The Reptiles & Amphibians of Kenya

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Days 1	Fly Nairobi
Days 2 – 14	Explore wonderful habitats in search of the region's reptiles and amphibians
Day 15 – 16	Inbound flights

Departs
Year-round

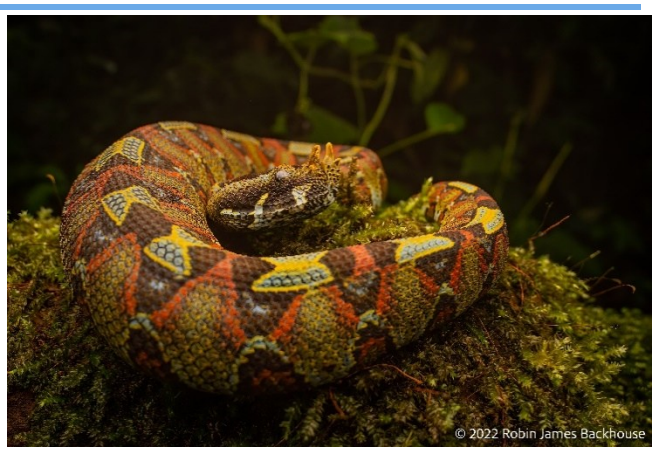
Focus
Reptiles and Amphibians

Grading
Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code KEN07)

Highlights

- Iconic species such as Green Bush Viper, Gaboon Viper, Rhinoceros Viper, Puff Adder, Southern and Central African Rock Pythons, Black Mamba, Eastern Green Mamba and Boomslang
- Little-known but exciting endemic species such as Kenya Horned Viper, Kenya Pygmy Chameleon, High-casqued Chameleon, blue-phase Speckled Green Snake and Usambara Vine Snake
- Excursion to Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to look for Golden-rumped Sengi, Sokoke Scops-owl and Caracal



Rhinoceros Viper (*Bitis nasicornis*), Silver-bladdered Reed Frog (*Hyperolius cystocandicans*), Green Bush Viper (*Atheris squamigera*) © Robin James Backhouse

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Introduction

Kenya is an extraordinary destination, not only for the 'Big Five' but also for its herpetofauna. What makes the country especially exciting is that, as well as possessing many of Africa's most sought-after snake species and plenty of exquisite chameleons, there is still much to discover with species' range extensions and new findings being commonplace. Kenya has many habitats to offer. Most of the northern part of the country is desert, it has rainforests in the west, Africa's second highest mountain in the central part of the country, vast remoteness in the southeast and beautiful white beaches with clear blue waters on the coast.

Kenya is home to a total of 147 species of snakes as well as countless other reptiles and amphibians. On this wonderful itinerary handcrafted by in-country experts, we'll travel from Lake Naivasha to the rainforests of western Kenya, to the plains of Tsavo and end our tour on the white beaches of the Indian Ocean coast!

In Kenya you'll be hosted by partners who operate an organisation dedicated to snake conservation, research and education. As well as the vast diversity, the country is home to a number of endemic snakes, some of which are highly threatened species. The organisation's mission is to carry out vital research into the status of range-restricted vipers from the *Atheris*, *Bitis* and *Montatheris* genera. For more information, please visit the 'Reptile Conservation in Kenya' section below.

Usambara Vine Snake © N. St John, 2024

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 Fly Nairobi

After arriving in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, we'll overnight in Karen – one of the more wooded and quiet areas of Nairobi where we won't even notice the hustle and bustle of this large city. The accommodation's grounds are full of beautiful, lush green trees and other plants that are surrounding the pool. Here, adjacent to the wilderness of Nairobi National Park, snakes like the Battersby's Green Snake (*Philothamnus battersbyi*), White-lipped snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*), East African Garter Snake (*Elapsoidea loveridgei*) or Brown House Snake (*Boaedon fuliginosus)* can sometimes be found. We'll enjoy dinner together before discussing the exciting itinerary ahead!

Days 2 – 3 Naivasha

After a late breakfast we will drive down the Great Rift Valley of Kenya towards Lake Naivasha. Lake Naivasha offers a stunning mix of wildlife, waters full of hippopotamus, and dramatic landscapes. We will stay in Oserengoni Wildlife Conservancy where you will get a chance to see the work of our partners in practice. The team will take you to their research site where we'll search for Side-striped Chameleon (*Trioceros bitaeniatus*), East African Highland Grass Lizard (*Chamaesaura tenuior*) and of course their research subject – the amazing Kenya Horned Viper (*Bitis worthingtoni*). During our time here we will combine traditional game drives with herping, and we can see such species as Plain Zebra, Masai Giraffe, African Warthog and the area is known for its healthy Leopard population.

