



WELCOME TO  
THE CRADLE OF MANKIND

Visit Koobi Fora Museum  
Paleo-archaeological sites  
Koobi Fora Campsite

Kenya Wildlife Service

DESTINATION  
MARSABIT





# INTRODUCTION

Marsabit, affectionately referred to as the Cradle of Mankind by Anthropologists because of its prehistoric sites, is an adventure lover's paradise. The Koobi Fora deposits - rich in mammalian, molluscan and other fossil remains - have contributed more to the understanding of paleo-environments than any other site on the continent. The county has diverse and unique attractions ranging from the misty dense forest of Marsabit National Park, home of the famous Ahmed the Elephant and a refuge for big-tusked bull elephants to the iconic crater lake, Lake Paradise. Marsabit is a land of craters and the only true desert in East Africa, the Chalbi. This expanse of salt pans and undulating sand dunes is inhabited by the nomadic Gabbra community who traverse it with their herds of camels in the sweltering heat. Marsabit is home to the largest desert lake in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site, Lake Turkana. It is also a haven for the largest Nile Crocodiles and European-migrant birds on the shores of the pristine South Island National Park. Marsabit's magnificent sceneries constitute the renowned biosphere reserve, Mount Kulal, with its forested volcanic flanks which offer exciting hiking possibilities. The rocky Ngurnit is ideal for an epic rock-climbing experience for the most adventurous traveler. Marsabit is a true melting pot of culture. It boasts fourteen diverse and indigenous communities that religiously celebrate their culture paying homage to the age-old customs of their forefathers. This beautiful fusion of culture is also exemplified in the Desert Museum and Gallery in Loiyangalani on the shores of Lake Turkana which showcases a collection of the authentic artefacts and traditional regalia of her people. Formerly referred to as the Northern Frontier District by the colonialists as it shares a five-hundred-kilometre border stretch with the heritage-rich Ethiopia, Marsabit is the new frontier for experiential and immersion tourism.









## CHALBI DESERT

Inside Chalbi desert is a huge salt pan East of Lake Turkana where there is no oasis. Amazingly, you might still come across an Oryx, Ostrich or even the endangered Grevy Zebra galloping across the great, shimmering whiteness. After the rains, the bone-dry land turns into a shallow lake. On its northern fringes, where the wind piles up sand dunes, a chain of oases nourishes vast palm grooves. The precious greenery attracts flocks of Sandgrouse and Gabbra pastoralists alike, who bring their camels in the hundreds to drink. The colourful dresses, the singing and the dancing of their women appear as a celebration of life in an otherwise hostile environment. Further north rises the Huri Hills which comfort the sweating traveler with moderate temperatures and distant views over a boiling country.

Chalbi desert does not have distinct temperature conditions. It has a semi-arid kind of climate. February is the warmest month in Chalbi going past 36 degrees Celsius. July is the coldest month with temperatures going as low as 18 degrees Celsius. Temperatures drop sharply during the night. It can get chilly.

On the fringes of the desert, a number of basic camps and lodges that provide modest accommodation and meals can be found. Local tour guides provide guiding services at a fee.





Goff Aretho crater  
near Marsabit town





## MARSABIT NATIONAL PARK

The Park comprises of three crater lakes that are the only permanent surfaces of water in the region, providing habitat for a variety of bird life. Major wildlife attractions include the African elephant. The Park is famous for its elephant named Ahmed that was provided with 24-hr security surveillance by presidential decree in the 1970's, to demonstrate Kenya's commitment to wildlife conservation. Other wildlife species are the Buffalo, Greater/Lesser Kudu, Hyena, Grevy's Zebra, Kirk's Dik-Dik, Lion, Leopard, Baboons, among others.

The beautiful Marsabit National Park is a refuge for big-tusked bull elephants, diverse birdlife, and reptiles. It also provides opportunities for visits to the singing wells and hikes in the dense forest wreathed in mist.

A volcanic crater is a circular depression in the ground caused by volcanic activity. It is typically a basin, circular in form within which occurs a vent (or vents) from which magma erupts as gases, lava, and ejecta. A crater can be of large dimensions, and sometimes of great depth. Marsabit County has five of such craters!

