



MINI GUIDE FOR
SUSTAINABLE TOURIST
Kenya edition

by Djemme - Slow Travel



Kenya is a **very poor** country, where one can die starving, and consequently a proper behaviour is crucial: in particular do not show your own wealth, without offending local people or causing some reactions even dangerous for the traveller himself.

Furthermore, Kenya has got an history of colonization by UK, which left deep marks (not always negative), as you can guess from distrustful behaviour of people (obviously not as much in Nairobi, or where it's normal meeting *wazungu* - Whites -, as in rural areas and outskirts).

DRESS

Most popular religion in Kenya is Christianity, so there are not strict rules about dressing as in Muslim countries.



girls from Lamu

That's different along the coast, where Muslim community is very large: here the great majority of women is veiled when out of home; nevertheless the presence of other religions make female dressing with bare legs and shoulders well tolerated.

In Nairobi, people generally is well dressed, at least for local parameters, so you can often see children dressed up to the nine, with laces and frills, women with impeccable lady's suit, men at least in shirt, but often in suit with tie. That's a way to feel *rich*, to dissociate oneself from the part of population who hasn't the chance to buy a new pair of trousers or a skirt. Downtown, among the streets crowded of employees of big banks, ministries, state offices and multinational enterprises, it's not rare to meet girls with deep miniskirts or men in double-breasted jacket, maybe passing nearby ragamuffins or very dirty children who take your hand holding it till they get some coins. Viceversa, into poorer slums and outskirts, side by side to people decorously dressed you can find the poorest, recognizable from clothes (or because they are drunk, if men).

Consequently, dressing in Nairobi can be fairly free, avoiding flaunting wealth. A rule generally valid everywhere: **the more you gaudy dress the**

more you may seen as a possible prey of robberies or rapes, unfortunately very frequent not so much towards

white people, but mainly towards local people, men or women. Remember that Nairobi, also named *Nairobbery*, is a very violent town, and every day you can read on newspapers about some buses hold up by bandits, about some rapes, or about some murders. In interior rural areas, far from towns, local people normally dress with the traditional clothes of their ethnic group: Maasai often dress only a small red tunic, if necessary with a checked cover when it's colder, and they are garishly decorated with necklaces, bangles, earrings and other jewels made out of coloured beads. Kikuyu, Luo and Kimeru women, and generally all women working in the countryside, use a sort of coloured length of cloth over the usual clothes; moreover they never wear trousers. Besides trying not to catch ones eyes, **white women, when in rural areas, could buy length of cloth to use over the usual clothes**, to be more discreet, and with more freedom in dressing even trousers. Along the coast, men often have the typical Muslim hat and long tunics, or a sort of cylinder length of cloth, tied at waist as a skirt, and women are veiled (at Lamu, they are always all in black and only eyes use to appear from the veil). For tourists, **not dressing too much garish and not showing too much bare skin** (both women and men) is enough.



kikuyu woman



in Nairobi



PUBLIC AFFECTION DISPLAY

Even between married couples **showing affection in public is not a common behaviour** for this people, neither among Christians, nor among Muslims. Sex is perceived as a taboo and any sexy attitude risks to be an invitation to bother. In Muslim community meeting men walking and taking hands is frequent: generally they are not homosexual but friends.

ALCOHOL

Kenya has got an **unbiased habit of drinking alcoholics**: a young man who can't pay for at least 5 beers during the evening, may easily decide to stay home, because he wouldn't get drunk. Alcohol is often useful to forget the poverty affecting the great majority of the population, as usual in developing Countries, and both day and night you can meet people drunk to such an extent that they can't even stand.

The traveller wishing to drink alcoholics can obviously find beer so easily (by the way, there is a local brand, Tasker, really popular) and even something much stronger. Anyway **moderation is a golden rule** here as anywhere, even for not giving example of bad behaviour example.



into a bar at Nyeri



*mosque on the coast,
between Mombasa and Malindi*

RAMADAN

During ramadan (month of abstention from food, drinks, smoke and sexual activities from dawn to sunset), practised by the entire Muslim community, **it a proper behaviour not to eat, drink or smoke in public**, at least into the areas where Muslims are the majority (along the coast). That's not "essential", both because a traveller visiting Kenya is not obliged to follow a rule not involving him, and moreover because believers of other religions don't follow it: that's only a matter of respect for Muslims believers.

PHOTOS / VIDEOS

Concerning both photos and videos, you can follow the general rules applying all over the world: **always ask for permission before taking a picture** to anyone. The attitude in front of a camera mainly depends from both the ethnic group and the habits towards tourists. Around Maasai Mara Park, for example, Maasai, usually very worried about the possibility that the camera steals their soul, on the other side are well used to tourism, and finally they may easily pose with or without a tip. In Maasai, Samburu and Turkana lands, especially in the most visited by tourists (not only around Maasai Mara, but also around Amboseli, in the area of Rumuruti and more Northern up to Lake Turkana), it is common to meet someone proposing to visit the village of the local tribe, where you can take all the picture you want! It's clear, it is a trick to tap tourists for money, and, although the village looks like the traditional one, it looks somehow artificial and false. In the same areas, if you just follow a less busy track, you can find strong determination to skip the tourists' cameras..