Days 4 – 6 Kakamega Forest

After breakfast we leave Naivasha behind us and head west to Kakamega forest. Kakamega is the most easterly remnant of the Guinea-Congolian rainforest. The forest has a wet and warm climate, with annual rainfall of over 2,000mm. The area is separated from the Great Rift Valley by a mountain range, and this has created a unique variety of reptiles and amphibians that can be found here. We will walk through closed-canopy forests and open grassland and will often be accompanied by primates and birds along the way. It is the last remaining area of real rainforest in Kenya and home to some of the country's most iconic snakes. We have two full

Montane Side-striped Chameleon (*Trioceros elliotí*)

days to explore the area and look for Gaboon Viper (*Bitis gabonica),* Rhinoceros Viper (*B. nasicornis),* Rough-scaled Bush Viper (*Atheris hispida)* and Green Bush Viper (*A. squamigera).* Other iconic species that we might encounter are the Jameson's Mamba (*Dendroaspis jamesoni*) and the little-known Black Lined Green Snake (*Hapsidophrys lineatus*). We will also be on the lookout for other reptiles such as Boulenger's Pygmy Chameleon (*Rhamphloeon boulengeri*) and the Montane Side-striped Chameleon (*Trioceros elliotí*)

Kakamega forest is also home to exciting animals from the other taxa. Notable bird species include Great Blue Turaco, Crowned Eagle, Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill and Crested Guineafowl. This forest is also excellent for primates with the Mau Forest Guereza, Schmidt's Red-tailed Monkey, and Stuhlmann's Blue Monkey being frequently sighted. On night walks we will keep our eyes open for the rare and elusive Eastern Potto as well as African Tree Civet.

We will be staying at a peaceful lodge set within lush gardens, with a trail leading directly into the surrounding forest. From here, we will enjoy walks along an extensive network of forest trails in search of the area's rich wildlife. The garden of this lodge is a popular birding destination and with many of the aforementioned species visible within the grounds themselves. Nearby ponds are excellent for seeing unique frog species such as Mackay's Forest Tree Frog (*Leptopelis mackayi*) and the Dwarf Rocket Frog (*Ptychadena taenioscelis*).

Day 7 Nakuru

Today we leave the lush forest of Kakamega behind us and drive back to Nakuru. Nakuru is Kenya's fourth biggest city with a population just over 500,000. We use this city as a stopover on our way to Tsavo, but we will be staying at a lovely place with idyllic cottages known for its abundant chameleon population – a site we should not skip! In the evening we will take a stroll to look for High-casqued Chameleon (*Trioceros hoehnelii*).

Day 8 Nairobi

We have a relaxed morning, and we will have the time to explore the surroundings of the cottages in daylight. For those that wish, we'll aim to re-find High-casqued Chameleon during daytime, allowing for additional photography opportunities, including wide-angle. We will also look for Mole Snake (*Pseudaspis cana*), Green Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivergatus*), Garman's Toad (*Sclerophrys garmani*), and the area's special mammals. After lunch we'll head back to Nairobi to overnight in our comfortable hotel, positioning ourselves for tomorrow's onward journey to the incredible Tsavo region.

Day 9 – 11 Tsavo Ecosystem

Today we'll leave Nairobi and drive to the Tsavo Ecosystem. During our time in Tsavo we stay at a relatively small conservancy just outside the Tsavo West and East National Parks, a location quiet with visitors but extremely productive, where we stay in luxury safari tents with en suite bathrooms and lovely beds. The camp looks out over a waterhole that is often visited by Impala, Warthogs, baboons, zebra, and if we're lucky, we might wake up with Elephants.

We have two full days to explore the Tsavo ecosystem. Our safari camp is located at the bottom of a little hill and we can go out on foot to explore the area around camp. Often sighted snakes are the Speckled Sand Snake (*Psammophis punctulatus)*, Red Spitting Cobra (*Naja pallida*), Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*) and Link Marked Sand Snake (*P. biseriatus*). Accompanied by rangers, we are able to explore more of Tsavo's hilly and rocky areas a bit further away from our camp.