## LAKE PARADISE

"The lake was shaped like a spoon, almost a quarter of a mile wide and three-quarters of a mile long, and it sloped up into steep, wooded banks two hundred feet high. A tangle of water-vines and lilies—great African lilies—grew in the shallows at the water's edge. Wild ducks, cranes and egrets, circled and dipped. Animals, more than we could count, stood quietly knee-deep in the water and drank.

*"It's Paradise, Martin!" I said.*

*He nodded.*

*That was how Lake Paradise was given its name."*

*~ Blaney Percival~*

In 1921, Osa Johnson, and her husband Martin, both natives of Kansas, took off for faraway East Africa determined to document on film a land they knew almost nothing about. They stumbled upon the iconic crater lake. The filmmaker and writer later wrote a book called "I Married Adventure" in which they document their adventurous journey in the 'wild' North hence popularizing Lake Paradise by giving it the name. It's a drinking haven for the big-tusked elephants of Marsabit and has a campsite hidden deep in the steep crater.



## AHMED, THE ELEPHANT OF MARSABIT

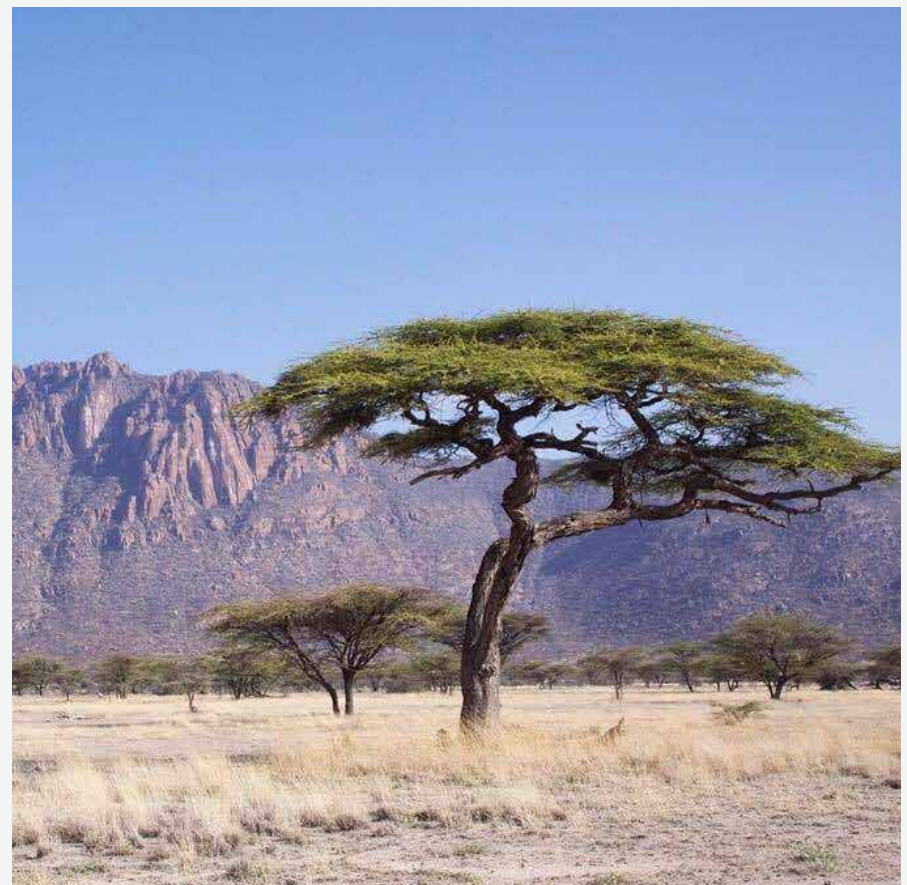
Ahmed of Marsabit was and still is the most famous Elephant ever to have roamed the African continent. Born in 1919, Ahmed came from the forests of Mount Marsabit and grew to become a truly unique giant, justifiably known by the natives and big game hunters alike as the "King of Marsabit".

In 1970, and in order to protect him from poachers, Kenya's President Jomo Kenyatta placed the Elephant under his protection by presidential decree, an unparalleled occurrence in the history of the country and the only Elephant to be declared a living monument. The giant was watched over day and night by two game warders against poachers.

