



Southern Kenya

At first glance the southern corner of Kenya may look like an expanse of blank space bisected by the Nairobi–Mombasa road, but really nothing could be further from the truth. This relatively small stretch between Kenya's two most important cities is largely taken up by the country's biggest national park and its most famous views, hugging the border with Tanzania where the slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro meet the Amboseli plains, and while it may not be as contoured as the highlands there's no shortage of remarkable things to see.

The parks are the best reason to visit southern Kenya, whether you opt for the classic but crowded vistas of Amboseli, explore the dark lava fields and caves of the Chyulu Hills, seek out leopards and rhinos in the diverse habitats of Tsavo West or skirt the green swathe of the Galana River in the vast emptiness of Tsavo East. With a range of tented camps, lodges, bandas and campsites awaiting the weary traveller, it's certainly no hardship finding somewhere to wake up in the wild, and off the main trails you'll rarely be bothered by others.

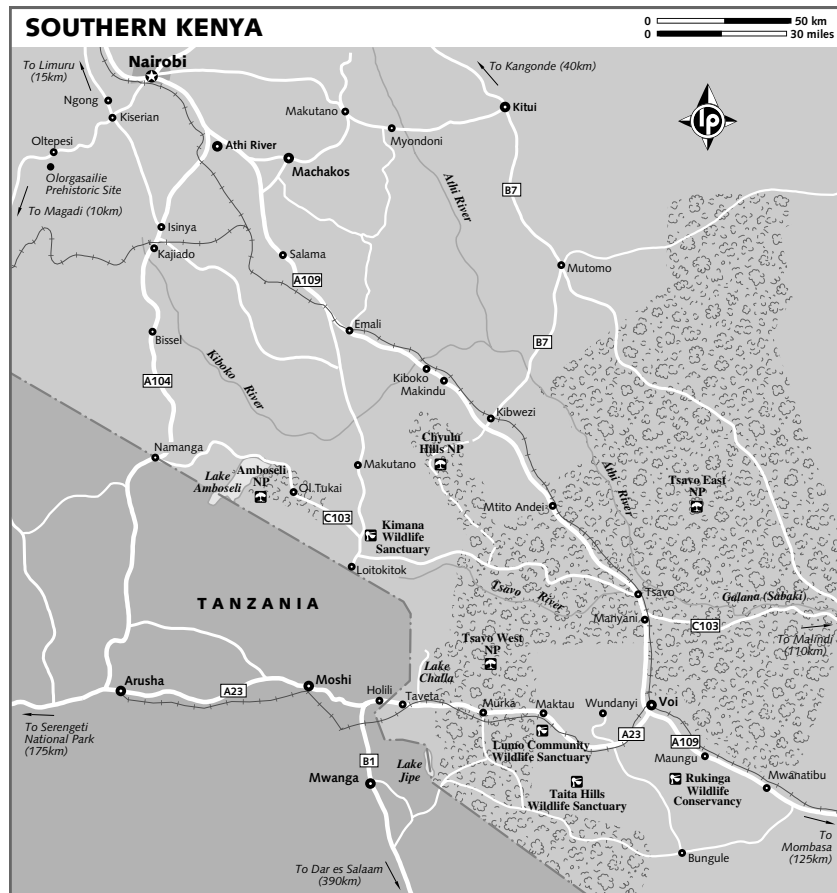
Outside the parks, community reserves and projects fight the good conservation fight at a grass-roots level, offering opportunities for visitors to give something back to the region. Walkers can also lose themselves in the surprising greenery of the hills around Voi.

However badly you want to get to Mombasa, stopping off to sample some of this area's attractions could transform your journey from a chore to a revelation. Bear it in mind as you negotiate yet another set of roadworks on the highway.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shooting wildlife – with a camera of course – and Kilimanjaro in **Amboseli National Park** (p137)
- Doing your bit for local communities at the many private **wildlife sanctuaries** (p149)
- Exploring the varied delights of **Tsavo West National Park** (p143), including the epic Shetani Lava Flow and the hippo pools at Mzima Springs
- Braving the country's scariest lions and elephants in the wilds of **Tsavo East National Park** (p145)
- Getting away from the open plains in the moist greenery of the **Taita Hills** (p149)





Climate

Falling between central Kenya and the coast, this area tends to be hot and dry, with average temperatures around 30°C, but still experiences heavy rainfall from March to June and from October to November.

National Parks & Reserves

Between Nairobi and Voi you'll find Amboseli, Chyulu Hills, Tsavo West and Tsavo East National Parks and the Ngai-Ndethya National Reserve. There are also a number of private conservation areas around, including Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary, Lumo Community Wildlife Sanctuary, Taita Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and Rukinga Wildlife Conservancy.

Getting There & Around

The main towns here are easily accessible by public transport, especially those strung out along the Nairobi–Mombasa road. However, trying to visit the national parks independently can be a logistical nightmare without your own transport; most people take the easy option and visit on an organised safari from Nairobi or Mombasa.

BISSEL

☎ 045

On your way from Nairobi to Namanga, it's worth stopping in the little community of Bissel, a vibrant Maasai township with a busy market where you can buy all sorts of tribal objects and everyday goods. Facilities

include a petrol station, a handful of *dukas* (shops), a freight container selling wholesale soft drinks and plenty of small bars and *hotelis* (eateries). You'll be a bit of a novelty, but people are very friendly, and if you feel like stretching your legs the hilly grasslands surrounding the town are good for a light walk.

There are matatus running from Bissel to Nairobi (KSh200, one hour) and Namanga (KSh100, one hour).

NAMANGA

☎ 045

A large township has grown up around the Tanzanian border at Namanga, and it's a good place to break the journey to Arusha or Amboseli, with some nice places to stay and a surprisingly relaxed atmosphere away from the frontier itself. The border crossing is open 24 hours and the two posts are almost next to each other, so you can walk across. Moneychangers do a brisk trade on the Kenyan side of the border if you need them, but don't believe anyone who says you can't take Kenyan shillings into Tanzania or vice versa!

Numerous Maasai women come here to sell bead jewellery and other Maasai crafts, and will materialise like magic around tourist vehicles, especially at the petrol stations. There's some great stuff on offer, but you'll have to haggle like a pro to get a bargain.

Namanga River Hotel (☎ 5132070; namangariverhotel@yahoo.com; camping KSh300, s/d KSh1550/2300) This is a posh affair with nice cottages, a good restaurant and bar, and a shady camping area, often booked out by overland groups. Half and full board are available, and for an extra KSh500 per person you can live it up in the 'Exclusive' rooms, excellent stone-floored accommodation with individual boilers in the bathrooms. Animal lovers should ignore the rugs and concentrate on the happy resident dogs and rabbits.

Namanga Safari Lodge (☎ 0735-249527; camping KSh300, d/tw KSh600) Just next door. The grand name doesn't quite fit the cheap and cheerful accommodation here, though a garden full of stucco animals goes some way towards creating a safari atmosphere. Meals are available on request, and the staff are generally eager to please.

Aslam Hotel (meals KSh100-140) A loyal crowd swears by this very friendly little cafeteria

where you can get the works without worrying about the price – meat, rice, fried cabbage, beans, sauce and a drink should easily come in under KSh160. It's on the left just past the police barrier.

Getting There & Away

The large Kobil petrol station marks the turn-off to Amboseli and is a good place to ask around for transport – overland trucks and safari groups pass through quite regularly, so there's a vague chance of finding a lift into the park or across the border. Otherwise, locals may be willing to take you into Amboseli, though this won't be particularly cheap. Fill your tank here if you're driving into the park.

