

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 1 – Thursday Sept. 14th – Depart Home



Today the four of us start a sixteen day trip in East Africa. This will be the 21st international trip we have taken together over the last 14 years....we like traveling together! Marie and Kal live south of Dayton, Ohio and Marcia and I (Jim) live northwest of Pittsburgh. Marie and Marcia are sisters and these trips give the four of us the opportunity to spend some quality time together in interesting places.



We will be traveling through the southern part of Kenya and the northern part of Tanzania, two countries on the Central East Coast of Africa, as shown on the map at left.

We will start and finish our trip in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, but mostly be on "Safari" in the countryside sighting and viewing the wildlife of Africa and meeting residents. We will not be taking the pre-trip to Sweetwaters Tented Camp, shown on the map.

We will be traveling "clockwise" on the route shown on the map, mostly in remote areas and over what are

said to be rough roads. The accommodations we will be staying at cater to these types of "Safaris" and are said to be very nice. There will only be 18 folks on our tour and we will travel in three rather unique six passenger 4-wheel drive Toyota Land Cruisers with pop-up roofs designed to insure everyone has a window seat and the opportunity to stand up and take pictures of the wildlife without having to shoot through window glass.

Although we will be just south of the equator the temperatures should be fairly moderate as we will be traveling on a vast plateau at altitudes between 4500 and 7500 feet. Average high temperatures should be around 76 degrees with night time lows close to 50 degrees. As we are right at the equator, sunrise and sunset will both be at about 6:30. Africa time is ahead of our USA time; in both Kenya and Tanzania we will be 7 hours ahead of USA EDT.

Here is a calendar of our activities for the next sixteen days:




2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari

Time is 7 Hours Ahead of USA EDT in Kenya and 6 Hours in Tanzania
Average Temps: Hi – 76; Lo – 50 (We will be mostly at 5000 Feet)
Sunrise at 6:30 AM and Sunset at 6:30 PM



		<p>Thurs. 9/14 <u>Depart Home</u> -Depart Pitt on AA 3573-3:20 PM -Arrive Chi-3:59 -Depart Chicago 5:30 PM on BA 0294 Meals: Airline Htl: Airline</p>	<p>Fri. 9/15 <u>Arrive in Kenya</u> -Arrive London Heathrow 7:20 AM -Depart London on BA 065 at 10:30 AM -Arrive in Nairobi Kenya at 9 PM Meals: Airline Htl: Nairobi Serena</p>	<p>Sat. 9/16 <u>Nairobi, Kenya</u> -Visit the Elephant & Giraffe Center -Blixen “Out of Africa” Museum -Safari and Tour Briefing Meals: B, L & D Htl: Nairobi Serena</p>		
<p>Sun. 9/17 <u>Amboseli NP</u> -Drive to Amboseli NP -View Mt. Kilimanjaro -Afternoon Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Amboseli Ser.</p>	<p>Mon. 9/18 <u>Amboseli NP</u> -Morning Game Drive in 6 seat safari vehicles with rising roofs -Evening Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Amboseli Ser.</p>	<p>Tues. 9/19 <u>Lake Manyara</u> -Drive in to Tanzania -Shanga Crafts -Tanzanite Gem Experience -Arrive at NP Meals: B, L & D Htl: Manyara Sr.</p>	<p>Wed. 9/20 <u>Lake Manyara</u> -Visit Mto Wa Mbu village and the local people -Game Drive in Lake Manyara National Park Meals: B, L & D Htl: Manyara Ser</p>	<p>Thurs. 9/21 <u>Ngorongoro Ctr</u> -Drive to the Ngorongoro Volcanic Crater -Drive to Lodge on the top edge of the crater Meals: B, L & D Htl: Ngorongoro</p>	<p>Fri. 9/22 <u>Ngorongoro Crater</u> -Descend 2000 feet for a 9 hour tour of the Wildlife Sanctuary in the Crater -Picnic on the way Meals: B, L & D Htl: Ngorongoro Ser</p>	<p>Sat. 9/23 <u>Serengeti Nat. Pk.</u> -Drive to the Serengeti plains -Visit Olduvai and Mary Leakey’s ancient human fossils find Meals: B, L & D Htl: Serengeti Ser.</p>
<p>Sun. 9/24 <u>Serengeti Nat Pk</u> -Early morning Game Drive in the Serengeti -Afternoon Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Serengeti Ser</p>	<p>Mon. 9/25 <u>Serengeti Nat Pk</u> -Travel thru the Serengeti to the Kirawira Luxury Tented Camp Lodge -Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Kirawira Lux</p>	<p>Tues. 9/26 <u>Masai Mara NP</u> -Drive to Kenya; see Wildebeest migration -Visit Fishing Village on Lake Victoria Meals: B, L & D Htl: MaraSerena</p>	<p>Wed. 9/27 <u>Masai Mara NP</u> -Morning Game Drive -Evening Game Drive -Farewell Dinner Meals: B, L & D Htl: MaraSerena</p>	<p>Thurs. 9/28 <u>Nairobi-Home</u> -Drive to Nairobi -Dinner at Pampa Grill -Depart Nairobi on BA flight 064 at 11:15 PM. Meals: Airplane Htl: Airplane</p>	<p>Fri. 9/29 <u>Travel Home</u> -Heathrow at 5:55AM on BA 064 -Depart London on BA 295 at 10:50 AM -1:25 PM arrive Chi -4:49 PM depart Chi on AA 3378 -7:13 PM arrive Pitt</p>	

As shown, Marcia and I will depart Pittsburgh for Chicago mid-afternoon today. We are flying British Airways as we were able to book from them seats with extra legroom. We will arrive at London’s Heathrow Airport tomorrow morning and then transfer to a flight that will get us to Nairobi around 9PM tomorrow.

Marie and Kal left the USA on Tuesday for Amsterdam in the Netherlands. We were concerned as they were flying through Atlanta on KLM. Fortunately Hurricane Irma cleared Atlanta in time and their flight went off as scheduled. They are hopefully enjoying time there and will arrive in Nairobi about 9:45 PM tomorrow.

We will again be writing a daily Trip Journal (with pictures) and posting it to the link on the e-mails we will send you (like this one) if you are interested in following us on our journey. We think that we will have OK internet connections at our lodgings and should be able to post the trip updates daily. Hope we don't bore you!

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 2 – Friday Sept. 15th – Arrive In Kenya

Tonight we will land in Nairobi, the Capital of Kenya, and start our Safari adventure. We are traveling for the first time on a tour with Vantage Travel. We have again chosen a tour rather than independent travel for safety and logistic reasons. We also think we usually learn more on a guided tour and save money on accommodations and meals versus what could do on our own. Most of our previous tours have been with OU (Odysseys Unlimited) or OAT (Overseas Adventure Travel). OU, OAT and Vantage are all based in Boston and specialize in offering small group travel to age 55 and older Americans. I believe OU and Vantage are “spin-offs” from OAT. All three companies seem to be run by someone with a last name of “Lewis”. Their Thanksgiving Dinners together must be interesting!

