



Mathews Safaris

# What to pack on Safari

## Clothing & Luggage

Contrary to popular belief, East Africa's climate can be quite moderate. Many destinations are high altitude (over 5,000ft) and therefore the evenings are surprisingly cool. It's best to bring numerous layers of clothing (polar-fleece etc) to adjust for temperature change in the evenings whilst cotton is the preferred material for daytime. Loose clothing works best and you might wish to avoid bright white material since our dust happens to be bright red. That said, laundry facilities are provided at most camps and lodges. Earth-tone clothing is best when on bush walks and it is wise to avoid bright blue.

We usually tell people to bring the informal, comfortable clothes that they feel most relaxed in. It can be fun, however, to dress up now and then for dinner (especially in the bush).

Women should bring a long skirt and long-sleeved shorts in case they want to visit any of the local villages, especially those on the coast.

Broad brimmed hats and good quality, polarized, sunglasses come highly recommended as the equatorial sun is quite fierce. Those with long hair should bring hair ties for those windy times atop the Land Rover.

Appropriate safari footwear can range from climbing boots to sports sandals. Good, light, walking boots are recommended for bush walks and you may wish to bring a old pair of sneakers as well. The bottom line is that sturdy soles are most likely to repel Acacia thorns which, much like sea urchin spines, can be surprisingly long and sharp. Needless to say, high heels are neither friendly to tents or practical in the bush.

We recommend that guests pack in soft luggage such as duffles so they can easily be stowed on the smaller aircraft. Please note that the weight limit for luggage on most scheduled, domestic, flights is approximately 30lbs. If time permits for shopping, good quality safari clothing and footwear can be purchased in Nairobi and Arusha.

## Money

The Shilling is the currency of East Africa. At the time of this writing there are approximately 970 *Tanzanian* shillings or 75 *Kenya* shillings to one US\$ (subject to change). There are no foreign currency restrictions. Foreign currency or travellers checks should be converted to shillings at a bank or Bureau de Change. Most shops or hotels will accept payment in US\$ although they usually prefer cash to travellers cheques. Although fairly widely accepted in Kenya, credit cards have limited use in Tanzania. They are accepted at only a few large hotels and one or two shops in Arusha. Most Mathews Safaris trips are **all inclusive** and there should be no need for money once you arrive with the exception of personal shopping or gratuities.

## Power

All mains electricity in East and Southern Africa is provided at 240volts AC. American equipment (110-120 volts) will not work at this voltage unless it has automatic voltage switching (ie: most cameras and laptop computers). We will provide US invertors for you. Most remote camps and lodges have limited power and may only supply electricity for a few hours per day. Our own private camps generate a modest amount of solar power at both 110 and 240 volts. It is therefore recommended that you bring extra batteries so that spares can be charged overnight or whilst on gamedrives.

## Light

All Mathews Safaris private camps provide you with ample 24hr lighting and good quality flashlights. However, many lodges and camps in bush do not provide electric lighting throughout the entire night and few supply flashlights of good enough quality to be useful. It is wise to pack one mini flashlight or a headlamp per guest as a precaution. Those that use AAA or AA batteries may be best and avoid flashlights that use C cell batteries as they can be hard to find locally.

## Sun Protection

The sun is deceptively strong at this latitude and altitude. If you have ever been burnt whilst snow skiing, you will understand. Bring a minimum of factor 25 sun protection and skin cream. A wide brim hat is always handy as is a light scarf for the evening game drives. Children should have factor 45 or greater in good supply.

## Cameras

What type of camera and film you bring on safari is up to you but do we have a few pointers.

First and foremost, the **world's best safari camera** is the one that you know well and are the most comfortable with.

Wild animals seldom cooperate nicely when posing for pictures and conditions in the bush can change extremely rapidly. To add to this, most of the drama occurs in the low light conditions of the morning and evenings. Subsequently it is best to approach wildlife with camera equipment that you know well and/or equipment that is simple to operate. If you plan to buy a new camera for your safari, take the time to get to know it very well before you arrive.

