



Mathews Safaris

## Planning Your Safari - in East Africa

This is the type of information we distribute to assist prospective guests in visualizing their safari plans. Planning a trip to the African bush should be fun. Take a look and get back to us with your questions and ideas.

### Just how do you get started on planning a safari?

Six months to a year is the usual time-frame for guests to first dream about a safari in Africa and then for us to develop a truly special adventure for them. In fact, Safari planning is very much like building a dream house. It's important not to rush the stage where you envision exactly what you want and it's always a challenge to balance the *romantic* with the *practical*. That's what Jared and I are here for. The "architecture" of a safari may take many forms before the final plans are complete. Correspondence over a few months forms the foundation of the best safaris; ample time for you to describe your dreams and expectations and opportunity for us to develop a variety of creative options. This is one of my favorite parts of the business in that I'm able to get to know the clients and I love the challenge of designing safaris which are tailor-made to your needs.

### Countries of Choice

Our forte is the classic *East African* safari (Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya), although we are guiding more and more safaris to Southern Africa at the request of our clients.

Some typical East African destinations, include:

**Tanzania-** the Serengeti, Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar and Ngorongoro Crater

**Kenya-** the Masai Mara, Amboseli, Mt. Kenya, Tsavo, Lake Victoria and Samburu

**Uganda-** Murchison Falls, the Mountain Gorillas and the Impenetrable Forest

People often ask why *East Africa* should be the stage for their Safari. Whilst we love traveling to the southern reaches of the continent, the main distinction between East and Southern Africa is that East Africa remains unfenced and open to vast migrations of free-ranging wildlife. For example, the Great Migration which takes place each year between Serengeti and the Masai Mara comprises more than 1.5 million wildebeest, zebra and a host of predators (the largest terrestrial migration on the planet). The game in the Republic of South Africa, in contrast, is kept on managed bushveld which is much more akin to parks and ranches in the US. We are also able to claim *true* equatorial weather and the two tallest mountains on the continent- Kilimanjaro and Kenya. Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of East Africa is its cultural diversity as Tanzania alone has more than 120 tribes. The level of service and accommodation in Eastern Africa is superb and we maintain the unique tradition of luxury-tented camps which are positioned and built based entirely on the needs of each group of guests.

What we value most about East Africa is the timeless quality of life, something very rare in this modern world. Whilst many of our competitors strive to tame the travel experience by applying all the gadgets of home, we offer the opportunity to cast that aside and *live* your adventure.

## The Best Safari Seasons

Your safari may be shaped on the weather and migration patterns. Eastern Africa straddles the equator and, subsequently, we have almost no characteristic variation between "summer" and "winter" and sunrise and sunset remain roughly the same year-round 6:30am & 6:30pm. When the sun does come down, it does so with astonishing speed. What we do have is two rainy seasons. The Long Rains in Kenya usually fall in Kenya between April and May while the Short Rains fall in November. This varies slightly in Tanzania as both seasons come a bit earlier. Uganda is much wetter all year around (envison the African Queen). The drier it is, the easier it is to see wildlife since the foliage is thinner and the animals must congregate around the rivers and watering holes. That said, some discerning clients prefer the drama and pageantry of the wet seasons and it seldom rains for more than a few hours a day. To get an idea of the weather in Tanzania try <http://www.meteo.go.tz:80/>

One thing to consider is that many of the East African parks and reserves are at a relatively high altitude (5,000ft above sea level and higher) the hottest days will not be as hot as you may imagine and the evenings will be quite chilly. Summers in many parts of the USA are often hotter and much more humid in comparison to days on Safari. Temperatures in most parks (with the exception of the coast) average in the 70s and lower 80s, with very low humidity.

The majority of the parks in East Africa boast masses of resident wildlife all year long but the highlight of year is the Great Migration which starts in Serengeti in May and enters the Masai Mara in June or July. This makes *your* summer and early fall *our peak season* as people from around the world flock to East Africa to experience the migration. The timing of the migration varies a bit from year to year. This year, the grazing was so good that we had hundreds of thousands of wildebeests munching through the Masai Mara until mid September. They left, thought for a bit, and returned for October!

