

AFRICA – KENYA MAASAI MARA & LOITA HILLS TREK

8-days / 7-nights guided sightseeing & walking safari



This fascinating tour in Kenya combines typical 4WD game viewing in the Maasai Mara Game Reserve with a walking safari led by traditional Maasai guides in their native land. The wildlife in the Maasai Mara is second to none, with so many iconic African animals found here, including lions, elephant, giraffe, and enormous herds of migratory wildebeest, antelope and zebra. We trek through the dense forest of the Loita Hills and pass through Maasai villages, allowing for an enriching and inspiring cultural exchange, learning so much about the Maasai people and their way of life. The landscape too is inspiring – the vast Rift Valley, the undulating plains of the Maasai Mara, the lush green forest of the Loita Hills, the vivid pink salt pans of Lake Magadi – combining to create indelible memories of an amazing journey.

Each night we make camp under the star-filled expansive African sky. Meals are all taken al fresco, of course, and the dining table is set up with the view in mind. Three-person tents hold one or two people and mattresses are provided. Camping allows us to visit places where few other travellers have been before, and provides the opportunity for authentic cultural exchanges with local communities. We camp in wilder bush settings rather than busy campsites. The food is high quality and all camps are comfortable and safe, although we do sacrifice some creature comforts – in this arid landscape water for washing is hard to come by so we provide access to a bush shower at each campsite. We are supported on our trek by a team of donkeys carrying our equipment and gear, so all you need carry each day is a daypack with camera and drinking water etc.

Cost from: High season **US\$2080** 20th July; 3rd, 17th August, 2019
Mid-season **US\$1910** 5th January; 2nd February; 6th July; 1st September; 5th October, 2019
Low season **US\$1800** 2nd, 30th March; 1st June; 1st, 14th December, 2019

Tent upgrades: Comfort tent add US\$175 (pictured) Comfort plus ensuite US\$240 per person
Singles tents are also available on request at extra cost.

Prices are based on a minimum number of persons on fixed departure dates.

Park entrance and conservation fees of US\$285 per person paid locally (*subject to change*)

Private group and family departures available on other dates – do ask for availability and costs.

Includes: 7 nights' camping accommodation, full board from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, treated drinking water, transport in 4WD safari vehicle, services of experienced guide and cook, traditional Maasai guides on walking safari, donkey team to carry gear during walking safari

Not included: International flights, drinks, meals in Nairobi, visa or passport charges, personal expenses, sleeping bag (can be provided for a fee), gratuities, park entrance and conservation fees.

Grading: Easy to moderate with walks up to 12km daily during 3½ days of walking safari. Trails can be rough underfoot and the heat can make walks seem more challenging in the summer months.

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Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Nairobi to Maasai Mara Game Reserve

Nairobi, a bustling city of over 1 million people, was established in 1896 as a stop on the Uganda Railway and gained importance during the colonial period as the centre of the region's coffee and tea industries. We drive to the edge of the spectacular Rift Valley escarpment and our first sight of this huge fault in the earth's crust is impressive. The African savannah seems to stretch endlessly below us. Just a few kilometres outside of Nairobi we plunge suddenly into Hemingway's Africa.

We drive through Maasai land to the Maasai Mara Game Reserve. The Mara is a succession of undulating plains and rivers lined with acacia trees, with an exceptionally rich variety of wildlife. Here we find the largest lion population in Kenya, but even more spectacular are the herds of antelopes, zebras, and wildebeest. During migration from June to October (the dry season) their numbers reach the millions, and the migrating herds of ungulates are trailed by hyenas, lions, cheetah and other predators. We go for a game drive this afternoon in the reserve, in our 4WD safari vehicle which has roof hatches for observation and photography. We camp tonight in tents within the reserve.

Day 2: Maasai Mara Game Reserve

We spend the full day driving within the Mara. This is one of Africa's best wildlife reserves and we hope to see at least four of the 'Big Five' – lion, leopard, elephant, and buffalo. It's unlikely we'll see the final member of the five, the black rhinoceros, as these majestic creatures have been poached to the edge of extinction. Other animals we may see include giraffe, hyenas, jackals, cheetahs, zebra, antelope, gazelle and wildebeest. The park is also home to nearly 500 species of bird, many of which are migratory, and to crocodile and hippopotamus in the rivers and wetlands. We camp within the reserve again tonight.