**Camera Types.** Many days will offer up "once in a lifetime" experiences. We suggest that each member of the safari has easy access to a camera throughout their time in the bush. If traveling with a group of close friends or as a family it is useful to have the following types of cameras on hand:

a) at least one **compact digital camera** of good quality (5 mega pixels or more with 3x zoom or greater). These are great for people shots, impromptu photos and other wonderful photo opportunities that you might not consider to take with more complex cameras. They also produce great panoramic shots and we find that they produce many of the photos that are the most memorable because they record daily life on safari.

b) **One SLR** (digital or otherwise) with interchangeable lenses for each person in the group who is serious about taking wildlife photos. Sharing a camera can be difficult, especially if groups are divided between vehicles. Most brands these days are comparable but we find Canon and Nikon to be the most robust in these conditions.

c) **One or more digital camcorders per group.** So much of what happens on safari is *memorable* due to the sound and the *action*. Camcorders can record this and they are great for children to experiment with on safari. Major brands are similar but it is best to have one that has a bright screen, a good zoom and saves to a memory card rather than a disk.

**Recharging.** Depending on your safari itinerary you may not have access to power at some times.

- a) Bring spare batteries and remember, batteries die a little more quickly at high altitude
- b) Bring the battery charger unit for each camera which requires one as well as adapters for English three-pin plugs.

**Dust never sleeps!** It is the true enemy to camera equipment! Have a good camera bag and lens cleaning equipment handy. If you have a digital SLR, you may wish to become familiar with procedure for cleaning the sensor without voiding the warranty. Alternatively, it may be a good idea to bring a separate camera body for each lens or resist changing lenses in the bush.

**"Film".** If you still use film (we do) bring more rolls than you think you will need. Slow speed film is good for mid day but much of the wildlife action will be at dusk and dawn. Bring rolls of 400 or faster if you intend to use a lens longer than 200.

**Memory.** If you use digital, bring extra memory cards or perhaps a notebook computer to download images. It may be wise to carry a copy of your camera software as well as the appropriate cables. All Mathews Safaris private camps have downloading and editing facilities in PC format and using Photoshop and Corel.

**Lens choice.** I find that a 70-310 zoom lens is good for most general wildlife photography and the lenses which come with most SLR kits in the USA are generally sufficient for most safari photos. However, if you wish to take true advantage of the spectacle, we suggest that you bring a good quality zoom lens of 300mm or greater and/or a 1.4 tele-converter to extend focal length. Coupled with this, it is suggested that you bring a short lens of good quality so you can capture the wide open spaces.

Please note that many professional camera shops in the USA should be able to lease you a high quality (fluoride) long lens for your trip.

**Keep Steady.** Long lenses can be difficult to steady. We can provide small beanbags for resting the lens on the windowsill or roof of the Land Rover. However, you may prefer a clamp for the sill of the Land-Rover window.

**Camera Malfunctions!** There is nothing more disappointing than coming on the safari of a lifetime and having your camera fail. There are good camera repair shops in Nairobi but we also carry spare Canon SLR and Digital cameras to help out if disaster strikes.

**Filters** are highly recommended for SLR camera lenses (especially skylights and a good polarizer).

## Books

Even on the most active safari there is time to relax and slow down to an East African pace. Therefore it is wise to carry a few books that you have long planned on reading when you could find a spare moment. Our private camps feature mini libraries (40-50 books) which are stocked, based on your interest, to include novels, natural history, guide books etc. Many guests like to have their own copies of the premier guide books. See our recommended booklist for examples and we would be happy to purchase copies for you.

## Binoculars

We have spare Nikon Sporter 8x36 and Steiner Marine 8x50 binoculars in camp for guests who break or forget to bring their own. However, it is wise to bring a good pair of binoculars for everyone who is likely to use them on your safari. Bird watchers will have their own particular favorites but we generally recommend binoculars for safari which are:

- a) of small or medium size and weight.
- b) bright enough to be effective at dawn or dusk when the animal action is the greatest.
- c) of a power of 7X or stronger
- d) designed to have a wide angle of view so you can easily locate animals and follow the action, and
- e) suitable for guests who wear glasses and have adjustable rubber eye cups.

A good quality pair with the above features can generally be found in US stores for \$180-\$300. Some guests struggle with keeping focused on the action and for them we recommend fixed-focus binoculars such as the above-mentioned Steiners or (if money is not an issue) digital binoculars with auto-focus and image stabilization.

## The Most Important Thing!

*Nearly anything* that you leave behind in the States, we can find locally. However, the one essential thing that cannot be replaced is laughter and your sense of humor. Be sure to bring this with you! Africa is a truly magical place but it is also wild, mercurial and unpredictable. That is part of its charm in an age when so much of our lives are scripted. You will have the most expert Safari Guides available but things do not always go as intended. This is part of the fun of safari. Wildebeests make their own plans without informing us, the weather creates detours and lions hunting behind schedule often delay dinner times. Bring an open mind and your safari will be sure to exceed your expectations.