



Packed and ready to go, I felt somewhat apprehensive about travelling half way around the world, on my own, to fulfill a life long dream. But within minutes of arriving in Nairobi and meeting my guide I knew I was in for a trip of a lifetime. Kenya, the birthplace of the wildlife safari has a well-deserved reputation as the quintessential safari destination. It is a showcase of breathtaking landscapes, abundant wildlife and diverse cultures.

My safari began in the bustling city of Nairobi. Here I met my fellow travellers and James, the incredibly knowledgeable guide who provided a detailed briefing of what to expect on safari. The first day I visited an elephant orphanage where orphaned elephants are raised by a group of keepers until they are 5-9 years old. They are then released back to the wild and carefully monitored until they are accepted into a herd. These orphaned elephants are never left unattended and recognize their keepers as their mother. From there I visited Karen Blixen's Museum made famous by the Oscar winning movie "Out of Africa" starring Robert Redford and Meryl Streep. This historical site marks a time in history when Kenya was governed by the British, which allowed many Europeans to settle, producing coffee, tea and other crops. My last stop for the day was to the Giraffe Manor, a 15-acre park owned by Jock and Betty Leslie-Melville to raise and protect the endangered Rothschild giraffes. It was interesting to understand how important wildlife is to the Kenyans. Many orphanages and sanctuaries have been developed to protect and provide for endangered or vulnerable species and almost all have processes in place to release these animals back to their natural habitats.

With the sites of Nairobi completed I was anxious to venture to the Kenyan wilderness and begin my wildlife safari. A few hours drive by Land Rover and there I was, in the bush and grasslands of a natural world unchanged by the passage of time. I can't begin to explain how incredible the first sightings of large herds of wildlife were. Zebras, gazelles, impalas, giraffes and elephants were in abundance. It was magnificent to just sit in the open vehicle and watch the procession of varied species as they wandered for food and shelter. Each game drive brought a new adventure, new animals and a variety of spectacular scenery. Sightings of lions, cheetahs, hippos, wildebeests, elephants, giraffe, antelope, hyenas, leopard, buffalo and birds became a daily experience but each was every bit as incredible as the first. Throughout my journey I travelled to four different parks and reserves. Each offered a different climate and elevation, and an array of different species of animals, scenery and tribal culture. I was a guest in two tribal villages, the Samburu tribe and the Masai tribe. Both tribes are nomadic, seeking grazing and water for their cattle and goats. Their rich cultures are based upon ritual and ceremony and harmony with the environment. Their diet consists of blood from their cows mixed with milk plus boiled meat from their cows or goats. Their simple way of life was both mesmerizing and admirable and I really enjoyed learning about their traditions and lifestyle.

While the bulk of my experience took place during day, I will never forget the uniqueness of the permanent tented camps. These stylish tents provided unexpected comfort including a king size bed, full bathroom, hot running shower, electricity and even a private butler. But the best part about the tents was the ambiance of the African nights. Lions, elephants, hippos, hyenas and many other animals could be heard in the distance while the crickets and frogs sang their nightly melodies in the foreground. I was truly in my element and would choose this over a hotel room any day!

As my journey came to an end I recollected my new experiences and realized that Kenya had touched my soul in a way that no other country had. I long to return again, to pick up where I left off and expand my journey through other countries in the magical land of Africa.