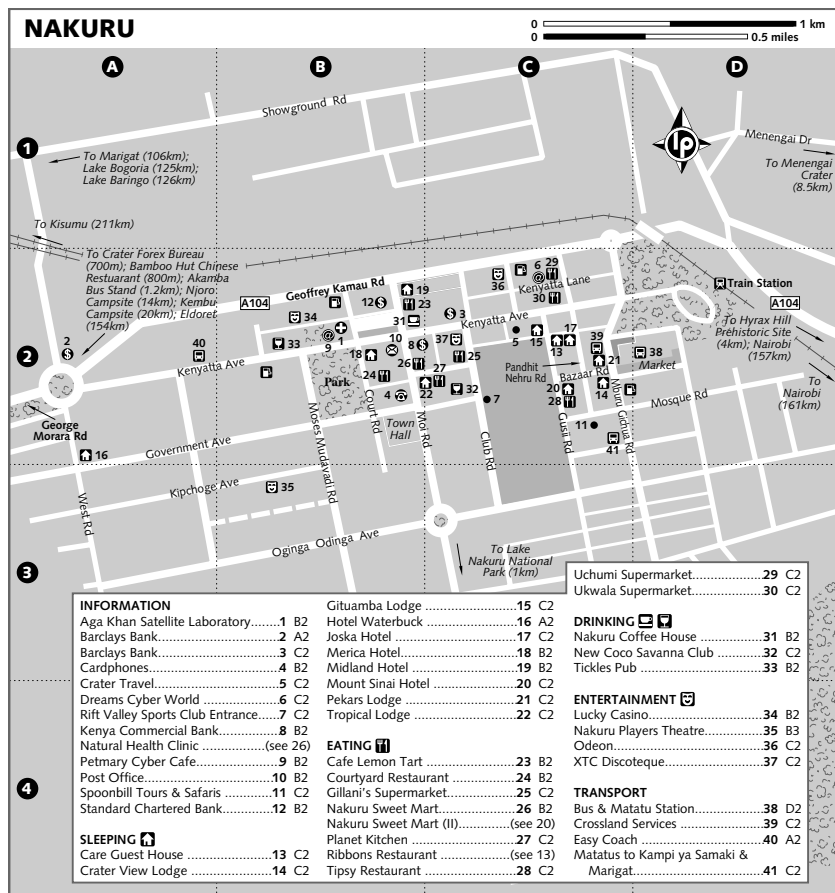
Keep an eye out for the massive lammergeyers (bearded vultures), which are slowly being reintroduced. Their wingspans can reach almost 3m.

The scenery here is dramatic, with rich ochre soils and savannah grasses squeezed between looming cliffs of rusty quartz basalt – it's all aglow in the early morning.

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. Commissioned by the Hamburg Geographical Society to find a route from Mombasa to Lake Victoria, Fischer was stopped by territorial Maasai, who comprehensively and most efficiently kyboshed his campaign by slaughtering almost his entire party. Fischer's tower is one of the park's many popular rock-climbing sites.

Rising from the gorge's southern end is the large **Central Tower** (rock-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. You'd do well to spend a couple of hours exploring here. 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.



Information

Changing cash and travellers cheques in Nakuru is easy, with numerous banks and forex bureaus. Barclays Bank's ATMs are the most reliable. Plenty of card phones are scattered around town.

Aga Khan Satellite Laboratory (off Court Rd) Various lab services. Malaria tests cost KSh160.

Crater Travel (☎ 2215019; off Kenyatta Ave) One of the few reputable travel agencies in town.

Dreams Cyber World (Kenyatta Lane; per hr KSh120; ☎ 8am-8pm, closed 1-2pm Fri) Fast connections and open Sunday.

Natural Health Clinic (Moi Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri) Natural remedies.

One World Tours & Safaris (☎ 0733-621598; PO Box 13047, Nakuru) Cheapest vehicle hire for Lake Nakuru trips.

There's no office, so you'll have to call. Usually rendezvous at Rift Valley Sports Club.

Petmary Cyber Cafe (Kenyatta Ave; per hr KSh120; ☎ 7.45am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Nakuru's fastest Internet connections.

