



WELCOME TO EASTERN AFRICA

A 17-day Safari (Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda)

This 17-day trip was taken in July across the Eastern African countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda. We launched our safari journey from Nairobi, Kenya through Lake Nakuru and the Maasai Mara before crossing into Tanzania to explore the Serengeti, Ngorongoro, and Tarangire National Parks. We popped back over into Kenya to experience Amboselli National Park and views of Mount Kilimanjaro before returning to Nairobi and flying to Kigali, Rwanda. From there we headed south to Nyungwe Forest to track chimpanzees and then north along the Congo border to Volcanoes National Park for a very close(!) hang with a mountain gorilla family. We eventually returned to explore Kigali and learn more of Rwanda's tragic history before flying back to Nairobi to stay at the infamous Giraffe Manor. This was an amazing trip after which zoos will never impress us again and we now have an even greater respect for the wild.



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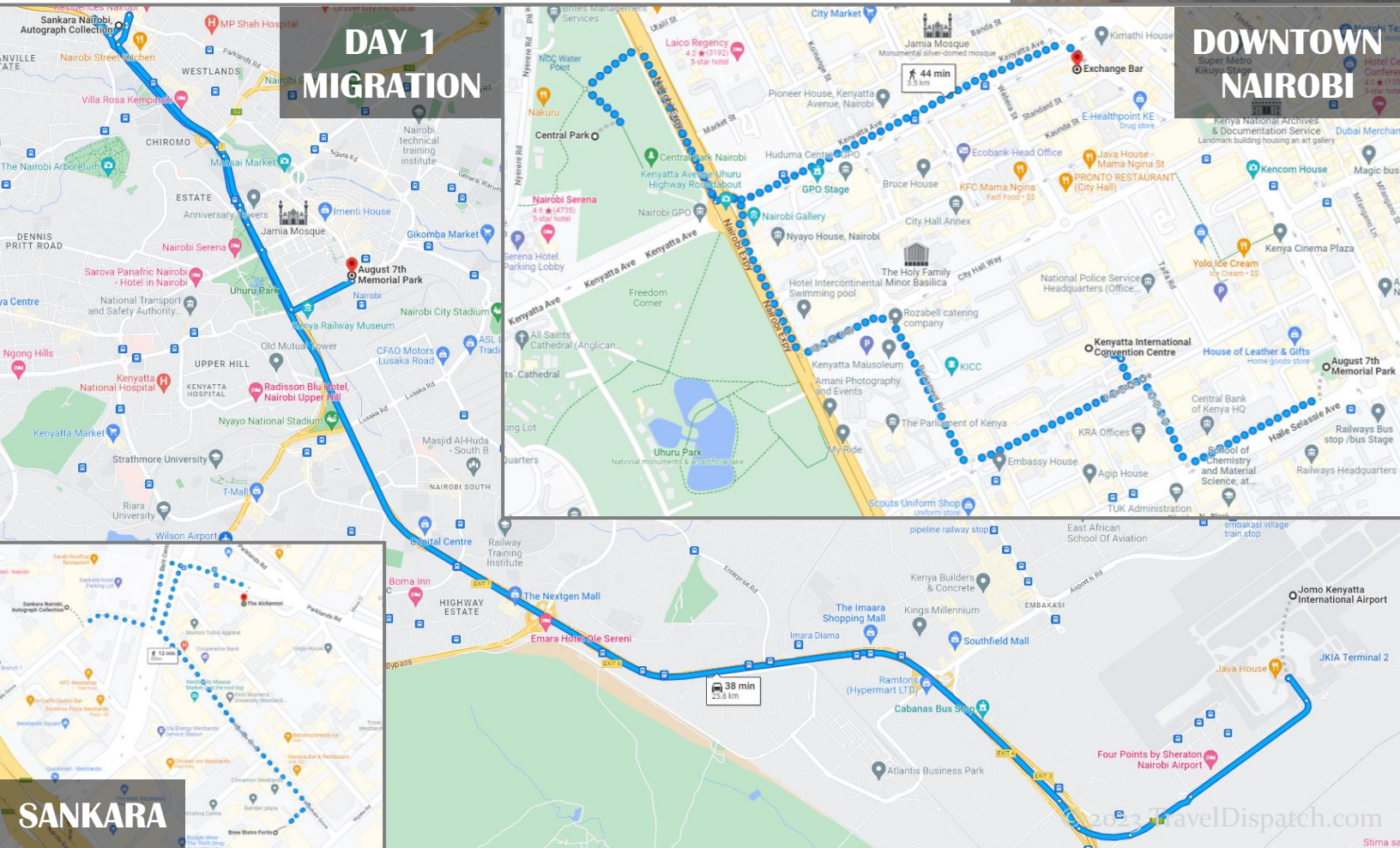
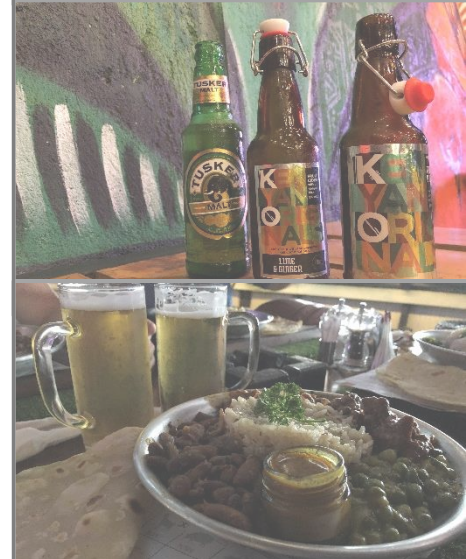
Custom
Google Map



DAY 1

Today we arrived in Nairobi, Kenya and did a little exploration before a good night's rest. We arrived at NBO in the late morning after an overnight flight and took a shuttle to our hotel for check in. Although we decided to take naps that afternoon, our original itinerary is below to check out a few sites in Nairobi. However, we still managed to make it out for a tasty dinner and beverages.

11:00AM	Arrive in Nairobi (NBO) , go through customs, and exchange money.
12:00PM	Take hotel shuttle to check in at Sankara Nairobi [20km; 30min]
1:30PM	Lunch at the Sarab Pool & Super Club (hotel rooftop)
2:15PM	Take a nap OR taxi to August 7th Memorial Park [5km; 15min]
	Explore downtown Nairobi (August 7th Memorial Park ; KICC rooftop ; Central Park)
4:00PM	Have a beverage at Exchange Bar (Sarova Stanley Hotel)
5:00PM	Take taxi to Sankara [5km; 15min]
6:00PM	Dinner at Brew Bistro Rooftop
7:30PM	Beverages at Alchemist Bar



DAY 2

Today we began our safari with Lake Nakuru National Park. After an early breakfast our driver met us in the hotel lobby to load our safari van with luggage and excitement! After navigating through horrendous Nairobi traffic we traveled across the countryside to Lake Nakuru for our first taste of safari; *it was delicious*. Lake Nakuru is known for its pink flamingos and white rhinos, but we saw plenty of other wildlife including zebra, giraffe, baboon, and more! The next [11 days of safari](#) were a custom itinerary we built with the sister companies of [Spirit of Kenya](#) and [Soul of Tanzania](#).

6:30AM Breakfast at Sankara

7:00AM Meet guide / driver in lobby of hotel and depart!