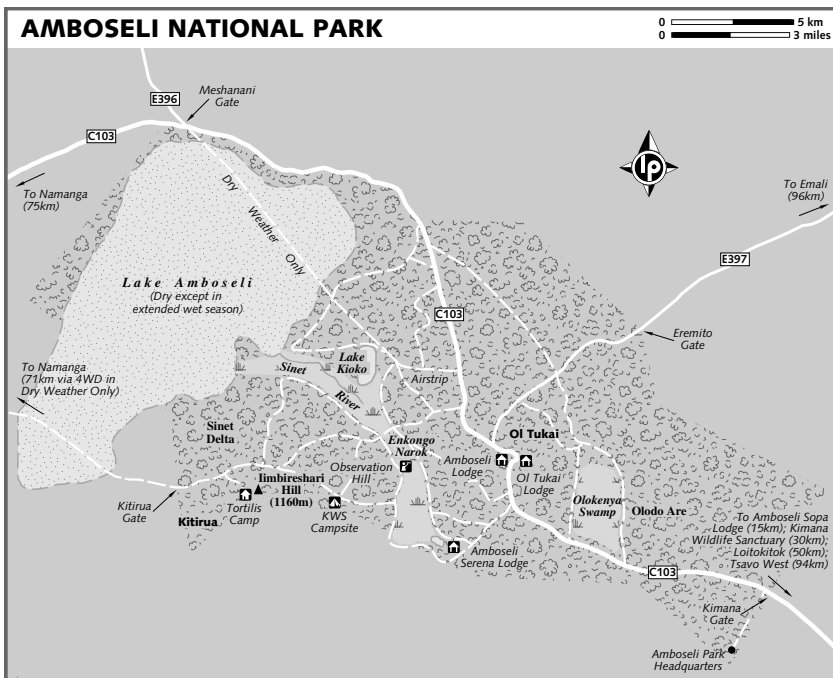
Buses between Nairobi and Arusha pass through daily (KSh250, two hours). Matatus also run here from the junction of River Rd and Ronald Ngala St in Nairobi (KSh250); Peugeot (shared taxis) on the same route charge KSh300.

Akamba has an office at the Kobil station, where you can book seats on the morning bus to Arusha. Several other companies also cover this route, as do matatus and Peugeots from the Tanzanian side of the border (KSh200 to KSh250, 1½ hours). For more details on getting to/from Tanzania see p373.

AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK

Amboseli (☎ 045-622251; nonresident adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) is the most popular park in Kenya after the Masai Mara, mainly because of the spectacular backdrop of Africa's highest peak, Mt Kilimanjaro, which broods over the southern boundary of the park. Cloud cover can render the mountain's massive bulk invisible for much of the day, but the two lodges in the centre of the park are perfectly placed for those classic early morning views.

As well as being a prominent part of the country's tourist portfolio, the park has been at the centre of some controversy since President Kibaki's 2005 decision to downgrade it from a national park to a national reserve, transferring its administration from the KWS to local authorities. Supporters claim that the move rightfully returns control of the land to the Maasai community, but many conservation bodies have argued that it's simply a political move aimed at securing the Maasai vote, and that degazetting parks



is an illegal move that could undermine Kenya's whole wildlife preservation system. In the wake of his crushing defeat on the constitution referendum, Kibaki's next move on this issue will doubtless come under heavy scrutiny.

At 392 sq km, Amboseli is a small park and lacks the profusion of animal species found in the Masai Mara, but as the landscape provides limited cover for wildlife you have a good chance of seeing some of the larger predators. The vegetation here used to be much denser, but rising salinity, damage by elephants and irresponsible behaviour by safari vehicles has caused terrible erosion. Amboseli can turn into a real dustbowl in the dry season.

Buffaloes, lions, gazelles, cheetahs, wildebeests, hyenas, jackals, warthogs, zebras, Masai giraffes and baboons are all present, but the last few black rhinos were moved to Tsavo West in 1995 after a sustained period of poaching. In the permanent swamps of Enkongo Narok and Olokenya, large elephant herds can be seen grazing with Mt Kilimanjaro in the background, probably the

definitive Kenyan wildlife shot (and available on innumerable postcards if you can't snap it yourself!).

Erosion and grass die-off is having a dramatic effect at Amboseli; the rains seem to provide less relief every season, and it's only a matter of years before the lack of food makes the animals move on. It's important for vehicles to stick to the defined tracks to avoid making things any worse. Hopefully others will follow suit and the grasslands that drew all these animals here in the first place can be preserved.

Sleeping & Eating

All lodge prices given here are for full board. For nonguests, a buffet lunch at any of the big lodges will cost US\$18 to US\$25.

Tortilis Camp (Nairobi ☎ 020-604053; www.chelipea.com; s/d low season US\$340/520, high season US\$400/640) This wonderfully conceived site is one of the most exclusive ecolodges in Kenya, commanding a superb elevated spot with perfect Kilimanjaro vistas. The name comes from the *Acacia tortilis* trees surrounding the luxury permanent tents. Food is cooked with-

out firewood, solar power heats the water and there's a huge organic vegetable garden. The rather daunting prices include transfers, wildlife drives, guided walks, cultural visits, laundry and most drinks, but not park fees or fancy wine. During the 'premium' season (Christmas/New Year and August to mid-September) rates rise by US\$65 per person.

Ol Tukai Lodge (Nairobi ☎ 020-4445514; oltukai@mitsuminet.com; s/d low season US\$114/143, high season US\$176/220; 🚰) This lodge belongs to the Block Hotels group. It's a splendid place, with soaring *makuti* (thatched palm-leaved) roofs and tranquil shaded gardens. The split-level bar has wonderful views and the overall atmosphere is of peace and luxury. Two of the attractive wooden cottages have wheelchair access.

Amboseli Serena Lodge (Nairobi ☎ 020-2710511; www.serenahotels.com; s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$210/260; 🚰) Posh Serena hotel in jungle-like gardens near the southern perimeter of the park. The low red adobe-style cottages make a change from the usual *makuti*, the very stylish lobby bar makes great use of hanging gourds and the nearby Enkongo Narok swamp ensures constant bird and animal activity.

Amboseli Lodge (☎ 045-622440; s/d/tr low season US\$70/90/122, high season s/d US\$117/180; 🚰) This lodge consists of a number of comfortable wooden cabins dotted around an expansive lawn and garden with sweeping Kili views. Quite a few tour groups drop in for lunch.

Amboseli Sopa Lodge (Nairobi ☎ 020-3750460; www.sopalodges.com; s/d low season US\$78/120, high season US\$162/260; 🚰) Just outside the park boundaries, the Sopa is a friendly chain lodge offering spacious thatched accommodation in round orange clay huts. If you're heading out of Amboseli the Tsavo convoy convenes nearby, and it's a good spot to refuel.

KWS campsite (camping per adult/child US\$10/2) Just inside the southern boundary of the park, with toilets, an unreliable water supply (bring your own) and a bar selling warm beer and soft drinks. It's fenced off from the wildlife so you can walk around safely at night. *Don't* keep food in your tent, though, as baboons visit during the day looking for a feed.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Airkenya has daily flights between Wilson Airport in Nairobi and Amboseli (US\$88,

one hour), departing from Nairobi at 7.30am. The return flight leaves Amboseli at 8.30am. Mombasa Air Safari flies here from Mombasa and Diani (US\$220) on the coast.

You'll need to arrange with one of the lodges or a safari company for a vehicle to meet you at the airstrip.

