

# Central Highlands



Forming the eastern wall of the Rift Valley and climbing from the heat of the northern plains are the Central Highlands, Kenya's heartland. What better monument to the region's importance than Mt Kenya, the country's highest mountain and Africa's second-highest peak.

Densely populated and intensively cultivated, the Central Highlands are home to the Kikuyu people, Kenya's largest and most politically favoured group (see p43). Squeezed into the mix are the Mt Kenya, Aberdare and Meru National Parks, which hold landscapes, wildlife, flora and fauna unseen elsewhere, as well as some amazing trekking possibilities.

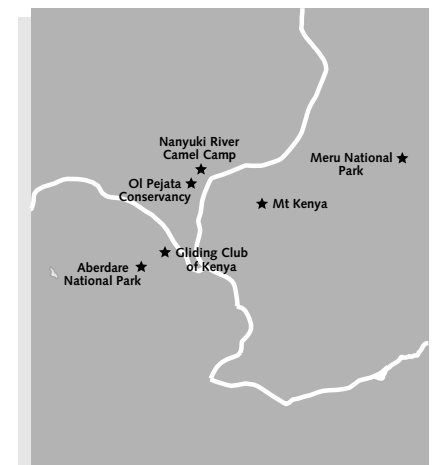
The Laikipia Plateau, stretching into northern Kenya from Nanyuki, is also home to a conservation project that has communities and ranches working together to protect and foster wildlife outside national parks. This effort can only bode well for the region's future.

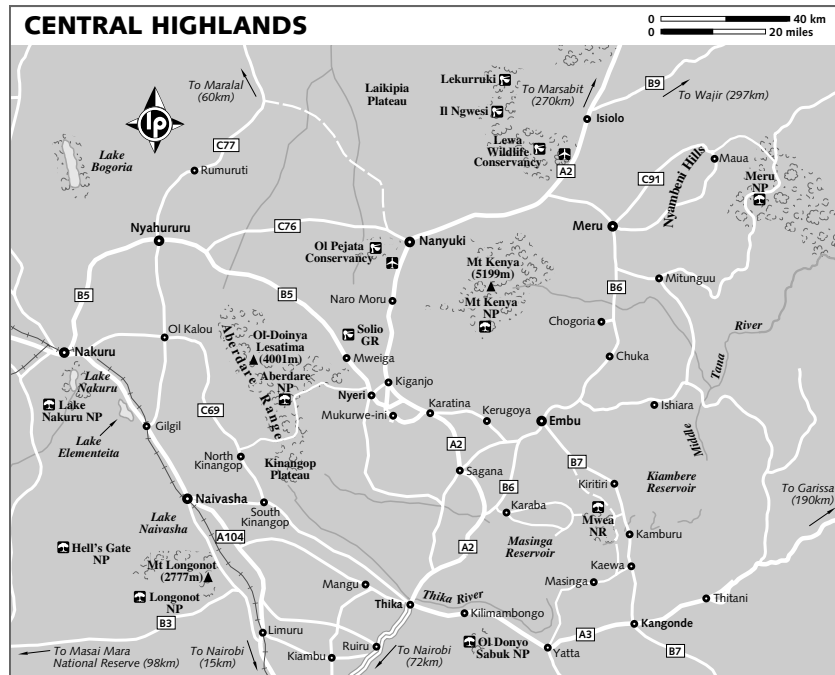
That said, the Central Highlands does have its problems, mostly tied to the purchase, division and distribution of many white farmers' lands to the Kikuyu after independence. This subdivision and its encroachment on one of Kenya's few remaining large forested areas has led to water crises and soil erosion. Many plots are also too small to support a family. Although a lot of forest still remains, demand for timber to be used as construction material and firewood (the most common form of fuel for cooking and heating) puts it at risk.

For ease of reference, the areas of the highlands that lie north of Nyahururu, Nanyuki and Meru are discussed in the Northern Kenya chapter.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Holding a frozen Kenyan flag in your frozen hands atop the frozen summit of Point Lenana on **Mt Kenya** (p261), just 16km from the Equator
- Disappearing into the depths of the riverside jungle in search of leopards at **Meru National Park** (p277)
- Testing your fear of heights while watching water fall into oblivion at Karura Falls in **Aberdare National Park** (p256)
- Meeting one of your closest relatives in the chimpanzee sanctuary at **Oi Pejeta Conservancy** (p274)
- Soaring in silence over the Aberdares with the **Gliding Club of Kenya** (p254)
- Living like a Somali nomad at **Nanyuki River Camel Camp** (p272)





## History

Before Europeans arrived much of the Central Highlands was occupied by Kikuyu people, who had been accomplished farmers and herders here for several centuries. The pleasant climate and fertile soils didn't go unnoticed by settlers, who were arriving after the completion of the Mombasa–Uganda railway, and soon the Kikuyu were sadly displaced. The Central Highlands quickly became known to some as the 'White Highlands'.

The Kikuyu resented the lack of land on their reserves and many formed a resistance movement known as the Mau Mau. Resistance first took the form of strikes, but after no results the Mau Mau turned to violence in the 1950s (see p29). While not even the staunchest patriot could claim that the Mau Mau won, the uprising forced British colonial authorities to reassess their position and ultimately grant Kenya independence.

After independence this region's stand against the British wasn't overlooked by the Kenyan government, who returned much of the white settlers' land to the Kikuyu. However, the reallocation of land did lead

to problems and agricultural production has yet to totally recover.

## Climate

The Central Highlands enjoys perhaps the most agreeable climate in the country. Average temperatures rarely exceed 23°C and nights are pleasantly cool. Rain essentially falls in two seasons: March to the beginning of June (the 'long rains') and October to the end of November (the 'short rains').

## National Parks

Mt Kenya National Park (p261) is more than just the home of Kenya's highest mountain and unique flora and fauna: it is the region's biggest attraction and treks to the summit of Pt Lenana (4985m) are the highlight of many people's trips to Africa.

While Aberdare National Park (p256) is best known to the outside world as the place Princess Elizabeth became queen, those who've been lucky enough to visit will recall it far more for its lush Salient rainforest, Kinangop Plateau and abundant wildlife.

Lesser-known Meru National Park (p277), with diverse landscapes and wildlife, is one of Kenya's best kept secrets.

The tiny national park of Ol Donyo Sabuk (p281) straddles its namesake hill and plays home to a lush forest, buffaloes, birds and primates.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Daily **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) services link Nanyuki with Nairobi (Wilson Airport), Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and Samburu National Park. Airkenya also has three flights a week connecting the Meru National Park with Samburu and Nairobi. See Getting There & Away under the relevant sections for more details.

### BUS & MATATU

The Central Highlands are linked to Nairobi, western Kenya and the southern reaches of northern Kenya by countless matatus (minibuses) and regular bus services. Limited bus services also connect the region to Mombasa and the coast.

## Getting Around

This region's roads are in particularly good shape and, thanks to the new matatu safety regulations, it is safer than ever to get around. Countless buses and matatus ply the routes between all major towns.

# ABERDARES

The Aberdares stretch from South Kinangop, east of Naivasha, up to the Laikipia Escarpment northwest of Nyahururu. Known to the Kikuyu as Nyandarua (meaning Drying Hide), the Aberdares were named by explorer Joseph Thomson in 1884. The lower eastern slopes of the Aberdares were long cultivated by the Kikuyu, while the higher regions (now part of Aberdare National Park), boasting 4000m peaks, 300m waterfalls, dense forests, bamboo thickets, mist-covered moors and serious trekking potential, were left to leopards, buffaloes, lions, rhinos and elephants. The Aberdares remain one of Kenya's best places to spot black rhinos.

European settlers established coffee and tea plantations on the eastern side of the

Aberdares and the wheat and pyrethrum (chrysanthemum) farms on the western slopes.

## NYERI & AROUND

### ☎ 061

A well-provisioned, lively place and one of the Central Highlands' largest towns, Nyeri is the administrative headquarters of Central Province and gateway to Aberdare National Park. In colonialism's early days Nyeri was a garrison town, but it quickly became a trading and social centre for white cattle ranchers, coffee growers and wheat farmers. The verdant surrounds are intensively cultivated for vegetables, sugar cane, citrus fruits, bananas, tea, coffee and macadamia nuts.

On a clear morning, you can see distant Mt Kenya in all its snow-capped glory. However, few travellers linger more than two nights.

## Information

Internet access is available for KSh1 per minute at numerous cafés and at the three post offices, which also host card phones. **Barclays Bank** (cnr Sulukia & Sharpe Rds) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh34 per leaf commission). With ATM.

**Kenya Commercial Bank** (Kenyatta Rd) With ATM (Visa only).

**Standard Chartered Bank** (Kenyatta Rd) With ATM (Visa only).

**Wanga Cyber Hut** (Batian Exhibition Centre, Gakere Rd; per CD burned KSh50) Burn images to CD using USB connections.

## Sights & Activities

### SOLIO GAME RESERVE

This private 17,500-acre **reserve** (☎ 55271; B5 Hwy; adult/child/vehicle KSh1600/free/500), 22km north of Nyeri, plays a major part in preserving and breeding black rhinos in Kenya. Most of the hook-lipped horned beasts wandering national parks were actually born here. Its current population of rhinos would make some sub-Saharan countries blush!

The reserve also hosts animals like oryxes, gazelles, hartebeests, giraffes and buffaloes. While visiting you'll probably see the beautiful crowned crane and several varieties of paradise birds.

Self-drive safaris are permitted, with free maps available at the front gate. Allmendinger's guesthouse (p255) offers half-day

## BEHIND THE BEANS

Kenya is a great place to buy coffee, and it is one thing you'll have no problem taking out of the country. However, next time you're sipping a frappuccino or demanding extra froth on your US\$4 skinny latte, spare a thought for Kenyan coffee farmers, who number among the planet's worst-exploited commodity producers.

Coffee became something of a *cause célèbre* in 2002 when Oxfam International launched its Make Trade Fair campaign, highlighting the huge gulf between farmers' earnings and the massive profits enjoyed by multinational 'roasters'. According to Oxfam, coffee prices had slumped to a 30-year low, with farmers worldwide receiving around US\$1 per kilogram, while the international industry, worth over US\$2 billion annually, charged consumers almost US\$15 per kilo.

The global market remains hugely oversupplied and buyers effectively force farmers to accept whatever price they offer. With most exporters buying through local cooperative societies, Kenyan growers receive as little as 4% of auction prices – a serious crisis for a country exporting up to 32,000 tons of coffee annually.

Thankfully the Make Trade Fair campaign has made gains and some major roasters now deal partially in Fair Trade Coffee, albeit as an infinitesimal fraction of their business. The sooner you demand Fair Trade Coffee for your skinny latte (don't forget that extra froth), the sooner the unjust imbalance facing Kenyan farmers will be rectified. So get ordering – you can sleep later!

trips for US\$60 per person (minimum two people, plus admission).

## BADEN-POWELL MUSEUM

Sitting within the Outspan Hotel's beautiful grounds, this **museum** (admission KSh100; ☎ 8am–6pm) was the former cottage of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the international Scout Association. You'll find oodles of scouting paraphernalia and great mid-20th-century photos. The man himself is buried behind **St Peter's Church** (B5 Hwy).

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Nyeri's three top-end hotels offer **Wildlife drives** into Aberdare National Park (p256). Outspan Hotel is the most reasonable at KSh2500 per person (minimum two passengers) for two hours, plus park fees.

If you fancy getting your head in the clouds, the **Gliding Club of Kenya** (Map p257; ☎ 0733-760331; gliding@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 926, Nyeri), based 2km south of Mweiga, fits the bill. A 10-minute flight costs US\$50.

Every Sunday and public holiday the **Green Hills Hotel** (Bishop Gatimu Rd) hosts a day-long mini-festival of traditional dance, music and puppetry. It's free and great for kids. A dip in the swimming pool is KSh200.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Most of the cheap options will curl your toes, so here are some of the better picks.

**Central Hotel** (☎ 2030296; Kanisa Rd; s/tw incl breakfast KSh600/850) Central hosts bright, clean, yet slightly cramped twins, and more roomy singles, with many boasting balconies. Service here is a step up from most.

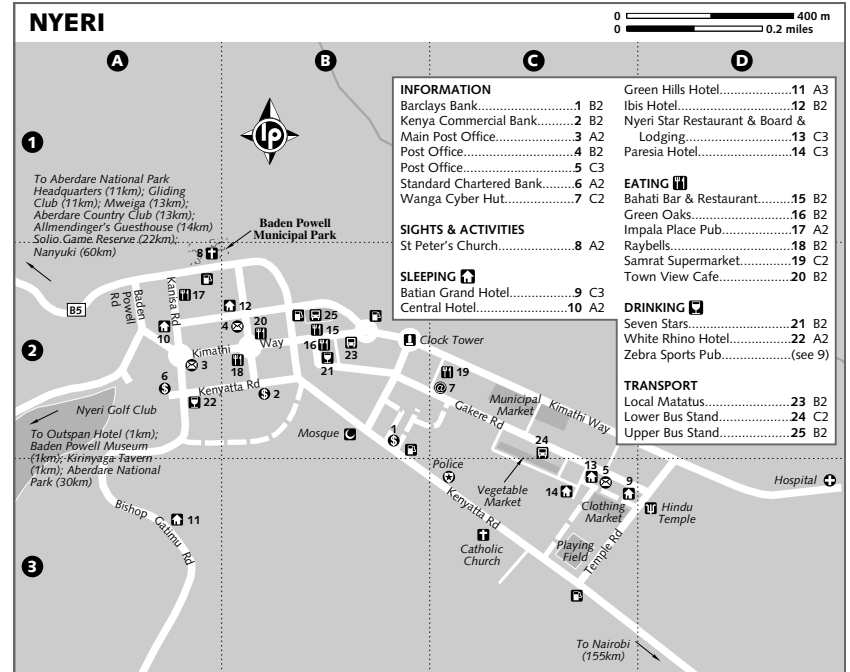
**Ibis Hotel** (☎ 2034858; s/tw KSh500/800) Representing good value, Ibis has comfortable and clean rooms with brilliant power-showers.

**Paresia Hotel** (☎ 2032765; off Gakere Rd; s/tw KSh300/500) With red cement floors and blue linoleum showers, Paresia is as colourful as it is cheap. Some rooms smell a bit musty, so sniff a few. Room 212 is the brightest of the bunch.

**Nyeri Star Restaurant & Board & Lodging** (☎ 2031083; Gakere Rd; s/tw KSh300/500) Slightly rougher round the edges than nearby Paresia, it still has hot showers and some sizeable rooms. The upstairs outward-facing rooms are brightest and most quiet. It is conveniently close to the bus station and parking is available.

**Green Oaks** (☎ 2030093; off Kimathi Way; s/tw KSh300/450) The rooms are bare-bones basic, but they're close to the upper bus stand. Its lively restaurant can get a little loud.

