

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



1. What should I bring/wear?

We are considered to be at the heart of Laikipia ‘Kenya’s high country’ and the altitude ensures we have hot days and cool evenings/early mornings, making life here very comfortable. Bring a fleece and long trousers though, as well as shorts and t-shirts, as morning and evening drives can be chilly. Please do not worry about formal wear of any kind, life in the bush is informal and based on comfort. Colours: Try to pack ‘bush’ colours – beige, khaki, grey etc. - these will allow you to blend in when driving in the open cars and walking, which will improve your chances of seeing wildlife immeasurably. *Binoculars are essential for best game viewing and to enjoy the amazing birdlife here –with 404 species on El Karama you do not want to miss out on seeing them up close!* Cameras for photography are of course on the list. Hats, sunglasses and sunscreen are necessary to avoid sunburn and heatstroke as we’re on Equator and at a higher altitude. It’s also worth bringing some anti-diarrhea sachets and rehydration sachets as people can sometimes get sensitive stomachs on the first few days in a new country.

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2. What are the seasons, when does it rain?

Traditionally, Kenya has two rainy seasons; March/April and November into early December. The lodge usually has a closed period during these months for at least three weeks, but do check with us first in case there’s variation in this schedule as the ‘green’ seasons can be a beautiful and lower cost time to visit Kenya and with our all weather roads we are not as restricted as some lodges in these times.

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3. How can I / will I spend an average day at the lodge?

We encourage guests to take part in all our activities. The day will begin with a 6:15 a.m. wake up call and tea/biscuits at 6:30 a.m. Shortly after, guests depart in their vehicles for a game walk on the central plains overlooking Mt Kenya. You will return to camp for a cooked breakfast by 9:30 a.m. or possibly even have a bush breakfast. After this guests can relax in camp, reading, fishing, swimming or even taking a trip up to the farm to see the organic garden and historic farm buildings. Lunch is usually around 1 p.m. after which guests can catch up on a bit of sleep or reading/writing – the early starts can take some adjustment! At 4:30 p.m. tea and cake are served before guests leave for evening game drives. Some guests take sundowners with them and opt to arrive back in the dark and add on a night drive (advance request). A log fire will be waiting for you and drinks served at the bar. On a starry night guests can gather outside looking over the river or at the pool for drinks. Around 8 p.m. dinner will arrive once all the guests are together. Because of early rising most people don’t last much past 10 p.m. when the waiters close up the bar and retire to warm beds and the sound of the river and night creatures.

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4. How long is the average stay at this lodge?

Guests usually stay 3 – 5 nights at El Karama. This is the recommended length of time and ensures that you have time to see and experience all we have to offer.

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5. Malaria?

Because of being at high altitude we are considered to be a very low risk environment for malaria. In the green seasons we do get ‘grass mozzies’ and for these repellent is very useful. We also have mosquito nets in the bandas and cottages – however these are more for comfort than necessity. *N.B we do find that guests on some anti malaria medication experience sensitive stomachs so do bear this in mind when packing your medical kit.* We always have a ready stock of fennel seeds and fresh ginger for sore tummies to help travellers!

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6. Can I charge my camera?

Yes, we have solar powered electricity throughout the lodge. There are charging plugs and points in your bandas/cottages as well as in the shared central areas. The solar system is on day and night, but we do ask guests to only charge cameras and laptops. No hairdryers, hair tongs or other heavy-duty electrical items!

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7. What animals can I see here?

We are lucky to have four of the BIG FIVE here on El Karama and over 80 mammal species big and small. Obviously, in wildlife areas there are no guarantees, but on an average 3-4 night stay with guests going out twice a day, you should have a the chance of seeing elephant, buffalo, hippo and all the plains game, as well as – if you are lucky - leopard, lion and cheetah. Sighting of big cats often depends on factors like weather, grass length etc. We also have endangered species here like the Grevy’s zebra, Laikipia Hartbeeste and wild hunting dogs (passing through). We also see smaller species such as aardwolf, striped hyena, bat eared fox, zorilla and very occasionally aardvark!