CAR & 4WD

The usual approach to Amboseli is via Namanga. The road is sealed and in surprisingly good condition from Nairobi to Namanga; the 75km dirt road to the Meshanani Gate is pretty rough but passable (allow around four hours from Nairobi). In the dry season it's also possible to enter through Kitirua Gate, but this is a bumpy old road and it's hard to follow. The track branches right off the main Amboseli road after about 15km.

Some people also enter from the east via the Amboseli-Tsavo West road, although this track is in a bad way and shouldn't be considered in a conventional vehicle. During the 1990s there were bandit attacks in this area, so vehicles have to travel together, accompanied by armed guards. Convoys leave from the Tsavo turn-off, near the Sopa Lodge, at around 7am, 9am and 1pm. Allow 2½ hours to cover the 94km from Amboseli to the Chyulu Gate at Tsavo West.

Self-drivers will need a 4WD to make the most of the park. Petrol is available at the Serena and Sopa lodges.

KIMANA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

About 30km east of Amboseli, near the road connecting Amboseli to Tsavo West, is this 40-hectare **wildlife sanctuary** (admission US\$10, vehicle KSh100). It's owned and run by local Maasai, and wildlife is just as plentiful here as in Amboseli. It was set up with the help of Usaid and the KWS in 1996 and has been an encouraging template for similar initiatives, particularly now that the African Safari Club has set up several properties here.

The only access to this area is the poorly maintained dirt track leading west from Emali (on the Nairobi-Mombasa road) to Loitokitok on the Tanzanian border, or the even more diabolical road between Amboseli and Tsavo West.

There's officially no need to join the Tsavo convoy if you're coming here from Amboseli, but the area south of Kimana has a reputation for banditry.

Sleeping

There are three guarded **campsites** (KSh150) within the sanctuary itself, and numerous luxury camps are dotted around the bush just off the road towards Tsavo West.

Nyati Safari Camp (☎ 042-32506; www.nyaticamp.com; s/d low season US\$85/150, high season US\$100/180) This is a very stylish Italian-run operation with just 10 tents aligned to face Mt Kilimanjaro. It's 16km outside Tsavo West.

Campi ya Kanzi (Nairobi ☎ 020-605349; www.campi.yakanzi.com; s/d from US\$480/740) A luxury tented camp on a 400-sq-km Maasai-run conservation project. It's centred on a nostalgically decorated stone cottage and offers extremely comfortable tents with fine views. Rates include, well, almost everything except transfers, champagne, insurance and tips. A US\$30 conservation fee applies.

Elsewhere in the sanctuary, Kimana Zebra Lodge, Leopard Lodge, Kilimanjaro Camp and Twiga Camp are all run by the private African Safari Club (p346).

LOITOKITOK

☎ 045
This rambling little border post, nestling in a permanent layer of powdery moon dust with Kilimanjaro peeking through the clouds above, is about halfway between Namanga and Tsavo East and has a certain offbeat charm, though it's not the most convenient base for the region's attractions.

Annoyingly, non-Kenyans aren't allowed to cross into Tanzania here, except as part of a tour with Kibo Slopes Safaris. This company operates out of **Kibo Slopes Cottages** (☎ 045-622091; kibocot@nbnct.co.ke; s/d/tr low season KSh1000/ 1800/2100, high season US\$35/60/75, cottages low/high season KSh3300/US\$60), a neat bungalow lodge on the main road into town. Rates here include breakfast and other meals are available.

It's possible to get here by matatu from Emali, just off the Nairobi–Mombasa road (KSh300), but it's a bumpy, dusty ride.

MAKINDU

☎ 045
This dusty junction town 45km northwest of Mito Andei is worth a visit for the **Makindu Handicraft Cooperative Society**, a community project that employs 120 displaced Akamba people who produce excellent woodcarvings from renewable woods (see p57). The Sikh

and Muslim faiths are vying for the attention of the townspeople here with two huge hospitals and religious centres. The ornate Sikh *gurdwara* (pilgrim's hostel) welcomes visitors and you can stay here overnight for a small fee; it's even recommended on www.sikhnet.com!

The best place to stay in this area is the **Hunter's Lodge** (☎ 622490; www.madahotels.com; camping KSh1000, s/d/tr KSh2500/3400/4200), situated 14km before Makindu (coming from Nairobi) on the Nairobi–Mombasa road. It's a relaxed hotel with comfortable rooms that overlook the river (fishing trips are available) and there are massive marabou storks in the acacia trees. The restaurant serves big buffet meals.

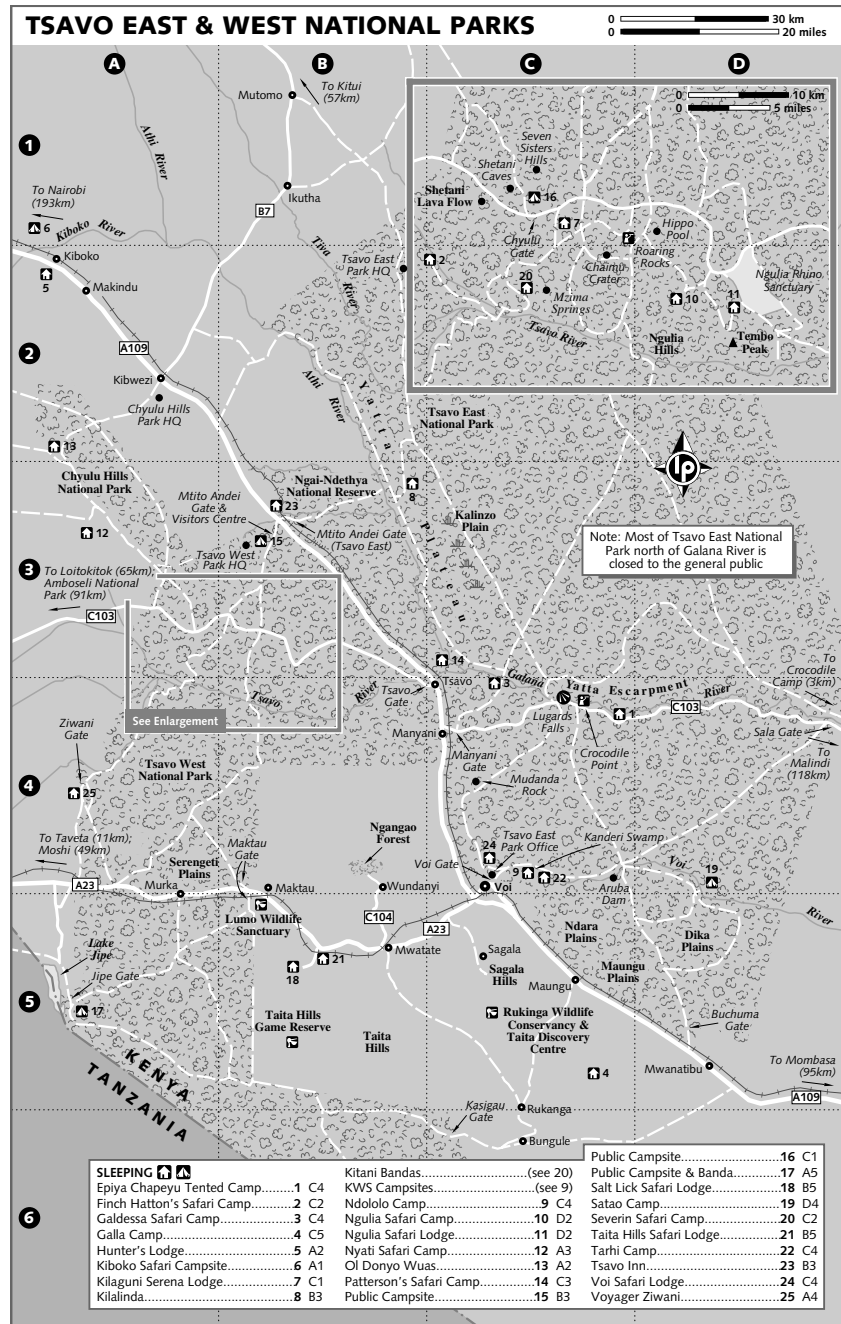
CHYULU HILLS NATIONAL PARK

Found northwest of Tsavo West National Park are the dramatic **Chyulu Hills** (adult/child US\$15/5), a collection of ancient volcanic cinder cones. The hills were gazetted as a national park in 1983 and have splendid views of Mt Kilimanjaro and populations of elands, giraffes, zebras and wildebeests, plus a small number of elephants, lions and buffaloes.