**Batian Grand Hotel** (☎ 2030743; batianhotel@wanachi.com; Gakere Rd; s/tw KSh700/1000) Front rooms face Mt Kenya at this well-appointed place with good facilities (when the boilers aren't leaking). The small inward-facing singles are darker than the larger carpeted twins and doubles. A coffee shop, restaurant and pub are downstairs.



**Green Hills Hotel** (☎ 2030604; Bishop Gatimu Rd; s/tw from KSh1350/2300; ☎) Some distance from the town centre lies the only true midrange option. The palm-lined 'standard' rooms are comfortable and sport shady balconies with garden views. The larger 'executive' options have lounge chairs and TVs.

## TOP END

These options are located within the Aberdare National Park (Map p257).

**Outspan Hotel** (Map p257; ☎ 2032424, Nairobi 020-4452103; www.aberdaresafarhotels.com; Apr–mid-Jul full board s/tw from US\$98/130, mid-Jul–Mar US\$130/160) Formerly part of Block Hotels, this lovely property has new owners, who are keen to up the standard while maintaining the historic character. The 'standard' rooms (15 to 21), with stone fireplaces and doors opening onto beautiful gardens, have the most character. While modern 'deluxe' rooms have cable TV, time is better spent on the gorgeous balconies. Outspan is found on the road to Aberdare's Kiandongoro gate.

**Aberdare Country Club** (Map p257; ☎ 2055620; Nairobi 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; low season full

board s/tw US\$87/172, high season US\$162/230; ☎) Surrounded by its own 500-hectare sanctuary east of Mweiga, this club sits atop a hill and proffers glorious views. Its new owners, Fairmont, plan on pumping millions into the place. The view and character should remain, but the rooms and service will be truly first class. Plenty of wildlife and leisurely activities (golf, tennis, horse riding etc) are in order here. Temporary membership is KSh500 per day.

**Allmendinger's Guesthouse** (Map p257; ☎ 0733-760331; gliding@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 926, Nyeri; full board s/tw US\$98/148) Just west of the Aberdare Country Club, this comes highly recommended, although the road here can be difficult during the rains. Prices include walking, hiking and bird-watching. Horse riding, gliding safaris and wildlife drives to surrounding parks and reserves can be arranged.

## Eating

Although Nyeri is basically a chicken and chips den, there's still a good mix of cheap local eateries.

**Green Oaks** (Gakere Rd; meals KSh80-220) A local favourite, with tasty curries and stews, a lively bar and a great vantage point from the balcony.

**Raybells** (Kimathi Way; meals KSh90-220) An excellent Western-style 'family' restaurant and takeaway, serving everything from samosas to pizza.

**Town View Cafe** (Kimathi Way; meals KSh60-180) A small but welcoming option for traditional Kenyan fare.

**Impala Place Pub** (Kanisa Rd; lunch buffets KSh200; ☎ 12.30-4pm Mon-Fri) While aiming to please the business lunch crowd, it should put a smile on your face too.

**Ibis Hotel** (meals KSh145-245) Within the hotel's covered courtyard, a restaurant pumps out quality Kenyan dishes. It is not a bad option for breakfast.

**Central Hotel** (Kanisa Rd; meals KSh90-200) There's a pleasant outdoor option fronting this popular hotel. Simple sandwiches, grilled meat and savoury stews are on the menu.

**Green Hills Hotel** (Bishop Gatimu Rd; buffets KSh550) Touted as the top restaurant in town, the bottomless buffets are sure to leave you as full as an egg.

**Bahati Bar & Restaurant** (Kimathi Way; chicken & chips from KSh150) When we asked to see the menu, staff stated, 'We do chicken and chips.' Need we say more?

**Samrat Supermarket** (off Kimathi Way) The best stocked supermarket in town.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Slide into a posh hotel for a cold beverage and a slice of the high life, or wade into a rough-and-ready dive to shoot some stick – you pick. Local hotels provide the happy middle ground.

**Green Oaks** (off Kimathi Way) The most friendly local bar in town, usually with European football on the box.

**Kirinyaga Tavern** (Outspan Hotel) While located behind the posh hotel's gates, this is actually reasonable and is separate from the hotel's bar. It has a bonfire and traditional dancing on Saturday nights.

**Zebra Sports Pub** (Batian Grand Hotel, Gakere Rd) An upmarket self-proclaimed sports bar.

**Seven Stars** (off Kimathi Way) Next to Green Oaks, this place is of the rowdy variety and is suitably messy.

**White Rhino Hotel** (Kenyatta Rd) The bar is the only reasonable remnant of this old hotel.

Look out for their ever-popular reggae nights.

## Getting There & Away

The upper bus stand deals with big buses and sporadic matatus to most places, while the lower stand houses local buses and a multitude of matatus heading in all directions. Some local matatus are also found on Kimathi Way.

Matatus run to Nanyuki (KSh100, one hour), Nyahururu (KSh130, 1¼ hours), Thika (KSh200, two hours), Nakuru (KSh250, 2½ hours), Nairobi (KSh250, 2½ hours) and Eldoret (KSh400, five hours). Buses duplicate most of these lines; you may occasionally have to change at Karatina for Nairobi.

## ABERDARE NATIONAL PARK

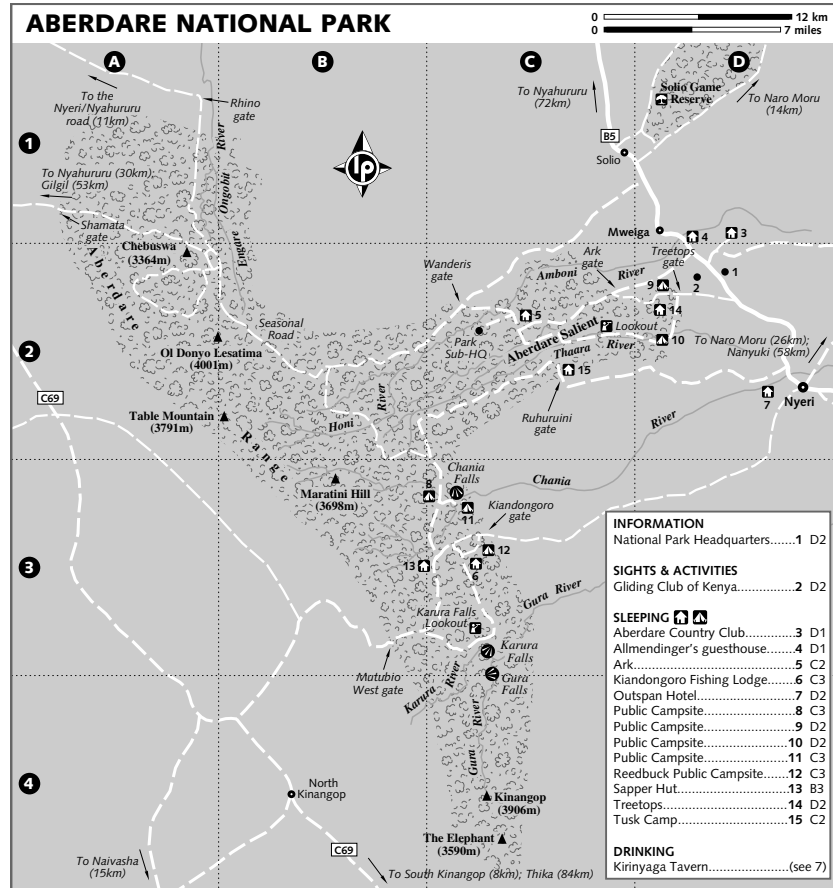
Created in 1950, this park essentially encloses two different environments: the striking 60km stretch of moorland, peaks and forest atop the western Kinangop Plateau and the eastern outcrop of dense rainforest known as the Salient.

The park has varieties of fauna, flora and scenery not found elsewhere. Elephants and buffaloes dominate, but other species, including black rhinos, spotted hyenas, bongo antelopes, bush pigs, giant forest hogs, black servals and rare black leopards, can also be seen. Look out for the few remaining lions (most were removed from the park to protect endangered bongo antelopes) from the viewing platforms next to the dramatic **Chania Falls** and **Karura Falls**. **Gura Falls**, which drops a full 300m down into thick forest, is less accessible.

Hundreds of bird species thrive, including giant kingfishers and regal crowned cranes.

Viewing wildlife here isn't like you'll find it on the open savannah of Amboseli and Masai Mara. The dense rainforest of the Salient provides excellent cover for the animals, so it's best to take your time and stay a few nights.

Thanks to rough terrain and minor roads turning into mud traps during the rains, KWS (Kenya Wildlife Service) restricts entry to all but 4WD vehicles. The park thus rarely features in safari itineraries and is even less visited by independent travellers. However, if you're prepared to hire a vehicle, join the lodges' tours, or hoof it on foot, your efforts will be rewarded.



## Information

To enter the **park** (adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) through the Treetops or Ark gates, ask permission at **national park headquarters** (☎ 061-2055024; Mweiga, PO Box 22, Nyeri). The headquarters, between Mweiga and Nyeri on the B5, sells the KWS Smartcard and excellent 1:25,000 maps (KSh450). Map proceeds go to the Rhino Ark Charitable Trust.

Africans are thankfully now allowed to visit the entire park and the road barrier below Tusk Camp has been removed.

## Activities

### TREKKING

KWS currently advises against trekking in the Salient, as the dense cover does make

walking dangerous for visitors, but the high moorland and four main peaks (all 3500m to 4000m) are excellent trekking spots. As is the case on Mt Kenya, heavy rain can arrive at any time, so you must be prepared. Mud and reduced visibility are two good reasons not to trek during the heavy rains (from March to May). You'll need advance permission from the warden at park headquarters, who'll provide an armed ranger (KSh1000 per day) to guide you and protect you against inquisitive wildlife. Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* has full details of the walks. See p261 for general details on trekking or contact the Mountain Club of Kenya (p97), which is a good source of information.

**RHINO CHARGE!**

Locals scratch their heads, the earth screams in vain and rhinos blush with envy – yes, the Rhino Charge is no ordinary race. First run in 1989, this entertaining annual event pitches human and vehicle versus mud and bush. While it sounds simple enough – using the least amount of distance to drive your 4WD to 13 strategically-placed posts within a 100-sq-km area – doing it is another matter entirely.

To win you must theoretically steer straight between each post, just like rhinos charge through the jungle. However, the organisers have a sense of humour, so the course takes advantage of natural obstacles too insane for most to tackle straight on. The fact that some try is where the entertainment value arises! If you're in Kenya when it takes place, don't miss it.

It's all in the name of charity and funds go to **Rhino Ark Charitable Trust** ([www.rhinoark.org](http://www.rhinoark.org)), who are constructing an electric fence around the perimeter of the Aberdare National Park and greater Aberdare Conservation Area. Once finished, the 340km fence will keep animals safely within the park (and out of fragile local farms) and stop local villagers encroaching on the forest. Over 230km of fence has been completed and Rhino Ark hope to finish in 2007. Don't worry, the charge will continue after the fence is done – large funds are required for the fence's maintenance and other Rhino Ark projects.

For environmental reasons the charge is held at a different venue each year and only the top 60 fund-raising vehicles can participate. Check out Rhino Ark's website for information and entry details – charge!

**FISHING**

Trout fishing is very popular, especially high up on the moors, but requires a permit from park headquarters (KSh100). Kiandongoro Fishing Lodge makes a good base and the Chania River is great for brown trout, but watch your back – there are tales of fishers being stalked by lions! Lions or not, best get an armed ranger to escort you.

**Sleeping****BUDGET & MIDRANGE**

The following accommodation must be booked through park headquarters.

**Public campsites** (adult/child US\$10/5) Basic sites with minimal facilities – some have water.

**Tusk Camp** (exclusive use per night KSh6000) Near Ruhuruini gate, these four cottages provide beds for eight to 10 people, a kitchen area (no pots, utensils etc), toilets, hot water, a dining/lounge area and great views.

**Sapper Hut** (exclusive use per night KSh2000) A simple banda, with an open fire, two beds and a hot-water boiler, overlooking a waterfall on the Upper Magura River. You'll need to bring everything from drinking water to bedding.

**Kiandongoro Fishing Lodge** (7-person cottages Jan-Jun US\$200, Jul-Dec US\$250) Sitting in an excellent spot on the high moor by the Gura River, these two large stone cottages offer bathrooms, gas-powered kitchens, dining rooms and fireplaces.

**TOP END**

Prices below include transfers (self-drive isn't permitted) from Outspan Hotel in Nyeri (for Treetops) and Aberdare Country Club near Mweiga (for Ark). Children under seven are prohibited at both lodges.

**Treetops** (☎ 020-4452095; [www.aberdaresafarihotels.com](http://www.aberdaresafarihotels.com); mid-Jul–mid-Dec full board s/tw with shared bathroom US\$135/180, mid-Dec–mid-Jul US\$198/250) It was at this very floodlit waterhole in 1952 that a sleeping princess became Queen Elizabeth II, upon the death of George VI. In 1957, three years after Mau Mau guerrillas turned the original into ashes, a much larger rendition was built on the opposite side of the waterhole.

Today, with faded, peeling bark siding and cast-iron spiral staircases, Treetops' exterior resembles a weathered shipwreck. The narrow wood-lined hallways, miniature rooms, bench-seated dining hall and shared bathrooms are just as shiplike, but thankfully they don't scream nautical disaster. Despite its quirks, Treetops reeks of charm and there's still one lone tree meandering its way through the floors, ceilings and walls near reception. Besides a great rooftop wild-life viewing area and photographic hides, there's an onsite naturalist who gives talks and happily answers questions.

**Ark** (☎ 020-216940; [www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com); low season full board s/tw US\$75/150, high season US\$185/250) What

this modern upscale version of Treetops lacks in history and charm, it makes up for in comfort and wildlife viewing. Sitting higher in the Aberdares, Ark's floodlit waterhole is surrounded by grasses and mountain forest, which attracts a wider array of animals than Treetops. Nightly visitors typically include elephants, rhinos, buffaloes and spotted hyenas. Spotting a leopard is less likely, but still a real possibility. Like Treetops, they dubiously spread salt to attract wildlife, but here it's confined to a smaller area, meaning there's less trampling of vegetation along the waterline (crucial for timid species to approach).

**Getting There & Away**

Access roads from the B5 Hwy to the Wanderis, Ark, Treetops and Ruhuruini gates are in decent shape, while the road from Nyeri to Kiandongoro gate is horrendous.

Regular Nyeri–Mweiga matatus (KSh50, 35 minutes) pass KWS headquarters and the main park gates. Since trekking the Salient is inadvisable, most trekkers use the Wanderis gate.

Nyeri's Outspan Hotel charges KSh2500 per person (minimum two people) for wild-life drives into the lower Salient, while the Aberdare Country Club charges US\$160 per vehicle; both rates exclude park entry fees.

