Kenya's Rift Valley – A Photography Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Nairobi & overnight.
Day 2	Transfer Olkirimatian Conservancy.
Day 3/8	Olkirimatian Conservancy.
Day 9	Nairobi.
Day 10	Depart Nairobi & arrive London.

Departs
September and October

Focus
Wildlife Photography (nocturnal hides and game drives)

Grading
Grade A (see grading section for more information)

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code KEN10) or brochure

Highlights:

- Dedicated night-hide photography sessions targeting nocturnal species and low-light behavioural encounters
- Big cat and hyena activity in the southern Rift Valley's predator-rich ecosystem
- Explore the southern Rift Valley on private game drives, with opportunities to search for elusive predators
- Led by expert wildlife photographer







From top: Masai Giraffe (Jeffrey Wu), Olive baboon, Caracal (Paras Chandaria)

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Introduction

The southern reaches of Kenya's Rift Valley form one of East Africa's most atmospheric and least commercialised wildlife landscapes. Framed by volcanic escarpments, acacia woodland, and seasonal river systems, the region supports a rich mosaic of habitats that in turn sustain a diverse and often elusive array of wildlife. Within this broader landscape, the Olkirimatian Conservancy represents a particularly compelling example of community-led conservation, where low-impact tourism and traditional pastoral land use coexist.

This itinerary is designed with a strong photographic emphasis, focusing not only on the more visible plains game but also on the region's nocturnal and elusive species. The addition of the photographic hides provides a rare opportunity to work at close quarters with wildlife in a controlled, low-disturbance setting. When combined with flexible night driving and extensive access to conservancy land, the area becomes especially valuable for photographers seeking behaviour-driven encounters rather than conventional game-viewing sequences.

The safari begins in Nairobi before overland transfer into the southern Rift Valley, where a 7-night stay allows for deep exploration of the Olkirimatian Conservancy. Days are structured around early morning and late afternoon field sessions, with extended night-time photographic opportunities in specially positioned hides.



Lioness

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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 Depart London & arrival in Nairobi

We depart London Heathrow mid-morning on board a scheduled flight bound for Nairobi. On arrival, in the late evening, we will be met for the transfer to a nearby, comfortable hotel in time for a good night's sleep.

Day 2 Olkirimatian Conservancy

The following morning, we will travel south towards the Olkirimatian Conservancy, with a transfer of approximately five hours along a mix of tarmac and graded roads. En route, you will enjoy the dramatic scenery of Kenya's Southern Rift Valley, passing Mount Olorgesailie and Lake Magadi before arriving at Lentorre Lodge.

On arrival at Lentorre, there will be time to settle into the lodge and familiarise ourselves with our surroundings for our 7 night stay. Depending on our arrival time, we may have our first opportunity for some photography around the lodge or an initial game drive before sunset.

Day 3 – 8 Olkirimatian Conservancy

Over the following six days, we enjoy an extensive and flexible programme of wildlife photography around Lentorre and the surrounding southern Rift Valley. The itinerary will be adapted throughout the stay according to wildlife activity, weather and photographic conditions, allowing us to make the most of particularly promising opportunities rather than following a fixed daily schedule.



Blue Wildebeest (Jeffrey Wu)

Game Drives & Wildlife Photography

Early-morning and late-afternoon game drives provide opportunities to explore the varied habitats around Lentorre, from open plains and scrub to riverine areas and the dramatic landscapes of the Rift Valley. The cooler hours of the day are particularly productive for wildlife photography, with opportunities to work with soft early light, backlighting, dust and changing atmospheric conditions.