Within the Chyulu Hills is Leviathan, the longest **lava tube** in the world, formed by hot lava flowing beneath a cooled crust. You'll need full caving equipment to explore it. Caving and trekking trips in the hills are possible with **Savage Wilderness Safaris Ltd** (Nairobi ☎ 020-2521590; www.whitewaterkenya.com; Sarit Centre, Westlands).

Although there's loads to see, the park lacks even basic infrastructure, though there has been a serious drive to open it up for tourism in the last few years. Forced evictions in 1997 have still not removed the problems of local communities damaging the ecosystem, and poaching is a big problem here, taking such a toll on the park's smaller animals that poachers have had to start targeting larger game. In May 2005 alone over 500 illegal snares were found.

The **park headquarters** (PO Box 458, Kibwezi) are 1.3km inside the northwest gate, not far from Kibwezi on the Nairobi–Mombasa road. For the time being, the best access is on the west side of the park, from the track between Amboseli and Tsavo West. The track into the hills from the headquarters is extremely tough going.



Sleeping

Ol Donyo Wuas (Nairobi ☎ 020-600457; www.richardbonhamsafaris.com; s/d from US\$400/640; 📶) With no facilities inside the park, this is perhaps the most convenient option, an innovative ecolodge that recycles water and uses solar power. The cottages here are built from local materials and a US\$20 conservation fee is charged to fund local community projects, including conservation, water projects and health services. Rates include wildlife drives and horse riding in the surrounding wildlife sanctuary.

Kiboko Safari Campsite (☎ 0721-312842; camping KSh500) A basic campsite outside the park at Kiboko, near Hunter's Lodge. It's supposedly open but staff seem utterly unprepared for anything as complicated as visitors.

Another nearby option is Nyati Safari Camp (p140).

Getting There & Away

Until the road from Kibwezi is brought up to standard, your best bet to get here is the 4WD track that branches off the Amboseli–Tsavo West road about 10km west of Chyulu Gate. Ol Donyo Wuas can be reached via this track, although most guests fly in on air charters from Nairobi.

The park headquarters is signposted just outside Kibwezi, about 41km northwest of Mtito Andei on the main Nairobi–Mombasa road.

SHETANI LAVA FLOW & CAVES

About 4km west of the Chyulu Gate of Tsavo West National Park on the road to Amboseli are the spectacular **Shetani lava flows**. This vast expanse of folded black lava spreads for 50 sq km across the savanna at the foot of the Chyulu Hills, looking strangely as if Vesuvius dropped its comfort blanket here. The last major eruption here is believed to have taken place around 200 years ago, but there are still few plants among the cinders. It's possible to follow the lava flows back from the Amboseli–Tsavo West road to the ruined cinder cone of Shetani (from the Swahili for 'devil'), at the foot of the Chyulu Hills. The views are spectacular, but you need to be wary of wildlife in this area.

Nearby are the **Shetani Caves**, which are also a result of volcanic activity. You'll need a torch (flashlight) if you want to explore, but watch your footing on the razor-sharp rocks

and keep an eye out for the local fauna – we've heard rumours that the caves are sometimes inhabited by hyenas!

TSAVO NATIONAL PARK

At nearly 22,000 sq km, Tsavo is the largest national park in Kenya. For administrative and practical purposes, it has been split into Tsavo West National Park (9000 sq km) and Tsavo East National Park (11,747 sq km), divided by the Nairobi–Mombasa road (A109). Both parks feature some excellent scenery but the undergrowth is considerably higher than in Amboseli or Masai Mara, so it takes a little more effort to spot the wildlife, particularly the big predators. The compensation for this is that the landscapes are some of the most dramatic in Kenya, the animals are that little bit wilder (you really don't want to mess with a Tsavo elephant) and the parks receive comparatively few visitors compared to the hordes who descend on Amboseli and the Masai Mara.

The northern half of Tsavo West is the most developed, with a number of excellent lodges and several places you can get out of your vehicle and walk. The landscape here is made of volcanic hills and sweeping expanses of savanna. The southern part of the park, on the far side of the dirt road between Voi and Taveta on the Tanzanian border, is rarely visited.

Tsavo East is more remote, but there are a number of lodges, and, refreshingly, a number of independent budget tented camps. Most of the action here is concentrated along the Galana River; the north part of the park is bandit country and isn't really secure. The landscape here is drier, with rolling plains hugging the edge of the Yatta Escarpment, a vast prehistoric lava flow.

During the dry season, the landscape in both parks is dusty and parched, but it erupts into colour at the end of the wet season, although, of course, that means there's more greenery to hide the wildlife.

Both parks were once the lands of the Orma, Watta, Maasai and Kamba people, but all the villagers were displaced when the park was gazetted. Some of these communities have now established wildlife sanctuaries and group ranches on the outskirts of the park. Tsavo had terrible problems with poachers during the 1980s, when the elephant population dropped from 45,000 to

just 5000 and rhinos were almost wiped out entirely.

Populations are slowly recovering and there are now about 9000 elephants in the two parks, but less than 100 rhinos, down from about 9000 in 1969. The last few years have once again seen a worrying upsurge in poaching.

Information

Entry is US\$27/10 per adult/child per day, vehicles cost KSh200 and camping is US\$10 per adult; as the two parks are administered separately you have to pay separate entrance fees for each. Both use the smartcard system – you'll need enough credit for your vehicle, entry fee and any camping charges for as long as you're staying. Smartcards can be bought and recharged at the Voi Gate to Tsavo East.

There's a small **visitor centre** (admission free; ☎ 8am–5pm) near the Mtito Andei Gate to Tsavo West, with interesting displays on conservation issues and some of the animals and birds in the park.

All the track junctions in Tsavo East and Tsavo West have numbered and signposted cairns, which in theory makes navigation fairly simple. In practice, some signposts are missing and the numbering system is often confusing, so a map is helpful. Survey of Kenya publishes a *Tsavo East National Park* map (KSh500) and a newer *Tsavo West National Park* map (KSh700). Both are available from the main entrance gates and the visitor centre at Tsavo West. Tourist Maps' *Tsavo National Parks* (KSh250) covers both parks.

Fuel is available at Kilaguni Serena and Ngulia Safari lodges in Tsavo West, and at Voi Safari Lodge in Tsavo East.

