

# Southern Kenya

## A Greentours Itinerary

### Day 1

#### Departure

We'll arrive into Nairobi around nine in the evening and settle in the Lazizi Hotel not far from both the airport and Nairobi National Park.

### Days 2 – 6

#### Tsavo East National Park

After a relaxed breakfast at the Lazizi we'll head southeast along the Mombasa Highway stopping for lunch at Hunters Lodge with fine bird-filled grounds where we'll see African Golden Weavers building their nests and abundant Black-necked Herons.

We'll soon arrive at the west gate into Tsavo East we'll immediately be struck by the appearance of this wild country. The scene is of red earth and very dry bush country. Every few kilometres a sharp-edged hill rises from the otherwise featureless and slightly rolling terrain. The vegetation is dominated by Acacias and *Commiphora* and trees are generally low, however we'll soon start to see the other-worldly shapes of Baobabs dotting the landscape. These thick-trunked trees, which look as if they have been uprooted and returned upsidedown to the earth, are an integral part of the Tsavo landscape, as are those sharp-sided hills that offer incredible 'out of Africa' views across these incredibly game-rich savannahs. We will take a game drive on the way in before arriving at Voi Safari Lodge at dusk where will have plenty of chance to settle in and get comfortable before meeting for dinner. Voi Safari Lodge's shady bars and verandas overlook a vast savannah panorama, and offer some of the most excellent game viewing in all Africa. Elephant, Lion, Impala, Warthog, Zebra, Giraffe, Hartebeest and Grant's Gazelle – and these are all just from the bar! Rusty-spotted Genets regularly come up the restaurant steps in the evening while you have to be careful not to trip over implacable Rock Hyraxes. Down at the waterhole there's always plenty of action, sometimes a Bat-eared Fox, Black-backed Jackal or Verreaux's Eagle Owl, a pride of Lions, flock of Ostriches or herd of Eland, and always Elephants. Sometimes huge herds of Cape Buffalo, two thousand strong, approach in a long line and it is only then that the Elephants display any signs of nervousness. Family groups of Banded Mongooses chatter away in the mornings as groups of Helmeted Guineafowl walk in to drink, Steppe Eagles and Bateleurs drift past the veranda only metres away, while Secretary Birds stalk brilliant orange and blue Rock Agamas below - and all this can be seen from the main lodge. Birds are incredibly abundant. The tiny Pygmy Falcon is impressively brash, whilst huge Martial Eagles and Lappet-faced Vultures are just magnificent. Kori Bustards often seem impervious to our presence, whilst Von Der Decken's, Red-billed and Grey Hornbills call loudly from the acacias. The brilliant colours of Red and Yellow Barbets are matched by the

intense beauty of Golden Pipits. The Superb Starling certainly deserves its name, however even they are completely outshone by the amazing Golden-breasted Starling, whose brilliant golden underparts and shimmering iridescent green, blue and maroon head and upperparts provide a show of true splendour! Seeps of water above the carpark provide a wonderful venue for those into photographing some of the more brilliant local birds including delights such as Green-winged Pytilia and Red-cheeked Cordon-Bleu.

We'll have morning drives and evening drives out into national park with a lengthy siesta in between so that we can enjoy all the amazing wildlife the lodge has to offer or perhaps relax in the swimming pool with a view, or watch the waterhole from the bar.... or perhaps all three! On those drives we'll get close, often very close, to an incredible variety of mammals and birds, and the photographic opportunities on this tour are exceptional. Animals such as Giraffes, Burchell's (or Plains) Zebra, Impala and Cape Buffalo are all seen frequently wherever we go. We're likely to see Lions on more than one occasion, probably several, and though they have a rather languid reputation it is equally likely we'll find them doing something interesting – maybe hunting, or eating, or moving the family... Other cats are not guaranteed but we've certainly a good chance of seeing both Leopard and Cheetah, the latter often hunts in the evenings in the grassier areas to the west of the lodge. This is also a good spot for the beautiful Serval, an elegant cat of mid size with long legs and a small head. We've a reasonable chance of seeing two other smaller cats, African Wild Cat, and Caracal, both of which are not uncommon in Tsavo, just notoriously elusive.