**NYAHURURU (THOMSON'S FALLS)**

☎ 065

Set next to Thomson's Falls, one of Kenya's most impressive waterfalls and the town's former namesake, is Nyahururu. At 2360m, this is Kenya's highest major town, and it has a cool and invigorating climate. Besides the falls and some nice forested walks, most travellers find little reason to linger more than a day or two.

One of the last white settlements to be established in the colonial era, Nyahururu didn't take off until the arrival of the Gilgil railway spur in 1929; now the trains carry only freight, and the town is once again becoming an agricultural backwater. The surrounding plateau is highly cultivated with maize, beans and sweet potatoes – they are all well represented in Nyahururu's lively markets.

The best approach to town is along the amazingly scenic road from Nakuru, which snakes up and down through the Sukukia

Valley's undulating farmlands and dense forests.

**Information**

**Barclays Bank** (cnr Sulukia & Sharpe Rds) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh34 per leaf commission). With ATM.

**Clicks Cyber Cafe** (Mimi Centre, Kenyatta Rd; per hr KSh180) Best Internet other than post office.

**Kenya Commercial Bank** (Sulukia Rd) With ATM (Visa only).

**Post office** (Sulukia Rd) With Internet and card phones.

**Sights & Activities****THE FALLS**

Located on the town's outskirts and formed by the waters of the Ewaso Narok River, **Thomson's Falls** plummets over 72m into a ravine and the resulting spray bathes the dense forest below in a perpetual mist. Get down, get close and get wet, we say! A series of stone steps leads to the bottom of the ravine – don't attempt to go down any other way as the rocks on the side of the ravine are often very loose.

There are some fantastic **walks** downstream through the forested valley of the Ewaso Narok River and upstream a couple of kilometres to one of the highest hippo pools in Kenya. Take time to explore a little. Guides are fairly easy to find, especially around the souvenir shacks overlooking the falls, but you'll have to bargain hard.

The falls were named by Joseph Thomson, the first European to walk from Mombasa to Lake Victoria in the early 1880s.

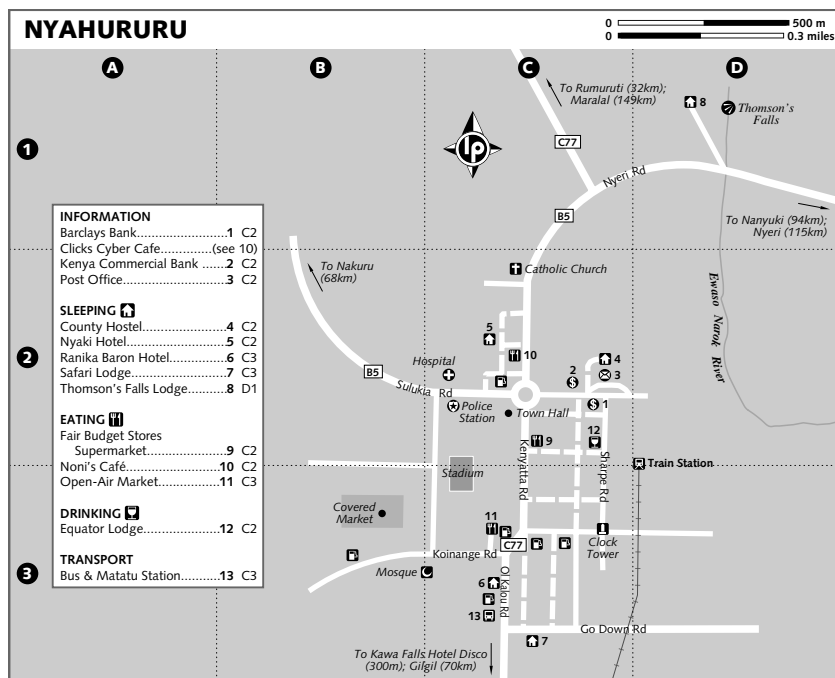
**Sleeping**

Nyahururu has a couple of places with single rooms for KSh150, but that's really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

**Safari Lodge** (Go Down Rd; s/tw KSh300/500) This massive new place is very clean, very bright and very affordable. Hot water is on demand and there are even sockets to charge your mobile.

**County Hostel** (off Sulukia Rd; s/KSh200) Behind the Nyandarua County Council headquarters, this place has quiet rooms with bathrooms and even toilet seats. At this price that's saying something! Couples can squeeze into the beds.

**Nyaki Hotel** (☎ 22313; off Kenyatta Rd; s/tw KSh350/800) This relatively modern five-storey building hosts small but comfy singles and large



clean twins that are essentially poor-man's suites. Rooms 131, 128, 119 and 116 are the brightest singles. It also features hot-water showers and secure parking.

**Ranika Baron Hotel** (☎ 32883; Ol Kalou Rd; s/tw/stc KSh350/500/850) This place is a little tattered, but the beds in the singles are large and married couples can share for no extra cost.

**Thomson's Falls Lodge** (☎ 22006; tfalls@africaonline.co.ke; off B5 Hwy; camping KSh300, s/tw incl breakfast KSh2200/2800) While the white planters are long gone, this nostalgic and cosy lodge that overlooks the falls still has character to spare. The main building and several cottages scattered around the manicured grounds have rooms with log fireplaces and decent facilities. The grassy campground is a right bargain, with free firewood and hot showers. As you'd expect, the lodge also has a charming bar, lounge and restaurant.

## Eating

**Noni's Cafe** (Mimi Centre, Kenyatta Rd; meals KSh60-150) Easily the cleanest and most welcoming of Nyahururu's local eateries. It's a great spot for breakfast.

**Thomson's Falls Lodge** (off B5 Hwy; mains KSh150-500, buffets KSh800) This is the best (and only) place to go for a minor splurge. Stuff yourself at a buffet or delve into Irish stew, mutton specialties or beef burgers. Packed lunches (KSh350) are available for guests. The grounds are a great place for a picnic, though it will cost KSh50 per group.

**Nyaki Hotel** (off Kenyatta Rd; meals KSh80-200) Probably the best of the many hotels serving standard Kenyan fare.

**Ranika Baron Hotel** (☎ 32883; Ol Kalou Rd; meals KSh75-200) Like Nyaki, it serves quality Kenyan eats.

For those who want to prepare their own meals, there are fruit and vegetables at the **open-air market** (off Koinange Rd). The brave can also find meat at the **covered market** (off Koinange Rd). The **Fair Budget Stores supermarket** (Kenyatta Rd) is fairly well-stocked.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Thomson's Falls Lodge** (off B5 Hwy) With plank floors, comfortable armchairs and blazing log fires, this is *the* place to enjoy a cold Tusker.

**Equator Lodge** (Sharpe Rd) We'll give this local bar an 'A' for effort regarding their kitschy forested facade. Inside they get a 'C' for late night carnage.

**Kawa Falls Hotel disco** (Ol Kalou Rd; admission KSh100; ☎ weekends) This popular disco occasionally hosts well known Kenyan DJs.

## Getting There & Away

Numerous matatus run to Nakuru (KSh100, 1½ hours) and Nyeri (KSh150, 2 hours) until late afternoon. Less plentiful are services to Naivasha (KSh200, 1½ hours), Nanyuki (KSh250, three hours) and Nairobi (KSh250, three hours). The odd morning matatu reaches Maralal (KSh300, three hours).

Several early morning buses also serve Nairobi (KSh230-250, three hours).

If you're driving north, fill up on petrol here, as it is much pricier in Maralal.

# MT KENYA NATIONAL PARK

Astoundingly, just 16km from the equator, 12 glaciers continue to shape the jagged roots of what was once Africa's tallest mountain. After seeing the 5199m worth of dramatic remnants that today comprise Mt Kenya (now Africa's second-highest mountain), it's easy to understand why the Kikuyu people deified it and still believe it's the seat of their supreme god Ngai.

Fortunately for the many travellers who try the ascent every year, Ngai doesn't seem to be concerned by trekkers. However, you'd be wise not to temp fate, so treat Mt Kenya with the utmost respect (see Responsible Trekking p265). Besides being venerated by the Kikuyu, Mt Kenya has the rare honour of being both a Unesco World Heritage Site and a Unesco Biosphere Reserve.

Mt Kenya's highest peaks, Batian (5199m) and Nelion (5188m), can only be reached by mountaineers with technical skills. However, Point Lenana (4985m), the third-highest peak, can be reached by trekkers and is the usual goal for most mortals, offering a fantastic experience without the risks of technical climbing. As you might imagine, there are superb views over the surrounding country from Point Lenana, although the summit is often cloaked in mist from late

morning until late afternoon. Above 3000m is mountain moorland, characterised by remarkable flora (see p262).

As marvellous as the summit is, a common complaint from trekkers is that they didn't allow enough time to enjoy the entire mountain. Walks through the foothills, particularly those to the east and northeast of the main peaks, and the Summit Circuit around Batian and Nelion, are dramatic and tremendously rewarding. You won't regret setting aside a week or 10 days rather than just four days for a summit rush.

If time is short or you don't want to do all the planning yourself, see p264.

## INFORMATION

The daily fees for the **national park** (☎ 061-55645; PO Box 253, Nyeri; adult/child US\$15/8) are charged upon entry, so you must estimate the length of your stay. If you overstay, you must pay the difference when leaving. You'll have to pay an additional KSh50 per day for each guide and porter you take with you. Always ask for a receipt.

Before you leave Nairobi buy a copy of *Mt Kenya 1:50,000 Map & Guide* (1993) by Mark Savage & Andrew Wielochowski. It has a detailed topographical map and full descriptions of the routes, mountain medicine, flora and fauna, and accommodation. It is stocked by the main bookshops in Nairobi and by some shops abroad, like Stanford's in London.

Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* has more information, details on wilder routes and some of the more esoteric variations that are possible on Mt Kenya.

Technical climbers and mountaineers should get a copy of **Mountain Club of Kenya's** (MCK; Nairobi ☎ 020-602330; www.mck.or.ke) *Guide to Mt Kenya & Kilimanjaro*, edited by Iain Allan. This substantial and comprehensive guide is available in bookshops or from the MCK offices (p97). MCK also has reasonably up-to-date mountain information posted on its website.

## SAFETY

Mt Kenya's accessibility and the technical ease with which Point Lenana can be reached create their own problems for enthusiastic trekkers. Many people ascend much too quickly and end up suffering from headaches, nausea as well as other (sometimes

## MT KENYA'S FLORA

The volcanic soil and rivers that radiate from the central cone of Mt Kenya have created a fertile environment, especially on the rainy southern and eastern slopes. Despite farms encroaching on the mountain up to an altitude of 1900m, the lower slopes are well wooded. Above this zone, apart from the odd spot where logging occurs, is untouched rainforest. Among the abundant species of plants here are giant camphors, along with vines, ferns, orchids and other epiphytes. On the drier northern and western slopes, conifers are the predominant trees.

On the southern and western slopes, as altitude increases, the forest gradually merges into a belt of dense bamboo. This eventually gives way to more open woodland consisting of hagenia and hypericum trees, along with an undergrowth of flowering shrubs and herbs. Further up still is a belt of giant heather that forms dense clumps up to 4m high, interspersed with tall grasses.

Open moorland forms the next zone and this is often very colourful, with a profusion of small flowering plants. Here you'll find the amazing groundsel tree with enormous cabbagelike flowers and the bizarre giant lobelias and senecios. This moorland zone extends up to the snow line at around 4600m. Beyond the snow line, the only plants you'll find are mosses and lichens.

more serious) effects of altitude sickness. By spending at least three nights on the ascent, you'll enjoy yourself much more.

Another problem can be unpredictable, harsh, cold, wet and windy weather. The trek to Point Lenana isn't an easy hike and people die on the mountain every year. With proper clothes and equipment, you stand a much better chance of making it back down. The best time to go is from mid-January to late February or from late August to September.

Unless you're a seasoned trekker with high altitude experience and a good knowledge of reading maps and using a compass, you'd be flirting with death by not taking a guide or by hiking with someone who isn't qualified. Even those with ample experience should take a guide if attempting the Summit Circuit.

## CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Seeing that Mt Kenya's summits are surrounded by glaciers and often covered by snow, you shouldn't be surprised to hear that nightly temperatures often drop to below -10°C (it certainly feels like it in Mackinder's hut), so bring a good sleeping bag. A closed-cell foam mat or thermarest is also vital for insulation if you're camping. A good set of warm clothes (wool or synthetics – never cotton, as it traps moisture), including quality headgear and gloves, is equally important. As it can rain heavily at any time of year, you'll also need waterproof clothing (breathable fabric like Gore-Tex is best). While a decent pair of boots isn't strictly necessary, hiking in sodden joggies isn't fun

and neither is losing your grip on wet or icy rocks near the summit. Bringing a pair of sandals or light shoes to wear in the evening when your boots get wet is a great idea. At this altitude the sun can do some serious damage to your skin and eyes, so sun block and sunglasses are also crucial items.

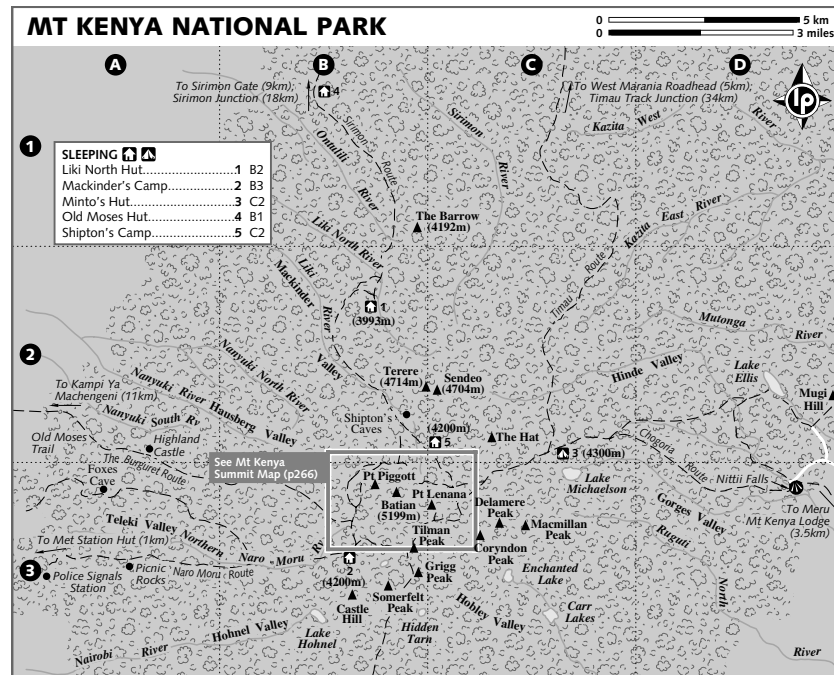
If a porter is carrying your backpack, always keep essential clothing (warm and wet weather gear) in your day-pack because you may become separated for hours at a time.