A loner and quite elusive, Ahmed was seldom seen and was known better by reputation than by sight. One morning in 1974, after having waited in vain for their charge to reappear from the copse he had disappeared into the night before, his personal body guards decided to go and look for him. When they found Ahmed dead, he was not lying on his side, but resting majestically on his famous tusks, half-leaning against a tree. He was 55. While Ahmed was alive, it was thought that his tusks were of record size but after his death his tusks were found to weigh only 67.2 kg (148 lbs.) each. This is still no mean size but it's still far from some other tuskers. Today, Ahmed of Marsabit can be admired as a mounted exhibit at the Kenya National Museum in Nairobi.

## THE 'SINGING WELLS' OF MARSABIT

The 'Singing Wells' of Marsabit is an age-old cultural experience mainly practised by herders as they draw water from wells to quench the thirst of the livestock, their main source of livelihood. It's a melodic show that encourages and entertains them as they undertake the communal activity. The singing wells are found around the Marsabit Mountain.







# LAKE TURKANA & LOIYANGALANI

The most saline of Africa's large lakes, Turkana is an outstanding laboratory for the study of plant and animal communities. The three National Parks serve as a stopover for migrant waterfowl and are major breeding grounds for the Nile Crocodile, Hippopotamus, and a variety of venomous snakes.

Lake Turkana National Park is made of Sibiloi National Park, the South Island and the Central Island National Parks, covering a total area of 161,485 hectares located within the Lake Turkana basin whose total surface area is 7 million hectares. The Lake is the most saline lake in East Africa and the largest desert lake in the world. It is surrounded by an arid, seemingly extraterrestrial landscape that is often devoid of life. The long body of Lake Turkana drops down along the Rift Valley from the Ethiopian border, extending 249 kilometers from north to south and 44 km at its widest point with a depth of 30 meters. It is Africa's fourth largest lake, fondly called the Jade Sea because of its breathtaking color.

It represents unique geo-morphological features with fossil deposits on sedimentary formations as well as one hundred identified archaeological and paleontological sites. There are numerous volcanic overflows with petrified forests. The existing ecological conditions provide habitats for maintaining diverse flora and fauna.

## BIRDS

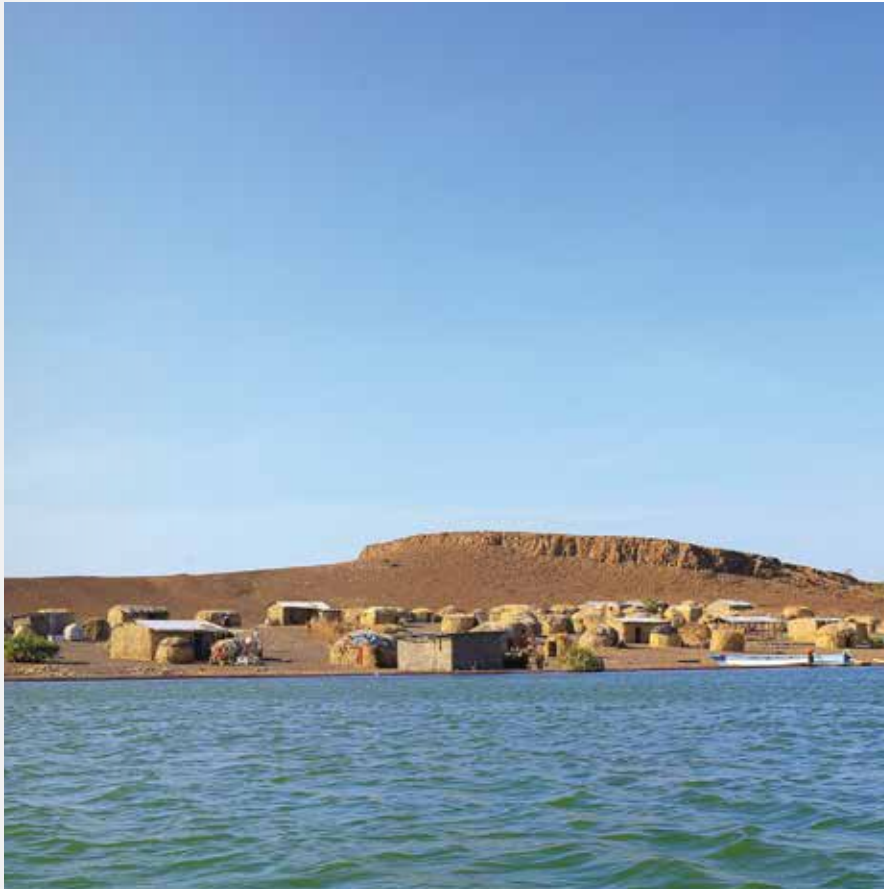
The Lake Turkana region is home to hundreds of species of birds endemic to Kenya. The East African Rift System also serves as a flyway for migrating birds, bringing in hundreds more. The birds are essentially supported by plankton masses in the lake, which also feed the fish.