The Galana river is a favourite area for the beautiful Lesser Kudu, which sports spiral horns and a white striped coat. We shall see Gerenuk and Fringe-eared Oryx, and down by the river Crocodiles and Hippopotamus loaf in the seething rapids as Wire-tailed Swallows hawk overhead. Grey-headed and Striped Kingfishers are easy to see and there's lots of beautiful Blue-naped Mousebirds. Huge flocks of Red-billed Queleas swarm like locusts over trees at Aruba's waterhole were large numbers of White Pelicans mix with Open-bill Storks.

It is tempting to always be looking hard for something special in the distance or at least mid-distance, but just cast your eyes down by the trackside, just a metre or so from the vehicle and you'll likely start to notice just how many of the little Kirk's Dik-Diks there are about, or perhaps groups of Black-faced Sandgrouse messing around close to the vehicle's wheels! As we stop and photograph all these wonderful mammals we can hardly fail to notice the wide variety of often beautiful smaller birds inhabiting Tsavo's biodiverse savannah. Somali Bee-eaters and Little Bee-eaters perch obligingly for us whilst striking White-headed Buffalo Weavers seem everywhere, sometimes with Red-billed Buffalo Weavers. Other fine birds we'll encounter are Three-streaked Tchagra, Straw-coloured Whydah, Cut-throat, Amethyst Sunbird, Black-headed Batis and the Pangani Longclaw as well as yet more starlings with Wattled, Blue-eared Glossy and Fischer's Starlings all on show.

We'll visit Mudando Rocks. Mudando means 'strips of drying meat' in the local language and the long exfoliated sandstone whaleback ridge certainly could resemble such. It is one of the few places inside the national park where one is allowed out on foot and there's a waterhole on the far side which always has something special – maybe a Bateleur drinking by the water's edge or perhaps a family of Warthogs moving in to drink. Sizeable flocks of stunning Vulturine Guinea-fowl will really impress with their gorgeous electric markings, while the amazing crimson and black splash on the chest of the Rosy-patched Shrike absolutely shines when it catches the evening sun!

Dwarf Mongooses roam the landscape like a multi-headed vacuum cleaner! Slender Mongooses skitter across the track flushing Somali Golden-breasted Bunting and Pink-beasted Larks. At the lodge Nuthatch-like Northern Crombecs and Northern Brubrus perch in the carpark trees alongside Spot-flanked Barbets, Cardinal Woodpeckers and African Penduline Tits. Butterflies are numerous but are easiest to see in the lodge grounds. Species we'll encounter include the beautiful Yellow Splendour and the striking Joker. Other less charismatic butterflies include Yellow Patch White, Forest Caper White, Citrus Swallowtail and Zebra White. Verreaux's Eagles soar over the lodge, also a good spot to see the uncommon African Hawk Eagle. Indeed the variety of birds of prey is outstanding. Gabar Goshawks watch from occasional tall acacias, superficially similar looking Pale Chanting Goshawks eye us from low branches across the tracks, and there's a wide variety of eagles including Wahlberg's Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle and Imperial Eagle. There's nothing finer than after dinner going down to the waterhole and watching what the Elephants are up to. Tsavo's Elephants are famous for their red coloration, a result of the intensely orange laterite soils of the park. Large family groups often gather at the waterhole. After a long drink many of the herd including some tiny youngsters often use handy rocks and each other as scratching and rubbing posts.

## **Day 7**

### **via Tsavo West to Amboseli**

After a morning game drive in Tsavo and yet another slap-up breakfast we'll head west towards Amboseli en route spending much of the day in Tsavo West National Park. This is more hilly country and well-treed so the rich mammal life is less easy to discern however we should see Eland, Lesser Kudu and Coke's Hartebeest on the way to magical Mzima Springs. Mzima's water is crystal clear and it is easy to see the local Hippos clearly even when below the water. Watching the hippos from the underwater hides is an extraordinary experience! You may even get to watch a Darter swimming past under the water. There's plenty of great birds here. Giant Kingfishers perch in trees along the water course while the Yellowbark Acacias that surround the pools have Little Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike and Red-headed Weaver.