Tsavo West National Park

This fine national park covers a huge variety of landscapes, from swamps and natural springs to rocky peaks, extinct volcanic cones to rolling plains and sharp reddish outcrops dusted with greenery. It's easily the more attractive of the two parks, but wildlife can be hard to spot because of the dense scrub. Birds are very common and there are large populations of elephants, zebras, hippos and leopards. Lions are out there, but they tend to stay hidden.

The focus is **Mzima Springs**, which produces an incredible 93 million gallons of fresh water

a day. The springs are the source of the bulk of Mombasa's fresh water and you can walk down to a large pool that is a favourite haunt of hippos and crocodiles. There's an underwater viewing chamber, which unfortunately just gives a view of thousands of primeval-looking fish. Be a little careful here – both hippos and crocs are potentially dangerous.

Chaimu Crater, just southeast of Kilaguni Serena Lodge and the **Roaring Rocks** viewpoint, can be climbed in about 15 minutes. The views from either spot are stunning, with falcons, eagles and buzzards whirling over the plains. While there is little danger when walking these trails, be aware that the wildlife is still out there so keep your eyes open.

Another attraction is the **Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary**, at the base of Ngulia Hills, part of the Rhino Ark program. It's close to Ngulia Safari Lodge, but a long drive from anywhere else. The 70-sq-km area is surrounded by a 1m-high electric fence and provides a measure of security for the park's last 49 black rhinos. There are driving tracks and waterholes within the enclosed area and there's a good chance of seeing one of these elusive creatures. Large numbers of elephants, buffaloes and other species have also moved into the enclosure.

Some of the more unusual species to look out for in the park include the naked mole rat, which can sometimes be seen kicking sand from its burrows, and the enigmatically named white-bellied go-away bird, which is often seen perched in dead trees. Red-beaked hornbills and bateleur eagles are also common. Look out for dung beetles rolling huge balls of elephant dung along the tracks.

It's possible to go **rock-climbing** at Tembo Peak and the Ngulia Hills but you'll need to arrange this in advance with the **park warden** (☎ 043-622483). This area is also fantastic for birdlife and there's a very reliable hippo pool on the Mukui River, near the Ngulia Safari Lodge.

Lake Jipe (*ji-pay*), at the southwest end of the park, is reached by a desperately dusty track from near Taveta. You can hire boats at the campsite to take you hippo and crocodile spotting on the lake (US\$5). Huge herds of elephants come to the lake to drink and large flocks of migratory birds stop here from February to May.

SLEEPING**Budget & Midrange**

Apart from camping in the park itself, the only vaguely budget options are the basic board and lodgings in the roadside town of Mtito Andei, near the Mtito Andei Gate, but most are pretty seedy and often serve as brothels for long-haul truck drivers.

Ngulia Safari Camp (Voi ☎ 043-30050; tsavoh@africaonline.co.ke; r KSh3500-6000) Formerly Ngulia Bandas, new management and a complete renovation have turned this hillside camp into Tsavo's best luxury bargain. Unusually, it's the self-catering accommodation that really shines, offering thatched tent-fronted stone cottages on the edge of the escarpment overlooking a stream where leopards are known to hide out. There are rooms without kitchen and a bar-restaurant for the won't-cooks (dinner KSh750) and some more building is in progress. All in all, the setting and standards outdo plenty of the more ambitious lodges at a fraction of the price, with lots of wildlife (inside and out!).

Kitani Bandas (Mombasa ☎ 041-5485001; www.severin-kenya.com; bandas/d/tr US\$50/65) Run by the same people as the top-end luxury Severin Safari Camp. Accommodation here is obviously much simpler than the flash, tented kind but it's great value and there's a small shop providing supplies at not-too-inflated prices. Bandas No 2 and 3 hog the nicest spots, with possibly the cheapest Kili views in the park. It's about 2km past its sister site, near a waterhole.

Public campsites (per adult/child US\$10/5) The public sites are at Komboyo, near the Mtito Andei Gate, and at Chyulu, just outside the Chyulu Gate.

Special campsites (per adult/child US\$15/5) The locations of these bush sites change from time to time so check with the **warden** (☎ 045-622483). Write to: Assistant Director, Tsavo West National Park, PO Box 71, Mtito Andei.

Down on Lake Jipe are some simple **bandas** (KSh1000) and a **campsite** (KSh200).

Top End

All prices listed following are for full board accommodation.

Severin Safari Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-5485001; www.severin-kenya.com; s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$156/240) At Kitani, this is a fantastic complex of thatched luxury tents with affable staff, Kilimanjaro views from the communal

lounge area and nightly hippo visitations. Room facilities are excellent (you even get a bidet), and the only reason it's not classed as a four or five-star establishment is the lack of a pool, which seems unduly harsh. The camp also has a self-catering annexe, Kitani Bandas (see left).

Kilaguni Serena Lodge (☎ 045-340000; www.serena-hotels.com; s/d low season US\$80/160, high season US\$210/260, ste US\$565; 🍷 🍷) Kilaguni has recently been renovated and is as attractive a place as ever, with a splendid bar and restaurant overlooking a busy illuminated waterhole – the vista stretches all the way from Mt Kilimanjaro to the Chyulu Hills, and guided walks in the nearby Seven Sisters Hills are possible. The extravagant suites are practically cottages in their own right, boasting chintzy living rooms, minibars, TVs and large balconies.

Finch Hatton's Safari Camp (Nairobi ☎ 020-553237; www.finchhattons.com; s/d/tr low season US\$210/285/427, high season US\$260/370/555; 🍷 🍷) An upmarket tented camp with bone china and gold shower taps, named after Denys Finch-Hatton, the playboy hunter and lover of Karen Blixen, who died at Tsavo. It's situated among springs and hippo pools in the west of the park, in grounds so sprawling you have to take an escort at night to keep you safe from the animals. In keeping with the colonial mood, guests are requested to dress for dinner. The camp has its own airstrip (flights from Nairobi cost US\$300).

Voyager Ziwani (☎ 043-30506; www.heritage-east-africa.com; s/d low season US\$130/180, high season US\$220/295; 🍷) By the Zimani Gate at the southwest end of the park is another luxury tented place, overlooking the Ziwa Dam. As well as wildlife walks, you can visit WWII battlefields and Grogan's Castle, a fortress-like hilltop residence built in the 19th century by swashbuckling British adventurer Ewart Grogan, who became famous for walking from Cape Town to Cairo to prove his love for a woman!

Ngulia Safari Lodge (☎ 043-30000; ngulialodge@kenya-safari.co.ke; full board s/d low season US\$80/160/228, s/d/tr high season US\$150/200/280; 🍷) A curiously unattractive block in a spectacular location, constructed in the bad old days of emerging mass tourism when hotels made little effort to blend in. The surrounding Ngulia Hills attract loads of birds and the lodge puts out bait for leopards, which guarantees you a

sighting, if not exactly a place in ecoawareness heaven. There's a waterhole right by the restaurant and sweeping views over the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary on the other side.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The main access to Tsavo West is through the Mtito Andei Gate on the Mombasa–Nairobi road in the north of the park, where you'll find the park headquarters and visitor centre. The main track cuts straight across to Kilaguni Serena Lodge and Chyulu Gate. Security is a problem here, so vehicles for Amboseli travel in armed convoys, leaving Kilaguni Serena Lodge at 8am and 10am.

Another 48km southeast along the main road is the Tsavo Gate. It is handy for the Ngulia Hills lodges and the rhino sanctuary. Few people use the Maktau Gate on the Voi–Taveta road in the south of the park.

The tracks here are only really suitable for 4WDs, and the roads in the south of the park are particularly challenging.