## REPTILES

The lake formerly contained Africa's largest population of Nile crocodiles: 14,000, as estimated in a 1968 study by Alistair Graham.







## **SOUTH ISLAND NATIONAL PARK**

Covered end to end in volcanic ash, the nightly glow of its South Island's luminous vents has inspired numerous tales of ghosts and evil spirits. The island is home to a profusion of birdlife including 34 species of European migrants most spectacularly viewed as they return home between March and May. At least 23 species breed here, including Goliath Heron, and African skimmer, while African Open-billed Stork, Duck and Gulls feed on the shores and the volcanic island lakes attract lesser flamingos. Birds of prey are also abundant, especially swallow-tailed kites. This park is ideal for game watching and has one of the world's largest concentrations of crocodiles.

## **CENTRAL ISLAND NATIONAL PARK**

Emerging starkly from the blue-green waters of the largest permanent desert lake in the world, Lake Turkana, the Central Island is made up of three active volcanoes that belch sulphurous smoke and steam. Three crater lakes - Crocodile Lake, Flamingo Lake and Tilapia Lake - provide breeding grounds for the world's largest concentration of Nile Crocodiles. Central Island has a campsite where visitors can enjoy the beautifully haunting sight of the lake's luminous waters wash up onto a black lava beach while the moon rises over the menacingly smoking craters.

## **LOIYANGALANI**

Loiyangalani is a small town located on the southeastern coast of Lake Turkana in Kenya. Loiyangalani means "a place of many trees" in the native Samburu tongue. It is home to the Turkana, Samburu, Rendile and El Molo people. The town is situated on the shores of Lake Turkana, the largest desert lake in the world and a UN World Heritage site. Its main industries include fishing and tourism. It is a popular tourist destination in Northern Kenya, as the surrounding El Molo and Turkana villages offer unique cultural experiences.

In June 2008, the first Cultural Festival took place at Loiyangalani, and it united all tribes of the Lake in celebration for one weekend. And from whence the festival continues to be held every other year.

Loiyangalani was the setting for John le Carré's novel, *The Constant Gardener*, and was also a location for the film of the same title.

Main activities: Boat-rides in Lake Turkana, visit to El Molo shrines, visit Rock arts in Marti (4km from town), visit to South Island and Central



Island National Parks, Annual cultural festival in May, filming and bird watching.

Accommodation: Desert Museum Villas, Oasis lodge, Palm Shade Camp, Malabo Camp, Tilamari Camp. Island Campsite, among others