We chose Vantage Travel due to their itinerary, good accommodations (with one exception all are two-night stays), guides, and meals (all are included). Vantage has informed us that our Tour Director will be Seif Mohammed. We've read very good reviews on him.



We have learned that the country of Kenya is about the size of France with a population of 48 million people. 73% of the population is under 30 years of age. Like most of Africa it is rapidly growing in population. 100 years ago Kenya's population was only 2.9 million.

Kenya was a colony of Great Britain from 1895 until 1963 when it became an independent country. Folks here drive on the left hand side of the road. English and Swahili are the official languages but Kenya has dozens of distinct tribes and 69 dialects are spoken.

Kenya and Tanzania are often called the “Cradle of Humankind”. Remains of primates from 20 million years ago have been discovered as well as the direct ancestors of Homo Sapiens

from over 1 million years ago. We believe we will be visiting one of the discovery sites.

Kenya is a democracy. The President is Uhuru Kenyatta who is the son of Kenya's first president. He was reelected president in the recent August 8th election with 55% of the vote. After the election, supporters of the defeated candidate rioted. Although 400 international observers, including former Senator and Secretary of State John Kerry certified the election as a fair one, Kenya's Supreme Court has just nullified the election results and a new presidential election will be held in late October (fortunately, after we are back in the USA).

Some comments on our packing for this trip. Vantage Travel has a strict 33 pound maximum on the weight of each traveler's main bag. This is due to somewhat limited storage area in the back of the Land Cruisers we will be traveling in. They sent to each of us a very nice Samsonite "wheeled" duffel bag for us to use as our main piece of luggage. As this is a relatively short tour and required clothing is informal, the weight limitation was not an issue. Also, effective August 28th Kenya has banned the possession or use of plastic bags! We have read that there is a \$40,000 fine and up to an 8 year jail sentence for possession, although we assume this would be for manufactures or distributors of large quantities of plastic bags. In any event, we are not taking any chances and did not use the zip lock bags we normally use to organize items in our luggage.

The travel to Nairobi has been somewhat grueling. Yesterday's one+ hour flight from Pittsburgh to Chicago, then a 7-1/2hour overnight flight to London and then today's 8-1/2hour flight from London to Nairobi. These last two long legs have been on British Airways Boeing 747s. We found that the Premium Economy "World Traveler" section that we paid extra for was quite nice. Wider seats with much more leg room, upgraded food and good service. Still, it was hard to get any real sleep. For this last flight, I have a window seat and get some great views from 37,000 feet as we fly through France, Central Europe, down the coast of Croatia and then Greece, across the Mediterranean Sea and into Egypt. We land in Nairobi at 9:30 PM. Kenya time is seven hours ahead of our East Coast USA time.



Nairobi, Kenya's capital, is a sprawling city of 3,375,000 people. We have read that over 600,000 of the residents live in the Kibera "slum".

Marie and Kal will arrive on their flight from Amsterdam a short while after us. We secure our Kenya Visas, clear passport control, claim our checked bags, meet our Tour Director Seif Mohammad and are bussed to our Nairobi hotel for the next two nights, the Nairobi Serena

Hotel, said to be one of the best in Nairobi. They will pick up Marie and Kal at the airport later. We check into our hotel at 11:30PM, somewhat exhausted.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 3 – Saturday Sept. 16th – Nairobi Kenya

The four of us got to bed this morning after 1 AM due to our long flights and the time zone changes. We get up around 7 AM. Here is a picture of the interior of our room and the nice wheeled duffle bags that Vantage Travel gave to each of us to insure we meet their 33-pound weight limit on our main piece of luggage.



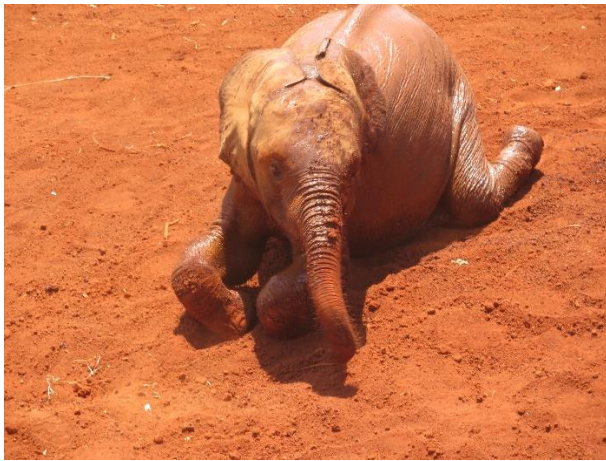
We have a nice breakfast with Marie and Kal in an open area of a restaurant looking out at the Serena's huge pool.

At 9:30 AM our group gets in an 18-passenger mini-van. We head for our first activity of the day; a visit to the Daphne Shedrick Elephant Orphanage Center. They are dedicated to rescuing "orphaned" baby elephants from the wild (orphaned because the mother either died or deserted the baby). They currently have 31 elephants they are nourishing. They will raise the elephants to the age of eight years old and release them to the wild. They have released 100 elephants this way. As we watch the elephants play in their mud hole we get a good lecture on the evils of poaching. The elephant population of Africa has declined by 70% in the last fifteen years as they are killed for their ivory tusks that are shipped to Asia for medicine and art carvings. It is great fun watching the elephants.

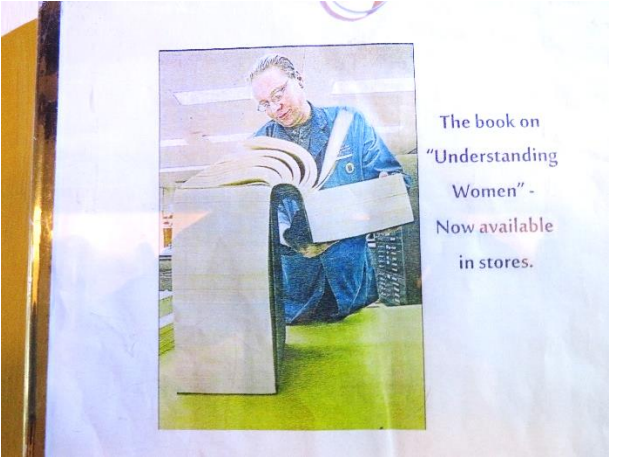




Marcia and Kal get splattered with mud by the friendly elephants but we all have a great time.



Our group now enjoys a great lunch at the Karen Bixen Coffee Garden. I get a kick out of a sign in the Men's Room.