Tsavo East National Park

The landscape in Tsavo East is flatter and drier than in Tsavo West, despite the fact that

one of Kenya's largest rivers flows through the middle of the park. The main track through the park follows the Galana River from the Tsavo Gate to the Sala Gate. The park headquarters, where you can charge and buy smartcards, is at Voi Gate.

Much of the wildlife spotting is concentrated on the Galana River, which cuts a green gash across the dusty orange plains of the park and supports plentiful crocs and hippos. There are several places along the flat-topped escarpments lining the river where you can get out of your vehicle, with due caution of course. Most scenic are **Lugards Falls**, a wonderful landscape of water-sculpted channels, and **Crocodile Point**, where you may see hippos and crocs. There are usually armed guards around, but you shouldn't get too close to the water. Kudus, waterbucks and dik-diks are common along the river banks. Also of interest is the **Mudanda Rock**, towering over a natural dam near the Manyani Gate, which attracts elephants in the dry season.

The bush is thinner than in Tsavo West, so wildlife is easier to spot, although it's not as plentiful. The rolling hills in the south of the park are home to large herds of elephants,

MAN-EATERS OF TSAVO

The lions of Tsavo National Park are unique in many ways. For a start, the males lack the typical mane that usually distinguishes this species, a fact often attributed to the dense thorn-filled vegetation of their habitat, which makes long hair a real hindrance to free movement. As an Earthwatch study recently revealed, they are also the only lions known to move in social groups with just one single male – most normal prides have one or two younger hangers-on as well as the alpha male.

Remarkably, scientists now believe there may be a single cause for all these idiosyncrasies: testosterone. When tested, Tsavo lions showed noticeably elevated levels of the male sex hormone, which could well be responsible for their hair loss and increased territorial behaviour.

This theory would also explain the famed aggression of the Tsavo lions, which has earned them a reputation as the fiercest predators in Africa. The best-known story concerns just two lions, who ate their way through 140 railway workers in a single year during the 19th century! The surviving workers soon decided that the lions had to be ghosts or devils. A series of ever more ingenious traps was devised by the chief engineer, Colonel JH Patterson, but each time the lions evaded them, striking unerringly at weak points in the camp defences.

Patterson was finally able to bag the first lion by hiding on a flimsy wooden scaffold baited with the corpse of a donkey. The second man-eater was dispatched a short time later, although it took six bullets to bring the massive beast down. Research has shown that the lions had badly damaged teeth, which may have driven them to abandon their normal prey and become man-eaters. Patterson wrote a best-selling book about the experience, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, which was later rather freely filmed as *The Ghost and the Darkness*.

Although there's been nothing to compare to this since, quite a few local people have been attacked over the last decade, so be a little cautious when walking at Chaimu Crater, Mzima Springs or Lugards Falls. Hormonal or not, the Tsavo lions are not to be trifled with.

usually covered in red dust. The action is concentrated around the waterhole at Voi Safari Lodge, and the **Kanderi Swamp**, which is home to a profusion of wildlife and the public campsite. You can expect elephants to stroll through the campsite in the evenings. Further into the park, 30km east of Voi gate, is the **Aruba Dam** built across the Voi River, which also sees loads of wildlife. A lodge has been under construction here for some time.

The area north of the Galana River is dominated by the Yatta Escarpment, a vast prehistoric lava flow, but unfortunately much of this area is off limits because of the ongoing campaign against poachers. During the 1980s, the rhino population here was decimated and there are worrying signs that poaching is once again on the increase. Some observers suggest this resurgence is due to America's so-called 'war on terror', which has closed down other sources of funding for many warlord factions in Somalia.

Until their partial translocation to Tsavo East, the sole surviving population of hirola antelope was found near the Kenya–Somalia border in the south Tana River and Garissa districts. Intense poaching (for meat) and habitat destruction have reduced their numbers from an estimated 14,000 in 1976 to a pitiful 450 today, 100 of them being in Tsavo East. There are also around 48 black rhinos, moved here from Nairobi National Park, although how long they last in this hard-to-police sanctuary remains to be seen.

On the positive side, the recent translocation of 400 elephants from the Shimba Hills National Reserve (see p169) has replenished the populations depleted by poaching, and should herald the start of efforts to rehabilitate the wild northern sector of the park and open it up for tourist activity.

SLEEPING

Budget & Midrange

Camping is essentially your only option if you want to stay in the park but can't spring for a proper lodge. If you don't want to camp but are happy sleeping outside the park, head for Voi (opposite).

Ndololo Camp (☎ 043-30050; tsavoh@africaonline.co.ke; full board s/d/tr low season US\$35/60/80, high season US\$40/70/90) A great-value tented camp run by the owners of the Tsavo Park Hotel in Voi. The 22 comfortable tents have knot-

ted wooden furniture, mosquito nets and canvas toilet and shower cubicles. A buffet lunch here costs KSh850, and there's a good bar. The camp also offers nature walks with Maasai guides. Annoyingly, you have to pay the US\$10 park camping fee on top of the room rates.

Tarhi Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-5486378; kedev@afri.caonline.co.ke; half board s/d US\$60/100) Owned and run by a German company, this is another reasonably priced tented camp right on the edge of the Voi River, about 14km east of Voi Gate. It's a lovely peaceful spot. Rates include meals and wildlife walks with a Maasai guide. It's technically a special campsite, so an additional camping fee of US\$15 is levied.

KWS campsites (☎ 043-30049; tenp@africaonline.co.ke; campsite per adult/child US\$10/5) There's a single camping area with basic toilets near Kanderi Swamp. Elephants wander through here all the time. You can always pop in for a beer or a meal at Ndololo Camp if you book in advance. There are also a few special campsites (adult/child US\$15/5), which move from year to year – inquire in advance.

Top End

Prices given here are all full board.

Voi Safari Lodge (Mombasa ☎ 041-471861; voilodge@kenya-safari.co.ke; s/d low season US\$80/110, high season US\$105/150; 🍷) Just 4km from Voi Gate, this is a cracking lodge owned by Kenya Safari Lodges and Hotels. It's a long, low complex perched on the edge of an escarpment overlooking an incredible sweep of savanna, with a rock-cut swimming pool and a natural waterhole that attracts elephants, buffaloes and the occasional predator. Rather chubby rock hyraxes sun themselves on ledges. Facilities include several restaurants and bars.

Kilalinda (Nairobi ☎ 020-882598; www.private.wilderness.com; s/d low season US\$350/524, high season US\$393/612; 🍷) Proof that even top-end resorts can take environmental issues seriously, this very fine ecolodge was built without felling a single tree. Accommodation is in luxury cottages; if you really want to splash out, opt for the Twiga Suite (single/double US\$525/786), which has its own private Jacuzzi. All guests pay a US\$20 conservation fee that goes into assisting local community projects and maintaining the surrounding wildlife conservancy.

Satao Camp (Mombasa ☎ 041-475074; www.satao.camp.com; s/d low season US\$80/120, high season US\$160/200)

On the Voi River, this is a popular upmarket tented camp run by top-class operator Southern Cross Safaris. It's nicely laid out, with 20 canopied tents surrounding a waterhole, and you can take guided bush walks (US\$30) and hire jeeps for wildlife drives (US\$100 per day). A sister camp, Satao Rock Camp, in the Taita Hills reserve should now be open for business.

Galdessa Safari Camp (Nairobi ☎ 020-7123156; www.galdessa.com; s/d low season US\$336/512, high season US\$446/684; 🚫 closed May) On the Galana River, 15km west of Lugards Falls, this place is close to the rhino sanctuary and is heavily involved in rhino conservation projects. It's very ecofriendly but frighteningly expensive, especially if you wish to book the eight tents for exclusive use. These rates include wildlife drives.

