

Hakuna matata, it's Kenya!

On an 18-month, 50 000 km-long journey from France to South Africa, **Patrick and Marie Gurney** arrive in Kenya, just in time for the great wildebeest migration in the Masai Mara.

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Having driven about 5 000 km through Ethiopia, along some of the worst roads of our trip so far, we were dusty and tired. We were looking forward to Kenya for two reasons: a luxury six-night break on Lamu Island, and watching frolicking wildebeest while sipping a G&T. The great migration was in full swing.

First things first, though: another border. We crossed from Ethiopia into Kenya at Moyale, and the Ethiopian side was a total non-event, even though we only got there at 6 pm. "You're my first vehicle this week!" the immigration official told us.

Unfortunately, on the Kenyan side, we were informed that the immigration office had closed. "Hakuna matata!" said a security guard, indicating a spot where we could set up camp for the night within the Kenyan border grounds. The following day the paperwork took 10 minutes and we were off.



NOMADIC TRIBE'S HUTS, SAMBURU REGION



TAWNY EAGLE



SAMBURU PEOPLE

Vampire tree dassies

The 250 km drive from Moyale to the town of Marsabit (on a fantastic tar road) took us through Kenya's immense northern semi-desert. We saw no people and no animals – it was just us and the vast, volcanic rock-strewn landscape, with a few trees to break the monotony.

Three hours later, we drove into Marsabit and stopped at a grocery store. Like two ill-mannered toddlers, Marie and I ran around squealing with delight at all the fridges containing yoghurt, cheese, wine and many other items we had simply forgotten about during the past two months in Ethiopia. We purchased a heap of goodies to re-stock the Hilux pantry.

Keen to test wild-camping conditions in Kenya, we camped in a secluded spot just outside Marsabit a few hundred metres off the main road. The next morning we encountered our first elephant.

Another surprise was the raw beauty of the Samburu, the next region we crossed. We spent two nights camping wild next to a dry riverbed. The area boasts some of Kenya's largest parks and conservancies, but we unfortunately didn't have time to visit them – we had friends waiting in Nairobi.

We spent a week in Nairobi and did plenty of catching up. The city and suburbs are full of large retailers, with new hipster food joints popping up all over the place. Nairobi has crazy traffic, mainly due to an ageing road network. New road construction creates havoc – an average 20 km trip across Nairobi can take up to three hours! We camped in our friends' backyard, and we also spent a few nights in the well-known overlander campsite called JJ's (Jungle Junction). There's an on-site workshop, so it's a great place to do some vehicle maintenance. Our front shock absorbers had clocked over to 80000 km in Ethiopia, so we installed new ones.

One resident of Nairobi needs a special mention: the tree hyrax – a boom dassie! This cute, furry animal emits a terrifying, vampire-like scream at night. It's the most horrifying sound in Kenya – not recommended for children!

Before the tree dassie drove us mad, we jumped on a short-haul flight to the coast for a bit of sand, sea and our own private chef.



NAIROBI TRAFFIC



LAMU CHANNEL



LAMU



STREET SCENE, LAMU



DONKEYS THRIVE ON LAMU

Lazy Lamu

With only one road on the island, and reportedly only one car, little has changed on Lamu since the 18th century. This tiny island is stuck in a relaxed time warp – even the estimated 4000 donkeys hanging around in doorways and alleys looked medicated by the fresh Indian Ocean air.

We wanted to experience both sides of the Lamu Channel, so our six-night stay was divided between two different Airbnb bungalows. The first bungalow was on Manda Island, and it had a real Robinson Crusoe feel, with a palm-fringed roof and a view towards Shela Beach, about 700 m across the channel on Lamu Island. The bungalow came with a private chef – all he needed was a budget and he'd conjure up all sorts of amazing meals: pizza, interesting coconut salads, prawn curry with naan bread... It made for deliciously simple living.

Our next bungalow was on Shela Beach, on Lamu. First we lunched at the nearby Peponi Hotel, then we walked down the alleyways past art galleries and tiny coffee shops, to our very own Swahili-styled four-storey holiday mansion. It also came with a chef!

Our only activity was to visit the local museum, which was surprisingly well curated. Other than that, we happily sat on our rooftop terrace for three days catching up with the rest of the world via the Internet.