We now visit the Karen Bixen Museum. She was an artist and a coffee planter in the 1920s era. She later returned to her native Denmark and authored the famous book *Out of Africa*. The museum is in the house she built and lived in. It contains much of the original furniture.

Next it is on to the AFEW Kenya Giraffe Collective. They have 11 giraffes. The adults are kept for breeding and the young ones released to the wild at the age of three. We enjoy interacting with the adults and see a one-month old baby. Marcia gets to kiss a giraffe.



We have found all Kenyans that we have interacted with so far most courteous and friendly; we try to be the same.

We now realize that unlike the tours we have been on with OU and OAT (who cover all tips except for the Tour Director's at the end of the trip) we need to pay most tips. Seif takes us to a shopping mall where we access ATMs to insure we have enough money for tips during our safari.

At 7:15 PM we all meet for introductions and an overview from TD Seif Mohamed. We have our Welcome Dinner at 8:15 PM. Then off to bed as we have an early start tomorrow on our safari!

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 4 – Sunday Sept. 17th – Amboseli Nat. Park

Today we start our Safari adventure. In addition to the numerous species of birds, reptiles, and mammals we will see, the goal of many travelers is to spot the “Big 5”. The Big 5 are the Leopard, Lion, Elephant, Cape Buffalo and Rhino. They were named the Big 5 by the early English explores who considered these five the most dangerous animals in Africa.

We enjoyed our two-night stay at the first-class Nairobi Serena Hotel.

At 7.30 AM we board our three, six passenger Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4s. We meet our driver/guide for the first three days of our safari, Steve, and watch as he expertly loads our luggage in the back.



We drive south for three hours on a somewhat bumpy paved road. Traffic, even in Nairobi, is light as it is Sunday. Steve tells us that there are three types of languages in Kenya. Swahili, English, and tribal dialects (of which there are 40). Swahili is the National Language but classes at all levels of schooling are taught in English so is probably the most widely used.

He tells us that Kenya is a very religious country. 79% are Christians, evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants. 16% are Muslim. Steve tells us he is a Born Again Christian. His church is affiliated with the Southern Baptists. Steve is very knowledgeable, easy to understand and has a big, booming voice. We sense he will be a great guide for the start of our safari.

We stop at a gift store run by a friend of our Tour Director. Seif had had already told us her story but we gathered around to hear her tell it. Jane suffered genital mutilation as a teenager. This is still a common practice with the Maasai people, the largest tribe in Kenya and Tanzania. When her two daughters were teenagers she refused to have then go through this cruel and senseless procedure. Her father has not talked to her since. Many Maasai will not marry women who have not had their genitals removed. She

started a live-in school for girls threatened by this procedure. OAT's Grand Circle Foundation donated one-and-a-half million dollars towards its construction. We drove by the large school on our way here and saw the many girls in their uniforms in the exercise areas. The girls also make some of the jewelry and paintings sold in the gift store. Her narrative was most moving. I purchased a beautiful carving.

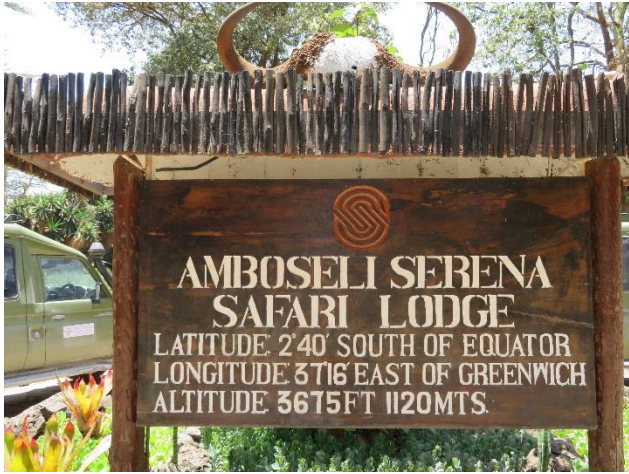


We now leave the bumpy paved highway and drive for an hour to Amboseli National Park on an incredibly bumpy dirt road. Sometimes we leave the rough road and drive on a dry portion of the lake bed. Marie takes precautions against the dusty air and our driver/guide "raises the roof".



Amboseli Lake and the marshes around it were created by the underground run-off of rain and melting snow from nearby Mt. Kilimanjaro. The soil is naturally salty and as it has been very dry; vegetation is sparse. But, due to water availability this area abounds with wild animals. 50 species of mammals and 200 bird types live in the relatively small National Park.

On the way to our lodge we spot Giraffe, Wildebeest, Zebra, Antelope, Ostrich, Gazelles, Maasai Cattle being herded, and Elephants.



We arrive at our hotel for the next two nights, the Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge. It was built in 1973 and we think we will enjoy remote luxury.

After lunch at the lodge we check into our rooms and find them to be quite nice. Each room has a nice patio. No air conditioning but really not needed at this altitude. The ceiling fan keeps things comfortable. During dinnertime the “turn down” man will draw mosquito netting around our bed. We are warned to close and lock our patio door as the Vervet Monkeys invade rooms

and steal things. They have even learned how to open the heavy patio doors.



At 4 PM we start off on our first game drive. Steve, our driver/guide, is very knowledgeable and an expert spotter. We see hundreds and hundreds of animals. Highlights are a large female Elephant, Baboons, Impala, Bustard Birds, Hippos, Elephants nursing their young, Ostrich, Water Buffalo, a lion and much more. The weather has been sunny and warm but a bit hazy.