It's not a good idea to sleep in clothes you've worn during the day because the sweat your clothes absorbed keeps them moist at night, reducing their heat-retention capabilities.

If you don't intend to stay in the huts along the way, you'll need a tent and associated equipment.

You'll also need a stove, basic cooking equipment, utensils, a 3L water container (per person) and water-purifying tablets. Stove fuel in the form of petrol and kerosene (paraffin) is fairly easily found in towns, and methylated spirits is available in Nairobi, as are gas cartridges, although the supply of these isn't guaranteed. Fires are prohibited in the open except in an emergency; in any case, there's no wood once you get beyond 3300m. If you engage porters, you'll have to supply each of them with a backpack to carry your gear and theirs.

If you have a mobile phone, take it along, suitably protected of course; reception on the mountain's higher reaches is actually very good, and a link to the outside world is invaluable during emergencies.



## Equipment Hire

Well-maintained rental gear is available at the **Naro Moru River Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62212; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 18, Naro Moru), although it can't be reserved and is relatively expensive (US\$4 per day for a sleeping bag). Most guiding companies will have cheaper equipment for hire, although you'll have less choice and lower standards.

## GUIDES, COOKS & PORTERS

Taking on a guide and a porter will improve your chances of getting to the top and avoiding altitude sickness. For starters, having a porter carrying your heavy gear is like travelling in a chauffeured Mercedes instead of a matatu. A good guide will help set a sustainable pace and hopefully dispense interesting information about Mt Kenya and its flora, fauna and wildlife. With both on your team, your appreciation of this mountain will be enhanced a hundredfold and, for the price, it is a bargain.

If you hire a guide or porter who can also cook, you'll won't regret it. It's one thing to arrive at camp safe, sound and enlightened,

but arriving to steaming coffee and a hot meal is beyond nice – it's heaven.

Considerable effort has been made in recent years to regulate guides and porters operating on the mountain. The KWS now issues vouchers to all registered guides and porters, who should also hold identity cards; they won't be allowed into the park without them.

Female guides are becoming more common, and technical guides for climbing Batian and Nelion are widely available.

## Costs

Basic qualified guides, like those from **Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62015; PO Box 128, Naro Moru), will cost you KSh750 per day. Cooks cost about the same, while porters charge KSh650. Guides with a little more knowledge, such as those from **Mountain Rock Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com), will set you back US\$15 per day, while cooks and porters cost US\$12 per day.

These fees don't include park entry fees and tips (budget around a day's wages per

person as a tip, but make it clear it is only for good service).

If you ascend the mountain along one route and descend along a different one, you'll be responsible for arranging and paying the transport costs for your porter and guide back to where they started from. It is wise to sort this out before you start, and agree on a price for return transport plus any additional wages (a day spent travelling home counts as a working day), food and hotel costs along the way.

Porters will carry up to 18kg for three-day trips or 16kg for longer trips, excluding the weight of their own food and equipment. If you want them to carry more, you'll have to negotiate an added cost. A normal day's work is regarded as one stage of the journey; if you want to go further you'll have to pay two days' wages, even if porters don't do anything the following day.

## SLEEPING

You can **camp** (adult/child US\$10/5) anywhere on the mountain – the nightly fee is payable to KWS at any gate. Most people camp near the huts or bunkhouses, as there are often toilets and water nearby. If setting up remote camps, see opposite for tips on waste disposal and camp location.

There are several huts on the mountain owned by MCK, but the only one that's in reasonable shape nowadays sits 5188m up on Nelion's summit – not for the typical punter!

Accommodation along the major trekking routes, whether in huts or larger bunkhouses, is described in detail in each route's accommodation section.

For information about pre- and post-trekking accommodation, see p269.

## EATING

In an attempt to reduce luggage, many trekkers forgo taking stoves and cooking equipment and exist entirely on canned and dried foods. You can certainly do this by keeping up your fluid intake, but it's not a good idea. That cup of hot soup in the evening and pot of coffee in the morning can make all the difference between enjoying the trek and hating it, or at least feeling irritable.

There are, however, a few things to bear in mind about cooking at high altitudes. The

major consideration is that the boiling point of water is considerably reduced. At 4500m, for example, water boils at 85°C; this is too low to sufficiently cook rice or lentils (pasta is better) and you won't be able to brew a good cup of tea either (instant coffee is the answer). Cooking times and fuel usage are considerably increased as a result, so plan accordingly.

The best range of suitable mountain foods is to be found in Nairobi's supermarkets, especially Nakumatt and Uchumi (p115). Elsewhere, there's a good range in the towns around the mountain (Nyeri, Nanyuki, Embu and Meru), but precious little at Naro Moru or Chogoria.

When you're buying dehydrated foods, get the pre-cooked variety to cut down on cooking time – two-minute noodles are a solution. It's a good idea to bring these from home.

Take plenty of citrus fruits and/or citrus drinks as well as chocolate, sweets or dried fruit to keep your blood-sugar level high. Fresh fruit and vegetables are available in all reasonably sized towns and villages.

To avoid severe headaches caused by dehydration or altitude sickness, drink at least 3L of fluid per day and bring rehydration sachets.

## ORGANISED TREKS

If time is limited or you'd prefer someone else to make all the trekking arrangements, there are plenty of possibilities. It is hard to go anywhere in this region without being approached by several prospective guides. All-inclusive packages – which include park entry and camping fees, food, huts, a guide, cook and porters, and transfers to and from the mountain – can be a good deal, particularly if you don't have any equipment.

As always, you need to watch out for sharks; picking the right company is even more important here than on a normal wild-life safari, as an unqualified or inexperienced guide could put you in real danger as well as spoil your trip.

**Mountain Rock Safaris Resorts & Trekking Services** (☎ 020-242133; www.mountainrockkenya.com; PO Box 15796-00100, Nairobi), in Jubilee Insurance House in Nairobi, is a real specialist at Mt Kenya climbs and runs the Mountain Rock Lodge (p271) near Naro Moru. Its day rates for all-inclusive trips start at US\$135 per person

per day, but drop to as low as US\$80 if five or more people are in your group. These prices are a good benchmark for quality service.

**Naro Moru River Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62212; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 18, Naro Moru) also runs a range of all-inclusive trips. Its prices are more expensive than most (US\$135 to US\$220 per person per day depending on group size), but it's the only company that can guarantee you beds in the Met Station Hut and Mackinder's Camp on the Naro Moru route.

There are several safari companies in Nairobi that offer Mt Kenya treks, but many just sell the treks operated by Naro Moru and Mountain Rock Lodges, charging you an extra commission on top. Companies that do run their own treks include the following.

**IntoAfrica** (☎ 0114-255 5610; www.intoafrica.co.uk; 40 Huntingdon Crescent, Sheffield, UK, S11 8AX) This environmentally and culturally sensitive company places an emphasis on fair trade and offers both scheduled and exclusive seven-day trips (six days of trekking) ascending Sirimon route and descending Chogoria. Joining scheduled trips costs US\$139 per day (minimum two people), while private treks

range from US\$128 to US\$256 per person per day, depending on group size.

**KG Mountain Expeditions** (☎ 062-62403; www.kenyaexpeditions.com; PO Box 199, Naro Moru) This company, run by a highly experienced mountaineer, offers all-inclusive packages from US\$265 per day (depending on group size), as well as no-frills budget options for around US\$80.

**Mountain View Tours & Trekking Safaris** (☎ 062-62088; PO Box 48, Naro Moru) Recommended by readers as being cheap and reliable. Prices are negotiable, but expect to pay around US\$60 to US\$70 per day.

**Sana Highlands Trekking Expeditions** (☎ 020-227820; www.sanatrekkingkenya.com; Contrast House, Moi Ave, PO Box 5400-00100, Nairobi) Sana operate five-day all-inclusive treks on the Sirimon and Chogoria routes that start at US\$325 per person (based on a group of five).

## THE ROUTES

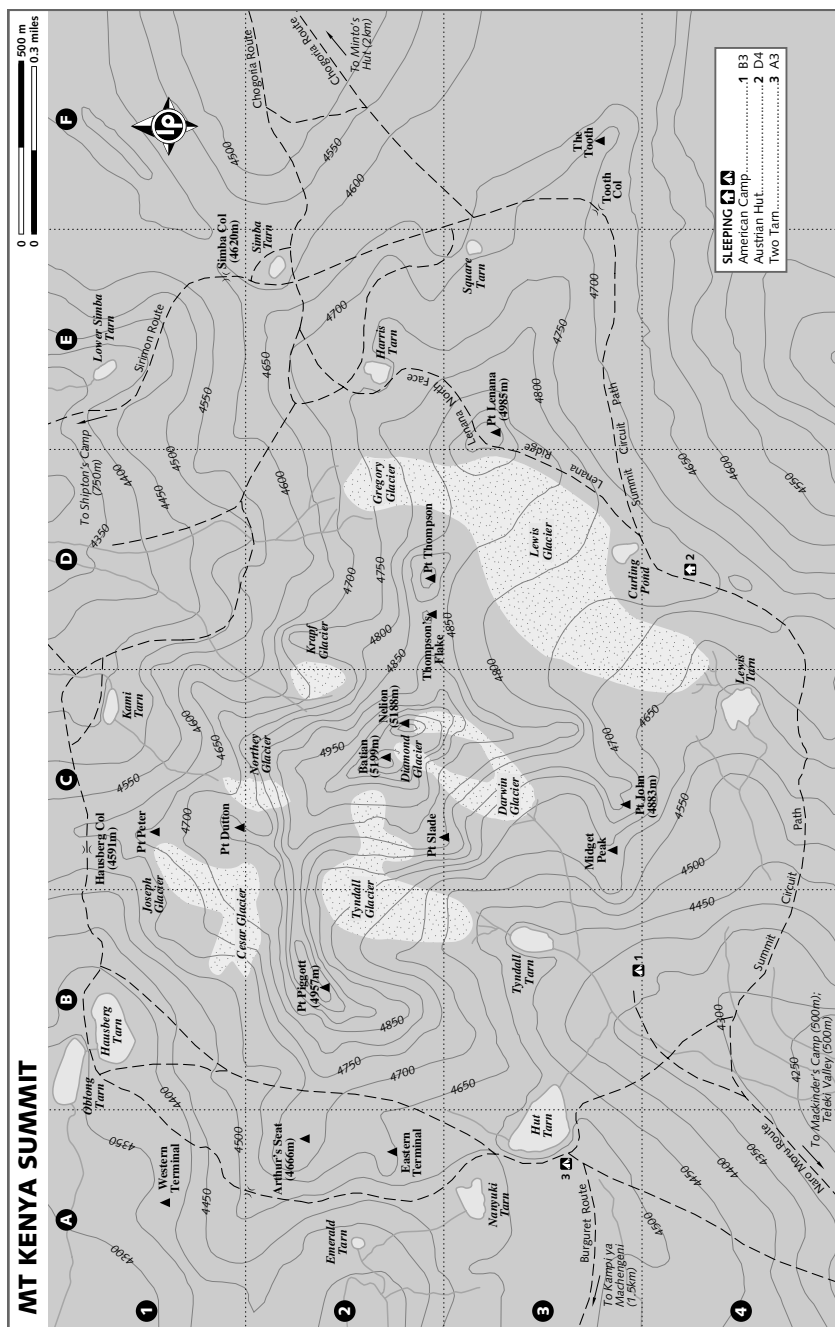
There are at least seven different routes up Mt Kenya. Of those, we cover Naro Moru, the easiest and most popular, as well as Sirimon and Chogoria, which are excellent alternatives. The Burguret and Timau routes

### RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Mt Kenya's trekking popularity is placing great pressure on the environment. You can help preserve the ecology and beauty of the area by taking note of the following information.

- Carry out all your rubbish. Never ever bury it.
- Minimise the waste you must carry out by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you'll need.
- Where there's no toilet, at lower elevations bury your faeces in a 15cm deep hole (consider carrying a lightweight trowel for this purpose). At higher altitudes soil lacks the organisms needed to digest your faeces, so leave your waste in the open where UV rays will break it down – spreading it facilitates the process. Always carry out your toilet paper (Ziplock bags are best). With either option make sure your faeces is at least 50m from any path, 100m from any watercourse and 200m from any building.
- Don't use detergents or toothpaste within 50m of watercourses, even if they're biodegradable.
- Stick to existing tracks and avoid short cuts that bypass a switchback. If you blaze a new trail straight down a slope, it will erode the hillside with the next heavy rainfall.
- Avoid removing plant life, as it keeps topsoil in place.
- Open fires aren't permitted. Cook on lightweight kerosene, alcohol or Shellite (white gas) stoves.
- Never feed wildlife, as it messes with their digestive system and leads them to become dependent on hand-outs.
- If camping, try to camp on existing sites. Where none exist, set up away from streams on rock or bare ground, never over vegetation.





are less well known and are described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*.

We also delve into the exciting but demanding Summit Circuit, which circles Batian and Nelion, thus enabling you to mix and match ascending and descending routes.

With the mountain usually shrouded in mist after 10am, you should set off early each morning to make the most of the trek. For the final Point Lenana assault, make a very early start to see the sunrise and the views from the top, which (if you're lucky) can include Mt Kilimanjaro.

### Naro Moru Route

Although the least scenic, this is the most straightforward and popular route and is still a spectacular and very enjoyable trail. Begin in the town of Naro Moru (p270) and allow a minimum of four days for the trek. While possible in three, if you arrange transport between Naro Moru and the Met Station, doing it this quickly risks serious altitude sickness.

### SLEEPING

There are three good bunk houses along this route: **Met Station Hut** (Map p271; dm US\$12) is at 3000m, **Mackinder's Camp** (Map p263; dm US\$12) is at 4160m and **Austrian Hut** (Map p266; dm KSh1000) is at 4790m. Austrian Hut (booked and paid for at any gate) has just been overhauled and is finally in good shape. Beds in Met Station and Mackinder's are harder to find, as they're booked through **Naro Moru River Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62212; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; PO Box 18, Naro Moru). If you're denied beds, you can still climb this route if you're willing to camp and carry all the appropriate equipment.

### GUIDES & PORTERS

Apart from the Naro Moru River Lodge in Naro Moru itself, guides, porters and cooks can be booked through **Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62015; PO Box 128, Naro Moru). Its office is 5km along the road towards the Naro Moru gate, but its staff also scout for business at hotels in town.

**Mountain Rock Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com) also provides guides/porters for this route at a cost of US\$15/12 per day. However, like most places, the lodge 'encourages' you to take an expensive all-inclusive package.

### THE TREK

Starting in Naro Moru town, the first part of the route takes you along a relatively good gravel road through farmlands for some 13km (all the junctions are signposted) to the start of the forest. Another 5km brings you to the park entry gate (2400m), from where it's 8km to the road head and the Met Station Hut (3000m), where you stay for the night.