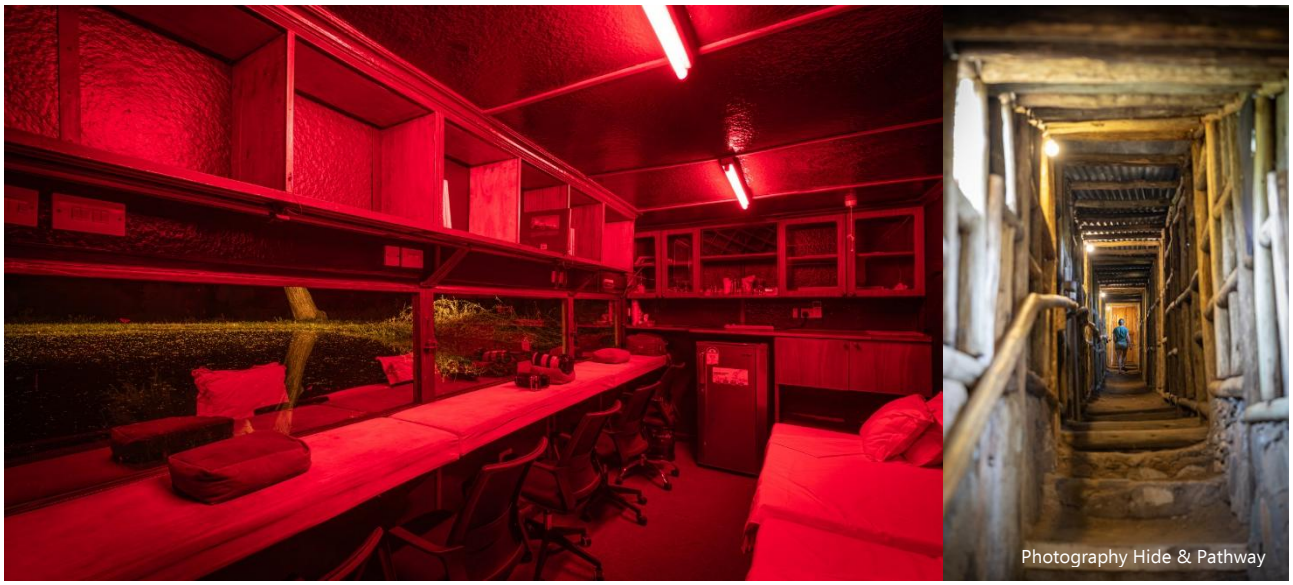


Thomson's Gazelles

The area supports a wide variety of wildlife, and time in the field will focus on both familiar species and more elusive subjects. Particular attention will be given to predators and smaller carnivores, including Lion, Leopard, Black-backed Jackal, Bat-eared Fox and Genets. With luck, there may also be opportunities to encounter more elusive species such as Caracal, Striped Hyena and African Civet which visit the waterhole on occasion. While sightings of any particular species cannot be guaranteed, the flexible nature of the conservancy allows additional time to be spent searching for promising photographic opportunities.

Photographic Hide Sessions

A key feature of the photographic programme is Lentorre's purpose-built photographic hide, located within the lodge itself, just below the main dining area. Its convenient position means that guests can walk directly to and from the hide whenever they wish, without the need for a vehicle transfer, allowing sessions to be fitted easily around other activities and personal preferences.



Photography Hide & Pathway



Leopard

The hide is sunk into the ground, placing photographers at approximately eye level with wildlife visiting the waterhole and creating a natural perspective for close-range images. High-quality one-way glass has been installed across the viewing windows, allowing photographers to work with carefully controlled focal lengths, lighting and backgrounds while remaining concealed from the wildlife. Patience is key when working from these hides, as wildlife may take some time to appear. However, the rewards can be exceptional, with superb photographic opportunities when animals come to drink.

The hide is designed for both comfort and extended photographic sessions. It is air-conditioned, as is the adjoining ante-room, making it particularly comfortable during the hotter months. The hide can accommodate up to six people, with two beds in the main photographic area and a further four in the adjoining ante-room. The ante-room is sealed and insect-proof and provides additional space for guests during longer sessions. Depending on group size, guests who do not visit the hide on the first evening will have the opportunity to do so on the second, with visits rotating thereafter to ensure everyone has time in the hide.

A separate flush toilet is available within the tunnel leading to the hide, approximately a 20-second walk away, meaning guests do not need to leave the area entirely during an extended session. The hide is also equipped with a water dispenser and refrigerator, while tea and coffee can be provided on request.


Porcupine & White-tailed Mongoose (Jeffrey Wu)

Particular attention has been given to the waterhole itself and to the photographic lighting. The edge of the waterhole has been shaped to allow reflection photographs to include more of the animal, including the hindquarters, while the lighting system gives photographers considerable flexibility over the

appearance of their images. Four forward-facing lights can be individually switched on and off from within the hide, allowing photographers to alter the lighting effect and adapt to different subjects and compositions.

A backlighting option has also been introduced, providing an additional creative approach and the opportunity to produce more atmospheric and distinctive images. This combination of controlled lighting, eye-level positioning, reflections and the ability to remain concealed makes the hide particularly well suited to photographers looking to experiment with different techniques rather than simply record wildlife sightings.

Although the hide is particularly attractive for mammal photography, it has also proved productive for birds. Early mornings can bring a variety of bird species to the waterhole for around an hour or more, providing excellent opportunities for birdwatchers and photographers alike. Owl sightings, particularly Pearl-spotted Owlet and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, have been a notable feature of stays at Lentorre. The quieter surroundings also provide opportunities to concentrate on smaller subjects and natural behaviours that can easily be overlooked during conventional game drives, allowing photographers to work at a more relaxed pace and make the most of the available light.


