

Kenya and tourism

Kenya is a popular place for people to go on holiday. Tourism is Kenya's fastest growing industry and largest earner of money from overseas. People go to Kenya for many reasons. Most have seen television programmes on it and want to experience animals in their natural habitats, for many people it is a danger, ambition, dreams and opportunity. "Hot Air Balloon Safari" is also popular, because tourists can see the animals from hot air balloon and Kenya has some of the world's biggest balloons.

Tourists come on foreign exchanges and holidays; they come to see some Maasai villages and the Maasai Mara National Park. They come to visit the beaches along the coasts, go on safari, or see some of Kenya's beautiful coral reefs.

Kenya welcomes tourists. They bring in massive amount of money for the Kenyans and the community depend on this source of income. The local people can make a lot of money by selling souvenirs. Handcrafted or hand sewn items can be brought off the streets by passers-by and many get jobs as minibus drivers or holiday reps. Sometimes, tourists pay money to the tribes, and stay in their hut for a night or so, just to experience what it is like to live in a hut.

There are over 50 National Parks and Game reserves in Kenya, which have been set up to welcome tourists and protect its scenery and wildlife.

There are also disadvantages of tourism and the main one is the damage done to the environment and wildlife by the tourists. Many of the minibus drivers in National Parks drive too close to the animals to get extra tips and please their customers even when this is illegal. The hot air balloons that are constantly flying over the Parks disturb the animals and birds with their noise and huge passing shadows. They have set whole herds of animals on the move, like the rhino, which have been driven out by the noise. The trailers for the balloons tear up the ground making the grass turn to dust. Some say the Maasai Mara is being turned into a funfair and that there is no peace for the animals anymore. They can't sleep, feed or mate. Storks and baboons have become scavengers and many animals have become obese and their health is at risk from the rubbish tourists leave. One elephant was poisoned by a battery and died. Lions and cheetahs are declining rapidly and many fear that Kenya is losing its natural beauty.

Another major problem is the tourists that regularly visit the coral reefs. The coral is being rapidly killed off. Tourists take coral and starfish away with them and coral dies whenever it is touched. The anchors from the boats full of tourists drag along the seabed killing thousands of coral as it goes, and the divers disturb the fish.

There is also a lack of respect for the local tribes. Tourists don't cover up, they wear revealing clothing and swimsuits and this is having an effect on the local women who envy this dress code. Local tribes complain that tourists bring prostitution, drink, drugs and crimes to their villages, and their women are being led astray.

There have been attempts made to try to blend tourism in with the environment. Minibuses are only allowed up to 25metres from the animals and are not allowed off the roads. North of Mombassa, in a town called Lamu; there are no large hotels, few bars selling alcohol and no package holidays or tours. Tourists are discouraged from wearing revealing clothing and charged to go into the main town and Sauo National Park. If this were to happen all over Kenya then the effects of tourism might not be as bad as it is now.