



CAPTURING KENYA'S WILD HEART

The ambience was just as I expected when I arrived in Nairobi on my first trip to Kenya. The bustling city was alive with everyone going about their day with purpose. I stayed at a Hotel and was pleasantly surprised to look out of my hotel room at views

across the Nairobi National Park. Yes, a national park where wild animals roam right next to Kenya's largest city. While the city of Nairobi enticed me to explore, it was a quick in and out visit en-route to the Laikipia and Kenya's Lady, Mount Kenya.

From the wilds of Africa's most iconic playground, the Mara, to the picturesque beaches of Watamu and to the countryside of Laikipia, Kate Webster takes you into Kenya's heart.



LAIKIPIA AND MOUNT KENYA

A short 35 – 45-minute flight from the Kenyan capital of Nairobi and I was landing at Nanyuki airstrip in Laikipia. There are two other airstrips for scheduled safari flights into Laikipia: Loisaba and Lewa Downs, however, Nanyuki is the main airstrip. Upon arrival into Laikipia, you will notice a country-feel like none other in Kenya. Formerly a patchwork of large ranches, and still an important livestock district, Laikipia is now where some of Kenya's most encouraging conservation success stories are unfolding. A designated World Heritage Site, the scenery surrounding Mount Kenya is breathtaking. It is a pristine wilderness with lakes, tarns, glaciers, dense forest, mineral springs and a selection of rare and endangered species of animals, high altitude-adapt-

ed plains game and unique montane and alpine vegetation. To the north-east of the Great Rift Valley, and north-west of snow-capped Mount Kenya, the high plains of Laikipia are growing more popular as one of Kenya's best safari regions. Much of the area here is managed to protect the wildlife, to promote a personal and small-scale approach to adventurous and often luxurious safari tourism, and to generate an income for the local Samburu and Ilaiikipiak and Mokogodo Maasai communities. Laikipia has a diverse range of tourism facilities for travellers of all varieties, some of which have long been a part of the landscape. With the horizon view peaking with Mount Kenya, the tallest mountain in

Kenya and the second tallest mountain in Africa at 5,199 meters, I began the 30-minute drive south-east of the airport to my home for the next few days. It's a resort set with the backdrop of magnificent views of majestic Mount Kenya. It was born of a love affair, and one that had all the ingredients of an epic Romance - a stunning older woman, a dashing aviator and, for their playground, all of Africa. Today, the place still holds a certain magic, felt radiating down from the mountain. A hospitality expert, Joseph Kanyiri explains the history of Mount Kenya. The peaks, when viewed from a distance, resemble the black and white plumage of the male ostrich. The black and white formations were actually rocks and glaciers on the peak area, hence it

was named the mountain "Kirinyaga" which in translation means – "the area of the ostrich". Legend has it the ancient Kikuyu and Kamba people used the name "Kirinyaga" to derive the term for their god – *Mwene Nyaga* - signifying the god who stayed at the top of Mount Kenya. The Kikuyu believe that Mount Kenya is a sacred place and they turn towards the direction of the mountain while praying or offering sacrifices. The Kambas pronounce it slightly differently, as "Kinyaa". Because the Kambas were the first people to encounter the European explorers, the Europeans used the Kamba version to name the mountain, calling it Mount Kenya. The country was later named after the mountain.