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

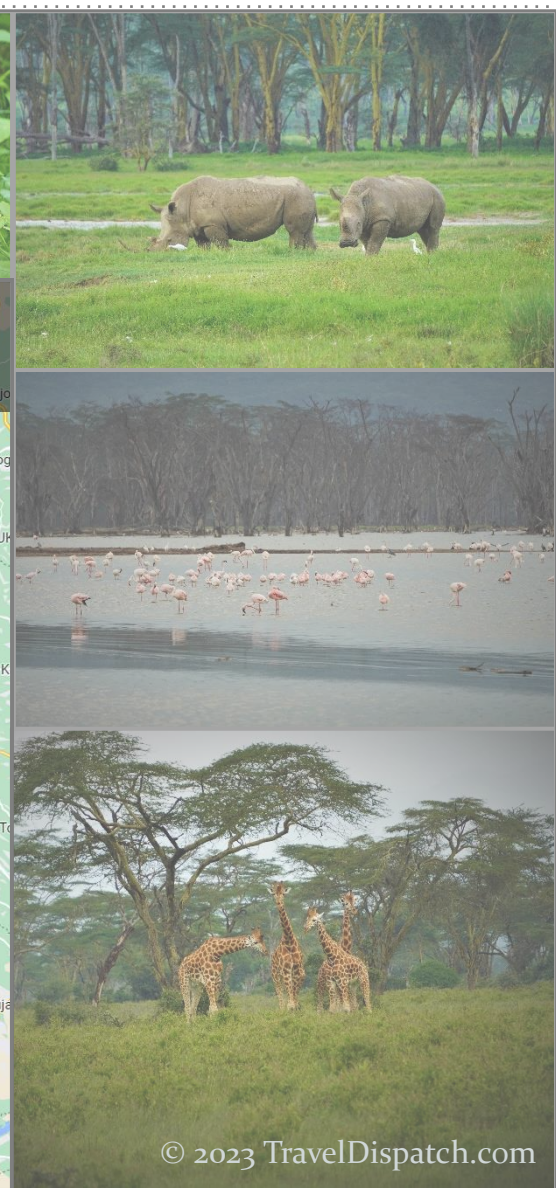
“Morning pick up in Nairobi and then drive to [Lake Nakuru National Park](#), across the equator, where lies the rift valley’s most famous lake. Known all over the world for its flamingoes, it’s alkaline and is recognized as being one of the natural wonders of the world. Lake Nakuru is now a rhino sanctuary, harboring a population of over 40 black and over 60 white rhinos, but the flamingoes, of course, have always been the main attraction. At times there may be almost 2 million flamingoes in residence, forming a stunningly beautiful deep pink band around the edge of the lake shore. Arrival in time for lunch then afternoon game drive.” – Spirit of Kenya

Check in at [Ziwa Bush Lodge](#)

DAY 2 MIGRATION

LAKE NAKURU

3 hr 37 min
170 km



Today we made our way to the spectacular Maasai Mara National Reserve. We made our way from Lake Nakuru to the Maasai Mara and ticked off a couple more of the Big 5 (lion and elephant). Along the way, we were chased by an angry-angry hippo and experienced great quality roads followed by horrible roads. About a half a dozen giraffes greeted us as we approached our glamping accommodations for the next three nights here in the Maasai Mara; it was a great sign of what was to come.

BIG 5

SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

Breakfast at Ziwa Bush Lodge

"An early morning drive to [Maasai Mara National Reserve](#). It holds on as one of the few places left on earth where wildlife still lives comparatively undisturbed in the numbers that once roamed the plains and forests of Africa. As the northern tip of the vast Serengeti ecosystem, the Mara hosts the spectacular seasonal migration of many thousands of Wildebeest, Zebras and attendant predators. Arrival in time for lunch followed by an afternoon game drive." – Spirit of Kenya

Check in at [Ilkeliani Camp](#)



Today we spent the entire day stalking wildlife in the Maasai Mara. We checked off our last remaining Big Five animal (leopard) who we found chillaxin in a tree. We saw countless lions laying and playing around like they were house cats; elephants making it very clear we should keep our distance from their young; and a cheetah out for a walk sans the sunglasses and crunchy snacks.

Breakfast at Ilkeliani Camp

"A full day in the Maasai Mara with flexible schedule and unlimited mileage. After breakfast, we have a full day game drive with packed lunch provided. The reserve is well known for its black-manned lions as well as its abundant resident wildlife and it's one of the few places where it's possible to see the Big Five during a morning's game drive. Many of the cheetahs are so tame they seek shelter from the hot sun under one's vehicle and several even climb on to the rooftop get better view of prospective prey.

For the bird enthusiast, almost 500 species have been recorded: among these, 16 species of eagle, plus many hawks and falcons, 6 species of vultures, 8 species of storks, 4 of bustard (including the Kori bustard, the world's heaviest flying bird), and 9 species of sun birds." – Spirit of Kenya

Dinner at Ilkeliani Camp

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard



Today we spent another amazing day stalking wildlife in the Maasai Mara. An early morning game drive followed by a visit to the Maasai and another drive that afternoon leading to an excellent sunset. Notable animal sightings included a gang of cheetahs, a leopard at the very top of a tree, thousands of wildebeest, a handful of lion cubs, and a couple of hyenas chowing down on some unfortunate animal. The Maasai village was filled with friendly faces, great information and insight, and a bit of jumping around.

Breakfast at Ilkeliani Camp

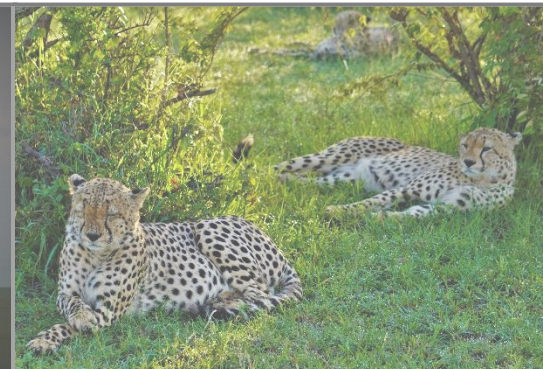
BIG 5

SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

“Another full day in the Maasai Mara with flexible schedule and unlimited mileage. After breakfast, we have a full day game drive with packed lunch provided. An optional visit to a Maasai village can be planned also. A visit reveals the singing and dancing that are part of their daily lives and sacred rituals. A glimpse into their homes and social structure is a poignant experience.” – Spirit of Kenya

Dinner at Ilkeliani Camp



Today we migrated with the wildlife from Kenya to Tanzania for the Serengeti. Despite the pleas from the hyenas, we had to say “kwaheri” to Kenya and “jambo” to Tanzania! After a long day’s drive from the Mara to the Serengeti, we were welcomed by some hippos (which meant they didn’t try to kill us) and found our tent to be nicer than many hotel rooms. NOTE: We transferred from our Spirit of Kenya van and guide to a Soul of Tanzania bush truck and guide at the border crossing.