We will be back in camp for lunch and as it can get hot in this area, we will relax while enjoying the wildlife that comes to drink at the waterhole. We can go for another stroll around camp and while in Tsavo, we will have early dinners so that we can go for early evening game drives. As the temperatures in Tsavo are between 35–40 degrees Celsius in the hottest months, even diurnal species can be found active in the hours between 6.00–8.00pm. We will drive slowly over the savannah, keeping our eyes closely on the road. The soil is still hot and often snakes such as Puff Adders (*Bitis arietans)* are enjoying the last bit of heat of the day. We will keep our eyes on trees for Black Mambas (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) and Boomslangs (*Dispholidus typus*). As we are in some of Kenya's prime wildlife areas, we might encounter the beautiful and elegant Genet or an African Civet strolling around looking for food, or a grazing Gerenuk. Many trees will light up with eyes and we will be on the look out for Bushbabies. If we are really lucky, we might even find an Aardvark or Aardwolf.

Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

Days 12 – 14 Kenyan Coast

The last stop of our trip is the Kenyan coast. We will be staying in accommodation, right on the Indian Ocean and with a swimming pool.

The coastal forests are the perfect location to look for Green Mamba (*Dendroaspis angusticeps*). After a short drive, we can go out on foot to stroll along the beach to look for the blue phased Speckled Green Snake (*Philothamnus punctatus*) (only found in this area), as well as East African Egg Eaters (*Dasypeltis medici*) and Tiger Snakes (*Telescopus semiannulatus*). There's a 'bird hide' that looks out over the ocean and from here countless species can be seen. It is a true birder's paradise!

Exploring the coastal belt a bit more inland, we might encounter Vine Snakes (*Thelotornis usambaricus)*, Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis)*, Ashe's Spitting Cobra (*Naja ashei)*, Eastern Stripe-bellied Sand Snake (*Psammophis orientalis)*, Eastern Small-Scaled Burrowing Asp (*Atractaspis fallax),* Bibron's Burrowing Asp (*Atractaspis bibronii*), Kenyan Bark Snake (*Hemirhagerrhis hildebrandtii)*, Central African Rock Python (*Python sebae*), Nile and Savanna Monitor Lizard (*Varanus niloticus* and *V. albigularis).* We will also look out for the 6-8cm Kenya Pygmy Chameleon (*Rieppeleon kerstenii*) and 30cm Flap-neck Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*).

Savanna Monitor Lizard (*Varanus albigularis*)

At the coast, the same applies as in Tsavo: it gets hot around midday, and we will be back in camp to enjoy the beach while avoiding the heat. We will get out again in the later afternoon and enjoy a sunset while walking or back in camp.

While here we will spend a morning visiting the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to look for the Golden-rumped Sengi and Sokoke Scops-owl. Caracal and African Bush Elephant are also often sighted here. Naturally, we will keep our eyes open for reptiles the whole time!

Days 15 – 16 Inbound Flights

After what is sure to have been a memorable exploration of Kenya's varied landscapes, this is where the holiday comes to an end. There is just a 45-minute drive to Malindi Airport where we connect with Nairobi Airport for our inbound flights.

Reptile Conservation in Kenya

In Kenya you will be hosted by our in-country colleagues who operate an organisation dedicated to snake conservation, research and education. Kenya is home to 147 snake species, including a number of endemics, some of which are highly threatened with extinction. The team are currently focusing their research into the status of range-restricted vipers from the *Atheris*, *Bitis* and *Montatheris* genera. Their work is currently focussed on the very rare Kenya Horned Viper (*Bitis worthingtoni*) and Mount Kenya Bush Viper (*Atheris desaixi*), both in need of assessment as well as urgent conservation measures. These species, along with many others in Kenya, face a multitude of threats ranging from habitat loss to direct poaching for the international pet trade. The expansion of urban areas and the increasing need for agricultural land is causing more human-snake interactions and a lot of snakes sadly end up being killed. The organisation is dedicated to saving these snakes by reducing the impact of these interactions, raising public awareness, and creating opportunities for people to coexist with snakes in the wild. Their education programme is tailored towards schoolchildren and teaches them how to identify snakes, what to do when encountering a snake, how to avoid a snakebite and snakebite first aid. They do this by using fun activities combined with beautifully illustrated materials. By going to schools on a regular basis and making snake education a continuous part of their curriculum, they aim to make sustainable behavioural change.