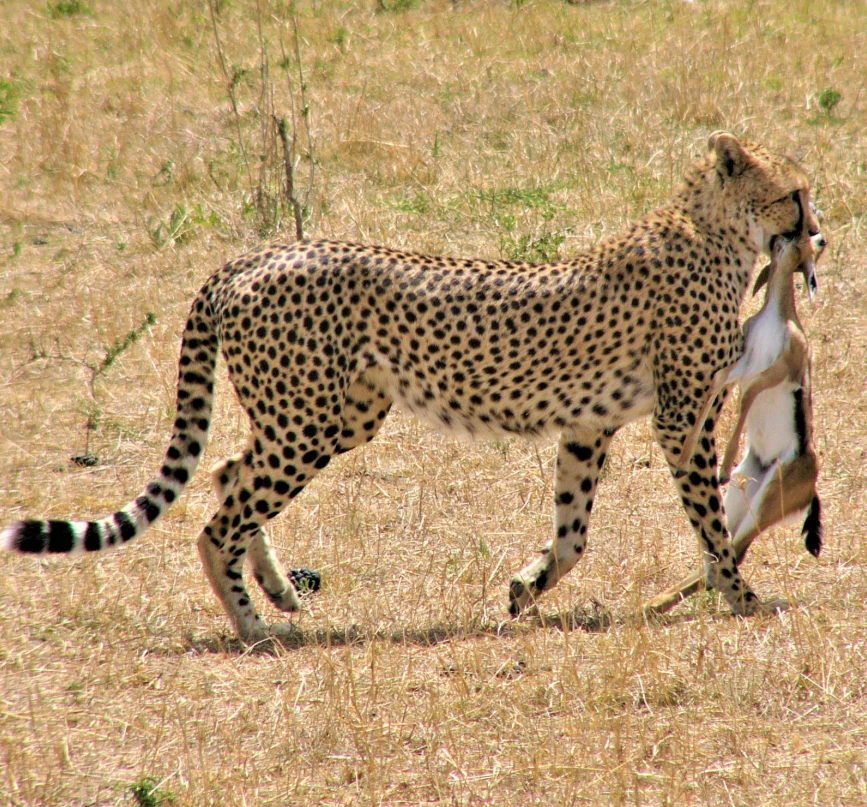


WATAMU WAVES

Having indulged in the mountains of Kenya, I was off to explore the one place I love most, the ocean and her beaches. It was back onto the small plane again on a trip to the beach area of Watamu. Some 25 km from Malindi Airport and 110 km from Mombasa Airport, the beach resort area of Watamu boasts white sand beaches with views out to the blues of the Indian Ocean that could easily be mistaken for a postcard paradise in the Pacific. When you think Kenya, you wouldn't normally think of a beachside escape, however, Watamu balances that African feel with resort beach life just perfectly. I was delighted to settle into my home for the coming days at one of the Beach Clubs, which is an all-inclusive beachfront property located inside the internationally acclaimed Watamu National Marine Park. Here, coral reefs offshore break the swell, so the waves lap softly in a rhythmic lull caressing the beach. These very reefs provide a playground for marine life and

sanctuary in the Marine Park that is considered one of the best snorkelling and diving areas on the coast of East Africa. With a prime location on the beach, there is ample offering of ocean activities, including diving, snorkelling, fishing and beach walks. Beyond the water activities, there is the quaint seaside town of Malindi to explore. Malindi town is situated on Malindi Bay at the mouth of the Galana River. Here, I wandered the streets freely, shopping at the local markets. The nearby ancient Gede Ruins is a must-see for any visitor to Kenya. This abandoned city, hidden from the world by tropical forest and isolation on the coast of Kenya, has great mysteries. The town was thought to have been founded in the early 13th-century, although considerable evidence to prove this continues to elude most scientists. But what has really baffled researchers is the well-established town's mysterious abandonment and its incredible development. For a split second while walking around these ancient ruins, I felt I could have been teleported back in time.





THE WILD OF THE MARA

Time was passing fast, so I got back on the plane on my final journey into Kenya's wild and untamed frontier.

The flight was where the excitement started, as I cruised over the Kenyan countryside speckled with townships and farms and expanses of terrain that was just empty. Not for the uneasy flyer, the flight took a few pit stops along the way, each time landing on a lonely runway which seemed in the middle of nowhere. My last stop was Olkiombo Airstrip in the Maasai Mara. Affectionately known as the Mara, this large game reserve in Narok County continues to the Serengeti National Park in Mara Region, Tanzania. The Maasai Mara was named in honour of the ancestral inhabitants of the area, the Maasai people. They described the area with cue taken from

its view when looked at from afar: "Mara," which is Maa (Maasai language) for "spotted," an apt description for the circles of trees, scrub, savanna, and cloud shadows that mark the area. Mornings in the Mara are the most memorable experience I had in Kenya. The sun's golden glow blanketed the plains, its warmth still developing with each minute that passed. The sound of morning birds filled the air in a symphony of calls. The smell of the bush danced on the air, a sweet mix of florals, rustic earthy scents and petrichor from the morning dew. It didn't take me long to grasp that this is a place of learning, where Africa teaches lessons that will change the way you view the world in one of the most incredible classrooms on the planet – the incomparable

Maasai Mara. A place where lions and other big cats own the night; a place where hippos stake claim to vast territories; a place where we submit to the supreme power of wild Africa and take our lead from Mother Nature. As dawn breaks, there was a stirring happening. There was movement on the horizon and there seemed a sense of urgency to start the day. That supreme power of the wild was upon me. Giraffes walked gracefully across the plains, curiously stopping every so often to glance around and survey the area. Grand majestic elephants paraded slowly, the younger elephants trailing playfully behind. Wild dogs called in the distance, an excited chatter like that of children running off to play. Herds of wildebeest congre-

gated as if attending a morning board meeting. Mixed with them were dazzles of zebra and I am told these are the stragglers that did not venture on the great migration. An intense sensation of completeness engulfed me while surrounded by this wild rawness. I felt this was the heart of Kenya. From these plains, a lifeline that keeps the country's heart beating; I gleaned what keeps Kenya alive and felt a beat that is rooted deep in the soil that supplies life to the age-old Baobab trees; a beat that echoes beyond the vast plains that feed such amazing and unique animals; a beat that lives on in the souls of those who live there and a beat that will always remain in my heart after my first visit to Kenya. 🌿

TRAVEL TIPS | ✈️ 🚗 🚢 🚆 //

COORDINATES + TOTAL DISTANCE

ATTRACTION MOUNTAIN KENYA

LATITUDE: 00.00
LONGITUDE: 37°7'E
ALTITUDE: 2135M. 7000FT

Approximate travel time from Lagos to Nairobi is 5 hrs, 20 mins

LAGOS, NG	6.656616 // 3.864769
NAIROBI, KE	-1.291842 // 36.878055