Post office (Kenyatta Ave) Town's cheapest Internet.

Spoonbill Tours & Safaris (☎ 0733-502768; Carnation Hotel, Mosque Rd) They seem to have a monopoly on activities around Nakuru. Most travel agents, including Crater Travel, use their services.

Sleeping BUDGET

Lurking within the maze of noisy and dirty budget options were these standouts.

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). 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 here 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, s/tw KSh310/400) The rooms here 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.

Other budget hotels that won't curl your toes include the following.

Care Guest House (☎ 0721-636447; Pandit Nehru Rd; s/tw KSh300/400) Ask for room 66.

Pekars Lodge (☎ 2215455; Mburu Gichua Rd; s/tw incl breakfast KSh360/720) A good deal for single rooms.

Campers can drop tent in nearby Lake Nakuru National Park (p245), at Hyrax Hill Prehistoric Site (p243), or 20km west of town at **Kembu Campsite** (☎ 0722-361102; kembu@africaonline.co.ke; camping US\$4, 1-1/2-bedroom cottages KSh3000/6000). Kembu has a great atmosphere and it's particularly popular with overlanders due to its truck workshop and airy bamboo-clad bar/restaurant (order your food in advance). The semi-secluded one-bedroom acacia cottage, with French doors, polished-wood floors, a gorgeous view of the surrounding area and great for families. Mountain-bike hire and various treks into the surrounding area can be arranged. 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 & TOP END

There's a limited amount of midrange and top-end accommodation within Nakuru, but great options at Lake Nakuru National Park (p245) and Kembu Campsite add to the selection.

Hotel Waterbuck (☎ 2215672; West Rd; s/d/tw incl breakfast KSh2000/2500/2500; ☎) Beneath the boring exterior lurk large kitschy African-themed doubles. Although a bit brash, they are, in fact, comfortable and more memorable than any other room in town. The singles and twins are small, boring and lack balconies. Kindergarten colours surround the courtyard and swimming pool. Non-guests can take a dip for KSh100.

Midland Hotel (☎ 2212125; Geoffrey Kamau Rd; s/d incl breakfast from KSh2300/3700) This popular place has a range of rooms (most with carpet) with varying levels of comfort. A third wing has recently been added; the names 'old wing' and 'new wing' are already taken, so we're wondering what they'll call it.

Merica Hotel (☎ 2216013; merica@kenyaweab.com; Kenyatta Ave; half board s/d US\$65/110; ☎) Opened in 2003 this contemporary tower hosts Nakuru's only top-end rooms. Ride the glass elevators up the sunlit atrium to your large, well-appointed room. Besides modern comfort, there's classic fun in Nakuru's best swimming pool (nonguests KSh200).

Eating

We could state the obvious and tell you that you'll have no trouble getting pleasantly stuffed in Nakuru, but we won't.

Merica Hotel (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh185-500) Take pizza, pasta, a tender steak or a fine Indian curry at a poolside table in Nakuru's highest-rated restaurant.

Bamboo Hut Chinese Restaurant (Map p244; Giddo Plaza, George Morara Rd; meals KSh300-700) Highly recommended by Nakuru's expat community, this place serves great Chinese fare.

Courtyard Restaurant (off Court Rd; meals KSh250-500) This place scratches a variety of itches, from Indian to Italian and from beef stew to seafood. The chicken *pili pili* (pan-fried chicken flavoured with coconut cream, green chillies and turmeric) is rather enjoyable. 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 cafe 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 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.

Nakuru Sweet Mart (II) (Moi Rd; meals KSh120-220) This second outlet is more of a sit-down option and serves sandwiches, burgers, greasy fried chicken and chips.

Planet Kitchen (off Moi Rd; meals KSh75-200) Serving simple local dishes, Planet Kitchen is usually busy with the after-work business crowd.

There are several well-stocked supermarkets for self-caterers.

Drinking

There are plenty of places pouring wobbly pops (beers), including the top-end hotels, and even one wee shop which brews great coffee.

Tickles Pub (Kenyatta Ave) This mellow pub is the friendliest choice and has several TVs keeping local footy fans happy. Things pick up on weekends when they host local DJs.