Many of Kenya's snake species are beautiful and are highly-prized in pet trade markets in Europe and the United States. Together, we also hope that the rising popularity of reptile and amphibian tours such as this one can provide a sustainable future where collectors can have a better future by transitioning their skills to a new career in guiding, in a similar way to what has been achieved with mammals and birds.

L to R: Dickson, Mirthe and Robin

The Team in Kenya

Dickson Kalu Katana: Dickson, better known as Ferry, was born on a little island in front of the Kenyan coast where he literally grew up with pythons, speckled green snakes and monitor lizards at his doorstep. He is a professional snake handler with over 10 years' experience and learnt his trade from his father who worked for a Reptile Park. From a young age onwards, Dickson joined his father to the snake park and learned all about Kenya's incredible reptile world. He, later on, worked with snakes in captivity and rescued many snakes from houses. He went on many explorations with the legendary East African herpetologist Stephen Spawls and has seen more of Kenya's wilderness than almost anyone. Dickson was excited to join Mirthe to set up a reptile conservation and research organisation in 2022. As Dickson has seen with his own eyes how snake numbers are decreasing, he is dedicated to protect them in their natural habitat. He is the organisation's researcher, snake handler on expeditions and he visits local schools to implement the snake education program. He is an incredible climber and spots snakes from miles away. He is very excited to take you on an expedition!

Mirthe Aarts: Mirthe, known as 'M', is a conservationist and researcher from The Netherlands. She has a Bachelor in Law with a focus on the international wildlife trade and a Master of Arts in the field of Globalisation and Development where she focused on sustainable development in conflict areas. After her studies in 2015, she moved to East Africa where she is nowadays working on snake conservation and mainly focused on *Bitis worthingtoni* research in Kenya. She found a great partner in Dickson and together they set up a reptile conservation and research organisation in 2022. She is the organisation's researcher, conservationist and expedition-planner and you'll find her in the bush looking for snakes whenever possible. She is dedicated to saving snakes in their natural habitat by doing research on population status, range and trends, creating awareness and she developed a creative and fun education program to teach children how to live in harmony with snakes. With her sharp eyes to spot snakes even in the most hidden places, she is keen on joining our expeditions to show you the incredible world of Kenya's reptiles and amphibians and tell you all about reptile conservation in Kenya.

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch, we'll continue into early-evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus.

Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour. As most naturalists know, snakes occur at low densities and are notoriously elusive, so it's unlikely that every species mentioned will be encountered. However, with the guidance of a leading herpetologist, your chances improve dramatically. A realistic goal might be to observe around 12–15 species –sometimes more, sometimes fewer – depending on conditions.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

This is a traditional lodge-based wildlife tour. Whilst some of the lodges are appointed simply, each is comfortable and has private en suite facilities. Accommodation in Tsavo will be in luxury en suite serviced tents. A certain level of fitness is required for the tour, as the terrain may be rough, steep, or slippery in parts.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The average temperature in the capital, Nairobi, at this time is 22ºC, with highs of 27ºC and lows of 14ºC after dark. On Kenya's Indian Ocean coastline, we can expect an average temperature of 28ºC. Highs reach 31ºC, while evenings are warm and only cool down to 24ºC. Midday temperatures in Tsavo can reach 35–40 degrees Celsius in the hottest months. As a rainforest, Kakamega forest can get very wet and it would be sensible to come prepared for some occasional rainfall, some of which may be very heavy. A strong waterproof torch is essential for the tour and amongst the options available a powerful head-torch will be most useful, which keeps your hands free for balancing.

What's Included

Breakfast, lunch, and dinners are included in the cost of this holiday, except for those required during travel to and from the holiday and starting with breakfast on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 15.

We will travel in an 8-seater Land Cruiser with an open roof. Purified water is included and available in the car.

Extending Your Holiday

We would be very pleased to assist in arranging pre- or post-tour extensions, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

Mandatory Travel Insurance

Please be aware that from 5 October 2026, most travellers visiting Kenya for less than 12 months must have Kenyan Government-provided travel health insurance.

If you require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA), you must buy this insurance as part of the application process. If you already hold a valid eTA, you must obtain the insurance through the Kenyan eCitizen insurance portal. Foreign travel insurance policies are not accepted in place of this requirement.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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