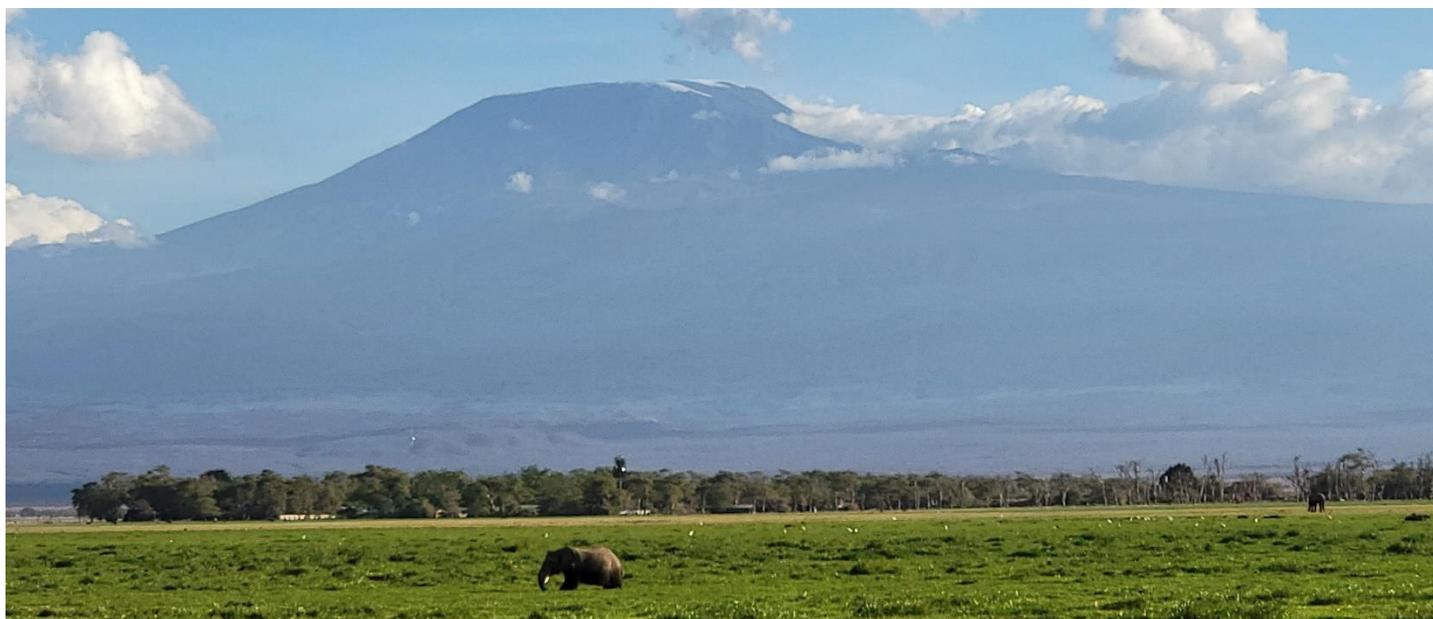


Part Two - Life in the Bush

My Kenya Safari Adventure

I always thought Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak soaring 19,341 feet through the clouds, was located in Kenya until we landed in Amboseli National Park. Stepping off the small plane, my first glimpse of the landscape was the mountain rising in the background before us; even its snow-capped peak was clearly visible without the usual shroud of clouds. Kilimanjaro actually became part of what is now Tanzania more than a century ago. In fact, Kenyan locals confirmed the mountain is located on Tanzanian soil, but they insisted "we still have the best view."



An elephant's eye view of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest peak, looking south from Kenya.

Moments later we were on our way, crisscrossing the park on dirt roads elevated above the wetlands to avoid flooding during the spring rainy season. Dominated by zebras, impalas, lions, buffalos and wildebeests, the park's abundant wildlife includes most species native to Kenya, but the real stars are the magnificent elephants roaming about freely.

I also was surprised by the variety and number of birds, including numerous native species, European migratory birds visiting for the winter and even a large flock of flamingos, who appeared out of place to me.