Breakfast at Ilkeliani Camp

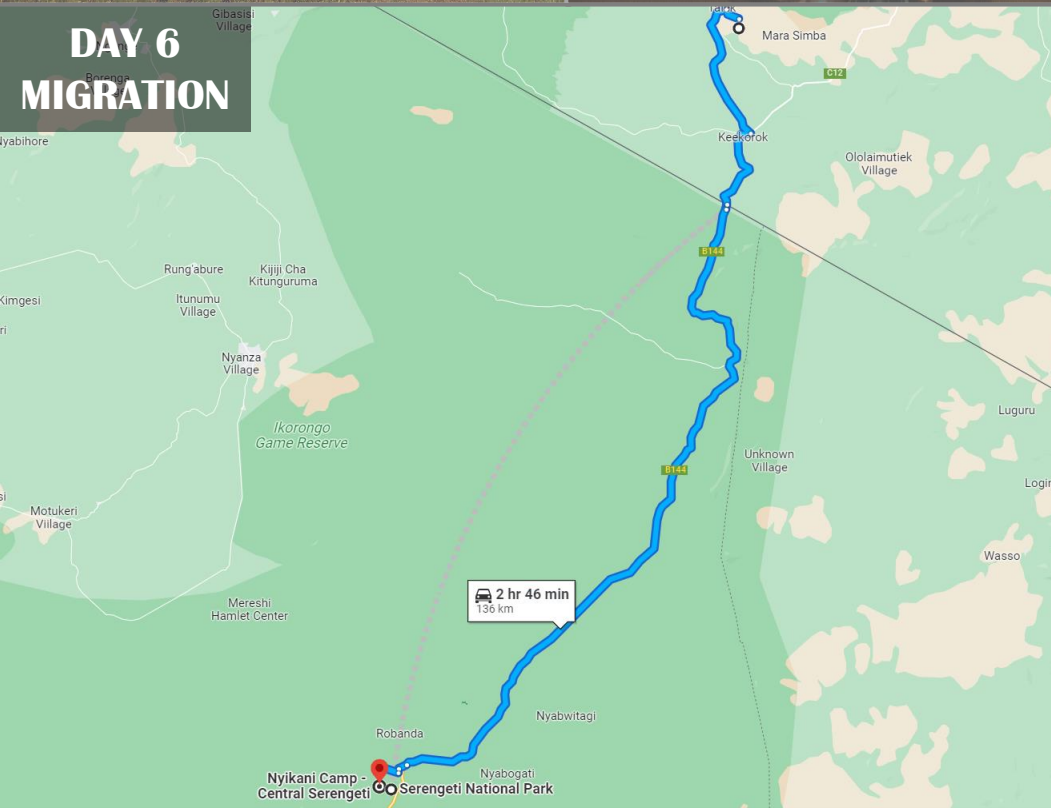
“We will initiate the day with an early morning game drive in Maasai Mara while driving out of the National reserve. After border formalities, drive to the [Serengeti National Park](#) in Tanzania. It will be a long day of driving but the game drives going in and out of the parks can be surprisingly incredible.

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

Chaka Mobile Camp is a mobile tented camp located in the Serengeti ecosystem. Chaka follows the wildebeest migration and moves seasonally from Northern Serengeti to Ndutu. An elegant camp with eleven ensuite tents and a team of highly trained staff, Chaka Camp offers privacy and comfort in the middle of the Serengeti wilderness. Meaning ‘bush’ in Swahili, Chaka is a bush camp that allows you to get up and close personal to one of the world’s most spectacular natural events - the wildebeest migration. From December to April, the camp is located in Ndutu, moving northward to Kogatende from May to December.” – Spirit of Kenya / Soul of Tanzania

Check in at [Nyikani Camp \(Chaka Camp\)](#)



Today we had a full day of adventure through the Serengeti. Morning game drive; lunch; and an afternoon game drive through the Serengeti. The migration of zebra is in full swing based on the thousands we saw marching along, while hundreds of hippos argued, wallowed, and splashed feces on each other....nature is diverse and at times strange. We saw all three large cats (lion, leopard, and a really fat male cheetah; who knew?!?), but the frequency and quantity of cats was not as high as in the Maasai Mara.

Breakfast at Nyikani Camp (Chaka Camp)

"One full day in the Serengeti with flexible schedule and unlimited mileage. As you crest the hillside, spread out before you, as far as the eyes can see, is the vast Serengeti. Serengeti mean "endless plains" in Kiswahili and this 6,900 sq. mile (18,000 sq. km) park is inhabited by more than 2 million large animals including more than a million wildebeest, hundreds of thousands of plains zebras, and Thomson's gazelles. Large predators including lions, cheetahs, and hyenas are drawn to the area by this abundance of prey which migrate throughout the park. Many smaller animals like rock hyrax, bat eared foxes, mongoose, honey badger, jackals, monkeys, baboons and African hares also inhabit the area along with nearly 500 species of birds.

On the way into the Serengeti, option to stop at the famous Olduvai Gorge, where Dr. Louis and Mary Leakey made their discovery of the first man that walked the earth. After attending a short lecture describing the archeological digs and geology of the gorge, you'll have time to visit the small museum. Afternoon game drive enroute to campsite." – Soul of Tanzania

Dinner at Nyikani Camp (Chaka Camp)

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard



Today we continued our migration from the Serengeti to the Ngorongoro Crater. After a morning of photogenic lions, we had an incredibly dusty multi-hour drive to arrive at Ngorongoro Crater. We drove into the crater to find a Garden of Eden of animals and silly hunting behavior by the resident lions. We eventually made our way out to find fantastic views of the crater from our lodge.

Breakfast at Nyikani Camp (Chaka Camp)

“Morning in the Serengeti and afternoon transfer to [Ngorongoro Conservation Area](#), the 8th natural wonder of the world. Stop for a picnic lunch, afternoon descent down to the crater floor for a day of wildlife viewing in one of the most incredible places on Earth.

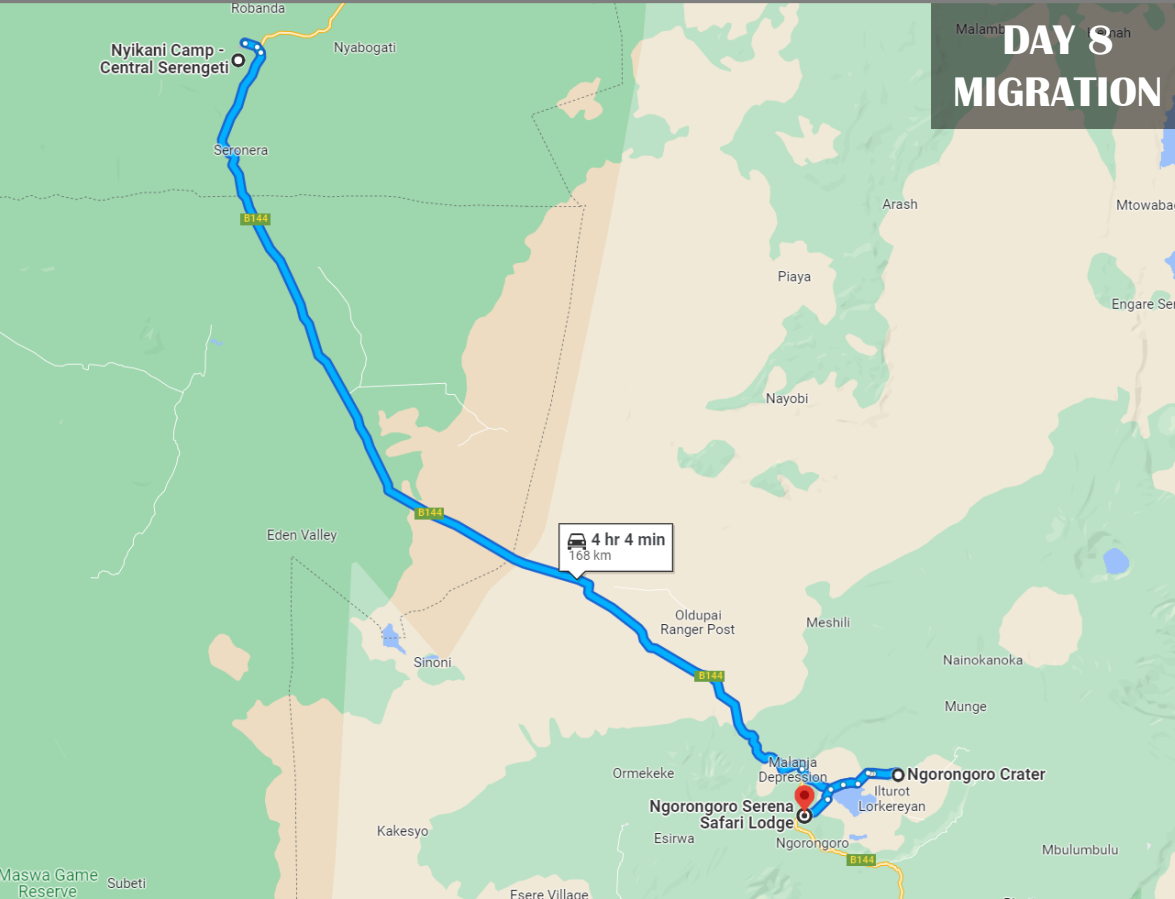
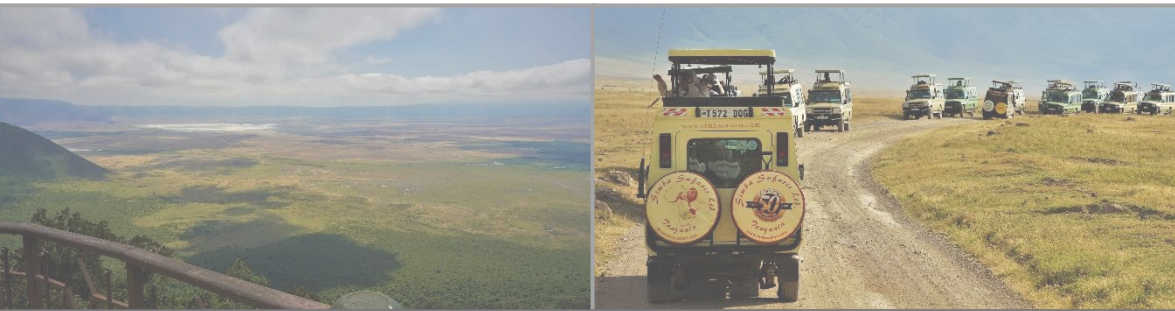
With walls 2,000 ft high and a crater floor that spreads for 102 sq. miles, the crater is a virtual Noah's Ark, inhabited by almost every species of wildlife indigenous to East Africa including the rare black rhino. In fact, the crater has the greatest concentration of wild life in the planet. It contains a river, several swamps, a soda lake that, from the top, looks like steam, full of flamingoes, a forest and open plains. Drive up the steep road out of the crater and transfer to your accommodation for overnight.”

