



# KENYA

*"If you let your fears get the better of you, you will live half a life. Be sensible, be smart, but for goodness sake, pack your bags and at least once in your life, take a safari to Africa because the joy of doing it will live with you for the rest of your life."*

~Johnathan Scott

Known as the "Cradle of Mankind", the original Garden of Eden, and the place where six million years ago, Millennium Man walked the Tugen Hills, Kenya is the ethnic homeland of us all. It was from Kenya's nurturing embrace that the earliest humans wandered forth to colonize the world. On the shores of Lake Turkana, however, where *Homo erectus* took his first upright steps, little has changed. The searing wind still scours the waters of the "Jade Sea", hippos wallow alongside crocodiles, and nomadic tribespeople live a life essentially unchanged from that of their ancestors fifty thousand years ago.

Kenya later became the adopted home of more than seventy different groups of ethnic African migrants, each with its own distinctive cultural identity. It is a land of miraculously harmonious contrasts: tropical ice, teeming wilderness, vibrant culture, and gentle tolerance. A place where, despite the burdens of poverty, drought, and famine, the phrase *Hakuna matata* ("no problem") embodies the national attitude, and a smile is the most valuable currency.

Today fifty-six national parks and reserves offer sanctuary to some of the world's most ancient and most threatened creatures. The country contains some of the last primordial rain forests and boasts more species of birds than anywhere else on earth. Stunningly scenic, steeped in history, and a photographer's paradise, Kenya was in the past a playground for royalty, millionaires, aristocrats, and eccentrics, and still remains one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. It is not for the trappings of tourism, however, that it is usually remembered. Visitors go away indelibly touched by the warmth, sincerity, and generosity of the Kenyan people; and the poorer the person, the richer the welcome.

Kenya has been welcoming incoming groups from the dawn of time, and the tradition of extending a welcome and providing hospitality is deeply ingrained in the national psyche. Kenyans can be relied upon to do everything in their power to make visitors feel at home. *Karibu* means "welcome" in Swahili, and is the usual answer to the question *Hodi?* which means "May I draw near?" Traditionally, a visitor to an encampment would call this question from the darkness beyond the fire, and the answer would be returned: "Welcome. Step into the light."

## When the Lion Roars, by Jonathan Scott

Many people think that I live in England, the land of my birth. But I don't. I am proud to call Kenya my home. I have lived here for nearly 40 years and married Angela on the Siria Escarpment overlooking the Masai Mara's animal-speckled plains. A year later we bought a house on the outskirts of Nairobi. We wanted a beautiful place for our children to call home and a good quality of life.

The Masai Mara is our second home. For part of each year, we base ourselves in a small stone cottage at Governor's Camp in Marsh Pride territory – lions I have watched since 1977. The same Marsh Lions destined to become the stars of the widely viewed TV program, Big Cats Diary, that I co-produced with BBC and Animal Planet for 12 years. We know the Marsh Lions better than we do many of our human friends. At night we lie in bed and listen to their thunderous roars echoing across the plains from Musiara Marsh at the heart of their territory. This is a never-ending story and what keeps us wanting to set out early each morning. The joys of safari are one reason why so many visitors fall in love with Kenya and long to return.

So how did I get to live my dream? As a child growing up on a farm in Berkshire, I was obsessed with wildlife and Africa. So in 1974 after earning a degree in Zoology at Queens University in Belfast, I set off overland for Johannesburg in an old truck. That 10,000 km trek through Africa changed my life. After four months on the road, I not only lost my heart to Africa, but glimpsed that place that I most wanted to return to – the Mara-Serengeti in Kenya and Tanzania, an animal paradise without equal. After two years working with wildlife in Botswana, I headed back to Kenya, more certain than ever that this was where I wanted to make my home.

A plan was beginning to emerge. My father was an architect and a talented artist who died when I was two years old. The gift he left me was in being an artist. I could always draw and was a keen photographer. Prior to leaving for Kenya, a publisher in South Africa commissioned a first set of my pen and ink drawings of wildlife. Meanwhile, a friend had introduced me to Jock Anderson of East African Wildlife Safaris who was looking for someone to help keep an eye on his camp situated just north of the Reserve. For the next five years, Mara River Camp became my home. I couldn't have cared less that there was no pay. I was living in the Garden of Eden with a canvas roof over my head.

That was 1977. Nearly 40 years later with 26 books to my name and co-producer of numerous TV shows, what have I learned from following my dream? Firstly, to live with acceptable risk. I have never been attacked or had my home broken into. I still walk the main streets of Nairobi and feel as safe as I do when on foot in London or San Francisco. Yes, of course, you need to be sensible and know your neighborhoods wherever you are in the world. Security is an issue everywhere these days and it is only right for governments to warn their citizens of risks to their safety. It's then up to each individual to evaluate that risk. We can never be certain that life will treat us kindly or that bad things might not happen. That is why it is so important not to become prisoners of our fears.

And our precious wildlife? The bottom line is this: If we abandon tourism, we abandon conservation. When people ask us, "How can we help?", we say, "By taking a safari". Wildlife based tourism is not a choice, it is a necessity. If we are serious about saving the world's wildlife, be it elephants or rhinos, pandas or lions, we can't do it without collective action. And one action is an unforgettable, life-changing safari in Kenya. It's time to think about a first safari – or a next one – and to remind us all why we love and need Kenya. *Karibu.*