You can also get up to the park gate (18km from Naro Moru) in 2WD in dry weather, although you won't make it to the Met Station in anything other than a 4WD. Both roads are deteriorating and often become impassable in wet weather. You can get a matatu from the post office in Naro Moru to Kiambuthi (KSh50), 3km short of the park gate. This takes you past Blue Line Hotel (p270), Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club and Mt Kenya Hostel & Campsite (p270).

On the second day, set off up the Teleki Valley to the edge of the forest (at about 3200m). From here you scale the so-called **Vertical Bog** onto a ridge, where the route divides into two. You can either take the higher path, which gives better views but is often wet, or the lower, which crosses the Naro Moru River and continues gently up to Mackinder's Camp (4160m). This part of the trek should take about 4½ hours. Here you can stay in the dormitories or camp. There are toilets, and drinking water is available. The caretaker checks your bunkhouse booking receipts.

On the third day you can either rest at Mackinder's Camp to acclimatise or aim for **Point Lenana** (4895m). This stretch takes four to five hours, so it is common to leave around 2am (you'll need a torch or flashlight) to reach the summit in time for sunrise. From the bunkhouse, continue up past the ranger station to a fork in the path. Keep right, and go across a swampy area, followed by a moraine, and then up a very long scree slope – this is a long, hard slog. KWS' Austrian Hut (4790m) is three to four hours from Mackinder's and about one hour below the summit of Lenana, so it's a good place to rest before the final push. Alternatively, you could arrive here on the third day, then go for the summit on the morning of the fourth. Facilities are basic, although the hut has been recently refurbished.

The section of the trek from Austrian Hut up to Point Lenana takes you up a narrow rocky path that traverses the southwest ridge parallel to the Lewis Glacier, which has shrunk more than 100m since the 1960s. A final climb or scramble brings you up onto the peak. In good weather it's fairly straightforward, but in bad weather you shouldn't attempt to reach the summit unless you're experienced in mountain conditions or have a guide. Plenty of inexperienced trekkers have come to grief on this section, falling off icy cliffs or even disappearing into crevasses.

From Point Lenana most people return along the same route – assuming you summit early, you can reach the Met Station on the same day. Alternatively, you can return to Austrian Hut, then take the Summit Circuit around the base of the main peaks to reach the top of one of the other routes before you descend.

### Sirimom Route

A popular alternative to Naro Moru, this route has more spectacular scenery, greater flexibility and a gentler rate of ascent, although it is still easy to climb too fast, so allow at least five days for the trek. It's well worth considering combining it with the Chogoria route for a six- to seven-day traverse that will really bring out the best of Mt Kenya.

Nanyuki (p272) is the best launching point for this route.

### SLEEPING

**Old Moses Hut** (Map p263; dm US\$10) at 3300m and **Shipton's Camp** (Map p266; dm US\$12) at 4200m serve trekkers on this route. They're both booked through the **Mountain Rock Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com), near Naro Moru.

Depending on how you ascend or descend, you may also sleep at **Austrian Hut** (Map p266; dm KSh1000), which is almost an hour below the summit. It's booked and paid for at any park gate.

### GUIDES & PORTERS

In Nanyuki, guides operating out of **Mt Kenya Mountaineering Information Office** (Map p273; ☎ 0733-340849; Mt Kenya Paradise Hotel) are generally quite reliable, but ask to see their KWS registration and go over your planned route in detail. The people at **Montana Trek &**

**Information Centre** (Map p273; ☎ 062-32731; Jambo House Hotel, Lumumba Rd, Nanyuki) seem to know their stuff but are a bit more pushy.

Guides/porters are also available from Mountain Rock Lodge for US\$15/12 per day. As with the Naro Moru route, they prefer it if you take all-inclusive packages.

### THE TREK

It is 15km from Nanyuki to the Sirimom Gate, and transport is included with pre-booked packages. Otherwise take a matatu towards Timau or Meru, or arrange a lift from town. From the gate it's about 9km through the forest to Old Moses Hut (3300m), where you can spend the first night.

On the second day you could head straight through the moorland for Shipton's Camp, but it is worth taking an extra day to go via **Liki North Hut** (Map p263; 3993m) a tiny place on the floor of a classic glacial valley. The actual hut is a complete wreck and is only meant for porters, but it's a good campsite with a toilet and stream nearby. You can also walk further up the valley to help acclimatise.

On the third day, head straight up the western side of the Liki North Valley and over the ridge into Mackinder's Valley, joining the direct route about 1½ hours in. After crossing the Liki River, follow the path for another 30 minutes until you reach the bunkhouse at Shipton's Camp (4200m), which is set in a fantastic location right below Batian and Nelion. The camp is also within sight of two glaciers, which can often be heard cracking.

From Shipton's you can push straight for **Point Lenana** (4895m), a tough three- to four-hour slog via Harris Tarn and the tricky north face approach, or take the Summit Circuit in either direction around the peaks to reach Austrian Hut (4790m), about one hour below the summit. The left-hand (east) route past Simba Col is shorter but steeper, while the right-hand (west) option takes you on the Harris Tarn trail nearer the main peaks.

From Austrian Hut take the standard southwest traverse up to Point Lenana – see p267. If you're spending the night here, it's worth having a wander around to catch the views up to Batian and down the Lewis Glacier into Teleki Valley, as well as the spectacular **ice cave** by the Curling Pond.

### Chogoria Route

This route is justly famous for crossing some of the most spectacular and varied scenery on Mt Kenya, and is often combined with the Sirimom route (usually as the descent). The only disadvantage is the long distance between Chogoria village (p279) and the park gate. Allow at least five days for a trek here. Side trips to Lake Michaelson and Lake Ellis would take up a couple of extra days.

### SLEEPING

The only option besides camping on this route is **Meru Mt Kenya Lodge** (Map p271; s/tw US\$22/44), a group of comfortable cabins administered by **Meru County Council** (Map p276; Kenyatta Hwy, Meru).

### GUIDES & PORTERS

The best place to organise guides and porters is the **Mt Kenya Chogoria Guides & Porters Association** (Map p271; ☎ 064-22096) at the Transit Motel (p280) near Chogoria village. Guides and porters aren't available beyond Chogoria Forest Station.

If you want porters to walk the whole stretch between Chogoria and the park gate, you may be charged two extra days' wages – make sure you negotiate everything before you leave.

### THE TREK

The main reason this route is more popular as a descent is the 29km bottom stage. While it is not overly steep, climbing upwards for that distance is much harder than descending it. Either way, it's a beautiful walk through farmland, rainforest and bamboo zones. You can camp near the Forest Station 6km out of town, but you'll still have 23km to walk the next day. Transport is available from the village, but it'll cost you, and even a Land Rover may struggle in the wet.

Camping is possible at the gate, or you can stay nearby in Meru Mt Kenya Lodge (3000m) – with transport to town available and a small shop selling beer, which is also popular with people coming down.

On the second day, head up through the forest to the trailhead (camping is possible here). From here it's another 7km over rolling foothills to the Hall Tarns area and **Minto's Hut** (Map p263; 4300m). Like Liki North, this nasty hut is only intended for

porters, but the area makes a decent campsite. It has a stream for water and a long-drop loo – which, incidentally, finally has a door (though it won't close!). Don't use the tarns here to wash anything, as they have already been polluted by careless trekkers.

From here you follow the trail up alongside the stunning **Gorges Valley** (another possible descent route for the adventurous) and scramble up some steep ridges to meet the Summit Circuit, which can take you in either direction. It is possible to go straight for the north face or southwest ridge of Point Lenana, but stopping at Austrian Hut or detouring to Shipton's Camp is probably a better idea and gives you more time to enjoy the scenery – see Sirimom (opposite) and Naro Moru routes (p267) for details.

### Summit Circuit

While everyone who summits Pt Lenana gets a small taste of the spectacular Summit Circuit, few trekkers ever grab the beautiful beast by the horns and hike its entire length. The trail encircles the main peaks of Mt Kenya between the 4300m and 4800m contour lines and offers challenging terrain, fabulous views and a splendid opportunity to familiarise yourself with this complex mountain. It is also a fantastic way to further acclimatise before bagging Pt Lenana.

One of the many highlights along the route is a peek at Mt Kenya's southwest face, with the long, thin Diamond Couloir leading up the Gates of the Mists between the summits of Batian and Nelion.

Depending on your level of fitness, this route can take between four and nine hours. Some fit souls have bagged Point Lenana (from Austrian Hut or Shipton's Camp) and then completed the Summit Circuit in the same day.

The trail can be deceptive at times, especially when fog rolls in, and some trekkers have become seriously lost between Tooth Col and Austrian Hut. It is imperative to take a guide if attempting this route.

## AROUND MT KENYA

Mt Kenya's vast bulk looms over the entire region, and the snow-covered peaks can be seen for miles until late-morning clouds obscure the view. The sheer distance involved,

and the variety of landscapes covered while circumnavigating the mountain, says something of its majesty.

To the west sit the undulating grassy plains of the Laikipia Plateau, home to the friendly town of Nanyuki, oodles of agriculture and one of sub-Saharan Africa's most important wildlife conservation sites. Skirting north of the mountain are the vast northern plains, dotted with volcanic cones and the Matthews Range in the distance. To the east and south, the landscape is more steep and home to thick forests, although logging (both legal and illegal) is paving the way for more crops of coffee and *miraa* (a leafy shoot with amphetamine-like effects), and threatening what is one of the country's most important water catchment areas. Further east is one of Kenya's most diverse and underrated national parks, Meru.

If we haven't made it clear already, there's much to see around Mt Kenya besides Mt Kenya. Break the mould and delve a little deeper into this unique region.

## NARO MORU

☎ 062

The village of Naro Moru, on the western side of the mountain, is little more than a dusty string of shops and houses, with a couple of very basic hotels and a market, but it's the most popular starting point for treks up Mt Kenya. There's a post office with Internet, but no banks (the nearest are at Nanyuki and Nyeri).

## Sights & Activities

Apart from gawking at Mt Kenya and starting the Naro Moru route up to its summit (p267), there are some fine things to do here. Mt Kenya Hostel & Campsite organises a number of excursions, including **nature walks** and hikes to the **Mau Mau caves**. Mountain Rock Lodge and Naro Moru River Lodge also run similar trips, as well as offering **horse riding** and **fishing**.

## Sleeping & Eating

Although there are a number of basic hotels in Naro Moru town, the best options are in the surrounding few kilometres. Eating options are incredibly slim, with only some hotels offering meals. There's a tiny store selling foodstuffs next to the post office, but you're better off shopping in Nanyuki or Nyeri.

## BUDGET

Note that both of the midrange and top-end options have great campsites.

**Mt Kenya Hostel & Campsite** (Map p271; ☎ 62412; mkenyahostel@wananchi.com; camping KSh250, dm KSh400) About 8.5km from town and 7.5km from the park gate, this place offers simple accommodation, a large campsite, kitchen facilities and a bar. The restaurant (lunch/dinner KSh200/KSh300) provides much needed calories, but don't expect your taste-buds to sing. They rent limited mountain gear as well as a 4WD vehicle. Mt Kenya treks can be arranged here too.

**Mountain View Hotel** (☎ 62088; A2 Hwy; s KSh520) This is the best option in town and is very basic. Patent red cement floors host large single beds (couples can squeeze in for no extra dough) and the bathrooms have hot showers. Treks and equipment can be arranged here.

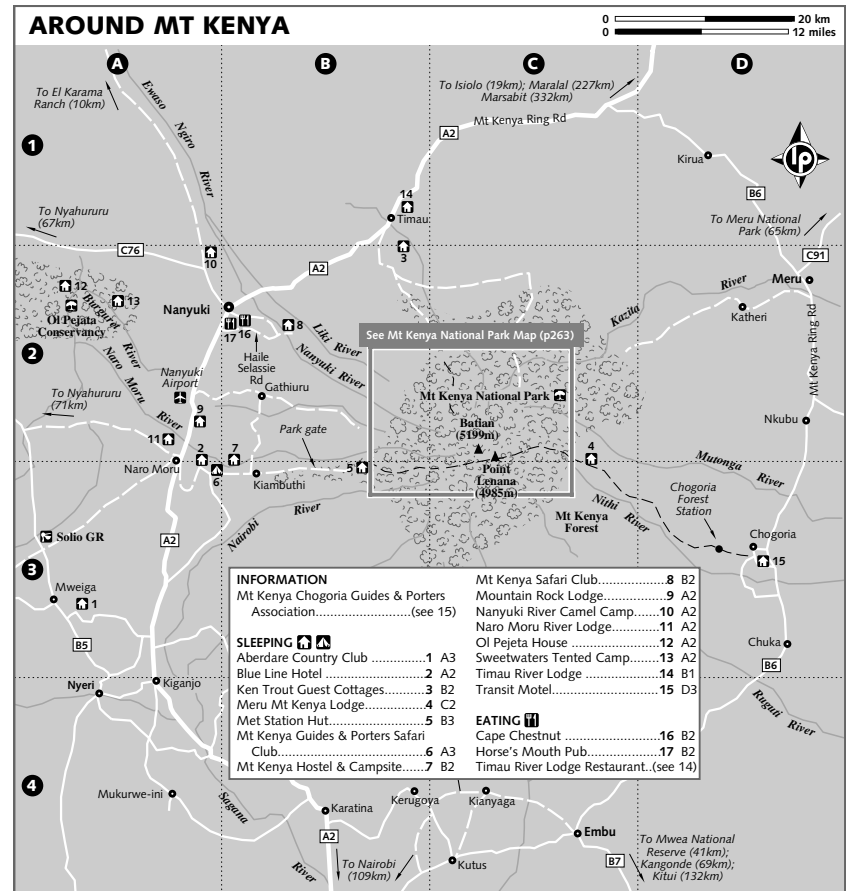
**Blue Line Hotel** (Map p271; ☎ 62420; camping KSh150, s/d KSh400/800) Similar in scope to its sister hotel the Mountain View, but hot showers are only available in the morning here. Blue Line is 3km from town and 1.5km from the Mt Kenya Guides & Porters office (convenient for organising guides the day before), but lies 13km short of the park gate. The hotel is generally pleasant and quiet, and has a bar and restaurant (meals KSh180 to KSh280). Rooms are clean.

**Mt Kenya Guides & Porters Safari Club** (Map p271; ☎ 62015; camping KSh150) You may also camp here. The club can provide tents (two-person tent KSh600). The site is rather primitive and the loos are rather grim – showers come in buckets.