– Soul of Tanzania

Check in at [Ngorongoro Serena Safari Lodge](#)

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard



Today we made our way from Ngorongoro to Tarangire National Park. We explored Ngorongoro Crater and saw what appeared to be a lion passed out drunk next to the road, of course the zebras were judging him. We then made our way over to Tarangire National Park and found giant Baobab trees, views, and more amazing wildlife.

Breakfast at Ngorongoro Serena Safari Lodge

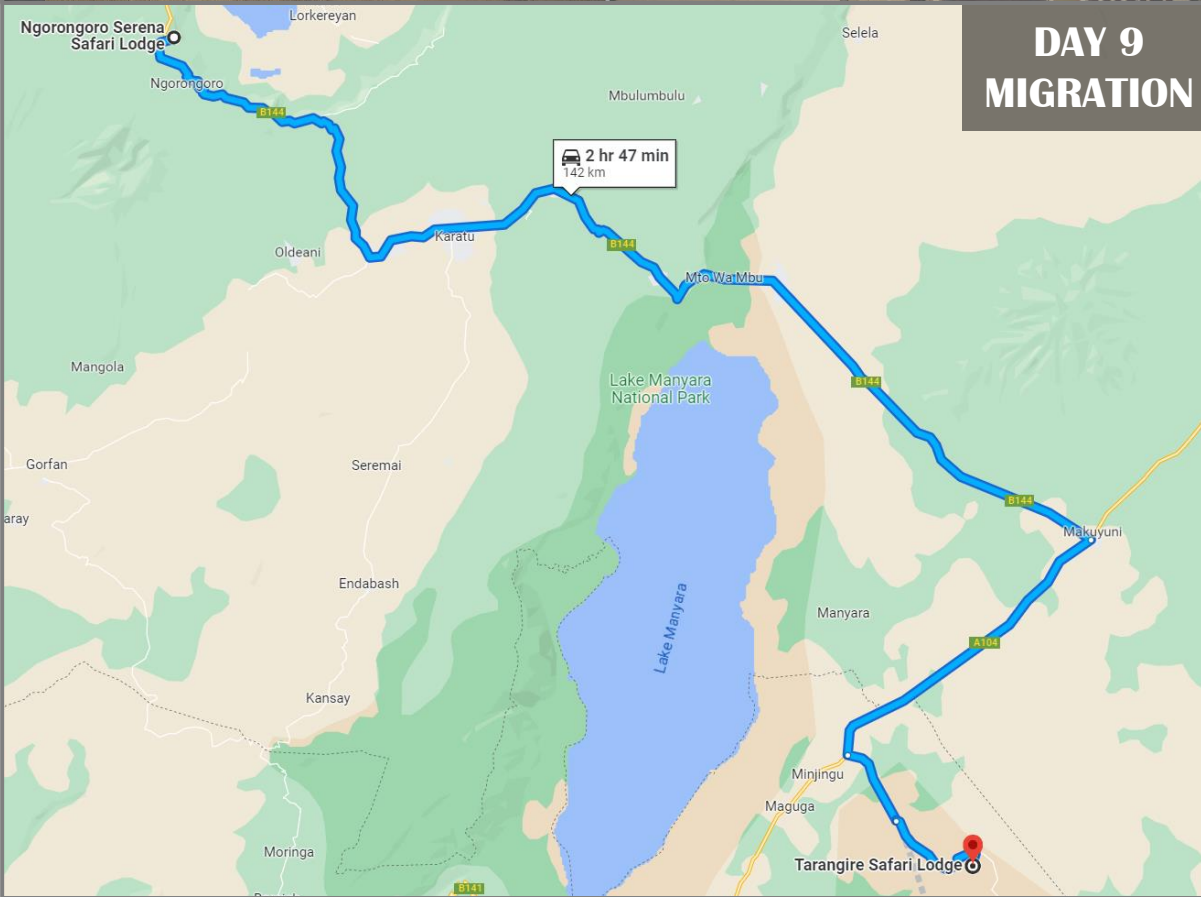
“Morning and lunch safari in Ngorongoro Crater. Afternoon transfer to [Tarangire National Park](#).”

Built on top of a high bluff with a breathtaking panorama, our lodge is superbly located in Tarangire National Park, providing one of the best views in Africa. Carving out the landscape below the lodge is the Tarangire River, a favorite watering place, which attracts impressive numbers and a variety of game. The scene unfolds before you while lounging on the outdoor terrace, allowing you to appreciate Tarangire's diverse wildlife.” – Soul of Tanzania

Check in at [Tarangire Safari Lodge](#)

BIG 5 SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard



Today we returned to Kenya and explored Amboseli National Park. We had a morning drive chock full of elephants before departing Tarangire and enjoying silky smooth tarmac for a couple hours enroute to Kenya. First impression of Amboseli National Park: it is a desert wasteland that could end up being a big waste of time. However, after seeing the areas fed by underground springs from Kilimanjaro, we started to see why it's worth the trip. **NOTE:** We transferred from our Soul of Tanzania bush truck and guide to a Spirit of Kenya van and guide at the border crossing.

Breakfast at Tarangire Safari Lodge

"Morning Safari in Tarangire. Afternoon transfer to [Amboseli National Park](#), check in at accommodation and afternoon rest or game drive, as you prefer.