AIRBNB ON MANDA ISLAND



CAMP CARNELLEY'S, LAKE NAIVASHA



KAKAMEGA FOREST



LUNCH TIME AT LAKE NAIVASHA



KISUMU YACHT CLUB

Thousands of flamingos, and a minor mishap

After flying back to Nairobi, we headed north-west on a 450 km, 12-hour journey towards Kakamega Forest National Park, taking in Lake Naivasha, Lake Elementaita and Lake Victoria along the way.

Driving to Naivasha, we passed pockets of zebras and we stopped to buy some rather odd Russian-looking sheepskin hats. (The hats inspired us to start planning our next adventure – the Silk Route...) We took in the views of the Great Rift Valley and saw many flower farms – Kenya is a major exporter of cut flowers to Europe.

Lake Naivasha has an average depth of only 6 m, and it's a haven for birds. We stayed at Camp Carnelley's, a well-run operation with a campsite, chalets and a huge restaurant that makes epic pizzas. We shared the campsite with pods of hippos, which munched on the lawn each night. A bit too relaxed after our two-night stay, I managed to forget my hiking boots under the Hilux; luckily we came past the same way 10 days later, so we could pick them up.

Lake Elementaita was full of flamingos – we guessed there must have been at least 50 000, as well as huge flocks of great white pelicans.

In Kisumu, on the banks of Lake Victoria, we planned to meet up with more friends. While driving down tiny dusty roads through a dense mishmash of houses – just five minutes from our destination for the day – we heard a terrible crashing sound. We hadn't noticed a low-hanging electrical cable, which had snagged on and damaged a big storage box on our rear roof rack.

A group of angry onlookers soon gathered. What I hadn't noticed at first glance was that a wooden electrical pole had also come down, and with it the electricity supply to half the suburb. We argued that the cable was actually a good 3 m lower than where it should have been (based on the other poles), but eventually we parted with US\$100 to avert a crisis.

Once our nerves had settled, we could actually enjoy Kisumu. We lunched at the Yacht Club and camped in a friend's yard, staying up late each night sharing stories about our road trip. (Read *Xanthe Hunt's beautiful column about Kisumu on p 144 – Ed.*)

Next stop was Kakamega, and we had two reasons to visit: My mother Shirley had asked us to try and snap a few photos of the old mission hospital where she was born in 1935; and we also wanted to visit the ancient Kakamega Forest.

Kakamega was once a small town but now it's a sprawling mass. Sadly, we couldn't find the specific mission hospital, but we did manage to camp for two nights in Kakamega.

The forest is a remnant of the once enormous Guineo-Congolian rainforest that stretched across Central Africa. It's listed as one of the 10 most important old-growth forests in the world and is home to a reported 350 species of butterflies.

We based ourselves in the public campsite and went for morning hikes. We saw waterfalls and lots of primates: black-and-white colobuses and red-tailed monkeys. Each night as we fell asleep, we savoured the sounds of the forest, but there was a nagging reminder that wildebeest were on the move and we should be, too.

The migration was calling.



AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK, WITH KILIMANJARO IN THE BACKGROUND



KAKAMEGA FOREST



GREAT MIGRATION, MASAI MARA



BLUE WILDEBEEST CROSS THE MARA RIVER



MASAI MARA

Wildebeest for days

From Kakamega Forest, we took a five-night stab at witnessing the wildebeest migration in the Masai Mara Triangle National Reserve. The 300 km southward journey through rural Kenya took us six hours. We were happy to have the new shock absorbers on the Hilux since the roads varied from shoddy tar to medium corrugations.

We were still getting used to the Kenyan savannah. You can see for kilometres! It removes all the “hide-and-seek” we’re used to in South Africa’s more densely vegetated parks and reserves.

Driving around the Masai Mara, we met up with a TV crew who told us that our timing was perfect – apparently they’d been there for a month already, but the wildebeest had only just started crossing the Mara River. Lucky us!

We witnessed a few crossings – smaller groups of about 200 animals. What was even more interesting was witnessing a few male wildebeest come down to the water’s edge to actively guide the herds across at selected points. We had never heard about this before, and it happened twice at different locations.

We camped for five nights inside the park at a total daily cost of US\$206 for both of us and the car. The campsite had no facilities, but it was centrally located within the park and staying there entitled us to a slightly reduced daily entrance fee per person. We met another South African couple – they had homemade boerewors!

