A blogger's guide to Nairobi

The Kenyan capital offers a fine mixture of food, safari and shopping options

By **Monica Kapila**

I have been travelling to Nairobi for the last 25 years and really noticed a change for the better when I visited this August. It is always so refreshing seeing all the greenery the city has to offer – I live among the skycrapers of Dubai – and the one hour time difference means there is no jet lag either. You can easily spend a day or even a night in Nairobi National Park and do a safari without leaving the city. There are a number of options for great days out or, if you want to stay city side, you can relax and take in the cool vibes of the Village Market with all its eateries, entertainment and shopping opportunities.

Photo **Getty Images**

Just one quick note before you plan your trip. Since September 1, Kenya has introduced new online visa requirements.

Nairobi was first named 'Enkare Nyrobi' from the Masaai phrase cool water. The water, cool climate and fertile soil helped the city become a preferred choice for early settlers. It was also valued for its strategic location between Mombasa and Kampala, serving as a rail town before eventually replacing the former as the capital.

Kenya gained its independence from Britain in 1963 and today the capital is a very cosmopolitan city that is home to many nationalities and the headquarters of the United Nations Environmental Programme. A great institution telling you more about the history of Kenya, its culture and art is the National Museum of Kenya. It reopened after an extensive refurbishment in 2008.

Today Kenya is known for its safaris but if you do not have time to do a flying package to the Masaai Mara then

Nairobi skyline

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exploring the Nairobi National Park is a great option. There are 35 lions that have made the park their home. The best chance you have of seeing them and all the wildlife up close is on a proper game drive with a reputable company. You can even spend a night and do an early morning game drive if you stay at the Nairobi Tented Camp. Packages include airport pick-ups that take you straight to the park and meals; game drives and visits to Daphne Sheldrik's elephant orphanage. Expect to see herds of buffalos, gazelles, zebras, baboons, giraffes and safari birds including ostriches.

Shopping in Nairobi should involve taking a break from shiny mega malls and browsing around the Masaai Market. You can buy colourful striped, cotton kikois (sarongs) from the Village Market site on a Friday morning that are great 'his and her' presents. There are lots of pocket money items here including beaded animal key rings, wooden salad spoons and even Christmas decorations. But do remember to bargain hard. Expect to pay between KSh 500 to 600 for a cotton kikoi. Artisan jewellery is always popular and very well priced too.

Many visitors bring back a box of fresh flowers. At KSh 200 for 10 white roses, it is hard to resist this option. Do check on the rules and regulations where you live though. Put them in mineral water and they should last a week or so. You can also wander around the zuchini vegetable emporium in the Village Market for the freshest produce and add to your flower box too. They will make up a basket for you that can be checked into the hold. Be sure to eat some of the healthy and locally-produced beetroot crisps while you are wandering around looking for Kenya green beans.

Another worthwhile stop is the area of Karen, an upmarket Nairobi country suburb.

Danish author Karen Blixen and her Swedish husband Baron Bror von Blixen Finke owned the farm at the foot of the Ngong hills and now the Karen Blixen museum is located here. The site was made famous by the *Out of Africa* movie and it is well worth visiting. Karen has a real country feel to it and has a great choice of quality restaurants. The Talisman is very popular. But do make time to check out the Kazuri beads workshop factory and buy some brightly painted pottery or jewellery to bring home.

Families will also love visiting Brown's Cheese Factory for its lunch and farmyard tour. You can even see how artisan cheeses are made and then taste them. Just under an hours drive from Nairobi with various art studios along the way, this trip makes a refreshing change to city life. There are no safari animals. Just cows, sheep and even ducks. Plus Brown's award winning cheeses are a genuine local product worth trying.

No visit to Nairobi would be complete without a trip to the now iconic Giraffe Centre. Photographs at the feeding platform are a must for any visit. Those that want to do something really memorable should stay a night at Giraffe Manor where you may get some extra guests joining you for breakfast.

Monica Kapila is a blogger at www.doindubai.com

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