Pearl-spotted Owlet (Jeffrey Wu)

The hide, therefore, offers a very different photographic experience from time spent on game drives. Rather than moving between sightings, photographers can settle into one location, work with a consistent background and light, and wait for wildlife to approach naturally. Sessions can be arranged at different times of day, with the flexibility to return to the hide when conditions are particularly promising.

For those interested in wildlife beyond photography, the hide also has a modest but growing library, providing something to browse during quieter periods.

Nocturnal Wildlife & Night Drives

Where conditions are favourable, evening drives can continue after sunset, providing opportunities to look for nocturnal wildlife and experience the conservancy at night. Particular attention will be given to smaller and more elusive mammals, such as Jackals, Bat-eared Fox Genets Lion and Leopard. With patience and a little good fortune, there may also be opportunities to encounter elusive species such as Caracal, Striped Hyena and African Civet, alongside other nocturnal mammals.

Night sessions will also provide opportunities to experiment with low-light photography and different photographic techniques, while allowing the group to spend extended periods in areas where wildlife activity is particularly promising.


Striped Hyena (Jeffrey Wu)

Lake Magadi & The Rift Valley Landscapes

A visit to the wider Rift Valley, including Lake Magadi where practical, can provide a change of environment and opportunities to photograph the area's distinctive landscapes, wildlife and birdlife. The combination of open spaces, water, reflections and dramatic geological scenery offers scope for wider environmental images alongside the more traditional wildlife photography.


Lesser Flamingos (Jeffrey Wu)

Birdwatching & Bird Photography

The lodge's spring, riverine vegetation and surrounding acacia scrub attract a variety of species with over 350 species recorded in the area, including Malachite Kingfisher, White-fronted Bee-eater, African Grey Hornbill, Von der Decken's Hornbill, Bare-faced Go-Away-Bird, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Blue-naped Mousebird and Hamerkop.

Early mornings and quieter periods provide opportunities to explore the lodge surroundings and conservancy at a relaxed pace. These sessions will offer a chance to practise tracking birds in flight, working with challenging backgrounds and making the most of the soft light at the beginning and end of the day. Species seen will vary with season and local conditions.



Bird Hide & Black-headed Weaver (Jeffrey Wu)

Flexible Photographic Time

The structure of these days will deliberately remain flexible. Some mornings may involve an extended game drive, while others could be dedicated to the hide or to searching for a particular species. Similarly, afternoons can be used for further wildlife photography, landscape work or additional hide sessions, with evening and night drives arranged where appropriate.

The emphasis throughout is on quality photographic opportunities rather than covering a fixed list of activities, allowing additional time to be spent in productive areas or waiting for promising wildlife behaviour. Midday periods can be used to rest, download and edit images, or discuss photography with the leader before returning to the field later in the day.

Optional evening image-review sessions can also be arranged, providing an opportunity to discuss composition, exposure and photographic technique, and to review images taken during the day.

Day 9 Nairobi & London

After breakfast, we leave Lentorre and transfer by road back to the international airport in time to check in for our overnight flight home, stopping for dinner in Nairobi. Please bear in mind that dinner here is at your own expense this evening.

Day 10 London

We will arrive back into London Heathrow early this morning.



Images courtesy of Lentorre, Jeffrey Wu & Paras Chandaria

Tour Grading

Grade A. This is a moderately active photographic safari with early starts and extended field sessions. Game drives may last several hours, including transitions into night-time photography on selected evenings. The itinerary requires a reasonable level of comfort with early mornings and flexible scheduling depending on wildlife movement and lighting conditions.

Road transfers within conservancies may involve uneven terrain, although overall travel distances are manageable.

Weather

The best photographic conditions typically occur during the dry season from late June through October. During this period, wildlife becomes more concentrated around permanent water sources, improving predictability and encounter rates. Skies are generally clear, with strong light contrast and excellent visibility for landscape composition.

Temperatures in the southern Rift Valley are warm, with daytime temperatures typically ranging from 34 to 38°C and but can be cooler with temperatures typically between 25 to 20°C at night, particularly in exposed areas near escarpments. Dust and wind can enhance atmospheric photographic conditions, particularly at sunrise and sunset.

Warm layered clothing is recommended for use in the hide due to the air conditioning.

Focus

This itinerary is designed primarily around photographic fieldwork, with an emphasis on low-light conditions, behavioural encounters, and controlled observation environments. Lentorre's hides form a key structural element, offering rare opportunities for nocturnal photography in a stable, non-invasive setting. The broader conservancy system supports extended night drives and flexible tracking of predator activity.