As Kilimanjaro rises in front of us the scenery becomes magnificent with rolling plains, sharp and tall hills, and black lava flows all cloaked in grasslands and light woodland. Black-bellied Bustard, Secretary Bird and Maasai Ostriches are frequent in the grasslands roundabout.

## **Days 8 & 9**

### **Amboseli National Park**

Amboseli's setting is remarkable. 400 square kilometres of natural grasslands and marshes sit directly at the foot of the highest mountain in Africa. Kilimanjaro dominates the scene. Amboseli is a mere thousand metres above sea level, Kilimanjaro is not far short of 6000m and its cone rises evenly and steeply to our south. The biosphere reserve itself is surrounded by six large communally-owned ranches that allow game dispersal when the grazing is good!

We'll have morning drives and evening drives out into national park with a lengthy siesta in between so that we can enjoy all the amazing wildlife the lodge has to offer – this is one of the great places to see Elephants with a large herd making the lodge part of their regular circuit. Zebra, Warthogs and Cape Buffalo are common animals here and we should soon start seeing Wildebeest even from the lodge itself. The swimming pool is a great place to relax in the day and is surrounded by Yellowbark Acacias so you can take your binoculars into the water with you and watch Speke's Weavers and Taveta Golden Weavers busy nest-building. The wonderfully complicated plumage of D'Arnaud's Barbets will be sure to delight and we'll see beautiful species such as African Paradise Flycatcher, Red-capped Crombec, Hildebrandt's Starling and Lilac-breasted Roller within the grounds.

As we drive out from the lodge we will soon start to see the characteristic birds and animals of this classic East African habitat. Hornbills, barbets, various colourful starlings and bustards will appear then we'll see Impala, then Giraffe... As we stop to photograph these elegant animals we'll notice a couple of Golden Jackals running towards us down the track... We'll find out why when we round the corner for there we'll find someone altogether larger and meaner! Spotted Hyenas! Amboseli is a great place for this powerful but little-loved predator and we're sure to have several meetings with them. We'll find Lions too, there's a goodly number in Amboseli however the other large cats Leopard and Cheetah though both here are not guaranteed. Numbers of some of the ungulates are impressive especially Impala and we'll see plenty of delicate little Thomson's Gazelles, often sheltering from the sun in the shade of an Acacia. Elegant Lesser Kudu will be a highlight and so too the ever-fascinating behaviour of the Baboon troupes which stalk the grasslands looking for trouble! Some of the scarcer or harder to see mammals we'll look for are Bohor Reedbuck, Honey Badger and African Wildcat.

Central to our time in Amboseli are the wetlands. Amboseli is set in a basin, the whole of which would have been a lake in the Pleistocene but only part of which is now a

temporary lake. This is at its best from October to December and we're visiting right in the middle of the period when water levels should be good. Amboseli actually has less than 300mm of rain annually so visiting at this season won't get us too wet, rather it is the underground feeds from the great mountain that well up in great papyrus swamps here. The result is a large tract of wet savannah with areas of open water and much marshland which is very much the heart of Amboseli. This provides abundant herbage for the herbivores and sustenance for myriad wetland birds. Some of the largest groups of Elephants in Africa spend a lot of time in this marsh, and we'll be able to photograph them with snow-capped Kilimanjaro as a backdrop! Waterbuck with their elegant strong-looking horns seem to be everywhere and we'll find time to watch the groups of Hippopotamus too. The numbers of wetland birds are outstanding. Along the lake's edge we'll see Lesser Flamingos mooching back and forth alongside ugly Marabou Storks making sure nothing unsavory is left uneaten! Black-necked Herons and noisy Hadadas are joined by many egrets and wading birds such as Blacksmith Plovers and Crowned Plovers, Spur-winged Plovers and Black-winged Stilts. Drier areas are home to two rather special birds, Yellow-faced Sandgrouse and the impressive Kori Bustard. Lappet-faced Vulture and Tawny Eagles are overhead and we can see both Eastern Pale Chanting and Pale Chanting Goshawks. Black Saw-wings and both Lesser Striped and Mosque Swallows hawk over the marshes where pairs of Crowned Cranes stand regally, golden crown feathers shining in the evening sun. Goliath Herons and Saddle-billed Stork are two of the marshes more spectacular avian denizens. African Jacanas are always a lovely sight and we'll soon hear the far-carrying call of the African Fish Eagle, a frequent sound here.

