

Itinerary

DAY 1

En route to a classic East African safari

We board our flight and enjoy the anticipation of Africa.

DAYS 2 & 3

Getting acquainted with Nairobi

We'll be met by our Micato Safari Director and whisked away to a place Hemingway spent many Hemingwayesque hours, the Fairmont Norfolk Hotel. We'll visit the Giraffe Centre and the illuminating National Museum, pay our respects at the newly renovated home of Karen Blixen (who, Hemingway said more than once, should have received the Nobel Prize for literature instead of him). And we'll have a welcoming lunch or dinner at Lavington, the home of Micato's founders, the renowned storytellers Felix and Jane Pinto.

DAYS 4 & 5

Larsens Camp in the great Samburu gamelands

We fly 200-plus miles north to the Samburu, in many ways the embodiment of the Africa we've been carrying around in our imagination since we were children (it was the home, for instance, of Elsa the lioness, of Born Free fame). Nurtured by the Ewaso Nyiro River, the Samburu is rugged, calmly inviting, and enveloped in the air of remote Old Africa, scented by acacia.

Our camp in the Samburu is a classic: Larsens Camp, set in the riverine forest of the Ewaso Nyiro, much frequented by friendly elephants, whose meanderings we can watch in comfort from the verandas of our airy, superbly designed tents. Game drives out of Larsens introduce us to the Samburu's sometimes almost shocking plentitude of large (and cunningly small) mammals, who are just the headliners in a fabulous cast of very natural, very intriguing characters.

DAYS 6 & 7

The Maasai Mara's famed Fairmont Safari Club

South by air to the Maasai Mara, the northern reaches of the Serengeti–Maasai Mara ecosystem, earth's richest wildlife habitat. Our base for explorations in the fabled Mara is the Fairmont Mara Safari Club, recently voted among the Top 20 in Travel+Leisure's consequential World's Best Hotels list.

Surrounded on three sides by the life-giving Mara River, the Mara Safari Club is a masterpiece of appropriate and generously luxurious design. And it's a great jumping-off place for extraordinary game drives in the mixed land- and waterscapes of the Mara. We'll visit a traditional Maasai village as we wend our way through this natural wonderland, the kind of place that moved Hemingway to write, "I loved this country and I felt at home and where a man feels at home, outside of where he's born, is where he's meant to go."

DAYS 8 & 9

Gazelles by the gazillions on the golden Serengeti

"How can one convey the power of Serengeti?" asked Cyril Connolly in *The Evening Colonnade*. "It is an immense, limitless lawn, under a marquee of sky. . . .The light is dazzling, the air delectable; kopjes rise out of the grass at far intervals, some wooded; the magic of the American prairie here blends with the other magic of the animals as they existed before man."

The Serengeti sometimes does remind us of the American prairie, but in truth it can't be compared with any other place on earth. Its kopje-dotted landscape, its vast and billowing skies, and especially its astounding wealth of wildlife make it one-of-a-gorgeous-kind. Flying via Nairobi and Arusha, we reach our base, Migration Camp, on the hippo-haven Grumeti River. Known for its superb tents (which, one traveller wrote, "have only one thing in common with normal tents: canvas") and its dramatic setting in rocky outcrops, Migration Camp is revered for its tranquility (something of a Serengeti specialty).

DAYS 10 TO 12

Exquisite Lake Manyara and the Ngorongoro Crater

We make the short flight from the Serengeti to Lake Manyara, then drive to our base for the next three nights, the quietly spectacular Manor at Ngorongoro, whose Cape Dutch cottages (with full suites) are tranquilly set within a coffee plantation adjacent to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The Manor, much admired for its cuisine and thoughtful service, offers a wealth of activities, from horsebacking, mountain biking and swimming, to estate walks and recreative spa lounging.

We'll make the thrilling drive up to one of earth's wonders, the great, green, animal-nurturing caldera of a once catastrophically cranky, now beneficently mellow volcano, the Ngorongoro. Winding up to the crater's rim puts us at Vail and Aspen altitudes of well over 7,000 feet, and being up that high, figuratively and actually, we may recall Isak Dinesen's words in *Out of Africa*, "The air of the African highlands went to my head like wine, I was all the time slightly drunk with it." And then we zoom down to the Lost World's lush and park-like floor (but which, make no mistake, is an animal, not a human, kingdom) for a day's game viewing and a festive bush picnic.

And we'll game drive and view-catch at Lake Manyara, which our guy Ernest Hemingway thought "the loveliest lake in Africa." The lake is a birder's heaven, (it's frequented by migratory species), and the water from its Crater Highlands-supplied springs makes it a forested redoubt for all the most glamorous large mammals, including the famed Manyara tree-climbing lions. (It's a little irreverent, but tree-lounging might be a better description.)

DAYS 13 & 14

Return to Nairobi and on to home

We affectionately say goodbye to the great crater, lake, and deliciously homey Manor, and fly to Nairobi, where we'll rest up in day rooms at the historic Norfolk or Boma Nairobi before our late evening flights.