



Kenya Tour Guide

The Great Rift Valley

The **Kenyan Rift Valley** stretches from the Dead Sea in the Middle East, south through the Red Sea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and into Mozambique. When you are visiting, particularly if you go to Common Ground Program and Namunyak Maasai Welfare, there are many sites to see on the weekends.

Major geological upheavals caused a series of lakes in Kenya, some of which are freshwater (Turkana, Naivasha and Baringo), and others of which are soda lakes with high saline content. These are rich in algae and tiny crustaceans, which are the main food sources for the millions of flamingos gracing the lakes.

The geological upheavals also resulted in the sprouting of volcanic mountains, including Longonot and Mount Kenya. The scenery in the Rift Valley is breathtaking and the approach, via road or rail, from Nairobi will take you up gently through the highlands and bring you suddenly to the edge of the Rift Valley, which drops away to a ribbon of green in the valley floor below.

The Great Rift Valley is a 6000-kilometer crack in the Earth's crust that divides Kenya geographically. This enables an extraordinary and diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to inhabit the land; much of which is open and available to visitors.

Things to See Around the Great Rift Valley

Kitale is a service town, 330 kilometers northwest of Nairobi. A small agricultural town, Kitale is a base for people heading to Mount Elgon, Saiwa Swamp National Park, and Turkana. The town dates back to the nineteenth century when it was known as the settlement of Quitale, a slave-trading center. The town was founded in 1908 as a service center, when European farmers started settling in the region. Its importance as a growth pole increased with the construction of the railway that reached the town in 1925. Kitale's development is similar to other Rift Valley towns, with township status given in 1930 and municipality status in 1968. Kitale is the seat of the District headquarters of Trans-Nzoia, a wealthy agricultural area, and serves a catchment population of over 800,000.

Kitale has a post office, banks, a busy market, and two museums. Treasures of Africa is a museum of the extensive collection of a gentleman named John Wilson. He is someone you will want to meet. His collection of the Karamajong from Uganda is unrivaled, and he will tell you the stories of his escape with great enthusiasm. The Kitale Museum has an ethnographic exhibition on the Turkana people, and at the back of the museum there is a small rain forest. There are several hotels and restaurants in town, as well as numerous shops. The bus and *matatu* park is a chaotic mess of vehicles and people shouting directions.

Nakuru, the capital city of the Rift Valley Province, is known for its fresh vegetable market and flower sales. The Menengai Crater, near Nakuru, is an extinct volcano, more than 8000 feet high, which allows for a spectacular view. The Hyrax Hill Prehistoric Site is an Iron-Age site, and has a museum that showcases artifacts from area mines.

Lake Nakuru National Park is known for the many flamingos that reside at the saltwater lake. During the right time of year and optimal lake conditions, between one and two million flamingos feed around the shore of Lake Nakuru, shifting the blue color of the shore to a sunset pink. Lake Nakuru is home to over 400 species of birds, so be sure to bring your binoculars. In addition to the birds, there are over 50 mammal species that roam through Lake Nakuru National Park, including the “Big 5” (elephant, rhino, lion, leopard, and cape buffalo). The best place to view the flamingos and other wildlife at Lake Nakuru National Park is from the Baboon Rocks.

Lake Bogoria National Park is located just north of Nakuru, and is less visited by tourists. Lake Bororia has a hot springs and geysers that spout and produce high clouds of steam into the air.

Lake Turkana is the second largest desert lake in the world. It is known as the “Jade Sea” because of the bright and beautiful color of the water. Lake Turkana is home to the largest crocodile population in the world. The Central Island on the lake has three well-known crater lakes (Lake Crocodile, Lake Flamingo, and Lake Tilapia) and an active volcano that interest tourists year-around.

Hell’s Gate National Park, in the Rift Valley, is known for its abundance of hot springs which are created from the volcanic activity beneath the Earth’s surface. For visitors with more scientific interests, Hell’s Gate National Park is home to Kenya’s Geothermal Station.