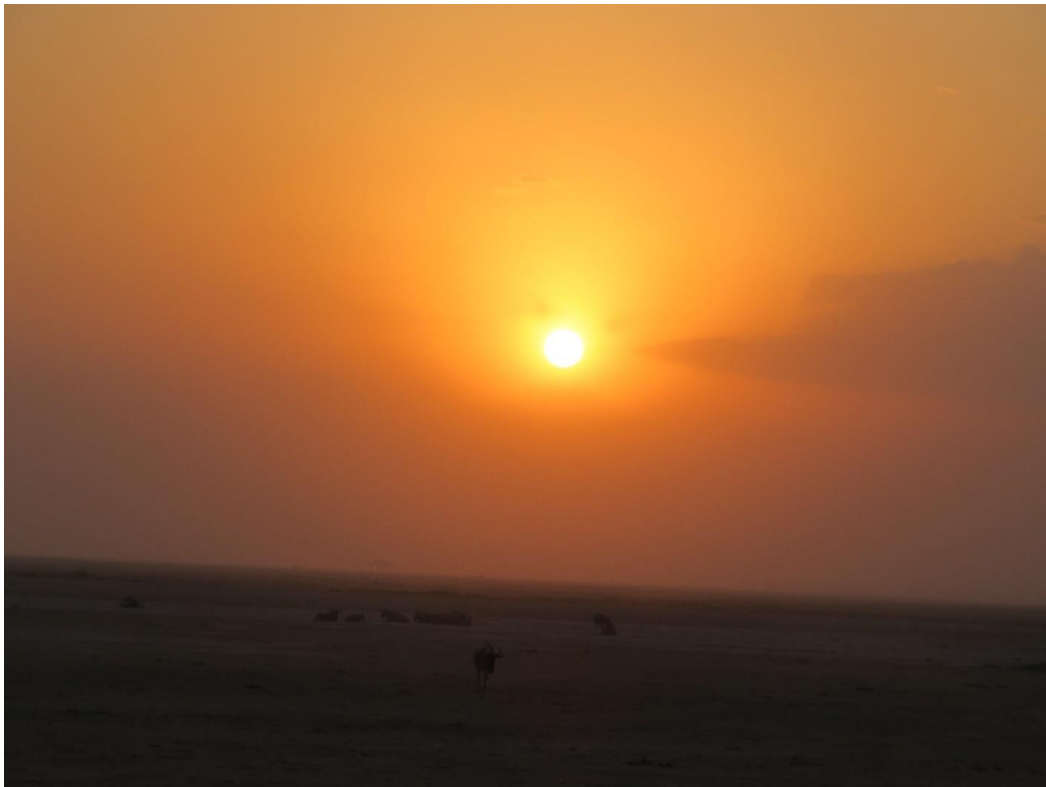




Marie, Kal and Marcia shoot photos while standing in the comfortable safari vehical. We can also remain seated and slide open the windows for clear shots.

We are reallly blown away by the hundreds and hundreds of wild animals that we saw today; many only yards away from our vehical.

While the still shots are nice it was really enjoyable to watch them move around and interact. We enjoy a nice sunset then return to our lodge at 7 PM for a great included dinner.



2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 5 – Monday Sept. 18th – Amboseli Nat. Park

We wake early after our first night's comfortable stay at the Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge. Our wake up call is at 5:15 AM and we depart on a 3 hour game drive at 6 PM. Tour Director Seif Mohamed says that these early starts insure that we see the most animals.

Going forward I am going to try to insert mostly pictures of animals we have not shown on earlier daily updates or sometimes the same animals doing something different or unique.

On our way to the main game area we watch the sunrise and see Mt. Kilimanjaro for the first time.



Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest mountain at 19,341 feet. We are still in Kenya but we can see it as it is right over the border in Tanzania. It is a climbing destination for many who want to climb the tallest mountain on a continent. Climbing Kilimanjaro is not a "technical climb"; i.e. no need to climb vertical rock faces. It is more of a long, steep hike. Our tour director climbed it when he was younger; six days up and two days down. It is still a very grueling challenge due to the altitude. About three years ago a world class athlete, the former tennis star Martina Navratilova, attempted the climb for charity. Half way up she encountered severe altitude sickness and had to be carried down the mountain on a stretcher.

We get a radio report of a pride of lions and race off to the area.



Our driver/guide says they are probably looking for a place to rest during the daylight hours.

We next pass a Zebra who is attempting to scratch off ticks and mites. Our guide tells us that you've never seen anyone riding on the back of a Zebra because its spine is too narrow and brittle. We watch a Vulture waiting for a Spotted Hyena to finish breakfast so it can have the scraps.



While these still pictures may look great the most fun is watching these animals prance and move around.

We are having another great weather day; sunny and mid-seventies.

We are also seeing many species of birds like the Cory Bustard at left and the Eagle and Vulture in its nest feeding a young one (below).



We spot Giraffes.



We are back at our lodgings at 9 AM and have a quick breakfast.

At 9:30 AM we meet a Naturalist for a two hour nature walk on the land right behind our hotel.

He explains that this area is popular with animals because of its water which is in marshy areas formed by underground water and snow runoff from Mt. Kilimanjaro. The water is relatively salty due to the minerals in the soil. The saltiness tends to retard plant growth.



We have a Maasai along with us, with his sharpened stick, for protection. He is dressed in the traditional Maasai clothing that they still all use today. We are doing fine on our walk until three Elephants emerge

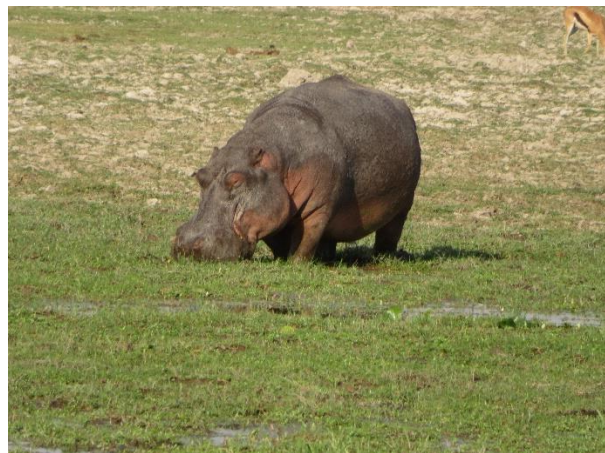
and start to head our way. We alter course while the Maasai maneuvers to move them in another direction. The Naturalist talks to us about the tree and plant life as well as the animals.

After lunch, we meet with our Tour Director regarding our border crossing tomorrow from Kenya to Tanzania. Apparently, this can sometimes be tricky and he wants to make sure we know exactly how to act and what to do.

At 4 PM we set out on another 3-hour game drive. These are great; this is what we came for.



We see animals big and small, like this Elephant family and a nursing mother Baboon.





Other highlights of this drive were spotting two Thompson Gazelles fighting, a Hippo out of the water, a two-tone Elephant (sand on the top, washed off by water below), and Cape Buffalo, one of the “Big Five”.

We often see the reality of life in the wild.



We enjoy a nice sunset.

Tomorrow we cross the border and start our travels in Tanzania.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 6 – Tuesday Sept. 19th – Lake Manyara



Today we enter Tanzania. It lies just south of Kenya and is about the size of Spain. It has a population of 52 million. In recent time it was known as German East Africa and then Tanganyika when Britain claimed it after World War I. Tanganyika achieved independence in 1961 and changed its name to Tanzania when the island nation of Zanzibar merged with it.

Over 100 different languages are spoken in Tanzania. There is no official language but English and Swahili are most widely spoken.

Tanzania is a constitutional republic but has been controlled by one party since independence.

Like Kenya, Tanzania's main industries are agriculture, services and tourism. As in Kenya, the Maasai people/tribe is the largest but there are many, many other tribes.



