

# Rift Valley and Lakes



## Further Links

- Classic East African Rift Valley scenery
- Masses of flamingos on the alkaline lakes - Nakuru, Elmentaita, Bogoria and to the far south, Magadi.
- Fantastic birdlife including close ups of Fish Eagles on the freshwater lakes.
- Great game viewing
- Easy access from Nairobi and a variety of accommodation

## Situation

Central Kenya. The Rift Valley system runs from Lake Turkana in the far north down to Magadi in the south.

## Activities

Game drives, walking, horse riding, bird watching, boating, camping, cultural visits.

The Rift Valley is a major geological feature splitting Africa from the Red Sea down to Mozambique. In Kenya a string of lakes form a line north to south down this amazing valley and the classic 'rift valley' landscapes are accessible in Kenya more so than in other parts of Africa - this is classic Africa with dramatic rocky outcrops and misty hills, flat valley floors dotted with acacia trees and thorny bushes. The valley stretches wider than the actual lakes so encompasses the **Laikipia plateau** and surrounding areas too - from the Mau Escarpment behind Lake Naivasha, across the Laikipia plateau past **Mt Kenya to the Mathews Range** north of Samburu. As well as walking and game viewing, horse riding is a popular pastime in the valley and there are several sites of geological interest.

**Lake Naivasha** is probably the most visited of the rift valley lakes, partly because of its close proximity to Nairobi. Being only 2 hours by road it is a popular weekend and holiday retreat for Kenyans as well as visitors. This is a freshwater lake and home to a huge variety of birdlife, plus hippos and on the shores in the fever trees, troops of Black and White Colobus monkeys often give you a wake up call! There is a game corridor passing through the area surrounding the lake, so zebra, giraffe and many antelope are often seen, plus in the private reserves and conservancies you can see rhino, grevy's zebra, eland, ostrich, hyaena and many others. Lake Naivasha was Nairobi's first 'airport' when flying boats used to land there in

the 1930s and it's also scene of the famous 'Happy Valley' characters. It is a fertile area on the valley floor and huge flower farms there provide work for thousands of people and export their produce daily all over the world. Large colonial houses flank the lake shore and private farms, some of which have been renovated to accommodate tourists. Near to the lake are several volcanic hills including Mount Longonot which you can hike up with amazing views and the Hell's Gate National Park provides opportunity to explore the geology of this region with rock formations, hot springs and lots of birds of prey, it is possible to use mountain bikes here. A popular place to go and have afternoon tea is Elsamere which is the old home of Joy Adamson of 'Born Free' fame, the house is full of photographs and artifacts from the days when Joy and George lived here and is a fascinating place to stop.

Next north in the valley is the small **Lake Elmenteita**, there is a lovely view from the main highway as you rise beyond Gilgil and look down onto the pink rimmed lake.

On to Nakuru, which is a bustling market town, and home to one of the most beautiful parks in Kenya, **Lake Nakuru** National Park. Most well known for the flamingos, whose numbers fluctuate as they migrate up and down the valley, it is also home to a very successful Rhino population and a good number of leopard which can often be seen in the forests surrounding the lake. There are a few nice places to stay near the park, or you can day trip here while staying at lodges in Naivasha, it's about a one hour drive between the two.

Heading north again, **Lake Bogoria** is a little visited and attractive small park, set against steep valley walls and home to naturally occurring hot springs, boiling geysers which erupt jets of hot water along the lake shore - living proof of the valley's volcanic history! You can walk or cycle to the hot springs but must take a vehicle further into the park. It's a good place to see Greater Kudu and again, there are a resident population of flamingos. You can visit here on a day trip from Baringo if you are staying there.

**Lake Baringo**, just north of Bogoria, is a freshwater lake and a stunning location for a remote get away break. Very few tourists visit here and it's peaceful and tranquil, just a few hippos grunting and fish eagles crying break the quiet. Some water sports are available and it's quite popular to go out on a boat and 'feed' the fish eagles, watching them swoop down to catch they prey. The local fishing tribal people are also happy to show you around their village and sell their handicrafts.

To the far north joining the Ethiopian border is remote **Lake Turkana**, the largest of Kenya's Rift Valley Lakes and getting here is recommended by air. It was formerly known as Lake Rudolf but changed to Turkana in the 1970s. It is a long lake stretching 265 km and averaging 30km wide. There are some volcanic islands and a few small national park areas which are World Heritage Sites. There is a famous fossil site at Koobi Fora in Sibiloi National Park.

On the Kenya - Tanzania border sits remote [Lake Natron](#), a haven for flamingos and a fascinating geological site with hot springs and the active Ol Donyo Lengai volcano providing a dramatic backdrop.



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