Maralai, in the Rift Valley, has a game sanctuary that protects many of Kenya’s endangered species. Maralai’s main attraction, however, are the camel safaris on which tourists are able to embark. Visitors rent camels and take guided camelback tours of the countryside. The Losiolo Escarpment, also known as the “World’s End”, is a cliff that is more than 2000 meters high and provides a breathtaking view, dropping into the Suguta Valley.

The **Aberdare National Park** is part of a volcanic mountain range that forms the eastern edge of the Rift Valley. There are three main towns in the Abedare area that cater to tourists and sell traditional and native gift items: Nyeri, Nyahururu, and Niavasha. Abedare National Park is home to many waterfalls. Higher elevations in the park form the bamboo zone, which grows at least three different species of bamboo. The Treetops Hotel is the main attraction of Abedare National Park; it is the world class, elegant hotel where Queen Elizabeth learned that her father had died and where she was named Queen of England.

Nyahururu is Kenya’s highest town and is one of the last white settler towns to be established. It is known by the locals as “T-falls” because of the numerous waterfalls on the outskirts of town.

Mount Elgon National Park hosts an extinct volcano, which is known for its superb elephant watching. This is the only place in the world where elephants go underground. They spend much of their time in the natural salt caves. Three of these caves are open to the public. (Caution: Check with local rangers before visiting as conflicts with poachers from Uganda occur frequently.)

Kenya is the world's third largest tea producer and **Kericho** is Kenya's tea production capital. Kericho also has a war memorial for a Maasai chief who was killed in the 1700s, and the ancient Holy Trinity Church. The Tea Hotel is the most popular place to entertain a "tea party". The hotel also offers tours of the tea plantations and trout fishing excursions to the local river.

Lake Victoria Region / Nyanza Province

Kisumu is the third largest city in Kenya and offers many amenities and necessities. It is also the closest city to Rabuor Village and Mama na Dada Africa in Kunya Village on Lake Victoria. There are many local spots that offer internet access. Rabuor Village is only a short *matatu* ride away so you may find yourself visiting often. Kunya Village, on the other hand, is about two to three hours away, but you may still want to travel to Kisumu once every couple of weeks to email. When you do travel to Kisumu, you may want to stay overnight at the New Victoria Hotel for a change. The New Victoria Hotel is clean, safe and the food is simple and inexpensive.

Please note that although it is not dangerous during the day, Kisumu is a dangerous town at night, particularly because of the street children. You will see children walking around with small plastic bottles hanging from their mouths. These children are sniffing glue, a tragic problem. Although you may want to help, realize that these children can also be very dangerous so do not offer them any money. There are local churches and organizations available to help these children, but the ones you see are very troubled because they reject the help in favor of being on the streets with their friends.

The **Kisumu Impala Sanctuary** is located just off the shore of Lake Victoria. It provides shelter for endangered impalas, as well as two leopards, spotted hyena, and two olive baboons.

Lake Victoria is the largest freshwater lake in Africa and the second largest body of freshwater in the world after Lake Superior. The lake is shared by Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya and is home to hippos and crocodiles. Lake Victoria is known for its good fishing and variety of fish, including the "world class" Nile Perch and Tilapia. Lake Victoria is the primary source of the Nile River, and it is said that sunsets on the Nile turn the water into liquid gold. (Caution: The lake is host to bilharzias, parasitic snails, so do not swim or walk barefoot in its waters.)

Rusinga Island is a popular attraction for game fisherman and has also been a hotspot for finding ancient fossils.

Ruma National Park is located in the South of the Nyanza Province and is less than 10 miles from Lake Victoria. This park was established to protect the Roan Antelope, which do not exist anywhere else in Kenya. Ruma National Park is also home to a variety of reptiles, including cobras and pythons.