New Coco Savanna Club (Government Ave) A cavernous place with pounding music, the odd pool shark and prostitutes.

Nakuru Coffee House (Kenyatta Ave) For a straightforward caffeine fix, this café sells excellent freshly roasted coffee.

Entertainment

For a rural town there's actually a choice of evening options.

Nakuru Players Theatre (Kipchoge Ave) Four evenings a month this theatre stages entertaining Kenyan plays.

Odeon (Geoffrey Kamau Rd; ☎ 6pm Tue-Sun) It's a bit of a dump, but it usually screens Western movies.

Lucky Casino (off Kenyatta Ave) For those who like to be more pro-active with their cash.

XTC Discoteque (Kenyatta Ave) With strobe lights and a dark dance floor, this is the nearest you'll get to a proper nightclub in Nakuru. They were playing JLo when we visited – we'll try not to hold it against them. Will you?

Getting There & Away

Regular buses, matatus and the odd Peugeot (shared taxi) leave the chaotic stands off Mburu Gichua Rd for Naivasha (KSh120, 1¼ hours), Tiyahururu (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.

Akamba (Map p244; George Morara Rd) buses leave from their depot behind the Kenol petrol station west of town. Destinations include Nairobi (KSh200, three hours), Eldoret (KSh200, 2¾ hours) and Kisumu (KSh300, 3½ hours). **Easy Coach** (Kenyatta Ave) offers the same destinations and a little extra comfort for almost double the cost.

Parking is tricky, with yellow-jacketed wardens charging KSh50 on most streets.

AROUND NAKURU Menengai Crater

You'd be forgiven for yawning when looking at the gentle forested slopes of this dormant volcano from Nakuru (yes, it's that boring). However, when standing high atop a promontory on the edge of its hidden crater some 8km away, your mouth will open for completely different reasons (yes, it's that jaw-droppingly gorgeous). Striking red cliffs radiate outward and encircle a 90-sq-km cauldron of convoluted black lava flows. While lush vegetation is now proliferating 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 defeated 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 of at least four

or five. Alternatively, you can take a taxi up and back for KSh1000. There's a small group of *dukas* (shops) at the main viewpoint selling drinks and trinkets.

Hyrax Hill Prehistoric Site

This **archaeological site** (Map p244; adult/child KSh100/50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) is 4km outside Nakuru and contains a museum and the remains of three settlements excavated between 1937 and the late 1980s, the oldest being possibly 3000 years old, the most recent only 200 to 300 years old.

The tiny museum discusses the distribution and cultures of Rift Valley peoples over the centuries. Try not to laugh at the plastic spitting cobra.

You're free to wander the site, but it's rather cryptic and a guide is useful – a tip of KSh100 is plenty. The North-East Village, which is believed to be about 400 years old, sits closest to the museum and once housed 13 enclosures. Only the 1965 excavation of Pit D remains open. It was here where great number of pottery fragments were found, some of which have been pieced together into complete jars and are displayed in the museum.

From Pit D the trail climbs to the scant remains of the stone-walled hill fort near the top of Hyrax Hill itself. You can continue to the peak, from where there's a fine view of flamingo-lined Lake Nakuru in the distance.

Looking down the other side of the hill, you'll see two 'C' shaped Iron Age stone hut foundations at the base. Just north of the foundations, a series of Iron Aged burial pits containing 19 skeletons was found. The majority were male and lots of them had been decapitated, so a number of colourful explanations have been offered.

Nearby, two Neolithic burial mounds and several other Iron Age burial pits were also discovered. The large collection of items found in these pits included a real puzzle – six Indian coins, one of them 500 years old, and two others dating from 1918 and 1919.

On a more lively note, there's a *bao* (a traditional African game that's played throughout East Africa) board carved into a rock outcrop between the Iron Age settlements and the museum.

It's now possible to **camp** (per tent KSh500) here, though facilities are limited.

Local matatus to Naivasha or Nairobi will take you past the turn-off (about 1km from the site), just south of Nakuru.

LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK

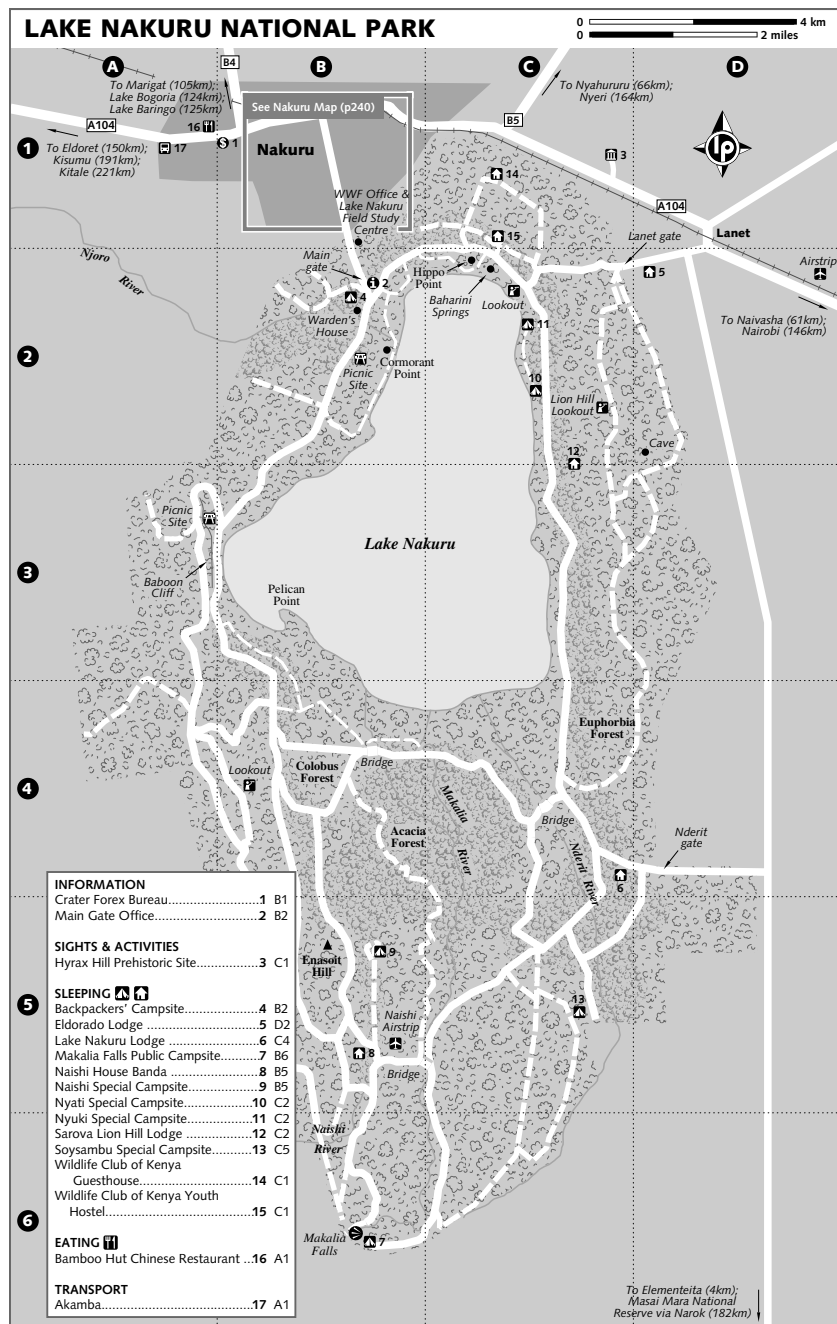
With a pink sea of flamingos lapping at its shores, rich areas of grassland, euphorbia and acacia forests, and rocky cliffs supporting a myriad of animal and bird species, there's little doubt why Lake Nakuru National Park is rivalling Amboseli as Kenya's second most visited park after the Masai Mara.

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. Wart-hogs 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 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 and affected the lesser flamingos' 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.

