
Wild Things

There are some things that a text book simply cannot recreate and a personal encounter with big cats and bigger hippos is one of them. Escape Worldwide's Darren Vurnum tells us more and shares his amazing pictures

A SAFARI is one of the greatest travel experiences imaginable. There's nothing quite like seeing huge herds of elephants crossing the plains, packs of lions lazing under a tree, or a pod of hippos cooling off in the river making their unique noise that sounds like they're laughing. At this time of year the annual migration is in full swing on Kenya's Masai Mara, when a million or more grazing animals – wildebeest, zebra, and a host of other creatures – head to the area in search of fresh grasslands, staying there until November when they return to the Serengeti. Whatever time of year you go on safari, though, there's always likely to be a huge amount of wildlife activity with big cats, elephants, and most other game being resident year-round.



Each safari experience is different, and totally memorable. Even if you've been on safari before you're likely to see different wildlife on a repeat trip and the variety of wildlife can be staggering. It's like a textbook opening up in front of you, with the classic 'big five' of lion, buffalo, elephant, leopard, and rhino being extended to the 'big nine' on the Masai Mara, taking in cheetah, zebra, giraffe, and hippo. Children will love spotting as many of them as possible.

East Africa has some of the best wildlife viewing opportunities of anywhere in the world and Kenya in particular is an ideal option for a family safari. It's just a nine hour flight to Nairobi and numerous national parks are within easy reach of the city; combine a few different parks on one itinerary to get a really good mix of landscapes and wildlife. What's more, with prices starting at under £1,500 per person for a 5-night safari next Easter, it's remarkably good value too. Travelling from park to park is fascinating, taking in the varied geography of the area and seeing day to day life in local towns and villages. It's also possible to visit a local school or a Masai village, where the difference to life at home couldn't be more apparent.

If you want to keep travelling to a minimum, head straight to the Masai Mara, an hour flight from Nairobi by light aircraft.



Don't miss...

for the grown-ups, a hot air balloon ride at dawn over the Masai Mara, float gently above the trees to see the wildlife below as it starts the new day.



One to avoid...

there's not much you can do about it, but you may be stuck in your vehicle for a while if a lion decides to have a nap in the shade the vehicle provides!

Just getting there is half the experience flying across Kenya with spectacular views, and as you come in to land over the Mara you'll get your first glimpse of the game on the ground. A great family option here is the Mara Intrepids Camp where 30 beautiful tents are spread throughout a riverside setting, including two excellent family tents. Unlike some properties the Mara Intrepids doesn't have any age restrictions for children, and the variety of wildlife they're likely to see within close proximity of the camp will take their breath away. The camp runs the Adventurer's Club too, introducing children to the animals and plants of the Masai Mara with a Masai naturalist, with activities including



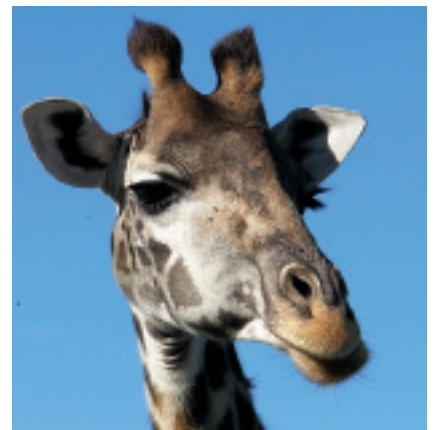
an obstacle course to show what the animals have to go through on a daily basis. On your return journey from the Mara your safari vehicle is likely to have to clear the airstrip of zebra and antelope before your light aircraft can land!

A safari holiday is packed with activity and adventure, and you're bound to come away having learned a great deal, both about Africa's wildlife and also its people and culture. Life is, after all an education.

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