Saiwa Swamp National Park is a great place to take a day trip to explore. This is an adventure that is only accessible by foot. The swamp opened in 1974 to protect the Sitatunga Antelope. The Sitatunga have unusually wide hooves which allow them to walk on the surface of the swamp. Saiwa Swamp National Park is also a great place to observe various kinds of monkeys.

Kakamega Forest is known as one of Kenya's best-kept secrets. As a rainforest, it is home to an abundance of plant and animal life, including over 320 species of birds. Overnight accommodations are available and are run by the Kenyan Forest Service. The town of Kakamega also has a local golf course.

Kendu Bay is home to a volcanic lake that is surrounded by myths and fables regarding its existence.

Kisii is Kenya's home of the soapstone. Travelers looking to purchase soapstone sculptors and carvings will most likely have better luck in the neighboring town of Tabaka.

Mfangano Island is a remote island on Lake Victoria. The island is only accessible by plane. It is known for the unique fishing techniques employed there, using lamps to attract fish and shrimp. There are also a number of prehistoric cave paintings and petroglyphs.

Nairobi

Nairobi is the capital of Kenya and one of Africa's fastest growing cities. Never travel in Nairobi alone, and always keep your valuables out of sight.

The **National Museum** contains East African art as well as exhibits on evolution, plate tectonics (especially as it relates to the Great Rift Valley), and a large collection of Kenya's many bird species.

Maasai Markets are a great place to see the Maasai culture first-hand and to purchase some pieces of Maasai beadwork. Safer but more expensive markets are located in and around Nairobi's hotels. To experience the cheaper and more authentic markets bring a guide for security.

The **Karen Blixen Museum** presents the story of Karen Blixen made famous by the movie *Out of Africa*. The site of the museum is the colonial house in which Karen Blixen lived and ran a coffee plantation from 1914 to 1931. There are also magnificent gardens on the property.

Located on 120 acres just outside of Nairobi is the **Giraffe Center**. It is home to the endangered Rothschild Giraffe. A visit to the park gives tourists an up-close experience with the very rare giraffe.

Nairobi National Park is home to 80 species of large mammals. It is a nice alternative way to experience Kenya's wildlife if there is no time to experience one of Kenya's large parks.

Please note: Petty crime and pickpockets are an issue for tourists, particularly in crowded locations. It is also illegal to photograph Kenya's President and other national symbols, including the nation's flag, police, and members of the military. It is, however, okay to photograph local people with their consent, but often they expect to be paid a small fee.

Additional Must-Sees

When you are working with Namunyak Maasai Welfare, you will have the opportunity to visit the **Masai Mara National Reserve**. Between July and October, Masai Mara is host to the annual Great Wildebeest Migration. Kenya's extraordinary wildlife follow the Wildebeest from Tanzania's Serengeti Plains each year and present a great opportunity to see them in all their wonder.

Donyo Wuas is another great place to view game. Straddling the border with Tanzania in the Cyula Hills, the area exhibits a spectacular view of Mount Kilimangaro.

Mombassa is Kenya's second largest city. It is located on the coast where travelers are able to experience its beautiful beaches. Travelers to Mombassa should not miss Fort Jesus that was originally built by the Portuguese to protect their trade route to India. It was later taken by the Arabs in 1698, and is now a great museum and example of 16th Century Portuguese architecture.

Lamu is an exotic island and 14th century stone town on the sea route of the spice trade, located north of Mombassa. It has recently been declared a world heritage site. The town is a center of Swahili culture and is filled with old Arab houses. No cars are allowed on the island so all traveling must be done by foot or donkey.

Mailinda is a village similar to Lamu. It is another great place to experience Kenya's beautiful coast with white sands, coral reefs, and opportunities to scuba dive and surf.

Mount Kenya National Park is home to Africa's second highest mountain (after Tanzania's Mount Kilimangaro). The Kikuyu tribe calls Mount Kenya Kere Nyaga, meaning Mountain of Brightness. Many rare and endangered species inhabit the park including albino zebra.