BIG 5 SIGHTING

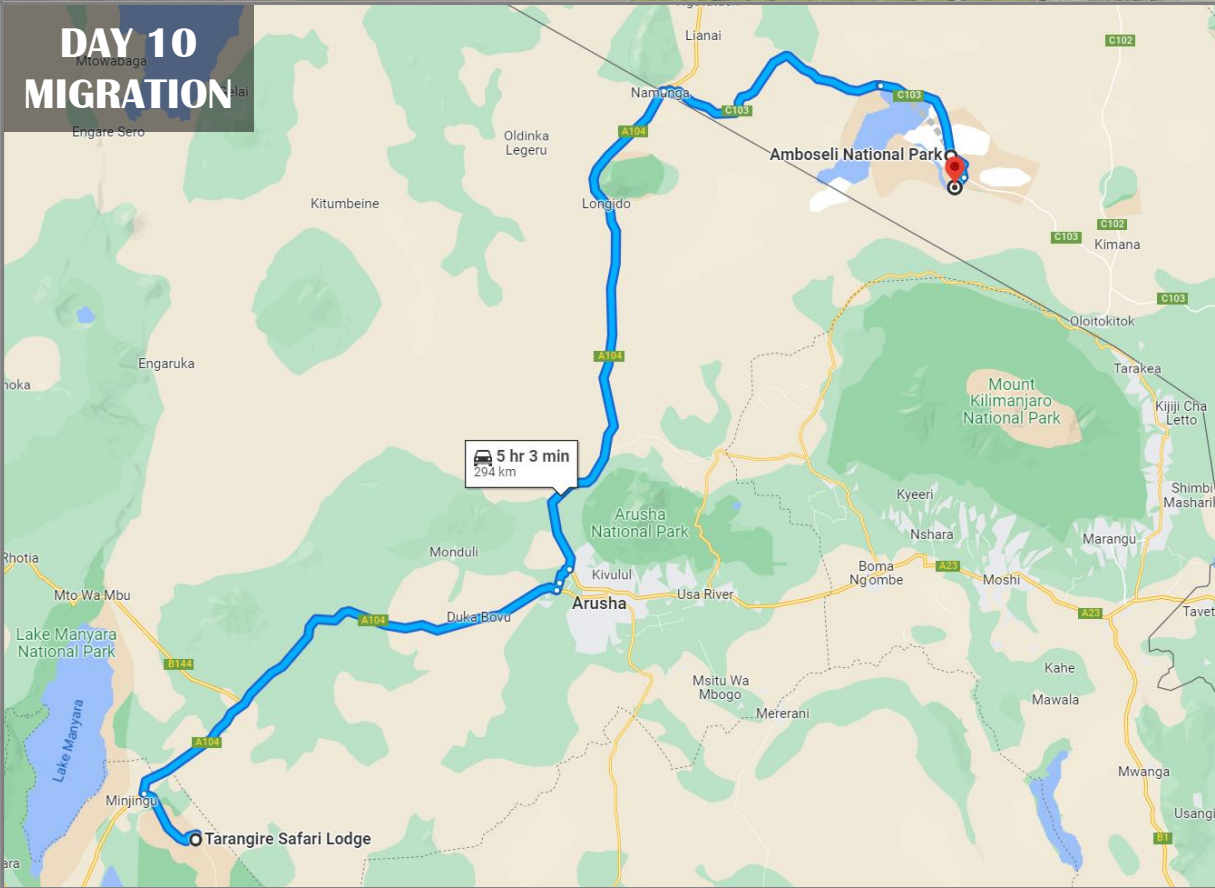
- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

Amboseli National Park is situated South of Nairobi, most of the park consisting of a dry, ancient lake bed and fragile grassland with patches of acacia woodland, while in the southern area there is a number of small rocky volcanic hills. Around the swamps OI Okenya, OI Tukai and Enkongo Narok, the vegetation is lush with yellow barked acacias and phoenix palms." – Soul of Tanzania / Spirit of Kenya

Check in at [Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge](#)



DAY 10 MIGRATION



Today we continued our exploration of Amboseli National Park. After a couple more game drives through Amboseli, we discovered a few things: seeing elephants trudging and eating their way through swamp bogs is fascinating; wildebeest seem to be a lot friskier here; and when Kili makes an appearance, it's worth the wait.

Breakfast at Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge

BIG 5 **SIGHTING**

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

“Early rise for good views of Mount Kilimanjaro before clouds build up over the summit with packed lunch provided.”

Despite its changing habitat, Amboseli National Park is possibly the best wildlife area in the whole Africa to experience elephants at close range. Left alone by poachers, elephants feeding and bathing in the swamps must form the highlights of any Safari.” – Spirit of Kenya

Dinner at Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge



Today we made our way back to Nairobi to fly to Rwanda. On our final day of safari where lions are present, we finally experienced our first relatively fresh kill! Mama lion guarded what appeared to be the remains of a wildebeest from circling jackals and plotting hyenas. Two female lions, two cubs, and a male lion all appeared to have shared in the feast. Even though it was over 100 meters away, it was still fascinating and exhilarating!

BIG 5

Breakfast at Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge

SIGHTING

- Buffalo
- White Rhino
- Lion
- Elephant
- Leopard

“Morning game drive in Amboseli. Early afternoon drive to Nairobi. Transfer to your hotel or the airport.” – Spirit of Kenya

Drive to **Nairobi (NBO)** airport [212km; 4hr]

9:00PM

Fly to Rwanda (time change of 1hr during flight)

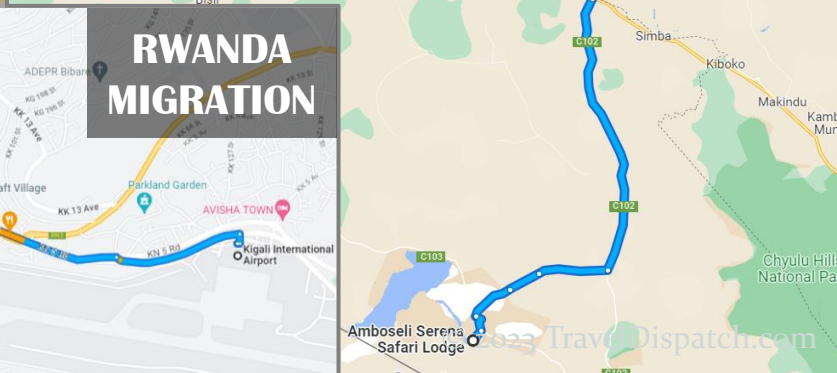
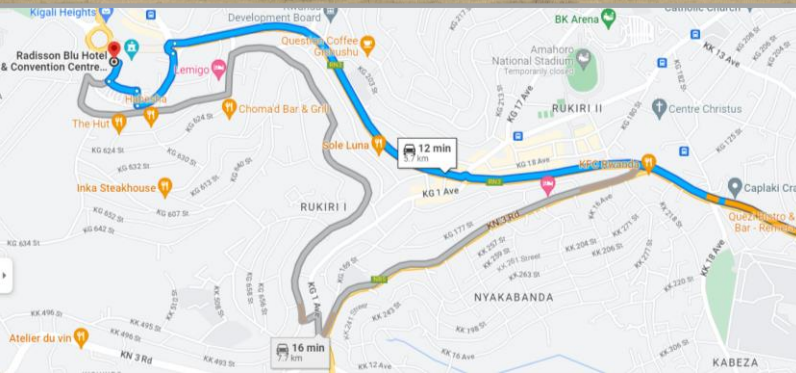
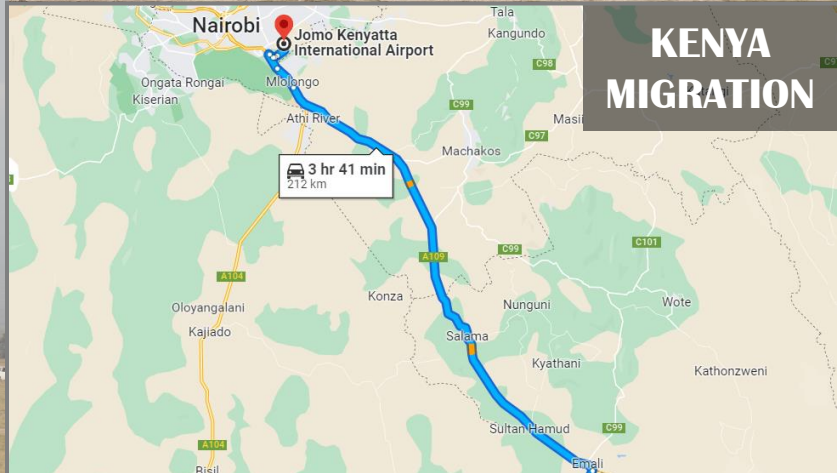
9:20PM

