



Exploring Kenya on a safari. built for two

By J. Madeleine Nash

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 stalled 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 Nairo-bi's fabled Norfolk Hotel, a rambling, Norman-style outpost with wide verandas and an inder flowers.

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-theroad 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

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 tow. Besides, the prospect of packaged tour. Besides, the prospect of

being chauffeured around by a hired driver appealed not at all to our sense of adven-

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

There were potholes deep enough to worry about driving into, and where the potholes and d, the washboard rippies 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-checkered capes, and smiled and waved their spears as we drove past 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.

to our own.

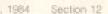
The boy nodded enthusiastically, then advanced his hand. "Sweets," he said. demanding payment in advance. In spite of all we had read about the Masai love for sweets, we had forgotten to bring any. By this time more Masai children had approached, thrusting arms with outstret palms through our car windows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

WHEN WE FINALLY arrived at Kichwa Tembo, a buccolic, 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

Continued on page 7



Getting to know the man behind the Chelsea. Page 3 Road races for all tastes at Elkhart Lake. Page 12 How to find a good car rental deal. Page 19





On the Mara plain, the author and the day's guide, James, who lent the travelers his all-seeing eyes. Finding elusive animals is one of the advantages of hiring a guide.

Thomas Nash photos

Exploring the wilds of Kenya on a self-styled safari for two

Continued from page 1

glue. We were delighted to find that our tent was equipped with a show-er. There was also a mechanic on the premises, who turned out to be handy when our car failed to restart for the short trip to the gas pump.

Morning began with brilliant salmon-red streaks in a gray sky. Through the chilly dawn mist we could see the great plains beyond. Some great black lumps a hundred yards or so from our tent were indecipherable at first. They turned yards or so from our tent were indecipherable at first. They turned out to be buffalo. One, snorting heavily, had passed close by our tent during the night, and in the moonlight we could see the full curve of its horns.

While the other guests were piling into mini-vans provided by the lodge, my husband, Thomas, and I ventured out in our Suzuki for our first game drive. As we dipped down into and out of a small stream, following a dirt track, we found a large giraffe staring down at us quizzically. Its eyes were large with long lashes, like a Cover Girl model. Girl model.

Girl model.

Being on our own allowed us that luxury. There was no one around to pronounce giraffes boring. There also was no one else around that late afternoon when we spotted a cheetah on the prowl. It had begun to rain, and the regular tourist mini-vans had already headed home for the avening. We watched the for the evening. We watched the cheetah until it became too dark to ee, following at a distance across

the open plains

This cheetah, with its small head and streamlined body, tried to ap-pear nonchalant. But it obviously pear nonchalant. But it obviously had its eye on a group of Thomp-son's gazelles. And the Tommies son's gazelles. And the Tommies had their eyes on the cheetah. As we watched, predator and prey tested one another. The cheetah, its head swiveling in all directions, trotted a wide circle around the Tommies. The watchful, nervous Tommies, their tails raised high for danger, approached the cheetah. "We see you," they seemed to be saying. "So don't try anything."

ON OUR OWN we found lionesses and cubs resting in a gully after feasting on a fresh kill. We saw great piles of hippos with ruffled, pink ears cooling themselves in the Mara River. We waited patiently while herds of elephants crossed directly in front of our car; some of the babies were small enough to fit under the bellies of their mothers.

Above all, we were awed by the

Above all, we were awed by the sheer number of animals we encountered. Alone on that vast, teeming plain, we drove through oceans of zebra and wildebeest that parted before us like waves before

the prow of a ship.

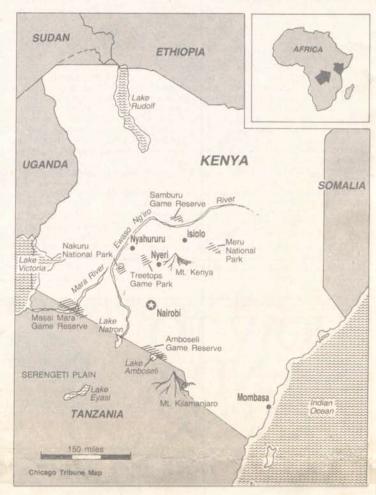
But some animals proved difficult But some animals proved difficult to find. Unsuccessful in our attempts to spot a leopard or a rhino, we finally hired a private guide: a slender, 23-year-old Masai named James Morinte. When we expressed puzzlement about the name, he laughed and explained that James was his Christian name. He was the first member of his family to learn either Swahili or

came to appreciate James quickly. His eyes, attuned to minute perturbations on the great Mara plains, could pick out what our eyes did not see. He did not find a rhino, but he spotted a whole pride of lions on the march, a tiny dikdik quivering with fear, and in the early morning he found leopards.

