

# THOMPSON'S

EAST AFRICA



## **Exploration with the Maasai**

### **Maasai Mara, Kenya**

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This holiday shows you the Mara from a new and uplifting perspective.

Based on twelve years of working closely with the Maasai people in southern Kenya, we link you to a carefully chosen group of Maasai families that have lived adjacent to the Mara for generations.

The holiday allows you to see and share the Mara through their eyes.

Why, are we doing this, especially when there are so many safari companies to choose from ?

Because I believe there is a huge gap in the experience of most people visiting Africa's game parks. I suspected this when speaking to many people, for whom the highlight of their safari has been sitting around a camp-fire listening to their driver or watchman tell tales of the bush and the local people. My guess is people connect to these stories and local people in this way because they feel secure and want to learn more from the people who live in this amazing landscape. And because few people can claim to know or love an area as deeply as those who have lived in it and shaped it for centuries.

So, we have set up a meeting of cultures from the safety and comfort of a well organised base. This allows you to explore the Maasai's more ancient way of life in a way that you are comfortable with. We do this by undertaking simple local activities with our Maasai hosts such as cooking, walking, practising using local implements and using local bush knowledge and craft

This is not an externally organised safari that dips into a cultural experience to buy local souvenirs. It is rather an exchange of experiences on an even footing that benefits both the local Maasai and you the visitor.

The basics we cover to appropriate exacting standards. But if you need to be enveloped in modernity when on a holiday this may not be for you.

However if you have some experience of off-the-beaten track travel, if you are interested in the way other people live and what they have to offer to modern life, then you will enjoy joining us.

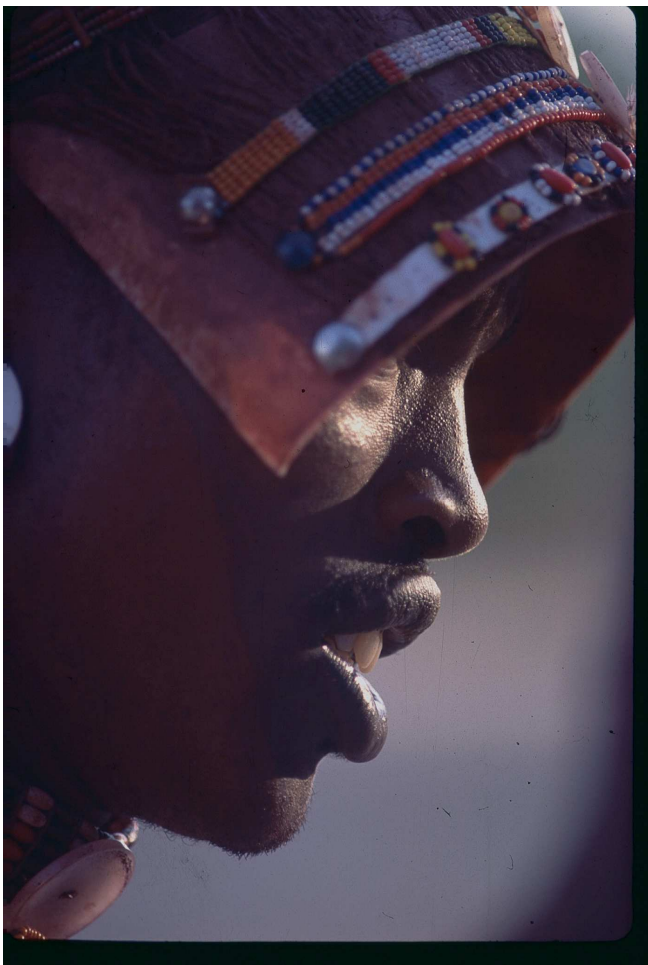
Mick

## Exploration with the Maasai

### Maasai Mara, Kenya

This stay is about exploration and experiencing the rhythm of the African bush with tribal people that have lived in the Mara and shaped it for centuries

This stay combines an “under canvas / game drive” experience with an opportunity to share time and the lifestyles of the local Maasai people, to learn their history with their experienced guides in a relaxed – welcoming atmosphere.



#### Day 1:

Your arrival will be via a swift transfer from a light aircraft to the Olashe Camp site, set on the banks of the *Ol Merroi* river. (*Olashe* in *Kimaasai* or *maa* means “reserved pastures”). The campsite is set in seclusion some half a kilometre from a nearby Maasai homestead (*enkang*). You will be afforded time, a refreshing drink, a chance to wet your taste buds with some local African tea, and a welcoming rest. Then a meeting with local Maasai homestead leaders (*kichwa ya nyumba*) who will point out



the local geography and main features of your three day stay. We will then drive you out in the world famous Maasai Mara Reserve to introduce you to the local ecology, taking you off the beaten trail to the Ngama hills and river lines, from which there are commanding views over the wider Mara – Serengeti (see cover picture). We will show you the full sweep of the Mara and the local place names and association associated with it from this vantage point.

Here you will learn first hand how the Maasai have helped shaped the land you see unfolding beneath you.