Arrive in **Kigali (KGL)**, exchange money, and shuttle to hotel [8km; 15min]

10:00PM

Check in at [Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre](#)

Beverage and snacks at [Piazza Bar](#) (outdoor terrace of hotel)

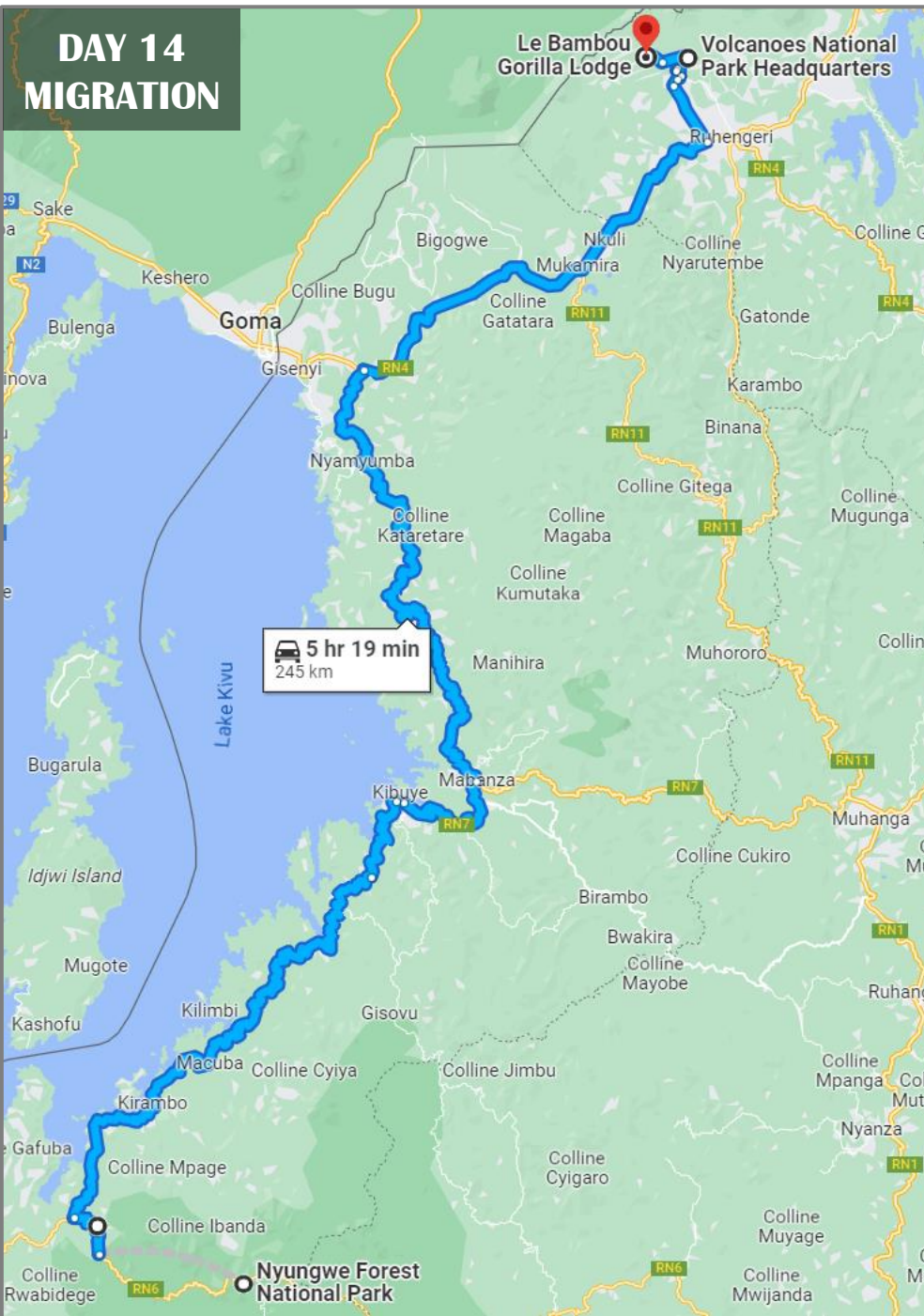


Today we went for a hike to track and see chimpanzees in Nyungwe Forest. We woke up at 4am, hiked a hard 8 miles through the damp mountain rainforest, watched a family of chimps eating figs in their treetop nests, and then drove 30 minutes on some of the worst Jeep trails I've ever seen (*mad props to the Toyota Land Cruiser; it's a proper beast!!!!*)...all before noon. We spent the rest of the day (*a long one, at that!*) driving from Nyungwe to Volcanoes National Park. Apparently, there are 5 volcanoes in this park, but we wouldn't know, since we arrived at night. It was a fantastic day and worth every pothole and bead of sweat!

Breakfast at Nyungwe Top View Hill Hotel

"Wake up early, enjoy your breakfast and get to the starting point for a debrief from the park officials / guide on the do's and don't before you set off into the forest for chimpanzee trekking experience. The trek will be done in time for your lunch, return to the lodge for lunch, check out and transfer to Volcanoes National Park. Check into your lodge for dinner and overnight." – Simba Africa Expeditions

Check in at [Le Bambou Gorilla Lodge](#)



Today we had an unforgettable hang out session with a mountain gorilla family. Today was all about gorillas; however, we also got to participate in some cultural dancing a little later. The hike to the gorillas in Volcanoes was much shorter and easier than to the chimps. We spent an hour hanging out with the Agashya family of gorillas; one of 10 families allowed for visitation. After a nice hang watching the family groom, eat, and play together, the alpha male (who was about 6ft away) started mean-mugging me something fierce. Our eyes connected for what seemed an eternity, and in that moment I thought: "yup, he could f@&* me up!"

Breakfast at Le Bambou Gorilla Lodge

"Have an early breakfast and be at the [Volcanoes National Park](#) starting point at least 30 minutes earlier for a briefing from the trekking guide about the Mountain Gorillas that you will be seeing in the volcanoes forest.

When you return from the gorilla trek you will go ahead and visit Buhanga forest for some Kinigi Cultural Village with dinner and overnight at your lodge/ hotel." – Simba Africa Expeditions

Dinner at Le Bambou Gorilla Lodge



Today we made our way back to Kilgali to learn more of Rwanda's tragic past before flying to Kenya. We made our way from Volcanoes back to Kigali to visit the Genocide Museum before flying back to Nairobi. After seeing so many excited and friendly young faces throughout this country, it was sobering to be reminded of the 2 million Rwandans who were slaughtered with machetes, bullets, and brutality by their friends, neighbors, and fellow countrymen in the early 90's. It's an atrocity that should make everyone with a conscience shake with anger and seek action; yet, it continues to occur across the globe. Political parties, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and philosophical ideals should never supersede our humanity and basic rights to live as one society. *End of P.S.A.*