Information

The main park (adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) gate is about 2km south of the centre of Nakuru. KWS smartcards and official guidebooks (KSh750) are available at the main gate's office (☎ 051-2217151), but not at the Lanet or Nderit gates.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

None of the following options provide any meals, so you'll have to bring your own food. If camping, always make sure your tents are securely zipped or the vervet monkeys and baboons will make a right mess while cleaning you right out. And remember to carry out all your garbage.

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 campsite sits inside the main gate and also has the park's best camping facilities.

Special campsites (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 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.

Wildlife Club of Kenya Youth Hostel (☎ 051-850929; dm KSh150, s with shared bathroom KSh300, s/tw KSh500/1000) This hostel is a nice, very friendly site with clean dorms, simple single rooms and two-bedded bandas, complete with cooking areas.

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. The rooms are overpriced and the pool is a little too green for our liking.

TOP END

Naishi House Banda (bookings ☎ 051-2217151; 6-person cottage plus 2-person annex Jan-Jun US\$200, Jul-Dec US\$250) Sit on the shady terrace and watch zebras and rhinos grazing on your very doormat – there are 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\$80/140, low season US\$160/220; 🍷) Sitting high up the lake's eastern slopes, this lodge offers first-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.

Lake Nakuru Lodge (☎ 051-850228, Nairobi 020-2733695; www.lakenakurlodge.com; full board high season s/d from US\$80/120; low season US\$160/190; 🍷) South of the lake, this lodge's standard rooms, housed in cute shingle-roofed octagonal cottages, are a big step down in quality from those at Lion Hill. The only options worth the asking price are the new 'deluxe' rooms (make sure you ask for the ones that aren't in the farmhouse). The usual facilities are available, along with activities such as horse riding (KSh1550 per hour) and nature walks (KSh800).

Getting There & Away

Walking in the park isn't permitted, so you'll have to rent a taxi, go on a tour or be lucky enough to hitch a ride. A taxi for a few hours will likely cost KSh2000, though you'll have to bargain hard for it. More enjoyable options are **One World Tours & Safaris** (☎ 0733-621598; PO Box 13047, Nakuru), who charge KSh6000 for an open-topped eight-seat 4WD (about six hours), and **Crater Travel** (☎ 051-2215019; off Kenyatta Ave, Nakuru), who organise 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.

NORTH TO MARIGAT

The journey north from Nakuru along the excellent B4 Hwy takes you through some

dramatic changes of scenery, particularly around the equator, where the landscape turns dry and dusty, getting more forbidding the further north you go. Suddenly, out of the sea of reds, browns and meek greens, the blues of Lake Baringo appear in the distance. Soon you'll start to descend and, as the roadside to the east drops away, you'll see brief glimpses of the red plains and distant hills. At the bottom sits **Radat**, a tiny village known to produce some of Kenya's best *asali* (honey). They sell it from roadside kiosks by the vodka-bottle full (KSh100). If you blink and miss Radat, don't worry as you'll find sweet *asali* for sale throughout the region.

As you approach Marigat the spectacular ridges and escarpments of the Tugen Hills come into view, and you'll see an extraordinary number of huge termites' nests towering up from the reddish plains.

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 since 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 nearby **hot springs** and **geysers** spew boiling fluids from the earth's insides – keep your distance! Amazingly, this inhospitable alien environment is a haven for birdlife and at **Kesubo Swamp**, just north of the park, more than 200 species have been recorded. One lucky soul spotted 96 species in one hour – a Kenyan record.

The lack of dense brush around Lake Bogoria 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, and you'll see your fair share of donkeys and cattle too.

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 claimed the evictions were 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 displaced families are sub-clans 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 future evictions scheduled for the forests around Mt Kenya and Mt Elgon, the political firestorm will only continue to heat up in the coming years.

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.