Our wake-up call today is at 5 AM. Bags packed and out by 5:45 AM. Then breakfast and depart at 6:30 AM after a nice two night stay at the Amboseli Serena Safari Hotel. We drive towards the border on rough roads sometimes impassible due to rising ground water. No problem, we drive over the salt flats which are usually smoother.

We arrive at the Kenyan border at 8 AM and clear their border control. We enter Tanzania and clear their border control by 9:30 AM.



We now board a twenty person motor coach and head south on a nicely paved, smooth road. As in Kenya, we often see the Maasai directing their cattle and sheep along the side of the road (or across it!) towards grazing areas. Possession of animals defines a Maasai's wealth.

At 11:30 AM we arrive at the large city of Arusha. We all have to go to the the "Tanzanite Experience"

which is a store where they tell us the history of Tanzanite, a blue gemstone found only below the southern slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, and then try to resist their sales pitch for expensive jewelry. We will later use our same ability to “say no” when we reboard our bus, surrounded by street vendors begging for us to buy their goods (“which I made myself”) although they all look the same.



We stop at a local restaurant and have a nice lunch outdoors. After lunch we move from our 20 passenger motor coach to Land Cruisers with Tanzanian drivers with whom we will be for the next six days.

We next go to a local artist’s gallery, the Trek Africa Gallery. Marcia and I actually buy a small painting.

We drive past the compound of the local Maasai Chief. We are told that he has forty wives and one-hundred children.



Our Land Cruisers climb for several miles on rough roads to the rim of the Rift Valley and on to our hotel for the next two nights, the Lake Manyara Serena Safari Lodge. It was built in 1996 and it looks great. Our room is nice and the view from our balcony even better. We can see the pool area to the right and the great valley to the left.



A very good acrobat show is put on by local performers prior to our dinner at poolside.



We have another great dinner and are early to bed as we have an early start in the morning.

I must comment on the quality of the folks on this tour with us. We have been on about twenty tours and always enjoyed our tour groups. This group, however, is really outstanding; perhaps our favorite. A collection of intelligent, entergetic and interesting folks.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 7 – Wednesday Sept. 20th – Lake Manyara



Wake-up call is at 5:15 AM and we depart on a game drive at 6 AM.

At the entrance to the National Park a picture is taken of the six of us in front of our Land Cruiser; myself, Marcia, Kal, Marie and the two ladies that were our companions in the vehicle every day (a mother and daughter; the mother lives in Crystal River FL where Marie and Marcia's parents lived and we all visited many times). Also shown is Seif, our Tour Director.

We drive into the park and it is a much different terrain than the savannah we have been on. This is more of a true forest.

We first encounter Baboons. Below is a picture of a mother nursing a baby and a family of perhaps a hundred Baboons coming up the road.



We next watch a family of Vervet Monkeys playing in the trees and the ever present Wildebeest.



We next encounter a scene that is hard to describe; thousands and thousands of birds flocking in two large ponds. Everything from Pelicans to Flamingos to Terns to Ducks.



There are, of course, Hippos in one of the two ponds.



Marcia spots a Cape Buffalo, one of the Big Five.



After a quick lunch back at our lodgings we head out, driving through the nearby town. Seif tells us that he used to take tour groups for a walking tour of the town but stopped because the souvenir vendors became too aggressive. Distressingly, he says many of the youthful vendors are strung out on drugs; marijuana, amphetamines, and pills, and he could not guarantee the safety of the tour members.

We now arrive at a Maasai village. We are welcomed by Barak who will be our host. He is one of the many sons of the local chief. He tells us this village has 120 residents and the tribe totals 2200. His father, the chief, is 99 years old, has 15 wives and 60 children.

The Maasai are all dressed in traditional clothing but this is exactly how they normally dress.



They perform some songs and dances for us, including their signature jumping dance.



They try to dress us, as best they can, in Maasai garb. They really seem to be enjoying this interaction.

We watch a fire making demonstration and a cooking demonstration.



The Maasai are known for shunning education and concentrating on grazing their herds of cows and sheep. Barak is trying to change that. They have started a Kindergarten in the village and send the children to a nearby elementary school. We visit the Kindergarten.



We are next taken in pairs by a Maasai to his house. These are basic affairs as they are a nomadic people.



We return to our lodgings and have some free time before dinner. We enjoy the view of the Rift Valley from our balcony.

Seif has asked us to meet him in the lobby at 7 PM for a briefing on tomorrow's activities. When we arrive he says they won't let us meet there; follow him. We walk outside down a long trail to an overlook where they have set up a special outdoor barbeque banquet just for our group. A great time. Unfortunately, no pictures as I did not bring my camera for what I expected to be just a normal

dinner!

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 8 – Thursday Sept. 21st – Ngorongoro Crater



We check out and depart at 8:30 AM after a two night stay at the Manyara Serena Hotel.

At 9:15 AM we arrive at the family compound of locals Martin and his wife Victoria. After some exercises like milking a cow we move into a medium size building and Martin, a member of the Irgqw tribe, describes old traditions and the current ones. He takes great pride in telling how the many tribes of Tanzania have started to integrate, frequently through intermarrige of teachers who have gone to other areas to teach and end up

marrying into a different tribe.

He also describes the wedding ritual, the dowery, and the special dress that the bride, the bride's mother, or a friend must make.



On the left, above, is the detail of the lower portion of the wedding dress. On the right, we go through the start of the wedding ritual. I am the groom with the three wives I will be marrying today. I will be a busy man. Everyone gets dressed up for the wedding.



We next go to a carving shop that does beautiful work. I buy an intricate rosewood carving.



Our next stop is Gibbs Farm, established in 1927 to grow coffee. We have an enjoyable tour of the grounds and enjoy lunch.



We now drive for several hours, on the usually rough roads, to the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater. Due to the height of the rim (7500 feet) and the size of the massive crater, it has been estimated that the original mountain was as high as Mt. Kilimanjaro.



We check into the Ngorongoro Serena Lodge, our home the next two nights. The rooms are great as is the view of the crater from our balcony.



We have a nice dinner.

Due to the location and altitude it is cold up here! There is little heat in the rooms. The turn-down maid puts hot water bottles under the sheets. Remember those?

Tomorrow we explore the wildlife living on the floor of the crater,

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 9 – Friday 22nd – Ngorongoro Crater

We depart our lodgings at 5:55 AM for a 2000-foot descent to the floor of the crater. We go down a rough one-way descent road built by the Germans in the early 1900s along an Elephant trail.

We immediately spot two young female lions.



We next spot and several Crown Cranes and a rare Black Rhino, one of the Big Five (we only have the elusive Leopard left to spot).



We see herds of Wildebeests and several Jackals.