## **Day 10**

### **Amboseli and Nairobi National Park**

After a morning game drive in Amboseli we'll have breakfast and then mid-morning we'll head back towards Nairobi stopping for lunch close to Nairobi National Park. Once inside the park only the city skyscrapers and new estates visible along the northern edges of the park will remind us that a city of more than three million people lies on the edge of some exceedingly fine habitat! The open grasslands are dotted with little flat-topped Whistling Acacias, these trees barely six feet tall and festooned with ant galls on their thorns – it is the wind through these that makes them whistle! We'll soon see Ostriches, herds of Coke's Hartebeest and Masai Giraffe and lots of Thomson's Gazelles. Groups of Plain's Zebra, Grant's Gazelles and Eland make a strange sight with the skyscrapers behind them! No guarantees, but this park is a great place to see Cheetah. Nairobi's fantastically varied birdlife will get us off to a great start too with various shrikes and weavers, Pied Kingfishers and Little Heron along the river, lots of vultures, and Pallid Harriers quartering the grasslands. This is a great park for bustards with several species possible including the impressive Hartlaub's Bustard.

## **Day 10 (pm) to Nairobi**

In the afternoon of Day 10 we'll head up to Nairobi and stay the night at the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel close by the Airport.

## **Days 11 - 13 Arabuko Sokoke Forest**

Now we'll start the second part of the tour. For this we'll be changing gear somewhat from a 'wildlife at leisure' approach to a more dedicated 'searching for mammals' scenario.

The next morning we'll fly to the coast for a three night stay at the Turtle Bay Beach Resort in Watamu. This excellent resort is right by the sea, has a nice swimming pool, and most importantly is close by the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest!

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, along with some relict coastal forests in Tanzania, form a biome with many unique species and yet covering only a small area. Mammal's endemic to these coastal forests include Golden-rumped Giant Sengi and Four-toed Sengi, Harvey's and Ader's Duikers, Zanj Sun Squirrel and Sokoke Dog Mongoose. However unlike many of Kenya's mammals, this is a decidedly difficult bunch to connect with! That said we'll have no problem seeing the Golden-rumped Giant Sengi, these curious little insectivores buzz back and forth across the forest tracks well before it gets dark. Four-toed Sengi are less common but still pretty easy to find. Daylight will allow us to catch up with Sykes' Monkeys and the pretty little Zanj Sun Squirrels. Harvey's Red Duiker are tolerably common, Ader's Duiker is less easy to find. Once darkness falls the place is alive with Kenya Coast Galagos and we should also have no problem seeing Small-eared Greater Galagos. Blotched Genets will be seen regularly and we'll hopefully see Coastal Suni. Finding the Sokoke Dog Mongoose would be a highlight but is very much in the hoped for bracket as are Caracal, Side-striped Jackal and Aardvark, all of which are found within the forest but are shy and rather scarce. Four-toed Hedgehogs can be found around the hotel grounds.

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is a great place for bats. We'll visit two caves both with substantial bat colonies. Kaboga Cave is full of Striped Leaf-nosed Bats, African Sheath-tailed Bats and Least Long-fingered Bats, these flying in droves around us as we traverse the guano-covered floor of the cave. The bats are even more varied in Makahuru and the numbers even more impressive. Thousands of bats fly around us, some of the same species as at Kaboga, but also Sundeval's Roundleaf Bat, Little Free-tailed Bat, and orange African Trident Bat.

## **Days 14 & 15 Tsavo East National Park**

Famous Tsavo East National Park is all about prime game-watching in a majestic Baobab-dotted savannah-scape. You need do nothing more than sit above the waterhole and watch as herds of Elephant, Cape Buffalo, Zebra and Eland come in to drink. Lions, Black-backed Jackals, Blotched Genet and Bat-eared Fox can all be seen from the lodge. We've every chance of seeing other cat species during our visit including Leopard, Cheetah, and the elegant ear-tufted Caracal. Serval can be found in the grasslands just northwest of the lodge though like the Caracal daytime sightings are not easy. Tsavo East is a great place to watch the antics of Gerenuk who are only too happy to show off their 'browsing walk'. Tsavo is one of the only places in the world where you can come across the super-rare Hirola, an elegant antelope whose wild population is down to a few hundred individuals. The tiny population in Tsavo is a translocated one but nonetheless important.