Day 3: Maasai Mara Game Reserve to Loita Hills

We farewell the Mara and drive into the heart of the Loita Hills. Even outside the park boundary the wildlife is still abundant – the Maasai people are pastoral not hunters and tend to dislike the taste of game, so we may see herds of gazelle or wildebeest grazing near Maasai dwellings. This evening we meet our Maasai guides who will accompany us over the next few days.

Day 4: Trekking in the Loita Hills

This morning we head into the hills on foot and the landscape of the Loita Hills is magnificent. We walk through lush forest where the fauna and flora are astounding. There are crested cranes and sacred ibis foraging for insects. Cedar, strangler figs and other giant trees provide a canopy in which colobus monkeys frolic, and we look for delicate native orchids. We camp tonight on a hilltop with great views to the escarpment.

Day 5: Trekking in the Loita Hills

A true cultural experience today, as we pass through several Maasai villages, where we sit down for tea and a chat with the locals, and encounter herdsman and warriors. We skirt the edge of the forest, passing waterholes and hoping to catch a glimpse of antelope or buffalo, then as we come closer to the Tanzanian border, the forest gives way to open fields. We join a walking track used by the Maasai to herd their cattle to the highlands or down to Lakes Magadi and Natron for salt and minerals. We reach a high open plateau with unusual rock formations and magnificent views of the Loliondo Hills in Tanzania, and camp again under the African sky.

Day 6: Walk Loita Hills to Rift Valley escarpment

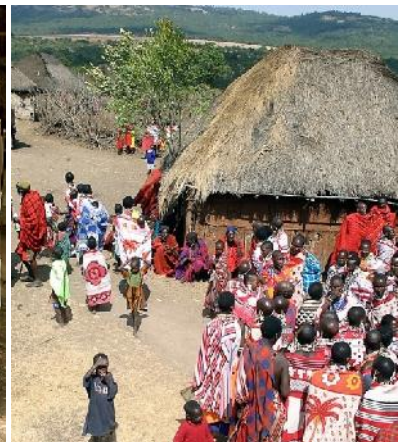
We cross small streams and pass rare plants as we make our way to the edge of the Rift Valley escarpment. The views from here are wonderful and expansive – a thousand metres below us we can see Lakes Magadi and Natron, to the south the volcanoes Gelai and Lengai, home of the Maasai god Ngai, and on the other side of the Rift Valley faint in the distance the Ngong Hills. Feeling on top of the world we make camp here tonight.

Day 7: Walk to Pakase River, game viewing at Shompole Wildlife Conservancy, drive to Lake Magadi

An early start as we hope to avoid the worst of the day's heat on our descent to the Rift Valley floor. At the foot of the rocky escarpment we cross the desert plains to the cool shade near the Pakase River. We meet our vehicles and take a game drive through the privately owned Shompole Wildlife Conservancy, home to zebra, wildebeest, gazelle, giraffe, elephant, cheetah and lions, along with over 400 bird species. Our camping spot tonight has views over Lake Magadi and the flocks of flamingos lining its shores.