The best months for trekking on Kilimanjaro or Mt. Kenya (Minimum age for climber 14 years) are December-January and June- July.

One thing to keep in mind is that migration time and the Christmas season are more expensive and more crowded. To book the most exclusive hotels and lodges for these seasons it may be necessary to plan up to a year in advance.

## Length of Trip and Number of Destinations

We believe that a proper safari is about really understanding and experiencing the African environment and culture. Some companies put so much on the itinerary that the safari comes to resemble a Land Rover racetrack. Our general rule is to select a few places from "wish lists" which we develop with our clients with a aim of spending no fewer than 3-4 days in each location. For vast spectacles such as the Great Migration, 5 or 6 days on location is a true pleasure. Climbs up the mountains should take a minimum of 7 days for Kilimanjaro and 5 for Mt. Kenya. The trip from the US is a long one so we encourage guests to plan for no fewer than 10 days in-country if they are to really get into the swing of things and understand what Africa is about. So, for a 10 day- 14 day trip, for example, 3-4 locations may be the best target. There is an embarrassment of riches to chose from (Kenya alone has over 30 Parks, Reserves and Conservancies). Jared and I are there to guide you on these choices and we will present a shortlist to meet your interests and expectations.

## Finding the Wildlife?

Everyone has expectations of what animals they would most like to encounter on safari and what landscapes they would most like to experience. We can thank National Geographic and the Discovery Channel for that. Several of the parks and reserves in Kenya and Tanzania boast all of Africa's "Big Five" (Elephant, Rhino, Lion, Leopard and Buffalo) but there is so much more to see and experience including a vast variety of birds and extraordinary creatures running the gamut from Ardwolf to Zorilla. A good guide will put together a plan so you can see the wildlife on your wish-list plus a few surprises as well. It's a good idea to inform your guide of your special interests early in the planning phase of your safari. The best safari companies will make specialist guides available who are experts on anything from butterflies to buffalos.

## The Landscape and the People

When in search of wildlife, people often overlook the big picture. Eastern Africa is a land of immense physical and cultural contrasts. Within a very short distance you can travel from the grassy savannah, through the deserts, across ancient lava flows and up onto alpine glaciers. The Great Rift Valley defines the region and is one of the largest and most dramatic topographical features on the planet. The land is studded with extinct volcanos, the most famous of which is Kilimanjaro. The coastline of Kenya and Tanzania feature some of the world's most magical beaches and historic towns.

The culture is even more varied than the landscape. East Africa boasts over 150 major tribes ranging from the nomadic Gabra people of the Chalbi Desert to the rich Swahili culture of the Indian ocean coast. Witnessing the struggle to maintain tribal identity and values in this modern day can be one of most fascinating aspects of your safari.

## The Guides

Your guide will make a huge impact on the quality of your safari experience. Although many of East Africa's Driver-Guides are very skilled, it is always advisable to insist upon a Professional Safari Guide. Jared and I prefer to personally host each safari and we add speciality guides based on the interests of our guests. Specialists we work with most closely include a variety of expertise including ornithology, angling, bush walking, mountain climbing, gourmet cooking, digital photography and piloting light aircraft. The sky is the limit.

## Group Size

It's important to decide from the start on how many people you want to travel with as this will affect the per-person costs and choice of lodging. The recommended size for most safaris is 6-10 people. Luxuries such as charter aircraft and private camps become much more affordable as numbers increase and fixed costs may be shared. Groups over 20 tend to overwhelm the environment and create gridlock on game drives. Plus, keep in mind that many four-wheel-drive game-drive vehicles suit groups of 4-6 people each and the most commonly used bush planes accommodate 10 people and their luggage.