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8. I am a birdwatcher, what will I see?

We have over 404 identified bird species (Jan 2014) here on El Karama – that is more than some entire countries have! We are also visited through the migratory seasons by travelling species such as European bee-eaters, Steppe eagle and many more. Over 80 resident bird species have been counted just around the lodge mess and swimming pool including the hard-to-see African Finfoot at the river. We have nesting sites all over the lodge compound including in the bamboo eaves of the dining room and in our home made nest boxes. Our staff leave food out at various bird tables, which mean close encounters are a daily occurrence.

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9. Will I be hosted at mealtimes?

Guests are looked after by a local team of Kenyan staff who speak very good English and who have been here since the beginning – some building the lodge with Murray and Sophie, the owners, and others even growing up here. They are kind, hard working and helpful. Sophie Grant or a colleague will be in the background to help answer questions and to give additional support when needed.

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10. What currency should I bring?

We accept USD or KSH cash on site at the lodge. These are also the most useful currencies to transact business in locally. There is now a Forex bureau in Nanyuki .

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11. Do you take credit cards?

Unfortunately, due to our remote location, we do not have the facilities on site to take credit cards.

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12. Language?

The team speak English and Kiswahili. Sophie Grant, the owner also speaks fluent French and good Spanish and can assist when required for some translation when she is on site!

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13. Are children/babies welcome?

YES. Family groups are very welcome here and our team has experience with children. We have developed activities aimed directly at children between 4 and 12 yrs to introduce them to bush life and to encourage learning and creativity. We feel passionately about getting children involved in every aspect of lodge and ranch life. Babies are also welcome here – the owners also have a small child and welcome other children to share her toys and play areas! We can provide a cot and high chair and with advance warning can provide an Ayah/ nanny who can help watch babies when parents are at meals or needing a little rest. Kenya is the perfect country for children as people are extremely kind and generous with their time.

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14. Will my phone work?

There is no phone signal in our lodge compound due to our remote location! It means that guests can really ‘switch off’ and you won’t have to worry about fellow travellers chatting on mobiles anywhere in the main lodge. We follow nature’s rhythm here: early to bed, early to rise, without digital technology! However, guests who need to make phone calls can be accompanied to the nearest ridge where we usually get ‘full bars’ for phones. The office has email access available for emergencies or urgent work use, but we do not encourage downloading of large image files or music as the system is slow and costly.

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15. Should I get insurance?

YES. We recommend that all guests take out travel insurance that includes evacuation coverage. As we are located 1 hour by road from the nearest local hospital and 4 hours drive to Nairobi hospitals we request that all guests are covered for accidents and evacuation. AMREF flying doctors provide extremely cheap and effective coverage - www.flydoc.org. Please get this before visiting.

16. How fit do I have to be for walks?

Because we are at a higher altitude, guests may find they are more tired on their first day or two with us. Walks however are usually gentle and paced to match the fitness levels of the group. Bush walks are designed to be peaceful and interesting not marching or overly vigorous because one has to be aware at all times of what is going on around you. We walk guests on the top of open plains giving good visibility and low risk of encountering dangerous wildlife at close quarters. This means there are no steep climbs or major rocky patches. Walks are usually 1.5 – 2 hrs in length and always accompanied by an armed guide.

17. Jogging/Running?

We regret that due to the presence of dangerous wildlife such as elephant, buffalo, hippo and snakes, this property does not permit running or jogging to lodge guests.

18. How far is the lodge from the nearest town?

We are 42 km or 1 hour's drive from Nanyuki, our nearest town, where all local amenities can be found including banks, internet cafes, ATMs (Barclays Bank Kenya), Nakumatt Supermarket and most importantly the Nanyuki Cottage Hospital and pharmacy!

Reference books

The lodge has a selection of natural history books including Fanshawe and Stephenson's East African birds and Jonathan Kingdon's mammal guides. We also have copies of Lavinia Grant's natural history memoirs 'A Small Piece of Africa' and 'On a Kenya Ranch' – these are the most beautifully written descriptions of ranch life on this property and the flora and fauna found here.