For an hour we doggedly perused a rock outcropping covered with bush. Finally, two leopard cubs came into focus, looking at first like sun-dappled twigs and leaves. One dashed briefly into the open and climbed a tree. As we left, James suddenly abouted stop. He pointed up into another tree, and there we saw the fresh carcass of a gazelle, a full-grown buck with beautifully whorled horns. Leopards often stash their kills in trees, James ex-plained, out of the reach of other predators. We could see the gazelle's stomach hanging out.

Unfortunately, we were not able to observe the leopards in peace and quiet. Soon after our arrival on al mini-vans and another private car. The advantage of hiring a guide, we discovered, was finding elusive animals; the disadvantge was that the guides all follow each

We left the Mara with regret and headed north, taking an infre-quently traveled route through Renya's lush green tea country. At first we passed many Masai. Some wore empty film cannisters and even Ping-Pong balls in their ears. We guessed it was to stretch the



lobes into even longer loops. But suddenly the road was paved, and there were no more Masai. Just ahead, five brightly robed women were in the process of squeezing themselves into an already full ma-

MATATUS ARE Kenya's most important form of transportation. A kind of cross between a Greyhound bus and a gypsy cab, a matatu may be a Peugeot sedan or a Toyota pick-up truck, with or without a camper on the back. Whatever, a matatu is always jammed. There is a saying in Swahili that a matatu is like a church because it turns no

trians that line the sides of every road, matatus present hazards for the unwary. They drive fast and stop suddenly. If they are meant to hold 12, they regularly carry 22. We people that its back door was held shut by a passenger balanced on the rear bumper.

Our destination was Lake Nakuru National Park, which ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson has termed "the most fabulous bird spectacle in the world." We arrived shortly before sunset and, though exhausted decided on a quick tour of the surroundings. Shortly after passing through the park gates, our car was mobbed by a curious pack of vervet monkeys. One of them hopped onto the hood and peered in at us through the windshield.

A steep, rocky track led to an area of the park known as the Baboon Cliffs. Bouncing our way to the top, we were rewarded with a spectacular view of the lake from above. Millions of bright-pink flamingos hugged the shoreline. Glowing in the setting sun, they collectively resembled artist Chris-

to's floating islands. Like all of Kenya's national parks, Lake Nakuru has designated camping areas. The one we chose was equipped not only with latrines but also with showers. We pitched our tent under a stand of mature, yellow-barked thorn trees that swread their hemohas in a wide spread their branches in a wide parasol. We could see several small nylon tents like ours nearby. Some of the campers included families with young children.

EARLY THE NEXT morning, we valked over to the lake and watched pelicans swimming tightly packed groups and rhyth-mically beating their wings on the water. Then we packed our gear water. Then we packed our gear and left for Treetops, the famous stillted lodge in the Aberdare Mountains that overlooks a water hole and salt lick frequented by animals during the night.

Looking over our maps, we er

roneously concluded that no route was paved, and we selected the shortest. When we found no signs for the turnoff, a not unusual situa-tion, we asked a khaki-uniformed pointed to the road we were alread on. His English was fragmented we were sure he had misunderstood

As it turned out, we had misun-derstood our maps: If we had folderstood our maps: If we had fol-lowed the policeman's directions, we would have connected with the longer route shown on the map. It was, we discovered later, paved. Instead, we found ourselves on a rutted dirt road that wound a tor-tuous path up one hill and down another. What should have been a short and easy trip turned into a fascinating marathon. Near the town of Nyahururu, we

Near the town of Nyahururu, we lost our way entirely, and in the confusion, managed to cross the equator three times. Finally we arrived at the Outspan Hotel in Nyeri, the departure point for Treetops. After the quiet beauty of rural Kenya, we were not ready for Treetops. First we were pointed to a crowded dining room for an obligatory buffet lunch, then loaded onto a bus with other tourists. Our was a florid-faced English ginde was a norse-faced engish-man billed as "the Hunter." He carried an elephant gun and barked orders like a drill sergeant. Treetops is the sort of place that

draws rave reviews from travel agents. It reminded us of Disney World. Once natural, both the salt lick and the water hole today are artificially maintained. The build-up of salt in the soil around the lodge has driven back the edge of