From here, we will introduce you to the world within the Savanna world, not usually seen, showing you the towering shade trees of the river lines (Giant Sausage Tree, Strangler Figs, Green-Heart), which form the drought refuge for the hardy Maasai people and their zebu cattle. These trees are relics of the wider Congo rain-forest that once spread across East Africa. In these river lines we seek fleeting glimpses of the savanna's more reclusive inhabitants – signs of bushbuck, dik dik, klipspringer, leopard, hammerkopf.



Returning via the Keekarok – Sekenani Road, you then have a chance to top up on your quota of big animals, with elephant, lion, buffalo, antelope and if lucky, rhino, cheetah and wildebeest. A late afternoon return will be followed by a greeting from the adjacent Maasai family.

We then join the family as they go about their major tasks of the evening, welcoming home their returning cattle, organising the milking, corralling sheep and goats and children into their separate homes. Dusk settles, and the hub-bub of the homestead dies down to be taken over by the clickings, whirrings and distant roars of the African night. This is a night-time as life had always been, without electricity, the gentle

rustling of people and animals, and murmuring of voices as people chat through the days events.

Supper is spent around the campfire, with a western meal prepared for you by local cooks. You are encouraged to chat with the local Maasai leaders about your plans for the next day. A local story-teller will come in to discuss recent happenings in the area, and give you a perspective on major events in these people's lives. You are free to ask them questions, and they in turn will volunteer stories from their history, from the movements of the Maasai at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under conditions of local warfare and the emergence of British empire, to their relationships to Tanzanian (*Kisongo*), *Loita* Hills and Western escarpment (*Siria*) Maasai, through to the creation of the Maasai Mara Game Reserve and Serengeti National Park in the 1950s and early 1960s, right through to more modern happenings. These stories will be told in amongst traditional *Maa* folklore and sayings.

Night time beckons, and you will return to your tents under star laden skies, with the thrumming of cicadas, and distant sounds of hyena and maybe lion in your ears.

## Day 2:



An early morning start – woken with fresh tea and breakfast.

We will be walking to a local salt lick which attracts game animals seeking out the vital salty ingredients of the soil, on the *Leropile* river lines to watch for early morning game. As you walk your guides will point out how they use the local grasses, shrubs and trees to sustain their livestock, and provide the people with everything from head-ache tablets and bedding material to tooth brushes. We will



provide an opportunity to join the Maasai guides as they use their local knowledge and skills to:

- use the local savannah to sustain their cattle and to supplement their own diet
- make use of the local flora
- make and set a local camp and fire
- test their use of local spears and bows and arrows
- trek the cattle down to water

This will be followed in the heat of the day by securing shade and eating a traditional meal (*Ol Pejet*), prepared by the wazee (men) who use such visits to teach their pre-warrior age boys bush skills. You will have a chance to speak to their respected leaders who can, through translators, explain to you their experiences of living firstly under British colonial government, and then under independent Kenyan governance. They will explain to you the cycle of a Maasai man's life, from birth, adolescence, warrior hood to junior and then senior elder, and the responsibilities that each stage entails. They will explain to you how they organise the long distance cattle treks during times of drought, the issues they have faced over cattle raiding from neighbouring Maasai sections or competing tribal people, or of attacks by wild animals, and how they deal with them. You will hear first hand what it is like to come across a stock-taking lion or leopard, and what you must do in these circumstances.

In the afternoon we will complete our hike back to the Olashe camp, in time for a restful relaxing wash and change, and then western style meal.

In the evening you will be invited into the Maasai homesteads (*enkangi-jik*) to experience an hour or two as the household settles into its night-time routine. This is seeing life as it always was, with a chance to ask questions of your hosts. You will be sitting with an elder wife and can move from house to house to visit the junior wives and grown – up sons. The living arrangements might give you some ideas for how to use your own space when you return !



At this time you are welcome to ask any question you wish, which will be answered with courtesy, and interest and honesty. A rare chance to share experiences and learn from an older way of living, closer to the environment, with all that flows from this.

You return to your tented camp for the evening. For those interested, an opportunity to spend the night in a local *enkaji* with the family can be offered.



### **Day 3.**

On the final morning we serve you breakfast – either in the tented camp, or if you wish, with your new friends in the Maasai (*enkang*). Maasai breakfast consists of African tea, served in a continual pot, either with local herbs, ginger or chocolate, and maize meal porridge, with boiled milk from the cattle. Of course we supplement this with a hearty Kenyan cooked breakfast.

You can then chose from a number of activities in the morning:

- to follow-the herdsmen and boys as they take their cattle off to near-by pastures and watering points,
- to stay with women as they go about their day, creating jewellery, preparing meals, and chatting in the shade,
- or we can arrange for an early morning game drive.

We then say our farewells with an exchange of gifts.

And we then provide an onward transfer to the airstrip for your return flight to Nairobi.

### **Additional Option A: Day 3/4**

In the afternoon we can take you on in the afternoon to a local luxury Tented Camp, providing luxury western style service for the mainstream Mara clientele. Here you join a regular set of game drives to ensure you top up on your list of large animals

spotted, and experience an African night of luxury in an old style, European tented camp.

