

Welcome to Naivasha

A quick getaway from
the Kenyan capital

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The name “Naivasha” comes from the Maasai word *E-na-iposha* (rough or moving waters), after the uneasy temperament of Lake Naivasha **(1)**, a historical watering point of the Maasai herders, on the shores of which the town sits today.

Located on the floor of the Great Rift Valley an hour and a half from Nairobi, it's a good place for a day trip or weekend getaway for those wanting to catch a quick break from the bustle of the capital without having to travel to the coast or even Nakuru.

Thanks in large part to the many resorts to be found here – and to their tendency to attract Nairobi partygoers – Naivasha has also come to be known as Kenya's “second coast”.

Getting around

Traffic jams are rare. Local cab-hailing app Wasili is a convenient way to get

around, and rides in town will cost around \$2.50. Boda boda motorbikes are widely available, charging \$1 and below for a ride. To move between town and lakeside during the day, the *maruti* minivans are also available, charging less than \$1 for the trip.

Vibe around town

Naivasha **(2)** is a century-old town that has grown steadily in recent decades as migrant workers joined the expanding hotel and flower industries around the lake. Kenya is a top exporter of cut flowers in the world, and half of that output is produced here.

While some streets may prove too crowded for comfort, take a stroll down Moi Avenue, whose picturesque shops, fruit stalls, eateries and banking halls make for a quaint backdrop to your arrival in town. There is an almost rural feel to how things are done here; people are more friendly and in less of a hurry, compared with Nairobi.

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Food and Nightlife

The foothills of the Aberdare Mountains fall toward the lakeside, close to town, creating some excellent viewpoints for the water body. Etched on the cliffs here is Panorama Park – when I visit I like to sit in the upper restaurant to eat something delicious as I check out the waters down below. Visit with friends and get the *nyama choma* special platter of grilled goat ribs, chicken wings and fish fingers served alongside ugali and vegetables for \$27.

Fresh Lake Naivasha seafood may be sampled at the historic La Belle Inn, serving meals on the terrace since 1926. A whole tilapia served with rice, parsley, chips or vegetables will come to \$6.50, and a plate of crayfish cooked in butter, garlic, herbs and chillies and a similar array of side dishes is \$7.50.

Carnivorous urges may be appeased at the Rift Valley Spur Steak Ranch inside Buffalo Mall where steaks start at \$14 and a standard rack of beef, pork or lamb ribs costs \$15. If you're just in

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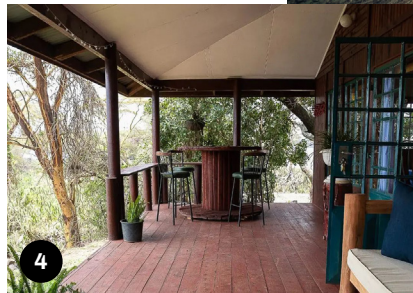
the mood for a good cup of coffee, the Java House is for you.

A fairly reserved weekday nightlife heartily picks up as the weekend arrives. In town, dance the night away, meet local people and devour Kenyan food at the usually packed Jikoniz Grill near the post office (beers cost around \$2.50) or head over to the equally inviting Old Station Lounge (3) on Kenyatta Avenue.

If camping, boating and biking are more your speed, Fisherman's Camp is perfectly fit for purpose. Its cottages, campgrounds, restaurants and bars are spread out on a hill among acacia trees near Moi South Lake Road.

Sightseeing

While the most common attraction is the wildlife, gorges and cycling trails of Hell's Gate National Park, you're still spoilt for choice when it comes to other



interesting places to visit here. Have a different experience with nature and wildlife by walking at close range with animals at the Crescent Island Game Sanctuary (4), where hosts will include wildebeest, zebra, giraffes, impala, waterbuck and gazelles, and entrance will be \$10 or \$30 for non-residents.

Take a hike up the extinct Mt. Longonot volcano (5) if you can stretch your muscles — a challenging three kilometres to the top (it's 2,776m high) followed by a seven-kilometre trek round the vast, forested crater, all of which take half a day to complete.

The local volcanic field carries more benefits: try the Geothermal Hot Spa in Olkaria, where visitors relax and swim in lagoons of naturally hot medicinal water tapped from geothermal wells. Entrance is \$4.

If you've an afternoon to

spare, sip some tea and see the museum at Elsamere, once home to conservationists Joy and George Adamson, whose adventures with Kenyan wildlife inspired the Academy Award-winning film *Born Free*.

What song best represents the town, and when's a good time to visit?

The Burundian musician Kidum lives in Kenya and his Swahili-French-English songs are popular here. His feel-good track *Enjoy* declares: *I live free, bila wasi wasi, leo najienjoy* (with no worries, today I'll have a good time). When people come to Naivasha, that's the feeling they're looking for.

Things are most alive around Easter and also during December, when the sun is shining and holidaymakers have descended upon the Second Coast for a good time. ■



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