**Joruna Lodge** (s/tw with shared bathroom KSh200/300, s KSh250) Just east of Mountain View, the singles with bathrooms and twin rooms pass the cringe test, but the rest don't. You get what you pay for and that's not much.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Naro Moru River Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 62212, Nairobi 020-4443357; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; camping US\$10, dm US\$8, May-Jun & mid-Sep–mid-Dec half board from s/tw US\$55/82, Mar-Apr US\$66/96, rest of year US\$90/120; 🍷) This relaxing lodge is about 1.5km north of town and is set on the sloping bank of the Naro Moru River in beautifully landscaped gardens. The standard rooms are well-equipped, while the pricier 'superior' rooms also have shady balconies. The 'deluxe' rooms are larger and also boast



vaulted ceilings and fireplaces. In addition, there's a well-equipped campsite as well as a dormitory block offering hot showers, toilets and firewood. Campers are able to use all the hotel facilities, which include two bars and a restaurant (breakfast/dinner KSh500/KSh1000).

**Mountain Rock Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 62625; info@mountainrockkenya.com; camping US\$5, standard s/tw US\$24/32, superior s/tw or tr US\$32/48) This place is located 6km north of Naro Moru, tucked away in the woods less than 1km from the Nanyuki road. The standard rooms at the lodge are decent value, while the 'superior' rooms have a bit of character to go with their fireplaces. You could also save a few dollars if you rent a fixed-tent (s/tw/tr

US\$15/20/24) or setting up your own in the campsite. Camping facilities include hot water, toilets, cooking facilities, electricity and ample firewood. It is a friendly and reliable place with a spacious dining room, two bars and a lounge. See p264 for information about the lodge's guided treks.

## Getting There & Away

There are plenty of buses and matatus heading to Nanyuki (KSh60, 30 minutes), Nyeri (KSh80, 45 minutes) and Nairobi (KSh300, three hours).

Naro Moru River Lodge operates transfers between the lodge and Nairobi (US\$80) or Nanyuki airstrip (US\$25), but you must book 24 hours in advance.

## NANYUKI

☎ 062

Founded by white settlers in 1907, Nanyuki is a small but very energetic country town. It is a popular and friendly place to base Mt Kenya treks, especially if taking on the Sirimon and Burguret routes, though you'll probably experience some initial hassle from the slew of guides, touts and hawkers.

Besides lapping against Mt Kenya's slopes, Nanyuki also sits on the edge of the massive Laikipia Plateau, which is currently one of Africa's most important wildlife conservation sites. Local communities and ranches here are being encouraged to share their space with wildlife, like lions, elephants and Grevy's zebras, and to adjust their activities to allow wildlife to flourish while at the same time decreasing potential human-animal conflict (see p323). Ol Pejeta Conservancy (p274), 17km south of Nanyuki, is a prime example of this sweeping and successful conservation movement.

You may be surprised to hear local kids spouting Cockney rhyming slang. They owe their linguistic prowess to the annual invasion of British army units who visit the region on joint manoeuvres.

### Information

**Barclays Bank** (Kenyatta Ave) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh34 per leaf commission). With ATM.

**Kenya Commercial Bank** (Kenyatta Ave) With ATM (Visa only).

**Marina Grill & Restaurant** (Kenyatta Ave; internet per hr KSh60) Internet access, cheap international calls and burning images to CD (KSh80) using USB port.

**Mt Kenya Cyberworld** (Kenyatta Ave; per hr KSh60) Internet and cheap international calls.

**Post office** (Kenyatta Ave) With Internet and card phones.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (Kenyatta Ave) With ATM (Visa only).

### Sights & Activities

Besides tackling Mt Kenya's Sirimon (p268) or Burguret routes, you could stroll 3km south to the **Equator** and check the antics of draining water. (If a flushing toilet's water moves clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anti-clockwise in the south, what will it do here?)

If you'd rather punish your backside instead of your feet, the **Nanyuki River Camel Camp** (Map p271; ☎ 0722-361642; camellot@wananchi.com; off C76 Hwy) offers great half-/full-day

camel journeys for US\$16/20. And if punishment isn't in your dictionary, how about a day of the high life at **Mt Kenya Safari Club** (Map p271; ☎ 30000; temporary membership KSH495).

### Sleeping

In town there are no shortage of budget or midrange options, while the only swank option, Mount Kenya Safari Club, is 11km away.

### BUDGET

**Nanyuki River Camel Camp** (Map p271; ☎ 0722-361642; camellot@wananchi.com; off C76 Hwy; camping US\$6, half board huts with shared bathroom US\$22) The only camping near Nanyuki is at this fabulous place 4km out of town. The firewood is free and there are decent facilities. The woven huts are modelled on a traditional Somali nomadic village and they're highly authentic – spending the night in one is an experience indeed. The food is excellent and the 200 camels are available for hire.

**Ibis Hotel** (☎ 31536; Lumumba Rd; s/tw KSh500/900) Bright rooms and a brighter covered courtyard lurk behind Ibis Hotel's facade of fresh tiles and woodwork. It is a comfortable, clean place and all rooms have mozzie nets. Angle for a room with a Mt Kenya view.

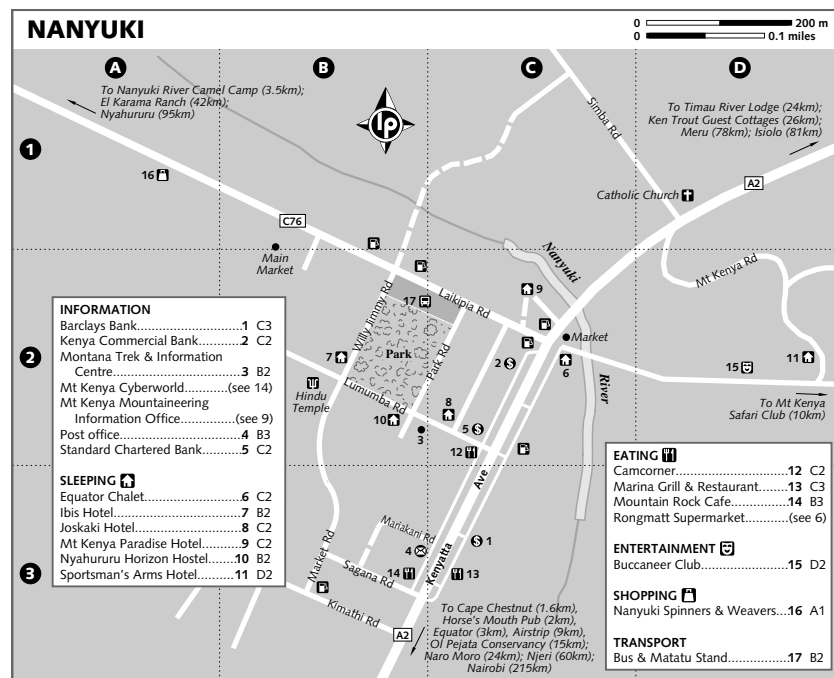
**Mt Kenya Paradise Hotel** (☎ 0722-899950; off Kenyatta Ave; s/tw KSh400/600) Formerly the Nanyuki Riverside Hotel, this place is a little dog-eared but has large clean rooms and is a good place to meet other travellers. It backs onto the Nanyuki River – grab a chair and sit on the terrace to the sound of birds and gurgling water. It's best avoided on weekends due to the disco.

**Joskaki Hotel** (☎ 31473; Lumumba Rd; s/tw/d KSh300/400/450) This is the best of the budget establishments. If you wander, you may hit the Joskaki jackpot: a room with some sun and a toilet seat! There's secure parking as well as a lively bar and restaurant.

**Nyahururu Horizon Hostel** (☎ 0723-741542; Lumumba Rd; s/tw KSh250/400) A step down from Joskaki but a decent place for a night's snooze. Expect the odd roach perusing the pavement floors.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Equator Chalet** (☎ 31480; Kenyatta Ave; s/tw/d incl breakfast KSh800/1200/1450) This newish place in the centre of town gives substantial comfort bang for minimal buck. Rooms surround a



breezy internal courtyard that opens onto two balcony areas and a roof terrace. The doubles have four-poster canopy beds and more modern bathrooms.

**Sportsman's Arms Hotel** (☎ 32348; www.sportsmansarms.com; off Laikipia Rd; s/d/tw incl breakfast KSh3000/4000/4600, 4-person cottages KSh7000; ☎) Set in landscaped gardens along the road east of town, this was once the white settlers' main rendezvous, and is still popular with tourists and soldiers. The modern single and double rooms outclass the older twin rooms, but the cottages are best: there's a choice of older thatched cottages and stunning modern ones dripping with facilities. The complex boasts a sauna, a gym, a Jacuzzi, tennis, squash, a restaurant and three bars (with table football).

**Mt Kenya Safari Club** (Map p271; ☎ 30000, Nairobi 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; full board s/d US\$270/390, 4-person cottages US\$995; ☎) Originally the homestead of a white settler family, this club was founded in the 1950s by a group including the late actor William Holden. Already one of the flashiest top-class resorts in Kenya, it's recently been bought by Fairmont

and they have big posh plans. If golf, tennis, croquet, snooker, swimming, fishing, bowls, an art gallery and a private wildlife sanctuary with a herd of rare bongo antelopes tickle your fancy, sign right up (though most cost extra). The views up Mt Kenya are excellent and there's a hedge maze that kids will love. Couples should ask for the riverside cottages (no more pricey than standard rooms), while families will love the charming family cottages. Access is from a well-signposted turn-off about 2km south of Nanyuki, from which it's 9km along a paved road.

### Eating

You'll find that most of Nanyuki's best restaurants are attached to hotels.

**Sportsman's Arms Hotel** (off Laikipia Rd; meals KSh150-450) Having Nanyuki's widest ranging menu, the Sportsman's Arms has long been heralded as the town's top restaurant. After having one of their curries, we won't argue.

**Ibis Hotel** (Lumumba Rd; meals KSh70-240) Steaks are the Ibis' claim to fame, though most meals are equally pleasing.

**Equator Chalet** (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh100-200)

The marinated chicken with garlic butter, herbs and roast potatoes hits the spot. It's a pleasant place for a meal.

**Camcorner** (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh60-260) A delightful oddity serving up the usual stews and steaks, as well as fiery curries and a selection of camel products (including camel *biltong* – jerky).

**Marina Grill & Restaurant** (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh90-350) Sit on the rooftop and delve into a burger or steak. The pizzas are tasty but embarrassingly small.

**Cape Chestnut** (Map p271; off Kenyatta Ave; ☒ Mon-Sat) This is an excellent coffee garden and snack place catering mostly for white farmers, expats and tourists. It's off Kenyatta Ave, 1km south of town.

**Horse's Mouth Pub** (Map p271; Haile Selassie Rd; meals KSh150-400) This place near Cape Chestnut caters for a similar clientele.

**Mountain Rock Cafe** (Kenyatta Ave; meals KSh60-200) Popular with locals, this is a good spot for cheap Kenyan fare.

**Rongmatt Supermarket** (Kenyatta Ave) A decent supermarket where trekkers can stock up.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

The eateries Cape Chestnut and Horse's Mouth Pub are pleasant places to enjoy a daylight beer, while in the evening the rooftop of Marina Grill & Restaurant is a good choice.

The **Buccaneer Club** (Laikipia Rd; ☒ Wed & Sat evenings) may look like a UFO, but its disco is nothing out of this world.

**Shopping**

There are a number of souvenir stalls and shops around town, catering mostly to the British army – if you have gear to swap, this is the place to do it.

**Nanyuki Spinners & Weavers** (Laikipia Rd) For something less tacky, try this women's craft cooperative that specialises in woven woolen goods. The product and pattern design is high quality and is cheaper than the same work in Nairobi.

**Getting There & Away**

**Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) and **Safarilink** (☎ 020-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) fly daily from Wilson Airport in Nairobi to Nanyuki. A return trip on Airkenya/Safarilink costs US\$130/149, while one way fares

for northbound and southbound flights are US\$60/70 and US\$80/90 respectively.

There are daily buses and matatus to Nyeri (KSh100, one hour), Isiolo (KSh150, 1½ hours), Meru (KSh120, 1½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh350, three hours).

**AROUND NANYUKI  
Ol Pejeta Conservancy**

Formerly called the Sweetwaters Game Reserve, this impressive 97-sq-km (soon to be 300-sq-km) **wildlife conservancy** (adult/child US\$25/13) is home to a wide variety of plains wildlife, including the Big Five, massive eland antelopes and a plethora of birdlife. There's also an important **chimpanzee sanctuary** (☎ 9-10.30am & 3-4.30pm), operated by the Jane Goodall Institute.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

There are two top-end accommodation options in the reserve.

**Sweetwaters Tented Camp** (Map p271; ☎ 062-32409, Nairobi 020-2710511; sweetwaters@serena.co.ke; low season full board s/d US\$90/180, high season US\$235/310) Recently purchased by Serena Hotels, this equator-straddling place is up for some major renovations. There are currently 30 permanent tents beneath thatched roofs that sit beside a floodlit waterhole (tent numbers one and two have the best view). It has a lovely small bar and a lounge where wicker abounds. Activities available include wildlife drives (US\$45), walking safaris (US\$21) and camel rides (US\$11 per hour).

**Ol Pejeta House** (Map p271; ☎ 062-32400, Nairobi 020-2710511; swtcc@kenyawe.com; low season full board s/d US\$210/270, high season US\$270/390) Once home to Lord Delamere and subsequently the holiday getaway of the now bankrupt international arms dealer Adnan Kashoggi, this house has also just been bought by Serena Hotels. Whether they'll keep Adnan's lavish decorations and his massive 4m x 4m bed is anyone's guess. Rates include wildlife drives.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

You can visit the reserve independently if you have your own vehicle. Access is off the A2 Hwy south out of Nanyuki. Mt Kenya Safari Club (p273) runs half-day wildlife drives for US\$55 per person (minimum two passengers); guests staying two or more nights get free entry to the conservancy and lunch at Sweetwaters Tented Camp.

**Timau**

This tiny town is a convenient stop between Isiolo and Nanyuki and has a couple of interesting accommodation options, offering a range of activities.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

**Timau River Lodge** (Map p271; ☎ 062-41230; timau.riverlodge@hotmail.com; off A2 Hwy; camping KSh300, cottages incl breakfast per person KSh1400) A wonderfully offbeat place, consisting of several lovely thatched cottages of varying sizes and a well-equipped campsite with a large covered cooking area. The restaurant (meals KSh150 to KSh450) is good and it happily caters to vegetarians. Besides offering all-inclusive treks (US\$70 per day) up Mt Kenya on the rarely used Timau route, the lodge also offers camel treks (KSh850 per day), cultural visits (KSh600 per day) and safaris to Ol Pejeta Conservancy (US\$68, minimum two people). There's a good chance of seeing elephants and other wildlife nearby.