## Getting Around in Style

When traveling in Africa, your mode of transport is very important. Our roads are harsh and transport between the parks by car can be time-consuming and exhausting. *Don't be fooled by the map*, distances that appear short can take hours in reality. Even on the main roads, a six hour drive (the average from Nairobi to the Masai Mara) can easily be more exhausting than a 12 hour drive in the USA. We encourage our clients to fly between destinations so that they can spend the most time possible enjoying their stay. Difficult road

segments can be eliminated through use of charter aircraft and all aircraft used by us adheres to British maintenance standards which far exceed those currently in use in the USA. Chartered bush planes range from 4-13 seats while the jet helicopters we use can carry up to 5 people each. Scheduled service to major parks and reserves often use larger aircraft up to 50 seats but note: none of the light aircraft serving the bush are pressurized. Therefore, it is important to notify us early in the planning process of ear problems or other health issues which may prohibit you from flying in light aircraft up to 10,000ft

When exploring the parks and reserves, our aim is to keep you as comfortable and as safe as possible. We use fully inspected and licenced Range Rover, Land Rover 110, Land Rover Discovery and Land Cruiser vehicles with four wheel drive, specially reinforced suspensions, restraining belts and safety equipment. All vehicles are linked by radio and/or satellite phone to each other and to base. All our bush vehicles have large roof hatches for the best game viewing and photography. For safety and environmental reasons we do not use minivans or 2 wheel-drive vehicles of any description.

On bush segments we traditionally match one professional guide with every 4 clients to provide a personalized approach. Upon request, we will increase the client/guide ratio by using 8-Seat Land Rovers. This greatly reduces costs per head.

## What Can You Actually Do on Safari?

The traditional image of a trip to Africa involves khaki-clad people trundling across the open savannah in a trusty Land Rover. That's still part of the picture today but much has changed. Traditional photographic safaris by vehicle are still wonderful but the best guides also encourage their clients to get out of the vehicles to experience Africa first hand.

**Classic Safaris** usually involve a sunrise game drive each day followed by a late breakfast. In the early hours the plains game are still active and the predators may be caught on their way home after a long night's work. The heat of the day is often spent relaxing in your camp or lodge since much of the wildlife is hidden from view at this time. This offers a great opportunity for you to slip into the African pace of things and enjoy being secluded in a timeless environment. A late afternoon game drive is recommended to take advantage of the cooler air and the more active game. In the late afternoon the big cats awake from their naps and start to prowl. Evenings are usually spent dining and telling tall tales in the firelight. Outside the reserves it is possible to take a late night drive to see what the predators have stirred up. You may also include at least one sunrise floating over the savannah by balloon - an excellent way to take in the big picture.

**Walking** amongst the game with an armed guard and guide is one of life's great pleasures. It's not usually allowed in the parks due to the density of wild animals but is possible on the neighboring lands and in private game reserves. It's also a pleasure to see the bush on horseback or as part of a camel train. Trekking in the mountains is superb and the summits of both Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya are achievable by fit walkers with no technical training.

**Meeting the people.** Cultural tourism is growing as more people are eager to discover the great diversity of people and lifestyles in the region. Your guide can help you engage with the local communities and help you to understand their heritage and values. This is the cradle of mankind and the region holds some of the world's most famous archeological sites.

**Taking to the water.** Lake Victoria and the Indian Ocean Coast offer a wide variety of options including trips by traditional dhow, watersports, sport fishing and fantastic diving.

**Flying** is a great way to experience Africa. US Pilots can come to Kenya and convert their license, allowing them to fly with our bush pilot to some of the countries most exotic locations.

**Bush Cooking.** Culinary tours can add a lot to the experience and we also offer special cooking safaris for those who wish to learn to create amazing meals without the muss of fuss of the modern kitchen.

**Getting involved.** Due to our extensive wildlife conservation background, we can get you involved in environmental work being carried out in the region and you can meet many of the most influential researchers and conservationists.

**For the most active** there is mountain biking, rock climbing, fishing, rafting and a variety of other options to consider including bush spas and the famous Lewa Marathon.

**Relax.** Last, but certainly not least is the ability to simply relax get away from the rush of the western world and enjoy our legendary hospitality. East Africans pride themselves on their service, safari cuisine and luxurious lodges. It always amazes me how easily most people shake off the hassles of modern life and settle into the pace of life in the bush; a life governed by the sun and the movement of the animals.

## Safari Styles and Pricing

One of the first steps in planning your safari is to establish what level of accommodation and travel you wish to experience. Many costs (such as park fees and domestic airfares) are fixed no matter what level you travel at and Africa is a premier (expensive) destination. What is not fixed is the class of the guiding, the level of vehicles used, the quality of the accommodation, the ability to fly between the parks and access to exclusive destinations. Allow me to give you an idea of rough costs based on the standard levels of safari.