Breakfast on Day 4 in luxury tented camp and transfer to airstrip for return flight to Nairobi



**Or**

**Day 3/4 Option B**

Road transfer to the Naivasha Inn – site of the first premier spa outside of Nairobi. The Naivasha Holiday Inn is set in the adjacent grounds to lake Naivasha – which is a rare freshwater lake set in the Kenyan rift valley. Unlike the other Kenyan rift valley lakes which are saline, this freshwater lake boasts an unusually rich mix of species with over 300 species of birds having been recorded in the lake environs.

The spa complex was opened in 2010, and provides a perfect end to your safari experience. A range of treatments can be provided, from relaxing massage to aromatherapy, hot stones, and hot and cold baths, sauna and jacuzzi.

There is something totally magical to sitting outside under an African sky, warm in your outside hot tub, in a bracing night air outside (Naivasha is a high altitude spot),



drinking in the thousands of glittering stars. A primeval and moving end to a wonderful connection with the old Africa that is just below the modern surface.

**Price per person:**

**Basic**

**Days 1 – 3**

**£ 850**

**Plus Day 4 option A**

**£ 175**

**Plus Day 4 option B**

**£ 275**

**What the price includes:**

**Basic**

Transfer from Nairobi to Mara by light aircraft

Accommodation 2 nights at Olashe Camp Site in tented camp accommodation, two per tent, camp beds with luxury duvet and mosquito netting, outdoor showers and long drop WC.

Bedding included

Towels and toiletries not included

Ground transport by land-rover or Toyota landcruiser 4WD vehicle with driver

Meals:

Full board from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 3

Return flight to Nairobi

**Optional day 3/ 4 Option A**

Accommodation 1 night at local luxury tented Camp accommodation, two per tent, full beds with luxury duvet and mosquito netting, sink, shared shower and WC.

Return flight to Nairobi

### **Optional day 3/ 4 Option B**

Ground transport to the Naivasha Inn. Accommodation 1 night Naivasha Inn in lodge accommodation. Free entry to Spa and 1 30 minute treatment.

What the price does not include:

Alcoholic drinks

Personal medication

Optional day 3/ 4 Option B, Costs do not include additional treatments

### **Equipment / Clothes needed:**

Anti-malaria prophylactics

Toiletries:

Soap, shampoo, plasters, moisturiser, sun-cream, pain-killers, blister tape, small first aid kit

### **Clothes**

A good sun-hat

Lightweight full length walking trousers

Sun-glasses

Firm Walking Shoes

Fleece

Full sleeve walking shirt

Swimming costume

Clothes and light shoes to wear in tents

Waterproof wind-cheater /

Vehicles equipped with basic first aid kits and fire extinguishers. See our health and safety policy for full supporting information.

### **Health requirements, dangers and experience**

You should have a good general level of background fitness and be able to walk for 3-4 hours on undulating terrain.

Minimum 12 years age

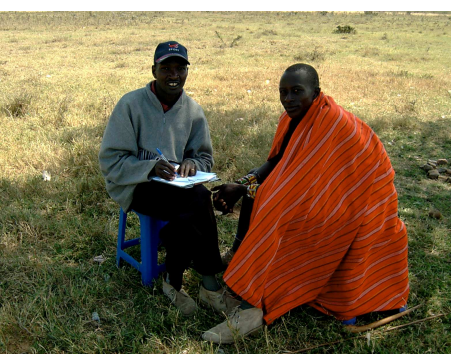
## Your Guides



**Mick Thompson:** Mick feel in love with Africa in 1989 when a nine month trip turned into 12 years living and working in many of east and Southern Africa's National Parks. The five years spent working amongst the people of the Maasai Mara in gaining his PhD instilled a passion for Kenya's wildlife and Maasai culture. A trip with Mick will allow you to delve a little deeper into the flora, fauna and social history of the area.



**David Ashby:** David comes from a fine travelling tradition. He has devoted most of his life to seeking out delightful places and wonderful people to share them with. David spent three years in Asia and Australia, climbing every mountain and volcano in sight, diving in every stretch of clear water and leading treks in the Himalyas. More recently David has built up his own successful European travel business after having travelled to most corners of Europe working for the best travel companies available



**Martine Oloilegero:** Martine was born on Ol Kenyei near to the Mara River, and has assisted with most of the major census and socio-economic surveys in the Mara over the last 10 years. He holds a business degree from Nairobi University and through his work, family and clan ties has worked with many of Maasai leaders living adjacent to the Park.

**John Ole Mpoe** was born on Siana next to the Maasia Mara Game Reserve, and was a formidable Il Keshili age set warrior. John is a humble and knowledgeable guide, and extremely capable, building up a large herd of livestock through his skill and wisdom. He has trecked cattle from Mara into northern Tanzania, to above the western Mara escarpment and into Nairobi. He knows most of the useful plants and their uses from a life spent living with his cattle