Other mammals we'll see include Coke's Hartebeest, Hippos, Fringe-eared Oryx and the beautiful Lesser Kudu. The local warthog is the Desert Warthog and sharing a similar distribution is the local variant on dwarf mongoose, the Somali Dwarf Mongoose, which is easily seen amongst the impressive termite mounds that dot the landscape. Families of Banded Mongoose are always fun to watch as they 'hoover' through the bushed savannah. Tana Gazelle, now split from Grant's Gazelle, are very common, and we'll see lots of Giraffe too. The latter offer an interesting taxonomic puzzle here as we are full square in the 'Galana River Hybrid Zone'. It is possible to see animals that look fully like Reticulated Giraffes and others that more resemble Masai Giraffes, and a range of intermediates too. Klipspringers step daintily across the rocks on a hill close to the lodge and around the lodge itself Yellow Baboons and Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax are ever-present. And all that's before we start the nocturnal activities.

Game drives at night in Tsavo are superbly productive. We'll see African Civet, African Wild Cat, White-tailed Mongoose, and plenty of Spotted Hyenas. We have seen Serval, Aardwolf and Striped Hyena on night trips here too, though all three are uncommon and a sighting of any of these should be regarded as a bonus. Taterils and Grass Rats scurry across the track. Senegal Bushbabies peer at us from Acacia foliage.

## **Days 16 – 19(am)**

### **Aberdares National Park**

East of the Great Rift rise the Aberdares, a highland area that is still largely forested, and which is home to a number of rare and local mammals. Unlike the open plains of many of Kenya's national parks the Aberdares makes the mammal watcher work much harder! But the rewards are great.

We'll have one night at the famed Ark. This lodge has an exceptional record of providing sightings for many sought-after species. Whilst the super-rare Bongo may not make an appearance (OK, perhaps I should rephrase that – it won't – it turns up

once a year!) while we are there, we'll certainly see plenty of the impressive Giant Forest Hogs. Other hard-to-see species in the area include Harvey's Duiker, Black-fronted Duiker, Lesser Cane Rat and Ochre Bush Squirrel. Both Duikers occasionally turn up round the lodge and we'll look for them along the forest tracks too in the daytime too. Spotted Hyenas visit the waterhole in numbers each night and you'll see White-tailed Mongoose and Genets too. Elephants provide endless entertainment while Waterbuck and beautiful Bushbuck are common. Brown Greater Galago and Marsh Mongoose are more rarely seen. You'll hear Southern Tree Hyrax but spotting them from the confines of the lodge at night is less easy. In daylight Mountain Suni crouch under the bushes around the lodge. Other common animals likely to be seen during the day around the park include Eastern Warthog, Bushbuck, Striped Ground Squirrel, Common Zebra, Slender Mongoose, Impala, Reticulated Giraffe, East African Eland and troupes of the elegant Mount Kenya Guereza.

We've chosen to spend one night at the Ark only as you are confined to the building at night there and there's no chance to walk or drive around. This is not the case at the Aberdare Country Club and indeed the grounds of this pleasant hotel, which are extensive and back on to conservancy land, have become well-known as a good site to see certain mammals. In daylight Ochre Bush Squirrels scamper around the hotel building whilst a sortie out onto the lawns even in daylight should reveal Harvey's Red Duiker, indeed we'll also see Zebra, Impala, Bushbuck and Warthogs too. At dusk Mountain Suni emerge and feed around the lawn edges and we'll see Scrub Hares and Southern Tree Hyrax, the latter much easier to see here. The weird and wonderful Maned Rat has recently started appearing in the grounds too. Up into the moorlands and bamboo forests above we'll find Sykes' Monkey and Mountain Reedbuck.

## **Day 19 (pm)**

### **Depart Nairobi**

In the afternoon of Day 10 we'll descend to Nairobi and have dinner before catching our late evening flight.

## **Day 20**

### **Arrive UK/Europe**

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