**The Entry Level Safari:** At the bottom end of the safari market is the minibus package trip with a local **driver**. Usually there are 7 or more people per two-wheel-drive van and the trips average \$150 - 200 per-person-per-day with packaged itineraries and entry level lodges and/or camping in pup tents. This rate is usually non-inclusive of many costs such as night drives, evacuation cover, special bush dinners, drinks, game walks, and fees to enter the parks. This rate may not also include transfer by air between the parks. Depending on your activity level, these extras can run to \$150 or more per-person each day.

**The Middle Range:** The center of the range is dominated by trips led by certified **Driver-Guides** in large Land-Cruisers or Land Rover vehicles (6-8 guests per driver-guide). These trips tend to use a combination of 3-4 star lodges and tented camps and guests are transported between parks on scheduled aircraft, when practical. The safari plans are modular in nature and packages may be adjusted based on client needs but a surcharge may be levied if you do not plan to join in with other groups. All lodging costs are based on shared rooms and prices run about \$230-400 PPPD, non inclusive of costs such as drinks, night drives, game walks, park fees and ballooning.

**Private Luxury Safari:** At the top of the range is the exclusive safari in the ilk of the great expeditions. These are based on the 1920's-style expeditions made famous by the likes of characters such as Churchill, Eastman and Roosevelt. Each trip is custom-designed for the client and personally hosted by professional

safari guides from the moment you touch down. All accommodation and transport is exclusive and every detail (menus etc) are specially tailored for each guest. Transfers between parks are achieved by private air charter to increase safety and maximize time spent in the bush. Accommodation is a combination of small luxury lodges and our exclusive camps, built especially for you in areas where the action is sure to be. Most of the locations used for the camps are on private conservancies where the standard tours cannot go and game-walking is a major theme. The guiding is done by Professional Safari Guides (the best in the business) and the trips cost from 550-1000 per-person-per-day but are inclusive of anything you could possibly think of. Simply put, you never see a bill once you arrive and your every need is cared for.

## Mathews Safaris

Mathews Safaris is one of the oldest safari private companies in Eastern Africa and it is situated at the private luxury level. The company was founded at the time when every trip was a special expedition. We intend to maintain the family tradition by offering custom-designed safaris at a time when so many tours are based on a formula or "packaged" for the mass market. We design one trip at a time and Jared and I are available to guide our guests every step of the way.

Terry Mathews, the founder of the company, continues to advise us but enjoys his "retirement" days as a world-famous sculptor of wildlife bronzes. The Mathews brothers continue to be involved in the business in one way or another. Glenn, the eldest, is a senior guide and rated as one of the best in the region while Phil Mathews and his jet Helicopter can make very special addition to any safari. Mathews Safaris Associates include Rory McGuinness, expert bush pilot and head of our Air Safaris for visiting private pilots. Njenga Mungai is our lead African Guide and excels at Alpine expeditions. Brian Finch leads our birding trips and is possibly the best birding guide in the region. We have a substantial team of chefs, drivers, game guards etc to make your stay as safe and magical as possible and there is a roster of specialist guides to choose from so that we can bring the very best resources to every situation.

We continue to specialize in custom designed luxury trips, but take pride in our ability to mix and match budget and comfort levels on safari. We are also now the first to offer specialized safaris for private pilots and safaris for adventurous chefs.

## What Does the Planning Process Involve?

**The start:** It may be difficult for you to decide where to start on your planning. I like to get the ball rolling by asking guests to briefly describe the best trip that they've ever taken. The answers help Jared and I to gauge what makes you happy and where your comfort levels are. From your answers we are able to create "wish lists" for your trip. A few key questions you might ask yourself are:

- 1) how active do you wish to be and what activities are you most interested in- (such as horseback riding, bush walks, mountain/rock climbing, camel trekking, mountain biking, flying, fishing, cultural visits)?
- 2) what's tops on your list of must-see species?
- 3) would you like to do only a wildlife safari or also include the coast (sport fishing etc), or an alpine section for the more active?
- 4) how many people will you travel with and what ages?
- 5) how important is it to have some destinations/lodges to yourself?