**Ken Trout Guest Cottages** (Map p271; ☎ 0720-804751; off A2 Hwy; camping KSh300, half board cottages per person KSh2500) This place, 3km south of Timau, is a more mainstream establishment with an excellent restaurant (meals KSh450; 11am to 5pm). There is some very good fishing here, although you pay for everything you catch. The main house (which sleeps up to eight) is rented exclusively and has old plank floors and brick fireplaces in most rooms. The cottages are much smaller but more cosy.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Any matatu running between Nanyuki and Isiolo, or Nanyuki and Meru, will happily drop you in Timau or at the turn-off to either sleeping option.

**El Karama Ranch**

About 42km to the northwest of Nanyuki, **El Karama Ranch** (☎ 062-32526, Nairobi 020-340331; info@letsgosafari.com; bandas per person KSh2500) is on the Ewaso Ng'iro River. Although still a working ranch, wildlife conservation is paramount and the 5668-hectares play home to lions, leopards, elephants, hippos, buffaloes and rare northern species like Grevy's zebras and reticulated giraffes. Billed as a 'self-service camp', it's an old family-run settlers' ranch with a number of basic but comfortable riverside bandas. Seated long-drop toilets and showers are close by. Bring everything you

need, including food. Activities here include wildlife walks, horse riding and camel safaris (see www.horsebackkenya.com). Let's Go Travel (p101) in Nairobi provides a map with directions. During the rainy seasons you'll need a 4WD to get here; however, as driving around the ranch is discouraged and there's little public transport, it's usually better to phone and arrange to be picked up, generally from Nanyuki.

**MERU****☎ 064**

Stretched out along the eastern side of the Mt Kenya ring road, Meru isn't so much a base of operations for Mt Kenya or Meru National Park, but rather a travel hub. Whether you end up having to spend the night here, or just stop to stock up on various commodities, it's worth a look around.

Because it's a regional service centre and not a tourist destination you'll rarely be hassled on the streets, despite them being alive with activity. The colourful main market is worth a stroll and if you ever thought of chewing *miraa* (see p277), Meru is the epicentre of Kenyan production.

It's quite a climb up to Meru from either Isiolo or Embu, and in the rainy season you'll find yourself lost in the clouds. However, when the weather is clear there are superb views for miles over the surrounding lowlands, and you may catch glimpses of Mt Kenya.

The town is a focal point for the Meru people (see p43).

**Information**

**Barclays Bank** (Tom Mboya St) Exchange cash and charge 1% commission on travellers cheques. With ATM.

**Cafe Candy** (Tom Mboya St; Internet per hr KSh180) Decent Internet connections.

**Kenya Commercial Bank** (KCB; Njiru Ncheke St) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh50 per leaf commission).

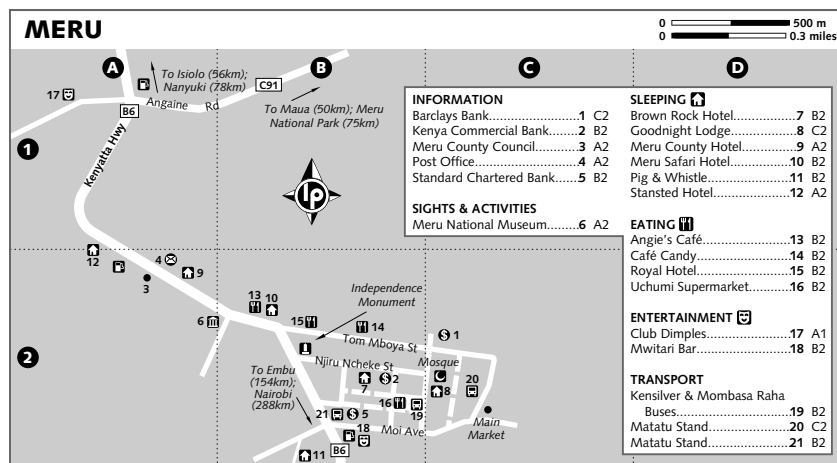
**Meru County Council** (Kenyatta Hwy) Bookings for Meru Mt Kenya Lodge on the Chogoria route.

**Post office** (Kenyatta Hwy) With Internet and card phones.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (Moi Ave) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh50 per leaf commission).

**Sights**

The small **Meru National Museum** (☎ 20482; off Kenyatta Hwy; adult/child KSh200/100; ☎ 9.30am-6pm,



1-6pm public holidays) is worth visiting. The usual displays are present, with an explanation of evolution and copious stuffed and mounted wildlife, but there's also a small and informative section concerning the clothing, weapons, and agricultural and initiation practices (including clitoridectomies) of the Meru people.

## Sleeping

Nothing here will truly float your boat, but hopefully those listed below won't sink it either.

**Goodnight Lodge** (☎ 30057; Mosque Hill Rd; s incl breakfast KSh350) Probably the best budget option. Rooms and bathrooms (hot water showers but no toilet seats) are clean and the upstairs options take in some sun. Breakfast is a bit of a joke (two boiled eggs and buttered bread).

**Brown Rock Hotel** (☎ 20247; Njiru Ncheke St; s/tw KSh350/450) Although the brown-and-white floor tiles are failing, this is still your best bet for cheap twin-bedded rooms. Some are brighter and have balconies, so check out a few. Hot water is sketchy at times.

**Meru Safari Hotel** (☎ 31500; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw KSh600/800) Considering your hot water showers come from the kitchen in buckets, this place is overpriced. Rooms are slightly more comfortable than those seen at Goodnight and Brown Rock. The terrace bar is its greatest asset.

**Stansted Hotel** (☎ 31119; Kenyatta Hwy; s KSh200) Any cleanish rooms at this price with

bathrooms (and toilet seats) are a blessing indeed. It's quiet too, but the beds aren't comfortable.

**Pig & Whistle** (☎ 31411; off Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast KSh1000/1200) This place has a distinctly ramshackle charm to it, with nice quiet grounds and a colonial-style bar/restaurant and lounge. Most of the cottages are uninspiring concrete blocks, but TV, phone and a dining area go some way towards compensating. More memorable stays are to be had in the old (1934) wooden cabins.

**Meru County Hotel** (☎ 20432; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast from KSh1000/1500) This is the other midrange contender in town, with a bit less style but a few more creature comforts. The 'studio' suites, with balconies and TVs, are well worth the extra KSh100.

## Eating & Drinking

With French, Thai, Chinese, Indian and Kenyan fare gracing menus, you won't go hungry here. OK, we're joking about the Thai, Chinese and French bits (how cruel of us!) but that still leaves you with Indian and Kenyan.

**Pig & Whistle** (off Kenyatta Hwy; meals KSh60-250) Flowering hedges separate tables in this scenic garden eatery that serves up tasty Kenyan fare. It's also a great place for an afternoon beer.

**Meru County Hotel** (Kenyatta Hwy; meals KSh60-280) Thatched umbrellas hover over each table on this pretty *nyama choma* (barbecued meat) terrace. If you want to give the flaming

meat a rest, Western, Kenyan and Indian meals are also on offer.

**Royal Hotel** (Tom Mboya St; meals KSh80-150) Deep pots ensure they still have food late in the evenings when most places are coming up empty. The bar is very popular at weekends.

**Café Candy** (Tom Mboya St; meals around KSh50-180) A very popular place with locals, this is a good place for cheap vegetarian curries, stews and fish during the day.

**Angie's Café** (Kenyatta Hwy; meals KSh50-150) Sedated goldfish patrol the aquarium and watch over some simple menus. Locals recommend the biryani.

**Uchumi supermarket** (off Mosque Hill Rd) A very well-stocked option for self-caterers.

## Entertainment

The **Mwitari Bar** (off Moi Ave), behind the Shell petrol station, is an odd, weirdly Swiss Family Robinson-style structure, which sometimes hosts live bands. The only other evening action is at **Club Dimples** (Angaine Rd;

cover KSh50; ☎ Wed, Fri & Sat evenings), which is an energetic disco joint up the hill.

## Getting There & Away

**Kensilver** (Mosque Hill Rd) has 13 daily departures from 6.45am onwards, covering Embu (KSh250, two hours), Thika (KSh280, 3½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh300, 4½ hours). **Mombasa Raha** (Mosque Hill Rd) has daily 5pm services to Mombasa (KSh900, 10 hours).

Regular matatus serve the same destinations for similar costs and leave from the main stand, near the main market, and from opposite the Shell petrol station. Matatus also serve Nanyuki (KSh120, 1½ hours) and Isiolo (KSh120, 1½ hours).

## MERU NATIONAL PARK

This national park is the cornerstone of the Meru Conservation Area, a 4000-sq-km expanse that also includes the adjacent Kora National Park, and Bisanadi, Mwingi and North Kitui National Reserves (which are

## MIRAA – MAKING MANY PLANS

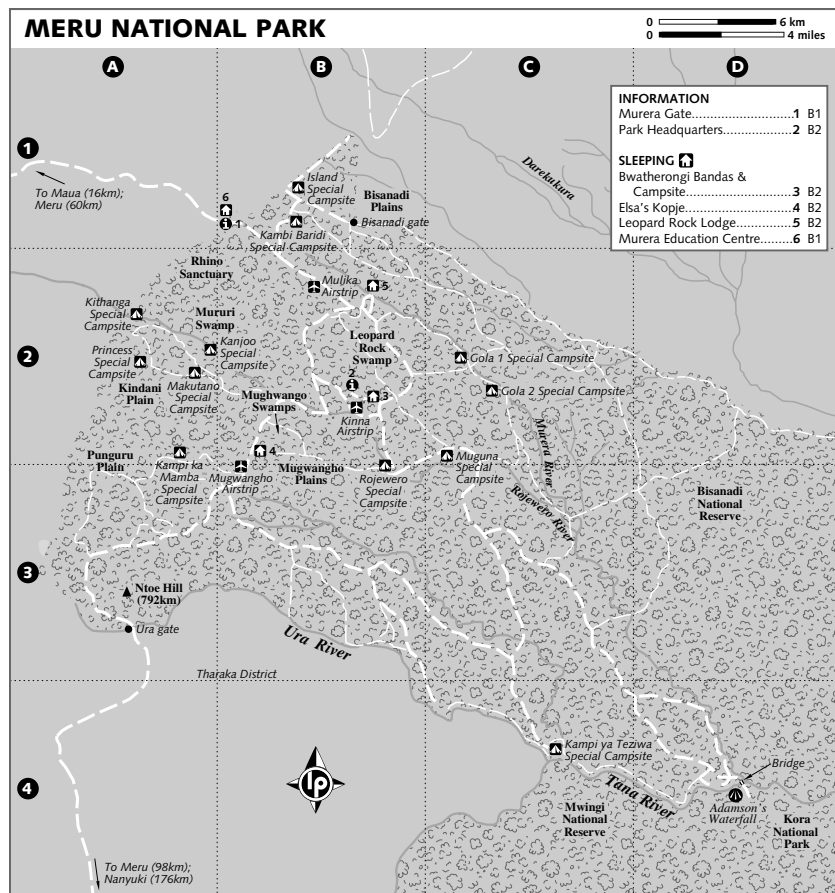
The small twigs and leaves you'll see people chewing around Mt Kenya are *miraa*, the product of an evergreen tree native to East and Southern Africa, Afghanistan and Yemen. It's also known as *coas* and *khat*, and over 40 other names around the world. Chewing *miraa* is an increasingly popular pastime in Kenya, but it's not nearly as important as in Somalia, where the drug is ingrained in the culture: in 1983 consumption reached such epidemic proportions that the government tried to ban it.

Some of the best *miraa* in the world is grown around Meru and it's a whopping US\$250-million export industry. Of course much of the demand is from Somalia and, since *miraa*'s potency is diminished 48 hours after picking, massively overloaded pick-up trucks race nightly to Wilson Airport in Nairobi for the morning flight to Mogadishu.

*Miraa* is a mild stimulant. Chewing it predates coffee drinking and is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of some societies, especially in Muslim countries. It's usually chewed in company to encourage confidence, contentment and a flow of ideas. Locals selling the stuff are often heard saying, 'when you chew *miraa* you'll make many plans...' Make plans is right, though getting around to doing anything about your much-vaunted plans is another thing entirely! The active ingredient, *cathinone*, is closely related to amphetamine, and the euphoric effects can last for up to 24 hours, depending on how much is chewed.

Chewing too much can be habit-forming and has serious consequences, known medically as '*khat syndrome*'. Aggressive behaviour, nightmares and hallucinations are common mental side-effects, while reduced appetite, malnourishment, constipation and brown teeth are common physical consequences. Even less pleasant are claims that *miraa* can cause spermatorrhoea (abnormal leakage of sperm – just delightful), leading to infertility.

*Miraa* is illegal in the USA, but is legally imported into several European countries, including the UK – though they are thinking of banning it. In Kenya it's sold in handfuls known as *kilos* or *gizas* for between KSh100 and KSh300, depending on size. Meru is a good place for curious travellers to give it a go, but those who don't gag at their first taste (there aren't many) usually only notice that it keeps them awake for prolonged periods. The texture is rather unpleasant too – funnily enough, it's just like chewing twigs.



closed), covering the lowland plains east of Meru town.

KWS has big plans for this park. In the 1970s the populations of rhinos and elephants could pull in up to 40,000 visitors a year, but banditry and poaching during the 1980s effectively put paid to tourism here, wiping out the white rhinos and leaving the area almost abandoned until the late 1990s. Today, substantial foreign investment, notably from French development agencies and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), has enabled a flurry of rehabilitation projects: a new rhino sanctuary opened in 2001 and now houses 25 rhinos (24 of them white), a new sealed access road is half completed, all the main park roads have been

upgraded, and there's now a bridge across the Tana River at **Adamson's Falls** (worth a visit) accessing Kora National Park.

With security long since settled, these improvements are starting to pay off and visitor numbers are steadily climbing, from a meagre 1000 in 1997 to well over 10,000 in 2004. With two luxury lodges and some of the best budget options in any of Kenya's national parks, Meru's fortunes should soon be on the up again. Visit soon and you'll still feel like you have this blissful place to yourself.

This resurgence is definitely a good thing, as the park is a complete contrast to the nearby savannah reserves of Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba. Abundant rainfall and numerous permanent watercourses

flowing down from the Mt Kenya massif support a luxuriant jungle of forest, bush, swamp and tall grasses, which, in turn, provide fodder to a wide variety of herbivores and shelter to them and their predators. This is one of the most geographically diverse parks in Kenya and a favourite with the safari cognoscenti; you need to spend a few days here to fully appreciate what the park has to offer.

While on the rise, wildlife is still not as abundant here as in other parks. To make things more challenging, the limited elephant numbers have led to an increase in vegetation cover, making it difficult to spot those species that do exist. However, with a little patience you can see elephants (often found in the marshy Bisanadi Plains at the north of the park), leopards, lions and cheetahs, along with lesser kudus, elands, waterbucks, gazelles and oryxes. Buffaloes, reticulated giraffes, and Grevy's zebras are common, while monkeys, crocodiles and a plethora of bird species, including the palm nut vulture and Marshal eagle, can be found in the dense vegetation along the watercourses. A drive through the overgrown jungle that shadows the Tana River is well worth the trip to Meru alone.