Day 8: Lake Magadi walk and return to Nairobi

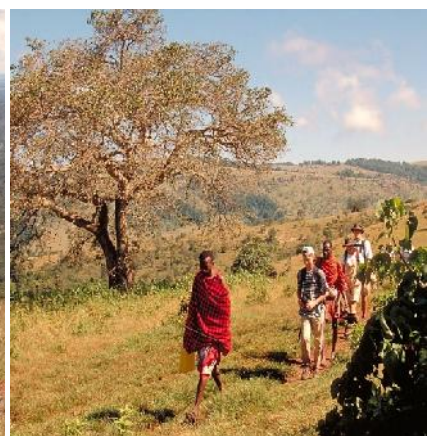
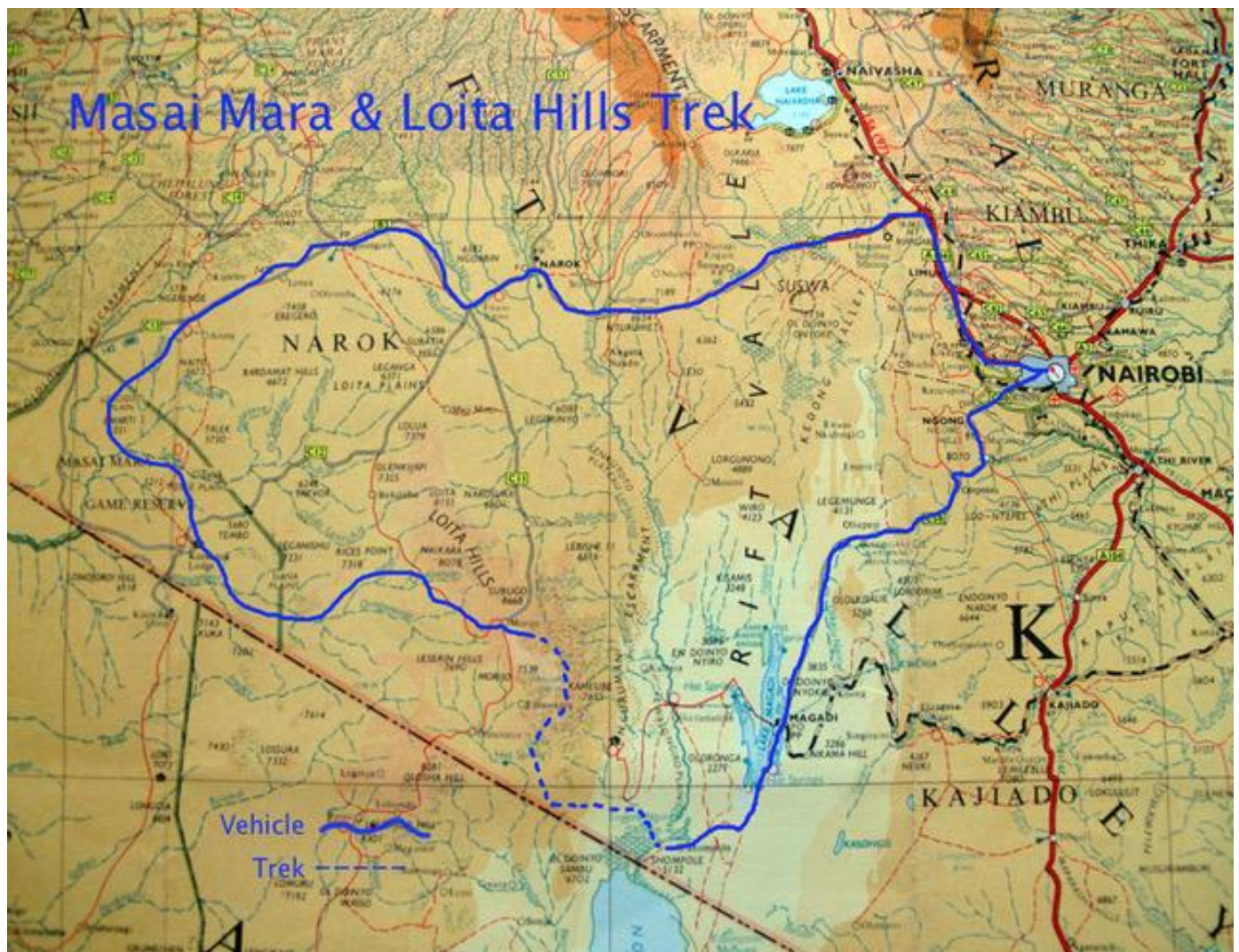
We wake early for a walk along the lakeshore. Magadi is a soda lake, surrounded by an enormous salt pan in shades of pink from pale rose to magenta. Hot springs at lake's edge provide ideal conditions for algae and microscopic aquatic life to thrive, in turn providing food for many birds, including the iconic flamingo. It's not unusual to see hundreds of thousands of flamingos, as well as pelicans, marabou storks and many other species in season. After our walk we drive out of the Rift Valley to the Ngong Hills and return to the hustle and bustle of Nairobi. No accommodation is included tonight and you will be transferred to the hotel of your choice.



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