*children of Nairobi
while a train passing*



If someone ask you **money in change of photos**, the suggestion is not to accept and not to shout. In particular in Kikuyu area (around Mt Kenya), women, especially if poor, are even offended if someone propose them to pose in front of a camera; the same as for Muslims women from coastal regions and above all from Lamu.

Concerning children, on the contrary, everywhere they are very available to be photographed (at least if mum is far away!), and they may even pry you. Digital camera provides something more: showing the just taken image to the child makes him feel important, and he will ask more and more pictures, making each time different faces. As wherever in the world, you should avoid **military and strategic targets**, and in general everything concerning police or the army.

TIPS

Tip is always welcome, but is should be **the consequence of a very satisfactory service**: to the taxi driver, who takes you all day long for a trip in the countryside and stops every time you want to take a picture), if it is worth to your trekking guide, to cooks and bearers, to boatmen, to waiters or simply to anyone showing you the next matatu stop. As a general rule, calculate about 10% of the total cost of the offered service.

MANNERS



vendors assault at Voi bus station

Generally speaking Kenyans are not *polite*, at least as in Western conception. at least as in Western conception. If you have to get on a bus, be ready to see groups of screaming people, pushing to enter before the others, careless of travellers getting out.

If you are buying something in a small and crowded shop, either you push at least a little bit, or you will be served at closing time. Although sometimes this behaviour could be very annoying, **getting upset is useless** : adapt yourself just enough to succeed in the challenge you are managing. Another issue showing the Kenyan low civil spirit is the respect for the environment: not-existent! If people have any sort of garbage in their hand (a plastic bag with left-overs or cigarette ends), they will casually cast it on the street from the bus or car window: you might remark it should be better

to take the garbage with you and cast in the first waste basket, but there are no waste basket available, and anyway no one would understand you. Unfortunately, the Country has got lots of more urgent problem to solve!

CHARITY

Everywhere you go, just because you are white, independently from your behaviour, the equation **white=rich** is strongly believed. Expect everybody, simply everybody, asking you money even in change of nothing. The classic formula used by all children to approach you is for example: *mzungu, how are you? give me one bob!* (bob is the colloquial way to name shilling). Although sometimes very difficult, you should **never give consent to these requests**, because the final result should be only to push Kenyan children to believe it's sufficient to ask for getting something.

Different is being available to pay, for either a service or a good, a price a bit higher than Kenyans: this is part of the game, and sometimes it's even official (the great majority of park fees and often even the hotel fees are differentiate for residents and for non-residents).



children, Kibera slums



Anyway the most important rule is **never give to children**, money, candies, pencils, or anything is asked for: from one side that should mean to expose a child to be picked on by other kids, and on the other side it's useless and negative showing a model according to which working is not required, *it's enough to beg rich people*

AT HOME

If you are hosted in a Kenyan family, remember to hold always a small necklace or a pen or a scarf, to gift when **someone is going to gift you something** (and that easily happens).

Observe the behaviour of the members of the family: if they take off their shoes, do the same, and if two of them sit on one chair, do not use a two-seats sofa just for you, on the contrary invite someone to sit close to you: probably they have got only two or three chairs and anyway they will leave you the entire sofa, but it's always better to try! If you are **hosted for a meal**, it's absolutely right to contribute (either you buy the food for cooking or you take something to gift to women and children).

NEGOTIATION



Maasai market in Nairobi:
negotiation is mandatory!

In Kenya **you can negotiate for several things** do not lose your temper if you realize that the asked price is higher than the one you got in the nearby shop and remember you are white and rich. Be prepared to **negotiate in a polite manner**. For example, if you are taking a bus or a *matatu* (local minibus) to reach a destination, if you ask for the ticket to the office of the bus station, probably they will propose you the most expensive; persist in asking all the various alternatives, so you can choose the best compromise price-time-comfort: a smart but kind and trusting attitude often gets more respect and better treatment, avoiding tricks.

BEHAVIOUR IN NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES

Concerning behaviour to hold inside the parks, you can find **full documentation at the entry gates of the parks** and in all tourist guide books, in any travel agency and renting car company. That can be summarized as following:

- vehicles circulation is possible only on traced roads (if it is not marked "no entry") and only from 6:30 to 18:30 with no exception; speed limit is 40kmh
- it's forbidden disturbing animals (following by vehicle, using the horn, suddenly turning or changing direction, lighting up them with headlamp) or inducing to move from their place or to stop what they are doing; it's compulsory to keep a minimum distance of 20mt from the animals; animals have always right of way
- entering inside the park is allowed only by vehicle, it's forbidden to get out, to sit on the windows or to get on the roof of the car
- it's forbidden taking away anything from the parks (animals, remains of animals, stones, plants, seeds, nests, wood) and it's strictly prohibited to touch animals and to feed them
- it's forbidden to leave rubbish
- it's forbidden to light fire and to cast cigarette ends
- domestic animals are not allowed.



behaviour in Maasai Mara Reserve



SOUVENIRS AND PROTECTED SPECIES



Kenya forbids coral collection, ivory exportation (elephant tusks and rhino horn), and all the items made with sea turtles (shells, jewels and combs). Furthermore, national law forbids as well trading and exportation of reptile skin items such as suitcases, belts, shoes, watch straps and wallets. Therefore, even though trading and export of some articles made by some wild species is allowed, it's always better taking information about the necessity of a licence, especially for export of plants, insects and shells.

Use always common sense: **if you have any doubt, avoid it!**