The following places are booked through **Let's Go Travel** (☎ 020-340331; www.lets-go-travel.net) in Nairobi.

Epiya Chapeyu Tented Camp (s/d US\$72/144; 🚫 closed Apr-Jul) A decent tented camp in a lovely glade by the Galana River, shaded by some vast palm trees. Wildlife walks and drives are available. The camp is run by an Italian company, and caters mainly for fellow Italians.

Patterson's Safari Camp (s/d low season US\$65/90, high season US\$85/120) Further west is another tented camp with the usual self-contained safari perma-tents. It's a relaxed place, only 9km from Tsavo Gate, and it sits on the spot where Patterson finally hunted down the man-eaters of Tsavo. So far no vengeful lion spirits (or relatives) have turned up to try and get their own back...

The African Safari Club (p346) owns the tented Crocodile Camp, close to the Sala Gate; there are several more private camps just outside the park here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most tourist safaris enter Tsavo East via the Sala Gate, where a good dirt road runs east for 110km to Malindi (see p208 for details). If you're coming from Nairobi, the Voi Gate (near the town of same name) and the Man-yani Gate (on the Nairobi–Mombasa road) are just as accessible.

Roads within the park are decidedly rough, and a 4WD with decent ground clearance is recommended. Expect longish journey times however you're travelling.

VOI

☎ 043

Small but always busy, Voi is a key service town at the intersection of the Nairobi–Mombasa road and the road to Moshi in Tanzania. The Voi Gate to Tsavo East National Park is just east of the town, and Voi has plenty of cheap places to stay, which is great for travellers who can't afford the safari lodges inside the park. There's a lively market area and a general air of activity, and there are some nice walks in the surrounding hills.

Information

Ashtek Computers (Fariji House) Email facilities.

Bafaigh supermarket Sells camera film.

Doctor (☎ 30139; Fariji House)

Kenya Commercial Bank (☎ 30138; Nairobi–Mombasa road)

Post office (☎ 30253)

Telkom office (Nairobi–Mombasa road)

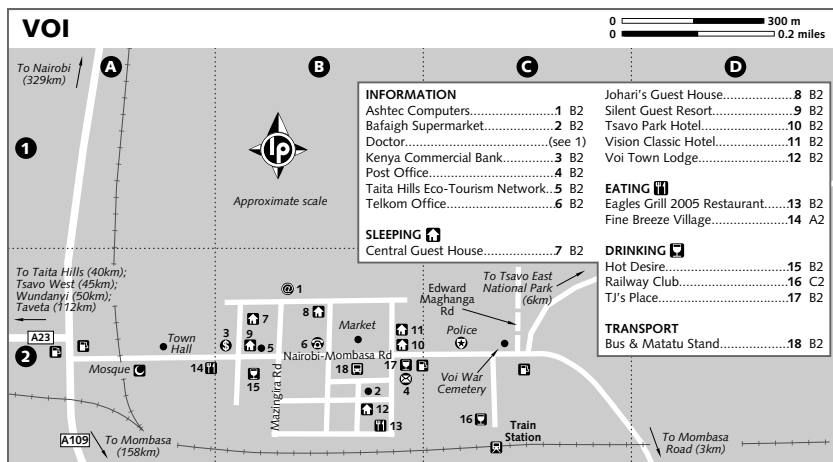
Sleeping

Tsavo Park Hotel (☎ 30050; info@tsavoparkhotel.com; s/d/tr KSh1200/1800/2500) Don't worry about the missing top storey of this central hotel – it's on the way, and until it materialises it's business as usual on the existing floors. The large rooms aren't bad value, with some satellite TVs, but ongoing building means that the plumbing's a bit dodgy (no cold water!). Rates include breakfast, and there's a good-value restaurant. At busy times you may be charged official nonresident rates (single/double/triple US\$40/70/90). The same people run the Ndololo Camp (opposite) in Tsavo East and Ngulia Safari Camp (p144) in Tsavo West, and transfers can be arranged.

Voi Town Lodge (☎ 30705; s/d KSh650/1000, s with shared bathroom KSh400) Resembling a converted meat warehouse, Voi Town Lodge is a friendly and economical alternative to the Tsavo Park Hotel with a handful of odd windowless rooms. Some of the walls don't reach the ceilings and it can get a bit echoey, but it's comfortable enough.

Vision Classic Hotel (☎ 30072; s/d KSh300/500) Upstairs next door to the Tsavo Park Hotel, this is an OK-value place offering clean, basic rooms. The customary dodgy shower-heater attachments provide hot water when the fancy takes them.

Johari's Guest House (☎ 30489; s/d with shared bathroom KSh250/350) A cheap courtyard place



behind a drycleaners, one block north of the main road through Voi. Large signs remind guests that smoking inside a mosquito net may not be the best idea.

Silent Guest Resort (☎ 30112; silentresort@yahoo.com; s/d KSh2200/3200) Technically this has a good claim to be the best hotel in town in terms of facilities, with piped music as an unusual extra, but there's not much justification for the exorbitant price tag and rooms are smaller than at the Tsavo Park Hotel. Safari companies often put up their groups here, hence the inflated rates. Prices include breakfast at the agreeable terrace restaurant.

Central Guest House (s/d with shared bathroom KSh150/200) Ultrabudget, ultrabasic accommodation near the Kenya Commercial Bank.

Eating & Drinking

Most of the guesthouses have reasonable restaurants, particularly the Tsavo Park Hotel, and there are a number of small food *dukas* and cafés around the bus and matatu stand.

Eagles Grill 2005 Restaurant (Voi Town Lodge; mains under KSh100) Also known as Central Vision Café, Voi Town Lodge's house eatery does all the basics, but doesn't serve alcohol.

Fine Breeze Village (☎ 31041; Nairobi-Mombasa road; meals from KSh150) This big leafy beer garden is Voi's top spot for *nyama choma*, and it's not bad for a few Tuskers either.

As Voi is a transport hub, there's a low-key prostitution scene servicing the truck drivers, which can be a hassle in some bars.

For a lively night out, TJ's Place, near the market, is a popular 24-hour spit'n'sawdust bar with a pool table. Hot Desire, a massive *makuti*-thatched club with booming bass, is where the night-time action is, in every sense of the word. The Railway Club, by the station, also hosts occasional big events.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses and matatus run to Mombasa (KSh250, three hours), and buses to Nairobi (KSh500 to KSh800, six hours) pass through town at around 10.30am and midnight. Busstar, Busscar, Mombasa Raha and Akamba all have offices around the bus stand. There are daily matatus to Wundanyi (KSh100, one hour) and Taveta (KSh250, two hours), on the Tanzanian border.

The **train station** (☎ 30098) is south of the town cemetery, at the eastern end of Voi. There are trains to Mombasa (1st/2nd class KSh1410/1130) at around 4am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and to Nairobi (1st/2nd class KSh2100/1475) at around 11pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

At the time of writing, the twice-weekly train to Taveta had been suspended, with no indication when (or if) services will resume. See p373 for information about travel to Tanzania.

AROUND VOI

☎ 043

In the bush on the edge of Tsavo West, there are a number of private and community-

owned nature reserves, all easily accessed from Voi if you have your own transport. The road between Voi and Taveta cuts through the lush hilly areas surrounding Voi and bisects the southern part of Tsavo West, providing some interesting detours for walkers and wildlife spotters.