Now there is excited chatter on our driver/guide's CB radio. Apparently, a driver for another company has spotted something and we take off at high speeds over the rough roads. Now, the drivers always speak to each other in Swahili so we do not know what they are saying. This is partly so we don't get disappointed if we can't catch a real prize. I tell the folks in our Land Rover that what they are really saying is "are your tourists as dumb as mine".

What they have spotted is a large male lion coming down from a faraway mountain. We can barely see him. Amazingly, he eventually comes right next to our vehicle and crosses the road right in front of us.



The Hippos are not bothered by him. We believe he came down from the mountain for a drink of water. This was another amazing experience.

Then another alert for our driver on his CB radio and we take off at a ridiculous rate of speed on rough roads. Two Lionesses have taken down a Water Buffalo and are having breakfast.

We next spot another pride of Lions relaxing.



At 9:30 AM it is time for breakfast and our three vehicles stop at a nice picnic area and our guides prepare breakfast. Kal discovers a Python trying to swallow a large bird.



Some of the other highlights were the Hippos and viewing the scenery.



We really enjoyed this perfect day in the crater on a great weather day.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 10 – Saturday Sept. 23rd – Serengeti N.Park



We depart our hotel, after a nice two night stay, at the civilized hour of 9 AM. The only negative here is that it was cold and windy on the rim of the volcano crater at 7500 feet. We enjoy the sunrise from our balcony.

Today we will drive to the Serengeti National Park where we will spend three nights. To the Maasai people, Serengeti means “endless plain”.

We pass Maasai villages and watch them graze their sheep and cows. We also see them with Camels.

These were given to the Maasai by an NGO hoping this would help them with their nomadic travels but they prefer to walk. They only use the Camels for milk.



At 10 AM we arrive at the Leakey Museum, overlooking the Olduvai Gorge, where Louis and Mary Leakey discovered hominid fossils more than 2.5 million years old. This area is called the “Cradle of Humankind”. We have a short lecture from a staff member and then explore the museum and observe the excavations, still underway.





We see the remains of extinct animals and study a copy of the 3.5 million year old Hominid Trackway. These are the footprints of early humans that were preserved in petrified volcanic ash. This helped archilogists determine when man started to walk upright and had aligned big toes.

We depart the museum area at 11:30 AM and continue our travels over the extremely rough dirt/clay/rock roads.

We arrive at the entrance to Serengeti National Park at 12:30 PM and enjoy our boxed lunches in a picnic area. We also climb to the top of a hill for a good view of the plains. It is another perfect weather day.



At 2 PM we enter the park and immediately see a male and female lion and later Cheetah.



We see Giraffe and after much waiting catch a glimpse of a well hidden Leopard up in a rock formation. This is the last of the “Big Five” we have spotted. Hope we get a better picture of a Leoprd later on.



At 4:30 PM we arrive at our lodging for the next two nights, the Serengeti Serena Safari Lodge, opened in 1998. The rooms are great. The park does not allow any fencing around lodges. Sun rises and sets at 6:30, so we need to call for escorts to take us to the lodge for 7:30 PM dinner and to return to our rooms after dinner. They close the swimming pool at 6:30 PM, as Elephants frequently walk up to drink the pool water.



2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 11 – Sunday Sept. 24th - Serengeti N.Park

We depart at 8 AM for an all-day game drive in the Serengeti. Several in our group have paid extra to enjoy a sunrise hot air balloon trip. We will be picking them up later in the morning.

We set out and immediately start seeing animals. Thousands of migrating Zebras and Wildebeests, Lion, Giraffe, and Elephants.



Now much excitement as word is received that the elusive Leopard has been spotted up on a high tree branch resting. We take off at high speed and are greeted by a great sight.



We stop at the park Visitors Center and eat our box lunches. Playful Hyrax run around our feet. The ballooners join us and report that they had a great time. The four of us had previously enjoyed hot air ballooning at Luxor in Egypt and at Cappadocia in Turkey. We thought the \$550 per person fee here was a little steep.(The balloon operators probably must pay a good size concession to the National Park.) Plus, we didn't want to miss a game drive. After lunch, we go on a guided nature walk.



Back on the (rough) road we spot a large family of Elephants under and Acacia tree. Then we spend time to watch the sixty or so Hippos in a pond.



We are back at our lodge at 4:15 PM. Tour Director Seif asks us to join him on the patio behind the swimming pool at 6 PM for an appreciation event. When we arrive, we are greeted by a Maasai band, and a bar and snack set up with a great view.



Below are Marie and Kal sitting next to Seif and Phyllis and Sandy and Alice and Shuman cutting a mean step.



We enjoy watching the sunset. The weather is great; a mild temperate with no real wind.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 12 – Monday Sept. 25th - Serengeti N.Park

At 9:30 AM we depart the Serengeti Serena Safari Lodge after an enjoyable two-night stay. We are heading towards a tented camp in the Serengeti so I guess we are going to have to “rough it” for just a one-night stay.

We leave with the roof up on our Land Cruiser but Seif detects Tsetse flies around us so we lower the roof while we are in the breeding area. We don’t want to get Sleeping Sickness, a form of encephalitis.

These Toyota Land Cruisers are extremely durable. I am amazed that they don’t crumble with the rough roads they are driven over at high speed. Our vehicle is nine years old with more than 200,000 miles and it runs great. However, we learn that yesterday one of our other three vehicles suffered a break in the bracket securing one of the rear leaf springs. Seif arranged for a replacement vehicle to be driven in from Arusha. The driver left Arusha at 10 PM and arrived at our lodge at 8 AM. He had to get special approval for driving at night through the park as there is elevated danger of hitting wild animals.

We see Topi and Zebras and Vultures guarding a corpse.



We arrive at our tented camp at 11:30 AM and find that it is luxurious, as we really expected. The lodge opened in 1998. Below is a photo of our “tent” and the interior.





We enjoy a nice lunch and quickly realize that the food quality and service is a level above the great quality we have enjoyed at the previous Serena lodges on our tour.

At 4 PM it has cooled down a bit and we depart on a game drive. It starts raining lightly and we lower the raised roof for about twenty minutes

until the rain stops. This is the first rain we have encountered on this tour. It is the dry season.

We spot a large herd of Antelope. Then we spot a Garaffe family consisting of two 1 month old babies, two females and a male. We have great fun for the next twenty or so minutes watching them.





We spot a Water Buck and then return to our lodge where we enjoy the sunset.

We enjoy a great dinner and then return to our tent with an escort, since there is no fencing here to keep out animals. There is a red button on our headboard, an emergency alarm, that we are to activate if our tent is invaded by wild animals!

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 13 – Tuesday Sept. 26th – Masai Mara NP



Our wakeup call this morning, at the tented camp, is at 5 AM but this one is different. A lodge escort arrives at our tent at 5 AM with the coffee and hot chocolate that we had requested yesterday.