Key focus includes:

- Nocturnal mammal photography in controlled hide environments
- Predator behaviour in early morning and late evening light
- Environmental portraiture within Rift Valley landscapes
- Small-group, low-density wildlife encounters with minimal vehicle pressure

Equipment to Bring

- Digital single lens reflex camera or mirrorless camera capable of photographing at least ISO 12800 for low-light shots early and late in the day
- Telephoto lenses (+500mm focal length advised for portraiture and game drives) for bird and mammal photography
- You may wish to bring a range of lenses with you, including a wide-angle lens. A lens with a wide maximum aperture (low f-number) is recommended to assist with night photography and low-light conditions

- Multiple camera batteries – as temperatures will likely be higher, you may use more batteries than usual
- Dust cover for camera equipment
- Camera cleaning kit, including blower, lens cloth and general cloth for wiping down
- Camera manual (physical or digital)
- Laptop with editing software
- Hard drive(s) to back up photos
- Tripod and/or Monopod
- Neutral density and polarising filters
- Wet weather clothing layers, including waterproof jacket and trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Daypack
- Water bottle and thermos flask

Dust can be a significant factor at Lentorre, particularly during dry periods and on game drives. We recommend keeping cameras and lenses covered when not in use and taking care to regularly clean equipment to prevent dust from entering or accumulating on your kit. Some guests may find it more comfortable to have a buff or scarf handy to cover their mouth and nose during dusty drives, helping to reduce the amount of dust they breathe in.

Food & Accommodation

We will be staying at Lentorre Lodge, a small, family-owned lodge in the heart of the Kenyan wilderness. Located within the Olkirimatian Conservancy, the lodge has just six villas, helping to create a peaceful and exclusive atmosphere away from the busier safari destinations. The lodge is unfenced and surrounded by wilderness, with views towards Mount Shompole, the Nguruman Escarpment and the surrounding plains.

The lodge is comprised of four individual villas and two family villas, each with its own en-suite facilities, fan and plunge pool. The rooms are individually arranged, with several offering particularly impressive views across the surrounding wilderness, while the prime room overlooks the lodge's waterhole.

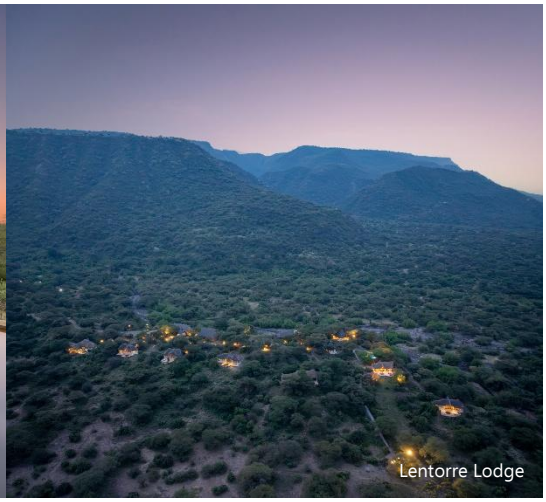
The main lodge areas provide comfortable spaces to relax between photographic sessions and game drives. Meals are served in the elevated upper area, while the lower lounge and bar overlook the waterhole and photographic hide.

The lodge's waterhole and underground photographic hide are a particular feature for this photography-focused itinerary. The air-conditioned hide is equipped with a fridge, bar and library, and provides a comfortable position from which to watch and photograph wildlife visiting the waterhole. During the dry season, the waterhole can be particularly productive, with opportunities for both daytime and evening wildlife photography.

As the lodge is unfenced, security guards patrol the property at night and a complimentary 'taxi' service is provided to escort guests between their rooms and the main lodge after dark.

Lentorre's remote setting and small scale are an important part of the experience, with the emphasis on wilderness, wildlife and photography rather than a large-scale luxury safari environment.





Inclusions/Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation in comfortable hotel on full board basis at Lentorre
- All guiding and photography tuition
- All meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 9. Dinner on Day 9, if required, is at your own expense.
- All park fees

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Meals on Day 1 and meals after lunch on Day 9
- Premium drinks
- Tips
- Visa fees
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, discretionary tips etc.
- Optional activities such as Helicopter Photography over Lake Magadi, Lake Natron and the Nguruman escarpment. Please request further information at the time of booking if this is of interest.

Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to Kenya. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel regularly prior to travel.

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, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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Spotted Hyena (Jeffrey Wu)