

Safaris in Kenya:

Breakfast With the Baboons; Tea With the Hippos by Martha Nell Beatty

A safari in East Africa? Neither my husband, Denis, nor I is a camper, but we had always heard that a tented safari was the best way to experience present-day East Africa and its animals. We decided to try it.

Our group of nine campers met in Nairobi, and while we were getting acquainted the staff of thirteen went ahead to Amboseli to set up the first of three camps. We left Nairobi the next day in some sturdy land cruisers, which had been arranged by Abercrombie & Kent, the safari organizers.

There were five tents for our group plus the dining tent and the staff tents. Somewhat amazingly, each tent was outfitted with a

rug, wall hangings and flowers in vases. On cool nights there were even hot water bottles tucked in the bottom of the beds. The en-suite bathrooms were not

bad at all: a basic toilet, a canvas bucket shower, and a basin filled by an attendant several times a day.

Each day started with the sound of a zipper, as the attendants brought tea or coffee with biscuits into the tents at 6:00 a.m. We were the last tent, so we could hear the zippers from each tent as the attendants came closer. Following the tea/coffee we were off for our early morning game drive, which lasted up to three hours. Then it was back for breakfast, which seemed to be soon followed by an *al fresco* buffet lunch.

After a siesta we had our afternoon game run, again lasting up to three hours. Then we'd be back for dinner, which was served in the dining tent. It was quite an elegant affair -- complete with candlelight.

We stayed up to three days in one locale, and by the second day we began to know the habitats of the various animals. In the Maasai Mara Reservation, which is about 100 miles west of Nairobi, we became very familiar with the lions' territory, where we would visit them several times a day. In the Aberdare region further to the north there was a lovely secluded spot by a river where some of our favorite elephants liked to gather to cool themselves. There were many trees in the Abedares where we enjoyed stopping to

view the white plume-tailed monkeys.

But we related best to the animals that lived near our camps. In our wooded Abedares camp, there was a large family of baboons. They made themselves known at breakfast when the smell of bacon and sausage permeated the air.

Our favorites were the hippos in the Mara. Here our camp was right on the Mara River near an area that a large group of hippos call home. By day they congregated in the muddy waters, then in the evening they would climb up the steep bank to spend the evening ashore -- almost in our camp.

The sound of the hippos delighted us. None of us had ever heard hippo chatter, which can best be described as the sound of laughter. It made us feel happy just to hear "our" hippos. We became almost protective of the hippos and resentful of tourists who would stop on the other side of the river to view them and take their picture.

The last evening in camp someone sug-

gested we play a game over dessert, describing the animal we'd most like to be. One wanted to be a lion, another a leopard, another a giraffe, and so on until the last one spoke: he wanted to be a human.

Why? "Because the human is the only animal capable of emotions and feelings." But it turned dark as he spoke, and the emotions about which he spoke seemed to be deceit, anger, cruelty, manipulation and lying. He brought us back from our fantasies and plunged us into what seemed like a frightening humanity.

What animal did I want to emulate? Elephants. They take care of their young as well as the old and infirm -- chewing the food for elders who have lost their teeth and burying their dead. They became a metaphor for the right way to live.

When Martha Nell Beatty is not dining with baboons and hippos, she is the co-owner of Unravel Travel in San Francisco where she books trips and safaris.

Books About East Africa

• *Serengeti Mitsuki Iwago* -- A Rich collection of color photos from Tanzania's famed Serengeti National Park. by an award-winning photographer.

• *I Dreamed of Africa Kuki Gallmann*

A haunting memoir of an Italian woman who moved to Kenya with her family. Her love for Africa shines through despite the family tragedy she endures.

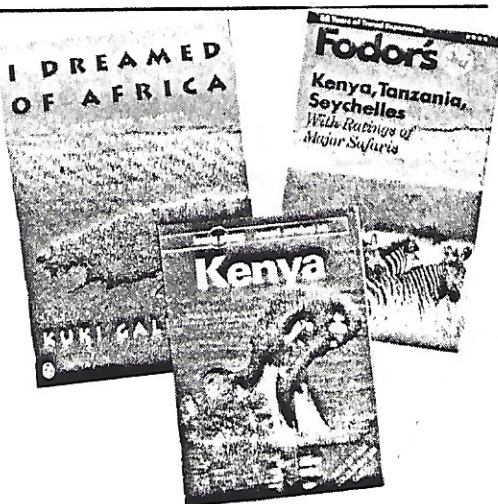
• *Lonely Planet: Kenya Crowther & Finlay* A handy-sized, thorough guide with lots of information about safari companies. Many off-beat travel tips, plus a 32-pg. color guide for animal watching.

• *Lonely Planet: East Africa Crowther & Finlay* -- A complete guide to Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. Includes almost all the information in the LP Kenya guide, so you don't need both.

• *Fodor's Kenya, Tanzania & Seychelles* Fodor's Guides have improved their format, and one result is this high-quality guide to East Africa. Contains a rating check-list of major safari companies.

• *Masai Mara: Kenya's Great Game Reserve Karl Amman* -- An outstanding portfolio of 2-page color photos of this famous game reserve. Over 125 beautiful photos.

• *Travel Journal Africa* -- Animal drawings and sighting tips, handy phrases, photo records and lots of space for writing



• *Insight: East African Wildlife* -- A good book for getting you in the mood for an East African safari. Many colorful chapters on the major animals and wildlife preserves.

• *Cycling Kenya Kathleen Bennett*

For the truly adventurous. The good news: Cycling Kenya lists companies that organize bicycle tours. The bad news: most wildlife parks will make you get off of your bike and get into a motorized vehicle.

• *African Wildlife Safaris* -- Color photos, health tips, maps, useful lists, and lots of information about the animals. Excellent for safari planning.

• *Out of Africa & Shadows on the Grass Isak Dinesen* -- A timeless classic about life in Kenya. Must reading.