## Information

Entrance to **Meru National Park** (☎ 062-21320; adult/child US\$27/10) doesn't entitle you to enter the adjacent **Kora National Park** (☎ 062-21320; adult/child US\$27/10). Visits into Kora must be prearranged with Meru's warden.

At present you need to have a 4WD or be on a tour to visit. Most road junctions are numbered, so KWS' *Meru National Park* map (KSh450), sold at the gate, is essential if you want to find your way around.

## Sleeping

**Bwatherongi Bandas & Campsite** (adult/child US\$10/5, bandas per person US\$15; ☎) Perhaps the best KWS camp in all of Kenya, this site has great showers, toilets, barbecue pits, a swimming pool and an *askari* (security guard) in attendance. There are also four excellent thatched bandas with shady verandas, twin beds, kerosene lamps, mosquito nets, decent bathrooms and small sofas.

**Special campsites** (adult/child US\$15/5, plus set-up fee KSh5000) There are about a dozen of these bush campsites (no facilities) located throughout

the park. The gate will let you know which are currently open.

**Murera Education Centre** (bandas per person US\$15) This centre's bandas by the main gate should only be considered if Bwatherongi's bandas are full. Ask at the gate for details.

**Elsa's Kopje** (☎ 020-604053; safaris@chelipecock.co.ke; mid-Mar–mid-Jun & Nov–mid-Dec full board s/d US\$320/600, Jan–mid-Mar, mid-Jun–Jul & mid-Sep–Oct US\$450/760, rest of year US\$520/920; ☎) Wake to glorious panoramic views and sweet breezes in these gorgeous open-fronted thatched cottages that blend seamlessly into the upper reaches of Mughwango Hill. This place is the definition of sensitively designed luxury. A rock outcrop seemingly bursts through the floor of cottage number one, where steps lead down to a stunning outdoor bathtub hewn into the cliff itself. The pool and surrounds are equally sublime. The hefty prices include three wildlife drives (one at night), walking safaris, fishing and transfers.

**Leopard Rock Lodge** (☎ 020-600031; leopardmico@wananchi.com; Apr–Jun full board s/d from US\$285/440, Jul–Mar US\$340/515; ☎) With landscaped gardens, a stilted restaurant on the Murera River and comfortable cottages, this lodge would shine anywhere else in Kenya, but here it's entirely outmatched by the stunning beauty of Elsa's Kopje. The lodge arranges similar activities to Elsa's, but charges extra.

## Getting There & Away

Simply put, there's no point reaching the park without a vehicle. If you don't want to join a tour, your cheapest option is to acquire a 4WD (and driver) from a local in the village of Maua, which is 31km from the gate. Regular matatus service Maua from Meru town (KSh100, one hour).

Every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday **Airkenya** (☎ 020-605745; www.airkenya.com) connects Meru to Nairobi (one way/return US\$150/300) and Samburu (one way/return US\$60/120). From Nairobi to Samburu with a stopover in Meru is US\$190 one way. Give your lodge your flight details for pick-up.

## CHOGORIA

☎ 064

The only reason to come to this small town on the lower eastern slopes of Mt Kenya is to access one of the mountain's most scenic climbs – the Chogoria route (p269).

It has a lively Sunday **market** and a couple of half-decent cafés in the village, but Chogoria has quite a reputation for hassle, with every man and his dog offering to take you up the mountain. On arrival, it's much better to bypass the village altogether, get yourself sorted at the Transit Motel, then head back if you need basic supplies.

The well-signposted **Transit Motel** (Map p271; ☎ 22096; PO Box 190, Chogoria; camping per tent KSh500, s/tw incl breakfast KSh1000/1600) is as great for arranging Mt Kenya treks as it is for flaking out when the long, enjoyable slog is over. The large rooms are clean with hot showers, mozzie nets and balconies. The TV lounge is comfy and the bar serves cold beers, but watch out for 'skunked' (stale) bottles. There's also a decent restaurant (meals range from KSh100 to KSh300). It's a 1.5km walk from Chogoria or a 2km walk from the town's centre. Don't believe rival mountain touts claiming the motel has burnt down – it's a cement structure!

Regular buses and matatus ply the road heading north to Meru (KSh60, 30 minutes) and south to Embu (KSh150, 1½ hours) and Nairobi (KSh280, four hours).

## EMBU

☎ 068

Surrounded by highly cultivated hills on the fringes of Mt Kenya's southeastern slopes is Embu, the unlikely capital of the Eastern Province. Given that this agricultural backwater town barely sits in the province, our only guess is that it was chosen as capital because of its agreeable climate.

Despite its local significance, there's not a lot for travellers here, and it's a long way from the mountain. However, it can make a good stopover on the way to Thika or Nairobi, and if you have your own transport, use it as a base for exploring Mwea National Reserve (opposite) or for visiting the coffee nurseries off the B6 and A2 highways.

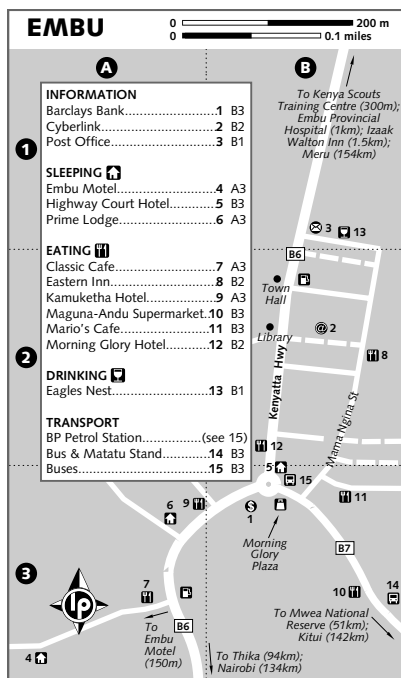
## Information

**Barclays Bank** (B6 Hwy) Exchange cash and travellers cheques (KSh34 per leaf commission). With ATM.

**Cyberlink** (off Kenyatta Hwy; per hr KSh120) Embu's fastest Internet connections.

**Embu Provincial Hospital** (Kenyatta Hwy)

**Post office** (Kenyatta Hwy) With Internet and card phones.



## Sleeping

There are quite a few cheap hotels spread out along Kenyatta Hwy in town but most of them are very basic and cannot be recommended.

**Kenya Scouts Training Centre** (☎ 30459; Kenyatta Hwy; camping KSh100, dm KSh250) This spotless place has great facilities and is a bargain. Four- or five-bed dorms are only rented to one group at a time, so if you're alone you'll get the room to yourself for only KSh250. Judging from all the anti-drug posters, it's not a good idea to saunter in here with your mouth full of *miraa*!

**Embu Motel** (☎ 0722-462277; off B6 Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from KSh700/900) Quietly set back off the main road, this is another great option. Cleanliness pervades throughout and the toilets even have seats. The motel has a comfy TV room, a spartan dining area and a safe spot to park your metal steed.

**Highway Court Hotel** (☎ 20046; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw from KSh400/800) The rooms are clean but they don't really gleam like those at Embu. It's a comfortable place, with hot-water showers, mozzie nets and TVs (only in

large twins, KSh1200). Some are brighter than others, so peruse a little. Security is excellent, but the lively bar and restaurant are noisy.

**Prime Lodge** (☎ 30692; off B6 Hwy; s/tw KSh650/1050) Prices have jumped here, but quality clearly hasn't. The same linoleum lines the cement floors, and most toilets still lack seats. On the upside, it's clean and most rooms catch some sun. Some rooms have baths instead of showers.

**Izaak Walton Inn** (☎ 20128; izaakwalton@winnet.co.ke; Kenyatta Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from US\$32/50) About 1.5km north of town is this well-known place set in fantastic old colonial grounds. Some standard rooms have a cabin feel, with wood-lined walls, while others are more contemporary and have glass walls leading onto small terraces. All of the rooms here have TVs and there's a great cosy bar where wood and wicker pervade.

## Eating & Drinking

**Izaak Walton Inn** (Kenyatta Hwy; mains KSh100-400, set-meal US\$7) A great place for a great meal. The French onion soup and Mt Kenya stew are recommended by well-to-do locals. The bar is a great place to introduce a cold beverage to your insides.

**Eastern Inn** (Mama Ngina St; meals KSh40-150) Fronted by a shady awning, this Christian restaurant serves up sandwiches, samosas, fried chicken and fish.

**Morning Glory Hotel** (Kenyatta Hwy; meals KSh80-200; ☎ 24hr) This is the spot for fried chicken and chips in Embu. The hotel also does decent breakfasts, but, after seeing their green goldfish tank, you might not want to order the fish.

**Kamuketha Hotel** (B6 Hwy; meals KSh80-200) They say they fry up the best tilapia in town – many locals would agree.

**Classic Cafe** (off B6 Hwy; meals KSh20-80) A dark and tiny hole in the wall serves up popular Kenyan dishes like *madado* (beans) and *ndengu* (lentils) with chapattis, rice or *ugali*.

**Mario's Cafe** (off Mam Ngina St; meals KSh35-130) Basic Kenyan eats served in the shadows of a fading TV.

**Maguna-Andu Supermarket** (B7 Hwy) A well-stocked supermarket.

**Eagles Nest** (off Kenyatta Hwy) The local favourite for a cold Tusker and *nyama choma*.

## Getting There & Away

Regular Kentsilver buses heading to Meru (KSh250, two hours) and Nairobi (KSh250, three hours) pick up passengers at the BP petrol station in the centre of town.

Mombasa Liners leave the BP station for Mombasa (KSh700, 10 hours) each morning at 7.30am.

There are numerous matatus serving Chogoria (KSh150, 1½ hours), Meru (KSh250, two hours), Thika (KSh200, two hours), Nyeri (KSh150, two hours), Nanyuki (KSh220, 2½ hours), Nyahururu (KSh300, three hours), Nairobi (KSh250, three hours) and Nakuru (KSh400, 4½ hours).

## MWEA NATIONAL RESERVE

The Kamburu Dam, at the meeting point of the Tana and Thiba Rivers, forms the focus for this 48-sq-km **reserve** (adult/child US\$15/5). Enclosed by an electric fence, elephants, hippos, buffaloes, lesser kudus and a myriad of birdlife are present here. Evenings at Hippo Point, when the animals amble down to the water's edge, are a particular highlight.

There's a **campsite** (adult/child US\$10/5) with basic facilities (no water) close to the reserve headquarters and another site with similar facilities, close to Hippo Point.

In wet season the nearest formal accommodation is in Embu (opposite), while in dry season there's a 14km shortcut from the gate southwest to the **Masinga Dam Lodge** (Nairobi ☎ 020-341781; camping KSh500, s/d KSh650/800; ☎). It's a simple place that looks over the dam and plains.

## Getting There & Away

Mwea is best accessed from the 11km dirt road that's signposted off the B7 Hwy some 40km south of Embu. Ignore the signposted 27km dirt track to the park that's 14km south of Embu – trust us! A 4WD is just about essential to get to Mwea and around the park.

## OL DONYO SABUK NATIONAL PARK

This tiny **park** (adult/child US\$15/5) was gazetted in 1967 and covers an area of just 20.7 sq km. The focus of the park is the summit of **Ol Donyo Sabuk** (2146m), surrounded by an oasis of dense primeval forest that supports a huge variety of birds and numerous primates, including black and white colobus and blue monkeys. The Kikuyu call the mountain



Kilimambongo (buffalo mountain) and buffaloes are indisputably the dominant animals here. Below the picnic site and communications tower on the summit is a salt lick that attracts regular herds.

It's possible to explore on foot if accompanied by a ranger (per half-/full-day KSh500/KSh1000). It's a 9km hike (three or four hours) to an amazing 360-degree view at the summit.

There's a pretty **campsite** (adult/child US\$10/5) just before the main gate, with soft grass, and shady trees. Facilities include one long-drop toilet, a rusty tap and free firewood.

### Getting There & Away

From Thika, take a matatu to the village of Ol Donyo Sabuk (KSh70, 50 minutes), from where it's a 2km walk along a straight dirt road to the gate. You could also take a matatu heading to Kitui and hop off at Kilimambongo (KSh50, 45 minutes), which is 6km from Ol Donyo Sabuk village.

### THIKA

☎ 067

Thika isn't much more than a busy little agricultural service town, and there aren't many of those famous flame trees to be seen. That said, it's a leafy place and quite pleasant for a stroll. The only true 'attractions' are **Chania Falls** and **Thika Falls**, about 1km north of town on the busy Nairobi-Nyeri road. It's also a good place to base a visit to Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park (p281).

### Information

**Barclays Bank** (Kenyatta Hwy) Changes cash and travellers cheques (KSh30 per leaf commission). With ATM.

**Cyber Cafe** (Uhuru St; per hr KSh60) Thika's best Internet connections.

**Post office** (Commercial St) With Internet and card phones.

### Sleeping & Eating

**December Hotel** (☎ 22140; Commercial St; s/d KSh600/800) This is the best and brightest of the budget bunch. The large rooms and bathrooms are well kept. Some rooms see more sun than others, so check a few (number seven is best).

**Thika Inn** (☎ 31590; Kenyatta Hwy; s/tw incl breakfast KSh650/1200) Just south of town, behind the Caltex petrol station, Thika Inn has reasonable rooms. While the bedding is fresh and clean, the bathrooms are slightly grungy. Thankfully the rooms are sheltered from their lively restaurant (meals KSh150 to KSh350) and disco known as the Vybesta Club.

**New Fulia Hotel** (☎ 31286; Uhuru St; s KSh300) Simple singles with bathrooms (no toilet seats). It's clean enough, but most are rather dark and lack mosquito nets.

**Blue Post Hotel** (☎ 22241; blueposthotel@africaonline.co.ke; s/d KSh1600/1900; 📺) Set in lovely gardens next to the Chania River, 2km north of town, this place has comfortable rooms with four-poster canopy beds, polished-wood floors and TVs. Rooms 101 to 106 cost no more, yet offer shady balconies and glimpses of Chania Falls. It has a great bar and a decent restaurant (meals KSh120 to KSh240) serving Western selections.

**Primos Hotel** (Kame Nkrumah; meals KSh50-220) With comfy seats and views over the street, Primos prepares Kenyan dishes, burgers and basic sandwiches. They also take a stab at beef stroganoff.

**Quality Cafe** (Mama Ngina Rd; meals KSh40-150) A popular place serving simple Kenyan fare.

### Getting There & Away

There are plenty of matatus heading to Nairobi (KSh70, 45 minutes), Embu (KSh200, two hours) and Nyeri (KSh200, 1¼ hours). The odd service reaches Naivasha (KSh200, 1½ hours).