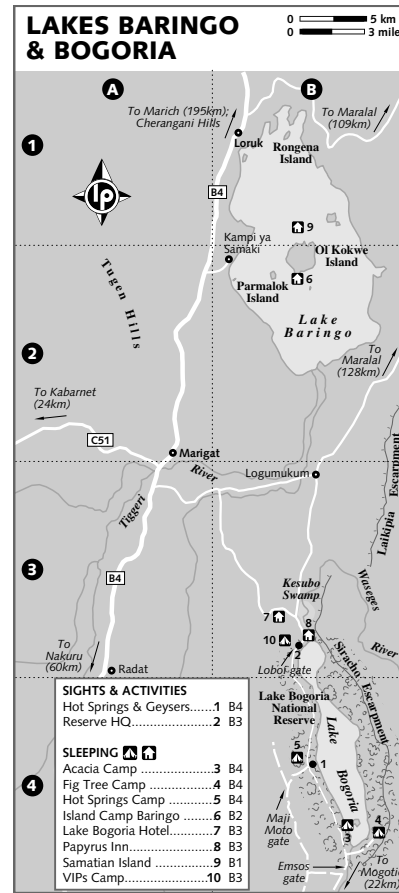
Sleeping & Eating

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. Sure the loos lack doors and baboons can be a nuisance, but there are brilliant views down the lake and a permanent freshwater stream. 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 on which your tent can rest. You'll have to bring your own water. Acacia and Fig Tree blow the socks off the dismal Hot Springs and VIPS campsites.

Papyrus Inn (☎ 051-2216980; s/tw with shared toilets KSh500/800) This overpriced place is in a bit



of a sad state, really, with crumbling walls and filth pervading the rooms. Its proximity to the Lobo gate is probably its only redeeming feature.

Lake Bogoria Hotel (☎ 051-2216441; lakebogoria@wanachi.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$70/90; 🚽) Set in lovely grounds around 2km before the Lobo gate, this hotel is a quality option with two swimming pools, one of them spring-fed. The rooms in the hotel are large and bright, while those in the new cottages (which are the same price) are more modern and much more comfortable. The on-site restaurant (lunch/dinner buffets KSh600/700, mains KSh100 to KSh350) serves a variety of dishes, including several vegetarian options.

The town of Marigat, located nearby, is a good place to buy local produce or to have a local meal:

Kamco Hotel (off B4 Hwy; meals KSh40-150)

Union Hotel (off B4 Hwy; meals KSh40-150)

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 Emsos and Maji Moto gates is at Mogotio, which is about 38km past Nakuru on the B4 highway, but both of these routes are poorly signposted and inaccessible without a serious 4WD.

Lobo 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 horrendous shape in this section.

The nearest petrol is found in Marigat.

Without your own vehicle, Lobo gate can be accessed by matatu from Marigat (KSh50, 30 minutes). Regular matatus serve Marigat from Nakuru (KSh180, two hours) and Kabarnet (KSh140, 1¼ 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, Lake Baringo has been plagued with various problems over the past few years. Irrigation dams and droughts caused the water level to drop alarmingly, pulling the shoreline back several hundred metres; severe siltation due to soil erosion around the seasonal *luggas* (creeks) has meant that the water is almost always muddy; and the lake has been overfished so badly that any tilapia caught these days is 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 it 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.

Information

Kampi ya Samaki has traditionally charged a toll (KSh200) to enter the town, but this no longer seems to be the case. The nearest banking facilities are in Kabarnet about 40km west, while Internet access is found in Marigat's post office.

Sights & Activities

BOAT RIDES

The most popular activities around Lake Baringo are **boat rides**, which are touted as competitively as the Masai Mara is in Nairobi – there are 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 dive for fish at a whistle, making for great (if slightly contrived) photo opportunities.

The most reliable trips are organised by the following:

Community Boats & Excursions (☎ 0720-523874; Kampi ya Samaki; per boat per hr KSh2200)

Lake Baringo Club (☎ 850880; Kampi ya Samaki; per boat per hr KSh7000)

Roberts' Camp (☎ 851879; Kampi ya Samaki; per boat per hr KSh2400)

Most boats accommodate up to seven passengers. A one-hour trip allows you to cruise the shoreline, while two hours allows you to check out Parmalok Island. With three hours you can visit Ol Kokwe Island.