**The Spark:** Then we send you information regarding the destinations and experiences we think you may enjoy. We include descriptions of the places to be seen, the wildlife, the culture and the style in which you will travel. We provide a gauge of the comfort level on safari and the general price range. For some people it helps to see plans from trips we have done in the past plus references and these can be provided.

**Visualizing the Safari:** We encourage clients to read up on East Africa as much as possible and we provide reading lists and suggestions for films and documentaries which might help you to prepare. We get feedback from you and, within a few months, we will have narrowed down the plan to a few very special locations.

*The ultimate situation for us is to meet with you during the planning phases. We try to visit the USA at least twice a year to personally discuss safari plans with our guests.*

**Finalizing your Safari Plan:** Once we get a firm idea where your interests are and at which level you wish to travel, we develop detailed safari plans and budgets for your review. We send the plans off to you in hard copy form or via the Internet. Then comes the fun bits, which involve fine tuning the plan, making final decisions on lodges and camps and adding in special surprises. As a last step, we double check on availability of key lodges camps and aircraft and we check to make sure the wildlife is cooperating with the “plan”. A 30% deposit is required upon confirmation of booking and the balance is required 3 months prior to the trip.

*Then you are on Safari.*

## Getting Here

There are two major air routes to East Africa and both have their advantages.

**Flying via Europe:** the most popular and cheapest route to East Africa is via Europe. Recommended airlines include Swiss, KLM, British Airways, and Kenya Airways. Virgin Atlantic begins service shortly and we can hardly wait. Kenya Airways plans the first direct flight from NYC to Nairobi in 2008 followed by Virgin Atlantic but all current options require a brief stop and change of plane in Europe. The advantage of this route for many is the opportunity of a European stopover (London, Paris, Rome, Brussels, Amsterdam, Zurich) and the shortest total flying time. A few of these flights arrive in Nairobi in the early morning and we are able to get clients straight into the bush but most arrive in the evenings, requiring an overnight in Nairobi. Flying to Kenya with kids is often easier if done with an overnight stay on the way.

**Flying via South Africa:** For those who wish to visit South Africa en-route to Kenya, South African Airways is an excellent choice. These flights leave Atlanta or NY and fly direct (depending on the jet stream and fuel loads) to Johannesburg. After an overnight stay, you can then travel on to Kenya or spend a few days in Cape Town and/or the wonderful South African parks. However, it is longer, more expensive and requires at least one overnight stay in Johannesburg. Flights via RSA come and go from Kenya in the afternoons, usually requiring an overnight in Nairobi as well.

**Flying via the Middle East:** A third segment of the field are airlines which require two plane changes en-route. These include Gulf Air, Emirates, Egypt Air etc. We highly recommend Emirates, especially if you wish to visit Dubai. However, due to the extra stop, we do not recommend flights for clients with young children unless they are intending to add a Middle East destination to their itinerary.

## Visas

Entry visas for Tanzania and Kenya are required by visitors from many countries, including the US and UK. If you are flying to Nairobi and intend to do a safari to Tanzania, you will need visas for *both* Tanzania *and* Kenya (preferably multiple entry for Kenya). It is essential that your passport be valid for at least six months from the date of entry to East Africa. Requirements change periodically so we advise you to check with the Consulate. Luckily, both Tanzania and Kenya have efficient Embassies in the USA. Visas may also be applied for on line.

Tanzanian Embassy: 2139 R Street NW, Washington DC 20008. Tel: (202) 939-6128 or

Kenyan Embassy: 2249 R Street NW, Washington DC 20008. Tel: (202) 387-6101

Otherwise, visas may be purchased (roughly \$50) upon arrival at the international airports in Kenya and Tanzania.

I hope this will help to get you started. Jared and I are reachable on the numbers below and would love to discuss your ideas by phone, email or in person. The time difference between here and the USA (7-8 hours ahead of the East coast) makes it necessary for us to take calls in the evening. This is no problem. Just send us an email to set a time and date to talk. We look forward to hearing from you as we truly love the challenge of creating new adventures.

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