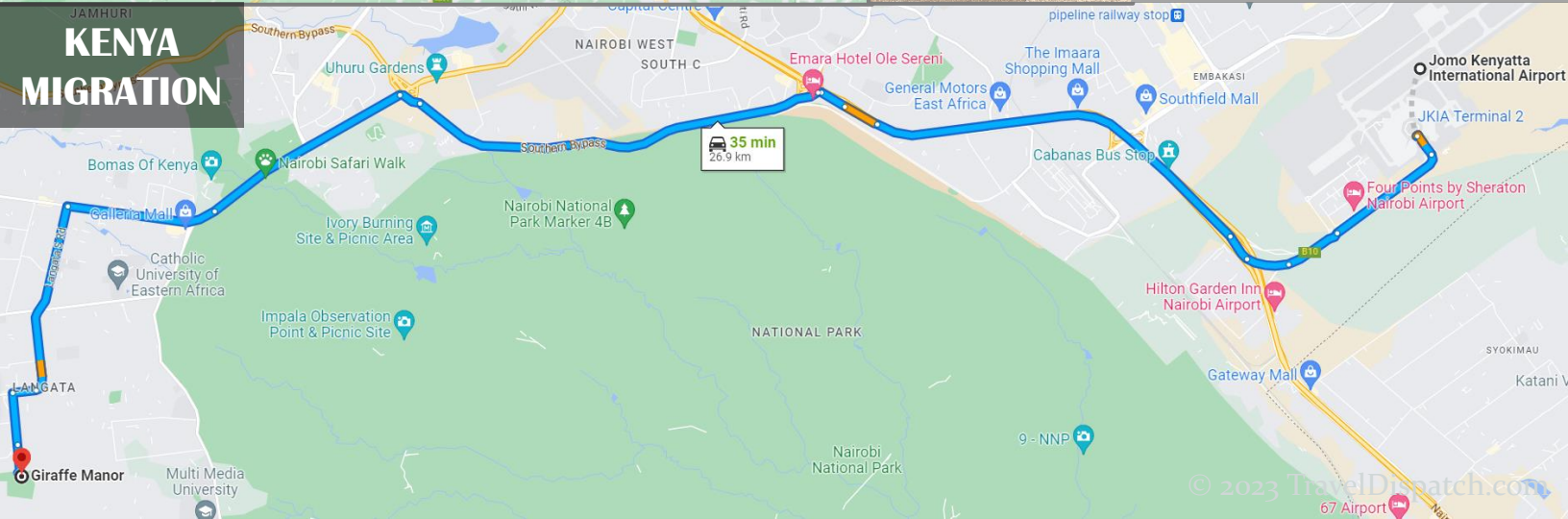
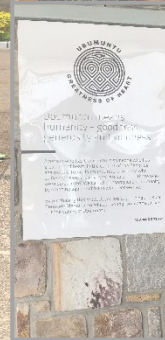
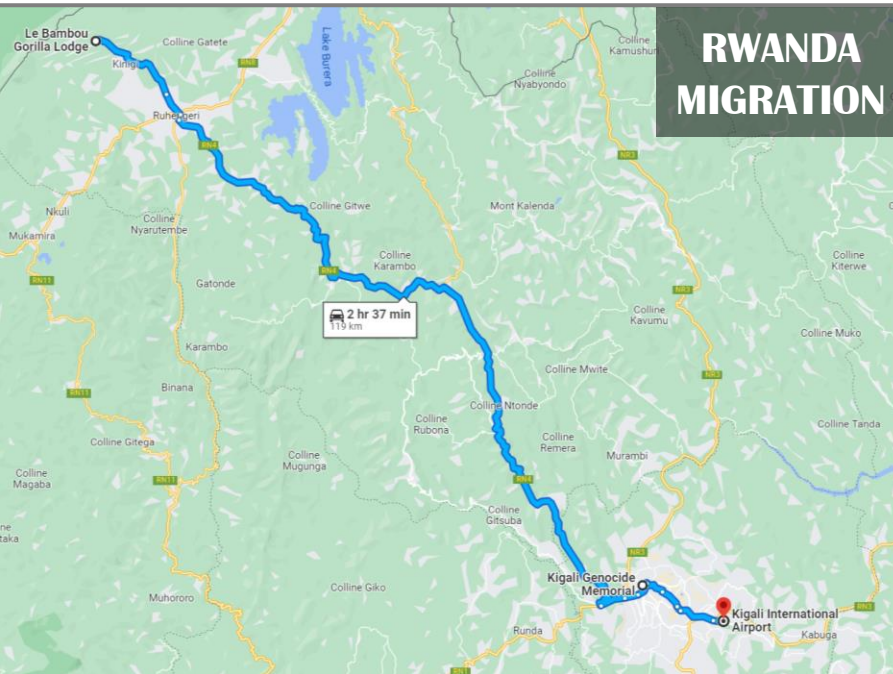
Breakfast at Le Bambou Gorilla Lodge

"Have breakfast, then drive to Kigali for a city tour where you will visit the [Kigali Genocide Memorial](#), local foods markets and artisan markets. You will have an opportunity to shop for Souvenir in local hand craft markets and then finally make your way to the airport for your return flight back home/ drop off at desired destination." – Simba Africa Expeditions

5:50PM Depart **Kigali (KGL)** and fly to Kenya (time change of 1hr during flight)

8:15PM Arrive in **Nairobi (NBO)** and get picked up by hotel driver [27km; 45min]

Check in at [Giraffe Manor](#) (you will need to reserve at least 1 year ahead of time!)



DAY 17

Today we had a full last day of our amazing safari adventure before flying home. We spent our last night at Giraffe Manor and it absolutely lived up to the hype. We ate with and made out with giraffes during breakfast and then visited some playful baby elephants at the Sheldrick Elephant & Rhino Orphanage. We hope you have a great time and agree this was an epic trip!

6:00AM Breakfast with the giraffes, pack, and store luggage; we pre-arranged a driver for a half day.

10:30AM Drive to [Sheldrick Elephant & Rhino Orphanage](#) [9km; 15min]