Rukinga Wildlife Conservancy

This private reserve southeast of Voi covers 68,000 hectares of ranch land between Tsavo East and Tsavo West. **Savannah Camps & Lodges** (Nairobi ☎ 020-331191; www.savannahcamps.com) has an exclusive tourism concession in the area, which is rich in wildlife. The Taita Discovery Centre in the sanctuary offers volunteer workers environmental education and bush adventure courses (see p367), and can also take visitors by arrangement.

Accommodation is provided at **Galla Camp** (s/d US\$132/190), a luxury tented camp within the sanctuary. It is very well run and you can get involved with loads of conservation activities. Rates include full board, transport within the ranch, conservancy fee and guide services. There are bandas for longer stays, though these are primarily for volunteers.

Sagala Hills

If you feel like getting away into rural Kenya but still want to be back in time for dinner, the long rounded ridges of the Sagala Hills provides a convenient but still untouristy diversion into real agricultural life, with all the unbeaten walking tracks your heart could desire. A daily matatu from Voi (KSh80, 45 minutes) struggles its way up the steep winding road to Sagala village, a tiny outpost with a handful of kiosks, where you'll doubtless be greeted with curiosity by the locals and should be able to persuade someone to guide you through the bush or around the *shambas* (farm plots) that cover the undulating hills.

Wundanyi

The provincial capital, Wundanyi, is an interesting place set high in the Taita Hills. It's a nice retreat if the heat of Tsavo gets too much and numerous trails criss-cross the cultivated terraced slopes around town leading to dramatic gorges, waterfalls, cliffs and jagged outcrops. It's easy to find someone to act as a guide, but stout walking boots and a head for heights are essential. Needless to say, the views are spectacular.

Other attractions in the hills include the butterflies of **Ngangao Forest**, a 6km matatu ride northwest to Werugha (KSh60); the huge granite **Wesu Rock** that overlooks Wundanyi; and the **Cave of Skulls** where the Taita people once put the skulls of their ancestors. The original African violets were discovered here, and the UNDP/GEP East Africa Cross Border Biodiversity Project office has more information about local fauna and flora.

The town market, hidden away behind the buildings on the hilltop, sells very cheap *loofas* (sponges made from a kind of squash).

SLEEPING & EATING

Taita Rocks (☎ 0735-651349; r KSh800-2000, per person with shared bathroom KSh400-500) Perched up a slope off the road on the way into town, with views towards Wesu Rock, Taita Rocks is the best of Wundanyi's limited accommodation offerings. The rooms are decent sizes, sleeping up to four people, the staff are frighteningly keen and there's a restaurant and bar, usually with constant TV and/or music.

Hotel Hills View (☎ 0735-273802; s/d with shared bathroom KSh300/450) Just next door, Hills View does indeed have hill views but the six horribly basic rooms are less easy on the eyes. Iffy power and dodgy plywood don't help, but it's cheap and has a terrace restaurant.

New Bistro 35 Cafeteria (mains from KSh80) This cheerfully painted eatery is on the left just past the post office as you head up the hill to the main market.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent matatu services run between Wundanyi and Voi (KSh120, one hour). Leave Wundanyi by around 8.30am if you want to connect with the morning buses to Nairobi from Voi. There are also direct matatus to Mombasa (KSh300, four to five hours) and an irregular morning service to Nairobi (KSh600, seven hours).

Taita Hills

South of the dirt road from Voi to Taveta, are the Taita Hills, a fertile area of verdant hills and scrub forest, a far cry from the semi-arid landscape of Tsavo. Within the hills is the private **Taita Hills Game Reserve** (adult/child US\$23/12), covering an area of 100 sq km. The landscape is dramatic and all the plains wildlife is here in abundance. If you stay at one of the lodges here, you can take a nocturnal

wildlife drive, something that's not allowed in the national parks.

The two lodges at Taita Hills are owned by the Hilton Hotel chain; the **Salt Lick Safari Lodge** (☎ 30270; saltlick@africaonline.co.ke; s/d/tr high season US\$185/226/286, low season US\$132/161/195), further within the reserve itself, is the one normally used for visitors. It's a weird complex of mushroom-like houses on stilts surrounding a waterhole, but the facilities are luxurious.

The bougainvillea-covered Taita Hills Safari Lodge is a more conventional hotel building and is usually only used if the Salt Lick Safari Lodge is full. Children under five are not admitted to either property.

For information, excursions and home-stays, contact the **Taita Hills Eco-Tourism Network** (☎ 043-30750; thenp@wananchi.com; Potter's House, Nairobi–Mombasa road, Voi).

Lumo Community Wildlife Sanctuary

This innovative new **reserve** (adult/child US\$20/10) of 657 sq km was formed from three community-owned ranches in 1996, but only opened to the public in 2003. It's partly funded by the EU and involves local people at every stage of the project, from the park rangers to senior management. Birdlife is plentiful and all the 'Big Five' are here, as well as several war relics from WWI. For more information, call the **sanctuary offices** (☎ 30936) in the village of Maktau, near Maktau Gate. If you contact them in advance, the rangers may be able to arrange a wildlife drive or guide for around KSh500.

Accommodation within the sanctuary is provided by the private **Lion Rock Lodge** (☎ 0735-453089; full board d US\$120), a *makuti* and canvas compound owned by the Tsavo Park Hotel in Voi.

The sanctuary lies on the Voi–Taveta road so you can get here by public bus or matatu.

TAVETA

☎ 043

This dusty little town sits on the Tanzanian border on the way to Moshi and Arusha. Unofficial car exporters drive the route constantly and there's a busy market here on Wednesday and Saturday, when people trek into town from remote villages on both sides of the border, but it's no more than a con-

venient stopping point for travellers. If you need money, the Kenya Commercial Bank has a bureau de change.

Tripple J Paradise (☎ 5352463; s KSh300-400, d KSh450-600) A pastel orange building conveniently situated on the main road. The Tripple J is hardly paradise (in fact half of it's still being built) but it's shiny-clean and better than you might expect, offering a range of rooms all with nets and fans. The bigger doubles have sofas and balconies overlooking the town.

There are also several basic board and lodgings around the main road and the market, charging around KSh100 to KSh200.

Getting There & Away

The Tanzania border is open 24 hours, but the border posts are 4km apart so you'll have to take a *boda-boda* (bicycle taxi; KSh40). On market days, trucks provide the same service for KSh20. From Holili on the Tanzanian side, there are matatus to Moshi (TSh1000), where you can change on to Arusha (TSh1500).

From Taveta, numerous matatus head to Voi (KSh300, 2½ hours) and Mombasa (KSh500, four hours) throughout the day. Six weekly buses also head on to Malindi.

There is currently no passenger train service to Voi, though it's possible the route may recommence in future.

LAKE CHALLA

This deep, spooky crater lake is about 10km north of Taveta, providing an atmospheric detour if you do decide to stop on the way in or out of Tanzania. There are grand views across the plains from the crater rim, near the defunct Lake Challa Safari Lodge, with the mysterious waters shimmering hundreds of metres below. The lake gained notoriety in early 2002 when a gap-year student was killed by crocodiles here. You can walk around the crater rim and down to the water but be very careful near the water's edge, and under no circumstances consider swimming – those crocs haven't gone anywhere, and they're unlikely to refuse another easy meal...

The road to Challa turns off the Voi–Taveta road on the outskirts of Taveta, by the second police post. On Taveta market days (Wednesday and Saturday) there are local buses to Challa village (KSh50), passing the turn-off to the crater rim.

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