BIRD WALKS

There's a constant twittering from birds in the trees around the lake, in the rushes and on the face of the escarpment near Kampi ya Samaki. Even if you're not an avid twitcher, it's hard to resist setting off on a dawn **bird walk**, when you will have a good chance of

SHORELINE SURPRISES

While some life in the lake is indeed struggling, crocodile populations are healthier than ever – so you'd best be careful when standing close to the shore. We got lost in the beauty of an early-morning sunrise one day while at the water's edge, and before we knew it there were 12 to 15 snouts poking from the glassy surface directly in front of us – cue speedy retreat!

While crocodiles (and hippos) do pose a threat, malarial mosquitos actually pose more of a risk here – whatever you do, remember your bug repellent.

seeing hornbills or a magnificent fish eagle in action. Lake Baringo Club offers the most knowledgeable guides, and it charges KSh1100 per person for a 60- to 90-minute walk. Roberts' Camp and Community Boats & Excursions leads less rewarding walks for about KSh300 per person.

CULTURAL TOURS

Lake Baringo Club offers tours to Pokot, Tugen and Njemps villages close to the lake (KSh 600); the Njemps are cousins of the Maasai and live on Ol Kokwe and Parmalok Islands and around the lakeshore, mainly practising pastoralism and fishing. You'll usually be able to walk around freely and take photos, but you'll probably be hassled to buy handicrafts. There's an additional KSh500 charge for entering each village.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

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, who won't go near the place at night, claiming you can see flames and hear screaming. So far no visitors have confirmed these sightings, but it sounds a bit more exciting than bird-watching!

The rock forming the cliffs outside of the town is also apparently suitable for **technical rock-climbing**.

Sleeping

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Roberts' Camp (☎ 851879; camping KSh350, bandas s/tw with shared bathroom KSh1000/2000, 4-person cot-

tages KSh5000) Easily spotted off Kampi ya Samaki's main drag, next to Lake Baringo Club, is this fantastic site. It's right on the lake and offers great camping facilities, comfortable cottages as well as an open-air restaurant/bar. They also rent four-person tents, with bedding, for KSh850 per person (including camping fees) and there are even shared cooking facilities for self-caterers. If the odd bat doesn't bother you, the wooden Hammerkop cottage, with its massive deck, large loft and airy ambience, is the most atmospheric place for a snooze. Campers need to exercise some common sense regarding the hippos, which may graze within just a metre of your tent at night. Ideally you should stay at least 20m away from them when you can, especially if they have young, and don't frighten them with headlights, torches (flashlights), loud noises or flash photography. No one's been seriously hurt by a hippo in almost 15 years here, but some readers have had decidedly close calls! Remember that they are wild animals and should be treated with respect.

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.

Lake View Lodge (☎ 851413; s with shared bathroom KSh100) Think prison cell block with distorted lake views. Although crude, the rooms are quite clean. The loos are outside and a little rough.

TOP END

Lake Baringo Club (☎ 850880, Nairobi 020-650500; block baringo@africaonline.co.ke; Kampi ya Samaki; high season & Nov–mid-Dec full board s/d US\$120/150, mid-Dec–Mar & Jul-Oct 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, and are 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 it 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. The 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.

Soi Safari Lodge (☎ 020-318774; www.soisafari lodge.com; Kampi ya Samaki; half board s/tw US\$60/80; 🍴 🍷) Strangely this new lodge, owned by ex-president Moi's son, thought the parking lot should have the lake views instead of the rooms – so sad but so true. Rooms are bland and the place has zero ambience. Air-con is its only redeeming feature.

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 whingeing 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.

Bahari Lodge & Hotel (meals KSh150-200) Of Kampi ya Samaki's few remaining local restaurants, this is the best place for cheap stodge.

Self-caterers should keep in mind that while some foodstuffs may be available at Roberts' Camp, fresh vegetables and fruit are generally in short supply, and there's only a very limited stock available in Kampi ya Samaki. Bring much of what you need – Marigat usually has a good selection.

Getting There & Away

A 25-seater bus leaves for Nakuru each morning between 6.30am and 9.30am (it departs when it's full). Bar that, hop onto one of the regular pick-up trucks heading to Marigat (KSh50, 30 minutes) and catch more frequent matatus from there on to Nakuru (KSh160, two hours) or Kabarnet (KSh140, 1¼ 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.