



## BALLOONING OVER THE MAASAI MARA, KENYA

### Maasai Mara Fact-file:

- Altitude: 1,500 m (5,000ft)
- Area: 1,812sq km (700 sq miles)
- Distance from Nairobi 275 km (170 miles)
- 4 airstrips
- National Reserve, administered by the local county councils
- Annual migration between Serengeti to the Mara from July-November each year
- Exceptional game viewing: lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, rhino, enormous herds of plains game
- Traditional Maasai culture
- Panoramic views
- 2 distinct eco-systems (upper & lower Mara)
- Game drives & escorted walks
- Hot air balloon safaris with champagne bush breakfast on landing

### A unique area:

The Maasai Mara is undoubtedly the Jewel in the Crown of East Africa, forever to be associated with vast numbers of game, the unique spectacle of its animal migration unchanged over the centuries. This is Hollywood Africa: vast rolling grass plains interspersed

with rounded hills, groves of woodlands, dense scrub thickets and the riverine forest of the Mara River which bisects the area. Smaller rivers feed massive fig trees growing along their banks.

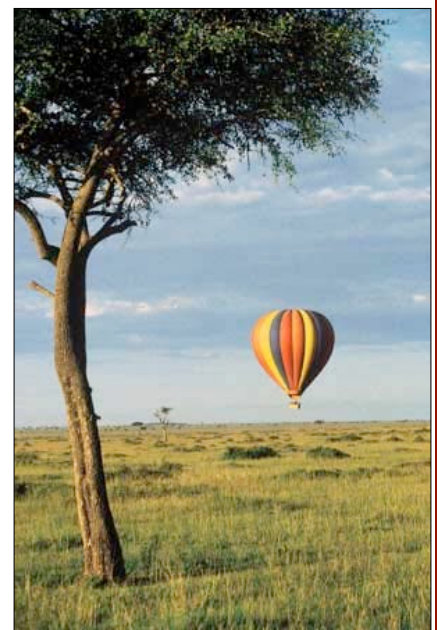
The word Mara is Maasai for "mottled" – and when ballooning over the plains of the Mara or observing them from the vantage point of one of the surrounding hills, it becomes evident why this area was so named.

It is probably the most famous reserve in Kenya. Its breathtaking views became familiar worldwide when the film 'Out of Africa' was released, as much of it was filmed in the Mara. It is perhaps the only region left in Kenya where visitors may see the super-abundance of animals that existed a century ago.

### Up, up and away...

One of the most incredibly uplifting experiences is to gameview from a hotair balloon, skimming the treetops and floating above the herds in the safe hands of an experienced balloon.

In the crisp air of dawn you assemble at the launch pad, gratefully drinking hot tea or coffee to ward off the dawn chill as the crew partially inflates the balloon with enormous fans. The gas burners are then ignited and the balloon fills with hot air slowly raising the baskets. Before departing, finalized checks are made, and you climb aboard, settling into the compartmentalized balloon basket ready for a take off.



### Origins Safaris

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The balloon lifts off just before sunrise when the breeze on the plains is still cold. Once airborne, you sail across the plains, blown by the prevailing winds, peacefully drifting across the game-studded expanse.

Apart from the hiss of the burners, the flight above the Maasai Mara plains is magically silent. The pilot controls the height of the craft by regulating the flow of hot air into the balloon. Sometimes the balloon will descend over the plains for a close up view of the wildlife; on other occasions, it rises to clear a tree canopy and rise over the riverine forest.

At the end of the flight, the passengers are treated to a champagne breakfast on beautifully laid out tables in the middle of nowhere – crews in Land Rovers have followed the balloon's flight and raced ahead to set up ready for your landing. The sense of euphoria and weightlessness continues long after the flight is over.

The tables are set out under a convenient acacia tree. Your hot and very welcome full breakfast is cooked using the burners from the balloon itself. After breakfast you are presented with your flight certificate and then your guide will take you on a leisurely game drive back to your lodge or camp, and the possibility of seeing the same pride of lions, or herd of elephants that had been viewed while ballooning. Over a dozen balloons depart from sites near six of the lodges and tented camps – we can advise you on the closest launch pad when we book your trip.

#### **Sample Balloon Safari Itinerary:**

- 0500 Wake Up**
- 0520 Walk or drive to launch pad**
- 0545 Tea & Coffee as burners ignite & balloon inflates**
- 0600 Lift off for dawn flight over the herds**
- 0730 Begin descent onto the plains (near the Serengeti/Tanzania border)**
- 0745 Champagne Breakfast on the plains**
- 0845 Game drive back to your lodge or camp**



**Fitness levels:** there are no special requirements for a balloon safari however anyone suffering from back pain or injury should seek medical advice first as the landing tends to be bumpy. Children under 12 are not generally permitted to join a flight.

**Safety:** all the balloon companies operate under licence from the Civil Aviation Association and regularly check, test and update equipment as required. Each flight is captained by a qualified and experienced balloon pilot.