



Thomas Nash photo

## Exploring Kenya on a safari • built for two

By J. Madeleine Nash

**N**AIROBI, Kenya—Later we would view downtown Nairobi as a civilized city, but at first glance it seemed derelict in the way of tropical places. In Jeevanjee Gardens, a public park, trash was scattered like fertilizer among the brightly flowering shrubs. On the red earth people lay sleeping.

The sidewalks were lined with gray-haired men trying to interest us in a shoeshine. "Shoeshine for success," one called softly. Then he looked at our Adidas running shoes and laughed.

Walking past the conversational huddles formed by Nairobi's street people, we saw carvings of giraffes, elephants and Masai warriors materialize from under raggedy sleeves as if by magic. "Only 40 shillings," whispered one man, holding up two small statuettes. We did a quick calculation: 40 shillings is roughly \$3.

In Nairobi we rented a four-wheel-drive Hertz Suzuki, a Japanese version of a Jeep.



The next morning, as we set off on an 18-day do-it-yourself safari through Kenya's game parks, we felt more than slightly conspicuous. The Suzuki was painted with black and white stripes: We were driving a metallic zebra.

Like Teddy Roosevelt, we began our safari at Nairobi's fabled Norfolk Hotel, a rambling, Norman-style outpost with wide verandas and an interior courtyard sheltered by a majestic Jacaranda tree. The tree, just coming into full bloom, showered the walkway below with large, lavender flowers.

Unlike Teddy Roosevelt, we had no porters, no guides. We

loaded our car with guide books, as many maps as we could find, a Jerry can for emergency gasoline, two five-gallon water jugs, enough freeze-dried food to last a week, peanut butter and bread for on-the-road sustenance, two sleeping bags and a lightweight tent.

THE STATESIDE travel agent we had asked to make a few reservations had tried to discourage us from traveling on our own. We even received a letter warning of "the extreme danger and difficulty you may encounter."

But when we ran our plans by a long-time Nairobi resident, she pronounced them sensible. Our idea was simple: to stay in a few luxury accommodations for fun, to camp when we felt like it and to try out some of the cheaper, self-service cabins [called bandas] provided by some of Kenya's parks. That way, we figured, we would see more of the country than on a rushed, packaged tour. Besides, the prospect of

being chauffeured around by a hired driver appealed not at all to our sense of adventure.

On our first day out we headed for Masai Mara, the northern extension of the Serengeti Plain. The views of the Rift Valley, an expanse of green and gold, were breathtaking. But from the village of Narok

chattering teeth, I joked to my husband that I was sorry I had not worn my jogging bra.

There were potholes deep enough to worry about driving into, and where the potholes ended, the washboard ripples began. To make matters worse, the road was not well-marked. In most places, it was not marked at all. At one point, we found ourselves hopping out of the car to check our direction with a compass.

But the sights along the way more than made up for the discomfort. We encountered scores of Masai walking along the road, tall, handsome people with earlobes stretched into long loops. They wore Roman-style togas and red-checked capes, and smiled and waved their spears as we drove past.

We stopped at the sight of Masai shepherd boys tending a flock of goats. "How are you?" recited the oldest, as if reading from a primer. He knew almost no other words of English. Pantomiming, we asked if we could take a photograph. "Picha, picha"—the Swahili word is close to our own.

The boy nodded enthusiastically, then advanced his hand. "Sweets," he said, demanding payment in advance. In spite of all we had read about the Masai love for sweets, we had forgotten to bring any. By this time more Masai children had approached, thrusting arms with outstretched palms through our car windows and under our noses. We drove slowly away, children clinging to our car.

WHEN WE FINALLY arrived at Kichwa Tembo, a bucolic, tented lodge on the outskirts of Masai Mara park, we were covered with fine, volcanic grit. It filled our nostrils and stuck to our eyelashes like

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