

SAFARI ETIQUETTE

Kenya's wildlife trust you and your guide to respect them and keep their habitat safe.

With poaching on the rise, fragile eco-systems disappearing, and some species struggling to stay off the endangered species list, safari etiquette is essential not just for the protection of wildlife, but for you, so that your safari is problem-free and the ultimate experience!

This is a universal list of guidelines - a start. Code of conduct will vary depending on where you visit: national reserve, park or conservancy.

Makena Safari clients will also receive a comprehensive list that will pertain to the specific area they are visiting.

1. Never leave the safety of your safari vehicle unless it's at a designated rest stop. It's not just the variety of small, medium and large wildlife that can be threatening, but it's also what could be slithering in the grass, sunning on a rock or lurking behind the closest bush.

For those watching the migration at river crossing points in Maasai Mara, leaving your vehicle is forbidden.

2. The cliché "use your indoor voice" applies on safari. Clapping, whistling and any other obtrusive sounds need to stay at home. Your pet at home most likely hates loud noises and that goes for wildlife as well.

3. Electronics. They are everywhere, but not on safari. Laptops, ipads or tablets need to stay home. If you must take your cell phone please turn it off or switch to vibrate while on game drives.

4. Even if you have great balance and like heights, sitting or standing on a safari vehicle's roof is still out of the question.

5. Littering or throwing food from a vehicle is forbidden, and you will be fined if caught. Just like in the United States. Also watch those plastic bags. They can easily fly out windows and wildlife can suffocate on the plastic.

6. Don't feed the wildlife. Monkeys can be aggressive and have been known to grab snacks from the hands of unwary individuals, or worse - bite.

7. Rescuing wildlife of any kind is not permitted. It is tempting to help an injured animal or one that may seem abandoned, but they need to be left alone. If need be, notify the proper authorities for that area.

8. No bribes. Even though you may have heard it works, it could exacerbate the situation.
9. Be on time. There's always a good explanation why your driver/guide wants to leave at a specified time.
10. A maximum of five vehicles are allowed viewing wildlife. If your driver comes upon five or more vehicles surrounding wildlife, then he is expected to stay back and wait until a vehicle leaves.
11. Your driver will keep a required distance from wildlife, obey the speed limits and refrain from off-roading except in allocated areas.
12. Not tolerated: Harassing, crowding, following or chasing wildlife.
13. No smoking except at designated rest stops.
14. Night time game viewing is not allowed, therefore all safari vehicles have to be back at the lodge or camp by nightfall.
15. If you happen to visit an area that permits walking safaris, then long pants, walking shoes or boots, and muted colors are strongly advised for your safety.
16. Sweets and gum for the children. It's fun to take something for the kids especially when visiting a Maasai or Samburu village, but more often than not these children have very poor dental hygiene with no access to dental care. An alternative: pencils, crayons, notepads or coloring books.
17. Ultimately you are responsible for your comfort while on game drives, so please ensure you have plenty of water, sun block, hat and any other items that you require.

* A driver's career can be tarnished or lost due to driver/tourist/wildlife conflicts that could have easily been prevented.

* At any time, if you feel that your driver has placed you in an compromising situation, talk to him.

*Many thanks to those who assisted with the compilation of these guidelines: several Kenyans for Wildlife members, the Mara Conservancy, and the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association.

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