South Africans will often debate whether it’s worth the cost of visiting the parks in East Africa if we have similar wildlife at home. It’s a valid argument, but much like you can’t experience the Sardine Run anywhere else but in SA, you can’t experience a migration like the one in the Masai anywhere else. It’s about paying money to see a truly unique spectacle. The first two hours in the reserve gave us a wildebeest crossing, Rothschild’s giraffes and a pride of lions!

From the Masai, we drove 230 km back up to Naivasha to collect my hiking boots. We had a 40th birthday celebration to attend in Nairobi, so it was worth the trip. For the party, we were treated to a traditional *karoga* at the well-known Mint Shack Restaurant in the capital. *Karoga* is the Kenyan word for “stir” – a cooking style that was started hundreds of years ago in Kenya by Indian migrants. You order your ingredients from the kitchen and cook your own Indian food, with chapattis, rotis and naan bread supplied by the kitchen.

From Nairobi, we drove a 260 km dirt-road route south towards the Iremito Gate into Amboseli National Park. While supposedly a “premium park”, of the four lodges we saw, two were dilapidated and had been closed for years. This left an unsightly scar on the landscape. The roads were terrible, so we only stayed one night.

From Amboseli, we drove to the Namanga border post with Tanzania. This road was also poor, like the others, and we were ecstatic when it finally turned to tar a few kilometres before the border.

We had been in Kenya for a month and driven about 2 500 km – 1 500 km on tar and the rest on dirt. Tanzania, here we come!



MASAI



MASAI

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

There are medical risks: Sleeping on a 5 cm-thick mattress for 400+ nights, and resting your arm on the car windowsill while driving 37 000 km takes its toll. We both developed the same condition, which we’ve dubbed “Overlander Arm” – a shoulder rotator-cuff injury which, apparently, is caused by a torn muscle and tendon. We both had a few physio sessions in Nairobi, but we still have another 15 000 km to go until we reach home in South Africa.

There are mental risks, too: On a trip as long as ours, you can easily lose your sense of humour over the smallest things. For example, I have been known to bellow: “Why are the spoons with the knives and forks?!”

Marie is a real trooper. I’m not sure many partners would handle the daily routine we follow and still manage a smile or a sarcastic (but loving) chirp in the morning.

Mental strength is certainly a key requirement when you’re on the road for this long.



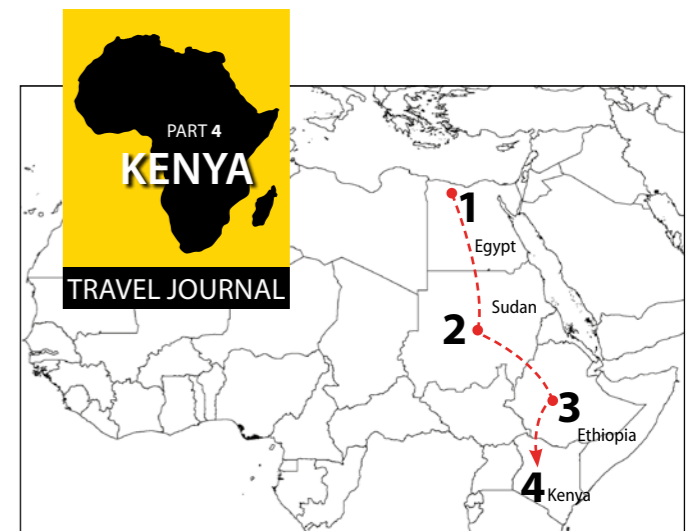
Patrick and Marie with the staff at Manda Island, Lamu

reached Kenya they had been on the road for 13 months, having driven through France, Switzerland, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

MEET PATRICK & MARIE GURNEY

Marie comes from Valence in France. She and Patrick set off from there on 3 June 2018, with the aim of driving back to their home in Johannesburg. By the time they

MORE INFO: You can e-mail them if you have questions about their trip (info@skultcha.com), or visit skultcha.com. Follow them on Facebook ([skultcha](https://www.facebook.com/skultcha)) or on Instagram ([@skulcha](https://www.instagram.com/skulcha)) – note the different spelling.



Next month: The Gurneys explore Tanzania.

See issue #158 for Part 1 of their Travel Journal through Egypt, #159 for Part 2 (Sudan) and #160 for Part 3 (Ethiopia).