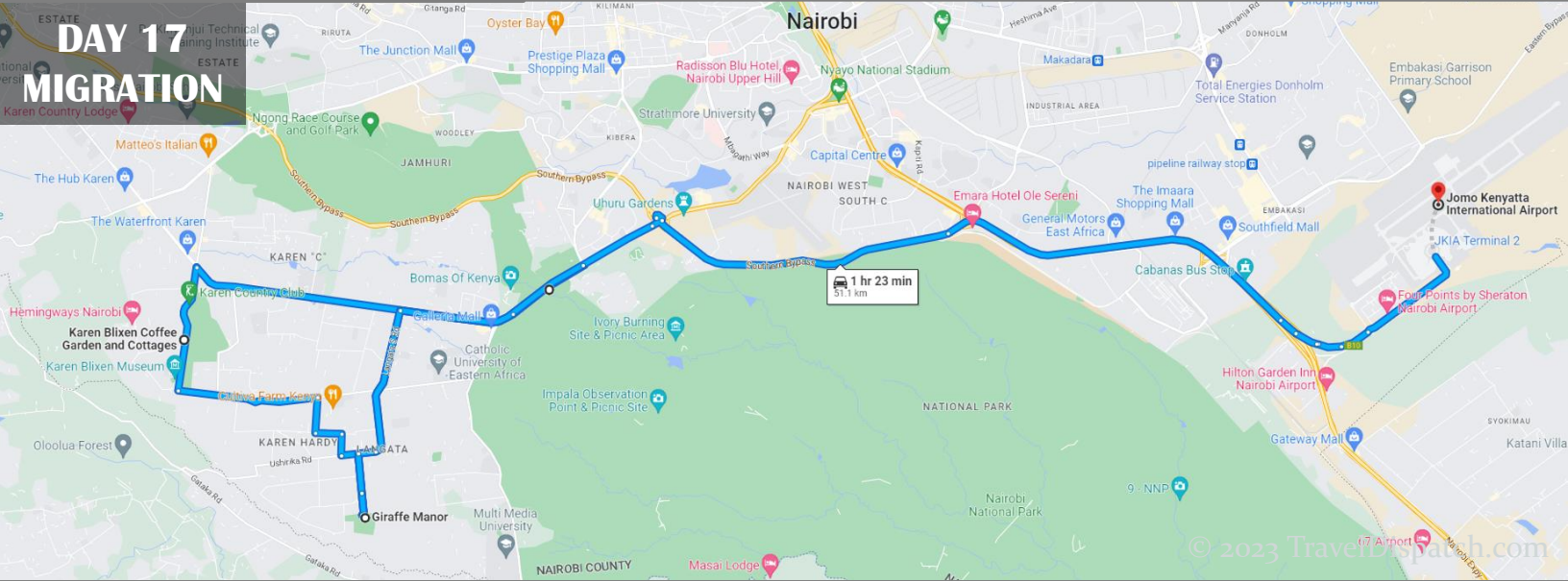
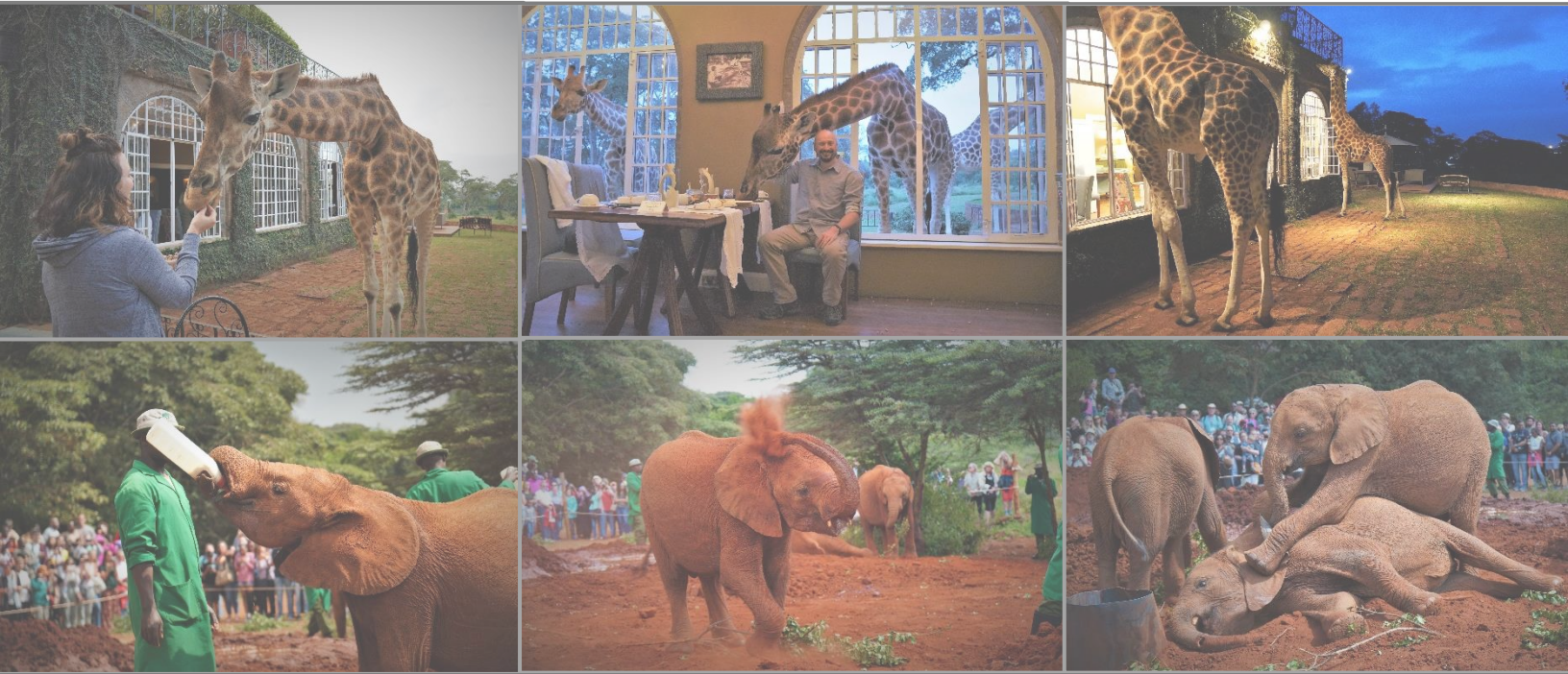
11:00AM Baby elephant feeding!

12:30PM Drive for lunch at [Tamambo Karen Blixen](#) [9km; 15min]

1:30PM Drive back to Giraffe Manor to have afternoon tea and hang with the giraffes [8km; 15min]

4:00PM Take shuttle to airport [27km; 45min]

Depart **Nairobi (NBO)** for home!



The lists below illustrate our top picks based on our experiences along our trip. The lists are not intended to be exhaustive and we do not have partnerships or receive incentives from any of our recommendations. We've included any available links to the providers and to 'our reviews' I've posted on TripAdvisor. We wish you memorable travels and encourage you to reach out with any questions!

LODGING

[Sankara Nairobi](#) [Nairobi, Kenya; Day 1] [{Our Review}](#)

Great staff and hotel in the Westlands neighborhood! ★★★★★

[Ziwa Bush Lodge](#) [Lake Nakuru National Park, Kenya; Day 2] [{Our Review}](#)

Nice tent / cabin style rooms and great food! ★★★

[Ilkeliani Camp](#) [Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya; Days 3 – 5] [{Our Review}](#)

Excellent location; brilliant tents; and fantastic staff! ★★★★★

[Nyikani Camp \(Chaka Camp\)](#) [Serengeti National Park, Tanzania; Days 6 & 7] [{Our Review}](#)

Best accommodations and service along our Kenya / Tanzania safari! ★★★★★

[Ngorongoro Serena Safari Lodge](#) [Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania; Day 8] [{Our Review}](#)

Brilliant views, service, and lodge! ★★★★★

[Tarangire Safari Lodge](#) [Tarangire National Park, Tanzania; Day 9] [{Our Review}](#)

Nice location; okay tents; but had digestive issues.... ★★

[Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge](#) [Amboseli National Park, Kenya; Days 10 & 11] [{Our Review}](#)

Serena quality and comfort in Amboseli! ★★★★★

[Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre](#) [Kigali, Rwanda; Day 12]

Convenient jumping off point in Kigali for Rwanda adventures.

[Nyungwe Top View Hill Hotel](#) [Nyungwe Forest National Park, Rwanda; Day 13] [{Our Review}](#)

Nice location and lodge! ★★★

[Le Bambou Gorilla Lodge](#) [Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda; Days 14 & 15] [{Our Review}](#)

Amazing service and great lodge! ★★★★★

[Giraffe Manor](#) [Nairobi, Kenya; Day 16] [{Our Review}](#)

We stayed in the Karen Blixen Suite; as hard as it is to believe, the Giraffe Manor exceeded all expectations! ★★★★★

TOUR COMPANIES & PARKS

[Spirit of Kenya](#) [Kenya-based tour company]

Days 2 – 5: George was a legend; most knowledgeable and best driver / guide of the trip!

Days 10 & 11: Richie was soft-spoken, difficult to understand, and his vehicle wasn't as comfortable as the others; he was our weakest driver / guide, but fortunately, it was only for a couple of days.

[Soul of Tanzania](#) [Tanzania-based tour company]

Days 6 – 9: Zamo hadn't eaten before meeting us at the border so we had to stop for him to eat lunch; despite the questionable start, he ended up being good at spotting animals in the bush.

[Simba Africa Expeditions](#) [Uganda-based tour company]

Days 13 – 15: Medee was incredibly proud of his Ugandan roots; despite him driving on the wrong side of the road a couple times (Uganda drives on the left; Rwanda on the right) he was great!

Our Top 5 Ranking of the Parks

1. [Maasai Mara National Reserve](#) – best wildlife and big cats; probably because of timing of migration
2. [Volcanoes National Park](#) – being within arm's reach of wild mountain gorillas was an amazing experience!
3. [Serengeti National Park](#) – second best wildlife viewing; also likely because of timing of migration
4. [Ngorongoro Conservation Area](#) – incredibly unique crater habitat and viewing of wildlife behavior.
5. [Amboseli National Park](#) – incredibly unique to watch elephants wade through swamps and views of Killi!