We arrived at **Oi Tukai Lodge**, an upscale classic Kenyan resort 184 miles south of the equator and located in the heart of the park, just in time for lunch. The afternoon involved settling into my bungalow, watching hundreds of animals grazing on the savanna visible from my terrace and getting ready for the afternoon animal drive. During the drive, we came upon a pride of lions settling down for the night. We also spotted a cheetah on the prowl for his evening meal and many other animals.

TWO-A-DAY ANIMAL DRIVES

Most days in the bush included two animal drives — one beginning about 6:30 am before breakfast, when animals begin moving about, and the second drive for a couple of hours late afternoon ending by dark. It was difficult at times to keep up with all of the animals we observed during these drives, but one encounter sticks in my mind. We came upon four spotted hyenas feasting on a fresh zebra kill

and fending off a lion at the same time. It was difficult to determine whether the lion or the hyenas were responsible for the kill, but clearly the hyenas were not in a sharing mood.



My upscale tent accommodations at the Fairmont Mara Safari Lodge. If offered everything I needed except heat on chilly nights. However, the staff made sure there was a hot-water bottle in my bed to keep me warm all night.

We also encountered numerous gentler scenes, including one involving a 4,000-pound hippopotamus buried in mud up to his neck simply to keep cool on a warm day. I learned from our driver that hippos can survive underwater three to five minutes without surfacing for air. And, since they cannot swim, hippos must sink to the bottom of the lake or riverbed, run across the bottom and exit from shallow water.

The next leg of our journey took us to the **Maasai Mara National Reserve** and the Fairmont Mara Safari Club, located at an elevation of about 5,500 feet and situated on a bluff overlooking the Mara River. The first sign of wildlife here was a crocodile basking in the sun along the riverbank.

During one of our game drives, we visited a special conservation center in the bush tasked with introducing white rhinoceros from South Africa to the region. The center currently cares for a female and her son, and officials plan to in [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

roduce other white rhinos in the preserve for breeding purposes. Protected 24 hours a day in a supervised secure area, these rhinos are increasingly comfortable around humans. So, under the watchful eyes of conservation officers, we approached these huge ancient animals with little or no apparent danger, but we still kept a safe distance.



Conservation officials have moved two white rhinos from South Africa into a secure preserve area and plan to add others in hopes of reintroducing them to Kenya.



ON BECOMING A MAASAI VILLAGE ELDER

As our safari neared its end, a Maasai Village Chieftain and the chief-in-waiting (his son) joined us on our last afternoon in the bush to share their experiences and tell us more about daily life in southwest Kenya. They also provided an opportunity to ask questions and to interact informally as we learned more about the local culture. For me personally, it was a special experience especially with the Chief making me an *Honorary Village Elder* in "recognition of my age and perseverance."

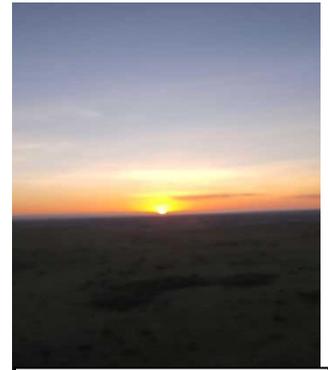
A village Chieftain (left) and his son, the chief-in-waiting, sharing their culture with our group.

I also will never forget climbing into a hot-air balloon basket and lifting off just before dawn to cap off my Kenyan experience in style. With the sun appearing over the eastern horizon and a full moon slowly sliding below the western horizon, all creatures below us were at peace and all appeared right with the universe. The serenity engulfing us as we gilded above Kenya's green hills was indeed magical!

Yet, thinking back, we never did get to see a spotted leopard — which means I must return to Kenya as soon as possible.

SAFARI POSTSCRIPT

Finding the right safari can be a daunting task because they come in all shapes, sizes and budgets. A free-spirited college student might be excited with the prospects of backpacking across East Africa but most people I know expect much more. In fact, I believe many travelers would be disappointed with anything less than a premium or luxury safari experience. I can recommend eight or ten excellent safari outfitters and tour operators, but the trick is to match your interests, expectations and budget with the right one. So, contact me if you're even thinking about a safari and, working together, we will find the safari experience that's right for you.



A sunrise over the green hills of Kenya is breathtaking and something I will never forget.