Bags out at 5:45 AM and then breakfast and we depart at 6:30. We will cross the border later today and re-enter Kenya.

We enjoy the sunrise over the Serengeti while watching a pair of Wildebeests.

Our first stop is a fishing village on the shore of Lake Victoria.



When our Land Cruiser arrives, we find Seif and the driver finishing replacing a flat tire on vehicle #2.

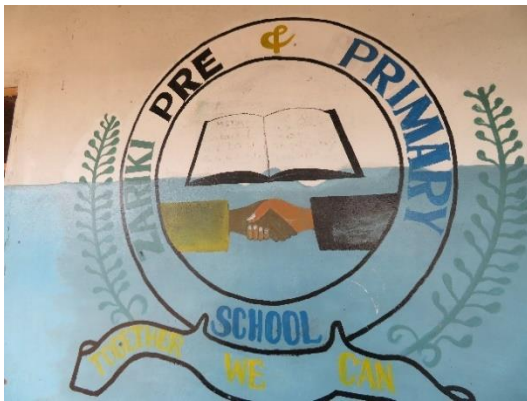
We sit through a good talk from a local about the lake and learn that it is the second largest fresh water lake in the world after Lake Superior. As Lake Victoria is only 240 feet at its deepest, I am assuming it's the second largest based on surface area and not volume of water. It is also the source of the White Nile, one of the two sources of the Nile River.



Thirteen folks in our group have signed up for a canoe ride in the lake, with town people doing all the paddling. The other five of us start off on a tour of the town with a local guide.



We learn that the town has 2000 inhabitants. Fishing is the main activity and source of income. Not all of the parents send their children to the excellent local school. They are afraid that they will become educated and leave town. The town's children quickly gather around us wanting to have their pictures taken and then see the picture. They grab our hands as we walk through town and they marvel at the raised veins on the backs of our hands and the rough skin on our elbows (not to mention the gray hair).



After our walk through town we cross a sandy field and arrive at the Zariki Nursery and Primary School. The school has 250 students in grades 3 through 7 and 16 teachers.

What is unique about this school is that all instruction is in English. Tanzania, unlike Kenya, has decreed that all instruction be in Swahili through grade seven. Some feel that this inhibits many Tanzanians from becoming really fluent in English. It is said that some Tanzania businesses prefer to employ Kenyans due to their better English skills.

We meet Martin, one of the school leaders. He tells us the government used to give the school a hard time but has come to accept the English instruction as it is a private (non-government) school funded by community and other donations. He said that last year, for the country-wide 4th grade achievement exams, the government translated the Swahili test into English for his school. I asked how his students performed and he said they were #1 in the district and #77 out of 10,000 schools in the country.



We enter several of the classrooms and are impressed by the students and the level of instruction as shown by the algebraic formulas on the chalk board on a math class and the writing on the chalk board in a literature class.

We are surprised that the thirteen canoers have not yet joined us for the tour. Most of them finally arrive and we learn that one of the nice ladies on our tour was holding on to her canoe's gunnel when another canoe hit it. She injured her hand (note: she recovered well).



At mid-morning, a group of female students form up and sing songs for us. They ask if we have a song we can sing for them. Phyllis quickly suggests the “Hokey Pokey” which our ladies perform. The girls quickly pick up the moves and have fun dancing and singing along.

The school visit was most inspiring. We plan to go to the website www.zariki.org and donate.

We depart for the border at 10:40 AM. Our vehicle is stopped for speeding. Our driver convinces the police that the photo they have of a speeding Land Cruiser is not his and he is let go. This is correct! He was not speeding!

We eat our boxed lunches in our vehicles and cross the border into Kenya at 2:30 PM. We say goodbye to our excellent Tanzanian driver/guides and meet our new Kenyan ones.



Although it is the dry season and there has been little rain Kenya seems much greener than Tanzania. The road we are traveling on is extremely rough. Maybe the worst we have been on. Marcia comments that this must be why each Serena lodge that we have stayed in offers massages.

We spot a family of Elephants.

It starts to rain heavily (really the first substantial rain we have had on this trip). My window is soon covered

in mud!



At 5 PM we arrive at the Mara Serena Lodge inside Masai Mara National Park. This is where we will spend the last two nights of the tour.

Although the lodge was built in 1973 it has most probably been updated several times and it is beautiful.

Tomorrow game drives and a chance to see the “Big 5” one more time.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 14 – Wednesday Sept. 27th – Masai Mara NP

We are up early after our first night at the Mara Serena Safari Lodge located inside of Kenya’s Masai Mara National Park. We leave the lodge at 6 AM on an early morning game drive. We watch the sunrise from our Land Cruisers.



We immediately spot an Elephant family including a young one. We watch as hot air balloons rise in the distance. Six of the folks in our tour group have opted for the balloon excursion this morning.



We spot a male lion, probably about nine years old our guide states, resting right by the side of the road. Mika and Tom, in the vehicle next to ours, zero in for some good shots.



We spot a Hippo on land and Hippos in the water. Seif tells us that Hippos kill more people in Africa each year than the Big 5 combined. Also, more people than die from Malaria.



A young Hyena trots across the road behind us and we see an Elephant family with a one-month old.



Next, we see two rare Black Rhinos. Also, a Secretary Bird.



We spot a herd of Cape Buffalos (not bad, we have spotted 4 of the Big 5 in less than two hours this morning; just need to find the elusive Leopard). We observe a very pregnant Giraffe.



We drive by a young Hyena in a watery ditch on the side of our road and then spot a Lioness with two six to nine-month old cubs.



We stop by the Mara River hoping to spot a Crocodile. A Maasai warrior points one out to us. Tour Director Seif tells us to follow the Maasai warrior and he will show us more crocs. We follow him down a narrow path and he hands us glasses of Champagne and leads us to our breakfast table on the shores of the river. What a surprise! Is this great or what! The folks that were ballooning now join us.



Small Mongooses are all around our breakfast spot. We see more Crocodiles and Hippos in the river.



What a morning! We are back at the lodge at 10:30 AM. This lodge, like our others, is again perched on high ground so we get excellent views of the park from our rooms.

We have no activities planned until the 4 PM game drive, except for lunch, so this gives me some rare free time to get caught up on these “daily” Trip Journals and for Marcia to send them.

At 4 PM we head out for our afternoon game drive. This will be our last game drive on the tour.



We first spot an Elephant family with a baby nursing. Then a large Lion family with half a dozen cubs 12 to 14 months in age.



Then we respond to a report of a Leopard sighting and spot the small female in a tree. Yes, we saw the Big 5 in one day..