WHAT WAS MOST objectionable about Treetops was the loud human company. But after 10 o'clock at night, almost everyone else had retired, and we had the balcony off our room to ourselves. The floodist scene through the night never ceased to amaze. At one point, a rhino lumbered out of the darkness. A great, prehistoric looking crea-ture with partly healed gashes on both sides, the rhino stayed for several hours. For a few minutes, it formed an odd trio with a dainty female bushbuck and a menacing black buffalo. We fell asleep to the sound of the rhino slurping pounds

From Treetops, we headed for Samburu National Park in Kenya's forbidding north country. We stopped for gas in Isiolo, a dusty town with a dusty market and a dusty mosque, and were immediate-ly assailed by peddlers of copper bracelets. One was about 14 years old and wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Datsun Rally." Isloio is the gateway to the northern deserts, and we began meeting a different kind of people there: nomadic Somalis, bare-breasted Samburu women wearing beaded necklaces piled as high as Elizabethan collars. In horror, we watched a naked boy sink to his hands and knees and drink from an

animal water hole. We camped in Samburu on the



The market at Isiolo: "In horror, we watched a naked boy drink from an animal water hole."

Tips for a safe, sane safari in Kenya

Reservations: Hotels in Nairobi can easily be booked through a stateside travel agent or your airline. Plan on spending at least three days in Nairobi getting organized. Nairobi travel agents are the best sources of current information. They can

arrange ndvance bookings at any of Kenya's game lodges and bondas and answer questions about camping and driving conditions.

One of the best agents is Marian Slade of Bruce Travel on Kolmange Street, P.O. Box 40009, Nairobi. Another good agent is Anne Kariuk of Silver Spear Tours, Standard Street: P.O. Box 40600, Nairobi. During high season [July-August and Christmas raperially], it is a good idea to have reservations at the more popular lodges.

Beating a can Noirobi be season.

Renting a car: Nairobi has many car-rental agencies. We decided on Hertz, which has mechanics in a

cies. We decided on Hertz, which has mechanics in a number of the game parks. The Suzuki four-wheel-drive is only slightly more expensive than a Datsun sedan [figure on spending around \$900 for three weeks, not including gas]. Land Rovers also are available for rental but cost much more.

The four-wheel-drive will seem very rough and slow on paved roads, but if you want to go off the beaten path, it is well worth having. From March until June, when the long rains fall, four-wheel-drive is a must. When you pick up your car, be sure you get a full tool kit, extra parts [a fan belt, rotor, distributor cap], good three plus spare, a jerry can for extra gasoline. Gas stations periodically run out of gas, so keep your tank and jerry can full.

Books and maps: Good books and maps are indispensable for a successful do-it-yourself safari. Whenever you see a book or map that seems useful,

Whenever you see a book or map that seems useful, buy it. Never assume you will be able to pick it up later. Assemble as complete a traveling library as

you can before you go.

Musts are J. G. Williams' "A Field Guide to the
National Parks of East Africa" [William Collins
Sons & Co.] and Cynthia Moss' "Portraits in the
Wild" [University of Chicago Press]. The guide-

Wild" [University of Chicago Press]. The guide-books with the most useful information about lodging come in French: "Au Kenya" [Guides Bleus] and "Le Kenya" [Nouvelles Frontieres]. The book store next to Nairobi's New Stanley Hotel on Kenyatta Avenue is a good place to look for road maps, maps of all the parks and good English-language guide books not rendily available in this country. The best map will be the most recent map. Currently, it is a googenessed map published by the Currently, it is a government map published by the Survey of Kenya. There is also a Michelin map to central and southern Africa and a Geographia map

Even with maps, expect to get lost. If you need to ask directons, remember that people wearing neck-

ties almost always speak English. In a pinch, a Swahili dictionary is useful.

Camping: Camping equipment can be rented in Nairobi, but it is bulky. If you don't plan on camping much but want the equipment as emergency back-up much but want the equipment as emergency back-up
for long drives, bringing your own backpacking
equipment makes sense. A 5-gallon water jug [obtainable in Nairobi or any sizable town] is also a
must. Many of Kenya's campsites do not provide
water, and laloss and rivers are not suitable for
drinking [or swimming] because of crocodiles and
bilharzia, a snail-borne parasite.

Most of the game-park lodges will let campers use
showers and pools for a fee. It is possible to buy
provisions outside Nairobi, but the selection is limit
ed: tinned meafs, peanut butter and iam, white

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Safety: Animals are not a serious concern so long as you follow rules of common sense. Walking is not allowed in the game parks, except in a few small

areas.

The great contrasts in wealth can lead to more serious problems with human beings. Armed robberies are not uncommon in Nairobi, and Masai Mara has experienced similar trouble in recent months. Use the same caution as you would in Chicago. Before setting out, inquire about the problems you may meet en route.

