

day: Kilimanjaro to the south; Mount Kenya to the north; the sere, burnt Great Rift Valley 2,000 feet below your feet; and the vast plains engulfing Nairobi to the west. The Ngongs make a fine setting for a hike, run, or horseback ride (see Funga Safari).

By circumnavigating the base of the hills in a four-wheel drive, you can see the startling contrast between the greenery of the Nairobi side and the hard-bitten Masai country of the Great Rift Valley. Hire a guide for any of these activities, as the hills can harbor wild animals and sometimes wild people, who want to take your money.

Muggings are a hazard of traveling in any Third World country, where the destitute live cheek to jowl with the wealthy, and Nairobi is no exception. Mathare Valley, a shantytown where the most desperately poor live, is a five-minute drive from the Hilton and three minutes from the Muthaiga Club, a bastion of colonialism created by British settlers with money, titles, and vast up-country land holdings.

Had I allowed squeamishness to overrule my curiosity, I would have never seen the side of Nairobi that left the most lasting impression on me: where the streams of humanity disappear to each night, on foot, by bus, or in jitneys bulging with bodies. Middle-class Africans disperse into the housing "estates," rows upon rows of one- and two-room stone bungalows that crawl to the vanishing point east of the city. The very poorest head for shantytowns along the Mathare and Nairobi riv-

ers. These low-income enclaves have gained a kind of permanence, evolving from illegal squatter settlements into villages where a man can hold title to his mud-and-wattle house and watch television in his living room.

These places felt as much like true Africa to me as the African villages I visited in the bush. A slow drive out Juju Road, along the perimeter of the Mathare Valley, will open your eyes to Third World realities. In spite of its poverty, however, the area does not exude desperation. People have not entirely lost their optimism, zest for life, or sense of humor. You see it in the names of their businesses: Small Happy Welcome Bar, Luke's Prestige New Life Hotel, and, my favorite, the Suffering Without Bitterness Bar.

Several day trips outside the city limits shouldn't be missed. The drive north up Limuru Road to the Kikuyu Escarpment takes you into the rich highlands, checkered with neat little farms and acres of coffee and tea. Farther up the highway, at the top of the escarpment, the view down into the Great Rift Valley is breathtaking—a 4,000-foot sheer drop. Beyond the overlook are Lake Naivasha and Lake Nakuru national parks, the latter famous for its flamingos, which perpetually fringe the lake with pink.

AFRICA BY BICYCLE

By Daniel Blumstein

Last summer I biked Kenya, a place largely untraveled by Western cyclists. Those planning to go should take a high-quality mountain bike (I used a Jamis Dakar), spare parts (especially rear derailleurs), and specialized tools for repairs.

Roads run the gamut from well-paved asphalt to corrugated mud. In Nairobi a 1:1,000,000 Kenya Route Map costs about \$2.50. More detailed topographic maps can be purchased from the Survey of Kenya, but avoid red tape and get them from

Edward Stanford Ltd. in England, 12 Long Acre, London WC2. None of the maps is very up-to-date, but the route map is adequate for most uses. Riding along the main roads is scary at times. *Matatus* (communal taxis) race by overloaded buses, which are in

turn passing slow-moving trucks. Once you're off the main roads, the going is easier and the people friendlier. Although visitors to Kenyan national parks must ride in enclosed motor vehicles, you can tour the rest of the country by bicycle and still see countless birds and animals. You can always hire a car for game drives.

Bicycle Africa and Forum Travel offer combination wildlife safaris/mountain-bike tours for those who prefer to have someone else plan their trip (Bicycle Africa, 4247 135th Place S.E., Bellevue, Wash. 98006, 206-746-1028; Forum Travel International, 91 Gregory Lane, Suite 21, Pleasant Hill, Calif. 94524, 415-671-2900).

FLIGHT LINES

By David C. Knudsen
& Tina Blaine

The major airlines have been charging about \$1,375 for round-trip airfare from New York to Nairobi, but you can cut that fare almost in half by going

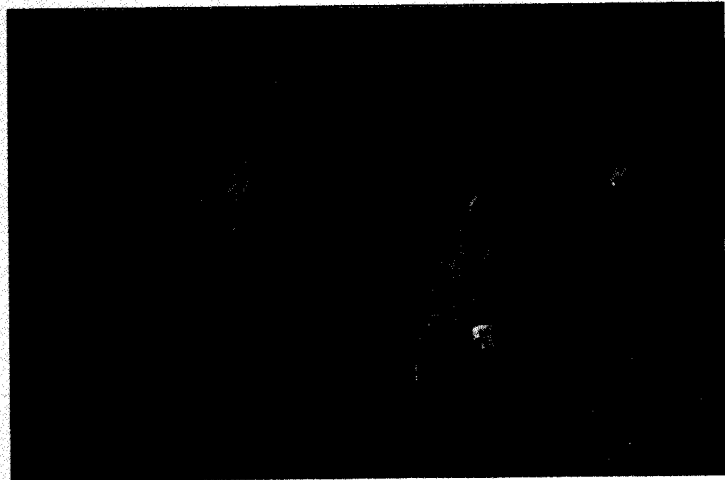
through London "bucket shops"—travel agencies specializing in below-tariff fares.

No airline will officially talk about the practice, but virtually every one that flies on to Africa from London slashes the cost of seats to dispose of excess capacity. A round-trip London-Nairobi fare can cost \$514. Combined with a low-season round trip on Virgin Atlantic between Newark and Gatwick, a savvy traveler can fly from the United States to Kenya for \$852 round trip.

A reputable specialist in discount tickets, as well as adventure trips, is Trailfinders Travel Centre, 42-48 Earls Court Road, London W8 6EJ, England. Trailfinders also publishes a free fact-filled quarterly newsletter that makes interesting reading for anyone considering an offbeat adventure trip.

Other good sources for tickets: African Travel Systems, 6 North End Parade, London W14 0SJ, England, (01) 602-5091 or telex 918907; Levitas Travel, 147 Oxford St., London W1, England, (01) 439-0880; and Wexas International, 45 Brompton Road, London SW3 1DE, England, (01) 581-8769. You can make reser-

Please turn to page 60



On the road to Maralal, Lake Turkana district