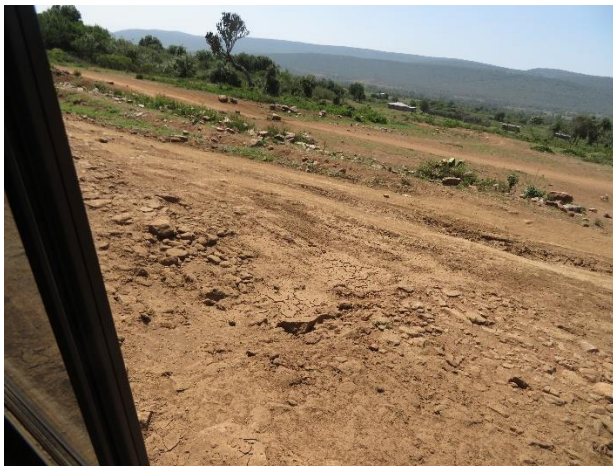
Then we run across another Lion family with a dozen cubs 12 to 14 months old. We watch them frolic and play for at least half an hour.

We are back at the lodge at 6:15 PM and have a nice Farewell dinner later in the evening.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 15 – Thursday Sept. 28th – Travel to Nairobi

Today will be our last day in Africa. It will be a long one. Tomorrow we will be home in the USA.

We have been warned that the first part of today's drive to Nairobi will be over very rough roads. Six members of our group have opted to fly from a nearby grass airstrip, on a small plane, to Nairobi for \$250 per person. I think most of us that are staying with the drive want to see more of the Kenyan countryside, towns and cities.



We hit the road at 8:30 AM and it is a rough one. Our driver frequently leaves the road to drive on "temporary" roads that someone has initiated to avoid the worst bumps and obstacles.



The countryside is varied but almost always green. At 11:20 AM we say goodbye to dirt roads and find pavement. We stop in the mid-sized city of Nokak and eat our boxed lunches.



Small, mostly Chinese made motorcycles are widely used by the Maasai youth. They use the cycles to transport goods and as an informal taxi service. The Maasai are continually moving their cattle and sheep trying to find good grazing land.



Nearing Nairobi, we drive up a long incline and get a good view of the Rift Valley. Entering Nairobi, we drive by the sprawling Kibera slum, It's home to over 600,000 people and is said to be the second largest slum in Africa after South Africa's Soweto. Our driver says the government is offering free housing to the slum residents, they just have to pay the utilities, but few want to move as they live for free in Kibera.

We have a nice included dinner at a new hotel restaurant on the sprawling airport grounds.



We are then transported to the terminal and check in for our flights. We go through five levels of security checks.

Marie and Kal's flight to Dayton, on KLM through Amsterdam and Atlanta and Marcia and Jim's flight to Pittsburgh, on British Airways through London and Chicago both take off just before midnight. It has been a long day and we are beat.

2017 Kenya & Tanzania Safari – Day 16 – Friday Sept. 29th – Travel Home



Marcia and I were dead tired when our British Airways 747 departed Nairobi shortly before midnight last night. We are on an eight-hour flight to London's Heathrow airport. Surprisingly we are able to get some good sleep on the flight, possibly aided by the roomy seats and legroom in BA's "World Traveler" Premium Economy section.

We arrive in London at 6 AM, picking up two hours. We actually feel OK. Our eight-hour flight to Chicago departs at 11 AM and is even more comfortable

than our first flight. We arrive in Chicago at 3 PM but our American Airlines flight is delayed one and a half hours. We land in Pittsburgh at 9 PM. Jaime picks us up and we are finally home at 10 PM. Marie and Kal make it home by 5 PM. Pepper is happy to see Marcia.

Here are some thoughts, mostly mine, on what was good and not so good on this trip (in no particular order).

Pluses

Vantage Itinerary: This was the main reason we chose to go with Vantage. They cram a lot of activity and different places into two weeks.

Accommodations: Were excellent. We stayed at properties owned by the Serena chain and they were at least four stars. Probably the best we could have stayed at in the areas we were in. The six Serena Safari Lodges were all unique in design.

Meals: The meals at the Serena lodges were all quite good. Breakfast and Lunch were buffets while dinner was a mix of buffet and ordering from choices on a menu. There was an omelet station at most breakfasts and a stir-fry/pasta station at dinner. The included meals we had outside of the Serena Lodges were also very good. The box lunches prepared for us by the Serena Lodges were OK.

The People of Kenya and Tanzania: Were uniformly courteous, friendly, cheerful and apparently quite happy. We tried to be the same.

The people in our group: As previously noted, the four of us have been on many tours and this is probably our favorite group of fellow travelers. This was a most friendly, intelligent and helpful group. Not that it is a big deal with me but I cannot recall a selfish act or anyone even showing up late.

The Land Cruiser Drivers/Guides: The four of us had three driver/guides during the trip. All were excellent both as drivers and as guides/animal spotters. I believe the folks in the other two Land Cruisers had a similar experience. I can't believe all Safari driver/guides are this good. Perhaps Seif/Vantage has some favorites they pick.

Vantage Tour Director: We believe we have had some great Tour Directors on some of the various tours we have been on. Seif Mohamad is right at the top of the list. His demeanor, organizational skills, knowledge, and ability to watch out for everyone without being overbearing was excellent. The surprise events he sprung on us were great.

Animals: We expected to see a lot of wild animals but never the variety and the quantity that we encountered. This was great, as this is what we came for.

Weather: Couldn't have been better. I believe the dry season is a good time to visit.

Conservation Efforts: We were impressed with the conservation efforts that we heard about sponsored by the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments.

Wi-Fi: The very good Wi-Fi at all of the lodges was great for emails and internet browsing (but not for internet phone calls). That it was free and did not require any passwords was a plus.

The Land Cruisers: The Toyota Land Cruisers used were the perfect vehicle for handling the rough roads and facilitating the photographing of the wildlife. The interior comfort was acceptable.

Interacting with the Tribal People: These were better than I expected. Each had a unique story to tell and they told it well with great humor and happiness.

Minuses

Tips: Vantage needs to review their tipping policies. They should follow the lead of Odysseys Unlimited and now even OAT and include all tips in the tour fee (except for the Tour Director). It was a bit of a hassle to make sure that one always had small bills with them. It was embarrassing when I forgot to tip a local guide or did not bring money. In my experience with OU, where we always seemed to have the best local guides, they did not seem to mind that they were tipped by the tour operator they knew what they were going to get and the travelers always had the option of still giving the guide an additional tip.

Dirt Roads: I guess they are better than they used to be but they are something!

Long Flights: The accommodations and service on our British Airways flights were among the best we have had. But, two back-to-back eight hour flights is grueling.

Additionally:

Jane's Story: Thanks to Seif for setting this up. Her fight against female genital mutilation is a moving story.

Here are our souvenirs.

Best, Jim