There is some trouble with Shifta, Somali bandits, in Kenya's north in remote resilient the danger of

in Kenya's north. In remote regions, the danger of being stranded with car trouble dictates traveling with at least two vehicles.

Medical problems: Take a small medicine kit

Antibiotics, water-purification tablets, anti-diarrheal medications are basics. Because there are now strains of chloroquine-resistant malaria in East
Africa, it is also a good idea to take two types of
anti-malarial drugs. Check with your physician.

The East African Flying Doctor Services [located
at Wilson Airport in Nairobi] will provide tourists

th a temporary membership for a very low fee. In a true emergency, they will fly you out of remote areas from the nearest landing strip. Costs: Round-trip air fare from New York on Pan

American's twice-weekly trans-Africa flight is \$1,300. The luxury game lodges provide three meals a day and range in price from \$50 to \$100 a night for two. Bandas run less than \$20 a night fully equipped. Camping usually involves a small fee, paid to the ranger at the gate. There is also a park entrance fee—about \$5 for a car and two people. A do-it-yourself safari has a decided financial advantage: A one-month trip for two cost us about the same as a two-week packaged tour.

J. Madeleine Nash

sandy banks of the Uaso Nyiro River, scanning the fast-moving water for crocodiles. Near our campsite were great piles of animal dung: The size indicated that the place had recently played host to a herd of elephants.

The next day we followed a dirt track along the river's edge. Though most of the park had been sun-baked to golden straw, the river created a narrow green oasis, and animals sought its cooling shade in the fierce midday heat. We found the fierce midday heat. the peculiar species of animals for Samburu is known: necked gazelles called gerunks, viv-idly patterned Grevy's zebras and reticulated giraffes.

At Amboseli National Park we stayed in a banda directly facing Mount Kilimanjaro. Each morning and evening, we sat on the porch of our banda (which also housed a family of noisy, slightly smelly bats] and watched zebras and will debeests slowly file by in a majestic procession. Once, and only once, the clouds lifted and we could see Kili's flat, snow-covered top. It looked as broad as a football field.

NEAR OUR BANDA were NEAR OUR BANDA were a couple of shops that acted as a kind of trading post for area Masai. We examined a spear, and a funny old Masai showed us how to use it. "Simba, simba," he growled, pre-tending to throw it. Simba is the Swahili word for lion, and Masai like this one regularly walk for

hours across Amboseli's lion-inhab ited plains. They come to the shop to trade their handicrafts and to buy sugar, flour and colorful cloths

The old Masai finished his demonstration and retired to the shade of a nearby tree. He cut an odd figure in a black French beret, headed earrings and a raincoat over his Masai robes.

"He is very rich," whispered Josephine, the pretty shopkeeper. "He has many wives and many cows." After a hard bargaining ses-sion, Josephine let us have the spear and four cowrie-shell neck laces in exchange for a Chicago T-shirt, a patterned no-iron sheet and a small amount of cash.

On the way to Amboseli, we had stopped off at Meru National Park, home of Elsa, the lioness heroine of "Born Free." Meru, we guickly discovered, is not a tourist hot spot. In the height of the dry season, the trees and bush looked as dead as in the midst of an Illinois winter. Everything, including the animals took on the red tint of the dusty soil.

We stayed in the Leopard Rock bandas, a group of riverfront cabins well-maintained by the Meru Coun-ty Council. Inside we found beds with fresh linens, mosquito nets, a full bath and a kitchenette equipped

with cooking and eating utensils.

Meru is famous for its small herd of white rhino, large square-lipped beasts that are nearly extinct. After Somali poachers killed five of meru's rhinos, the remainder were put under guard night and day. The rhinos' caretaker was a tall Sam-buru ranger. He had long loops in his ears and was dressed in khaki shorts and a navy blue T-shirt that read "Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago."

At some point, a journey peaks, but very often the moment stands out only in retrospect. For us that moment occurred in Meru when we undertook a rough journey of more than 50 miles to the banks of the Tana River. It was a lonely drive that took us through remote and desolate country. At last we reached the river-broad, tawny and rimmed with stately palms.

On the other side of the river, just heyond the hippos resting like rocks in the center, we noticed a boy. We watched as he approached the water, gingerly, looking for crocodiles. Then he led his cattle

We tried to place the boy on a map, and we estimated that on his side of the river the closest paved road or town of any size was a twoday cross-country drive. Suddenly we realized that what separated us was more than a matter of miles far from us as the women we had seen along the roadsides walking for miles with firewood on their backs and jugs of water on their heads. The distance was cultural, and it was immeasurable.

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