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Nairobi: City View

Almost nowhere else in Africa can you spend the day admiring giraffes and lions and then step into a posh French restaurant the same evening. The aptly dubbed "Safari Capital of the World," Nairobi attracts tourists from the world over. They come here to explore the city that *Out of Africa's* author, Karen Blixen (a.k.a. Isak Dinesen), fell in love with.

Nairobi means "the place of cool waters" in the Maasai language, apt for a city that lies right on the rich **Nairobi River**. With a population of almost three million and some of the largest shopping centers in East Africa, Nairobi is full of vitality and buzz. Walk away from the stylish streets in the business and tourist districts, however, and you'll get a glimpse of the real Africa. There are 42 ethnic groups in Kenya, and a large number of them are represented in Nairobi. This makes the city an exciting melting pot of languages and cultures.

FROM STOPOVER TO DESTINATION

Nairobi was founded in 1899 as a rail stop on the route between Uganda and Mombassa. Only a couple of years later, outbreaks of the plague and malaria, as well as a massive fire, threatened the existence of the city. It survived relatively intact, and by 1905 was named the British administrative center in Kenya. Over the next decade, the first big wave of tourists arrived, mostly in the form of big-game hunters, who made Nairobi their official stop before venturing into the wild. Thanks to animal protection laws, today's visitors shoot cameras instead of guns.

Nairobi is a vibrant cosmopolitan center with a thriving nightlife. Embassies, multinational company headquarters, and the **Nairobi Stock Exchange** are all located here. It is also one of the few cities in the world where almost all religions are represented. Here, mosques, churches and temples share the streets with gurdwaras, the place of worship for followers of Sikhism. While Nairobi has long been known as one of Africa's dangerous cities, that reputation is somewhat exaggerated. Petty crime is common, but most tourists never set foot in the truly dangerous parts of the city, the slums.

BORDERING THE WILD

Visitors to Nairobi will do the city a disservice if they skip either its modern sights or its wonderful landscapes. Nairobi is the center of Kenya's music scene, mainly in the form of **souqous** (known locally also as *lingala*), an electric guitar-driven dance music originally from Congolese-Caribbean rumba. **Nairobi National Park**, the only African game reserve to border a capital city, is home to black rhinos, hippos, giraffes, and African buffalos. Perhaps one of the most striking things about the park is the fact that it's separated from the city only by a fence.

Even for visitors just passing through, Nairobi has much to offer. Skip the *matatu* minibus and instead take off on foot to explore the streets. On the way, buy a traditional *kanga* wrap to protect your head from the sun, and stay refreshed with a cold cup of *chai kavu*, a local tea specialty.

-Diana Bocco



Nairobi skyline at sunset



Nairobian man



Nairobi church



Giraffe in Nairobi National Park



Uhuru Park