## **SOUTH ISLAND NATIONAL PARK**

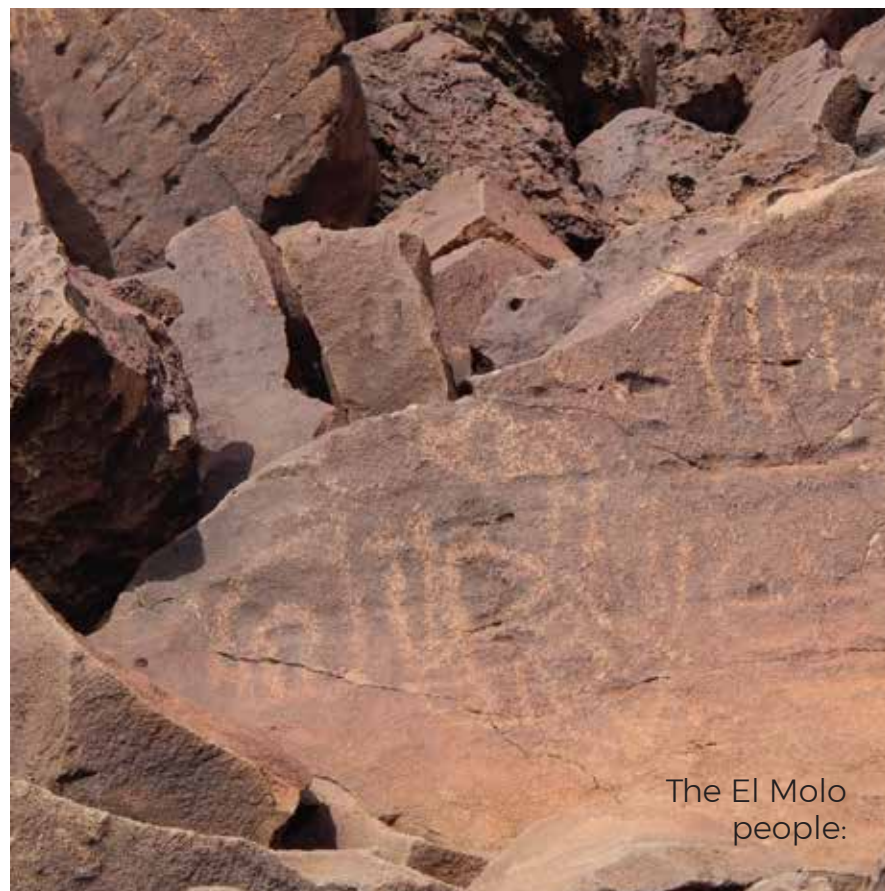
The El Molo are believed to have originally migrated down into the Great Lakes area around 1000 BC from Ethiopia in the more northerly Horn of Africa region. They are believed to be the smallest ethnic community in Kenya. Owing to the arid environment in which they entered, they are held to have then abandoned agricultural activities in favor of lakeside fishing.

Historically, the El Molo erected tomb structures in which they placed their dead. A 1962 archaeological survey found that they were mainly found near springs or wells of water. The El Molo today primarily inhabit the southeast shore of Lake Turkana, between El Molo Bay and Mount Kulal.

Today, most group members are admixed with adjacent Nilotic populations, with only a handful of unmixed El Molo believed to exist. Many El Molo speakers have also adopted cultural customs from these communities.

## **THE GABBRA PEOPLE**

Gabbara are nomadic pastoralists, inhabiting an area of about 40,000 square kilometres in the arid lowlands of northern Kenya. With an exception of the elevated areas, Gabbra land receives an average of 150-200mm of rainfall per year. It is due to this aridity that they lead a nomadic life, constantly moving in search of water and grazing for their camels, cattle, sheep and goats. Livelihoods here are centred around livestock, primarily camels, which are used for transportation, milk and meat. The camel has a special significance in their way of life that includes payment for dowry and mentions in their songs. The Gabbara still operate traditional institutions responsible for supporting the social structures of the community, and upholding traditional laws. Every year based on the sighting of the moon (Gabbra have a lunar calendar), they practice a ceremony called the Sorio in which communal marriages are undertaken in the entire Gabbra land. In the same period, special ceremonies to







commemorate the dead in the society is also held on a yearly basis. The Gabbra lunar calendar has unique resemblance to the Islamic calendar in the naming of the weekdays and the months and the events therein. Gabbra houses are made from woven sisal mats, sticks and camel hides and are portable. Whole villages can be packed up, loaded onto a camel train, and moved to follow better pastures and rain.

## **SIBILOI & KOBI FORA PRE-HISTORIC SITES**

Located on the wild and rugged shores of Lake Turkana, Sibiloï is home to important archaeological sites including Koobi Fora. The area is characterized by semi-desert habitat and open plains flanked by volcanic formations including Mount Sibiloï, where the remains of a petrified forest can be seen. Sibiloï serves as a stopover for migrant waterfowl and is a major breeding ground for the Nile crocodile. Terrestrial wildlife includes Zebras, Grant Gazelles, Lions, Leopards, Stripped Hyenas, Beisa Oryx, Greater Kudu, Cheetahs and Northern Topi, among others. A total of over 350 species of aquatic and terrestrial birds have been recorded in Lake Turkana. Sibiloï is surrounded by the Turkana, the Gabra and the Dassanach who are communities with very rich and unpolluted traditional cultures.

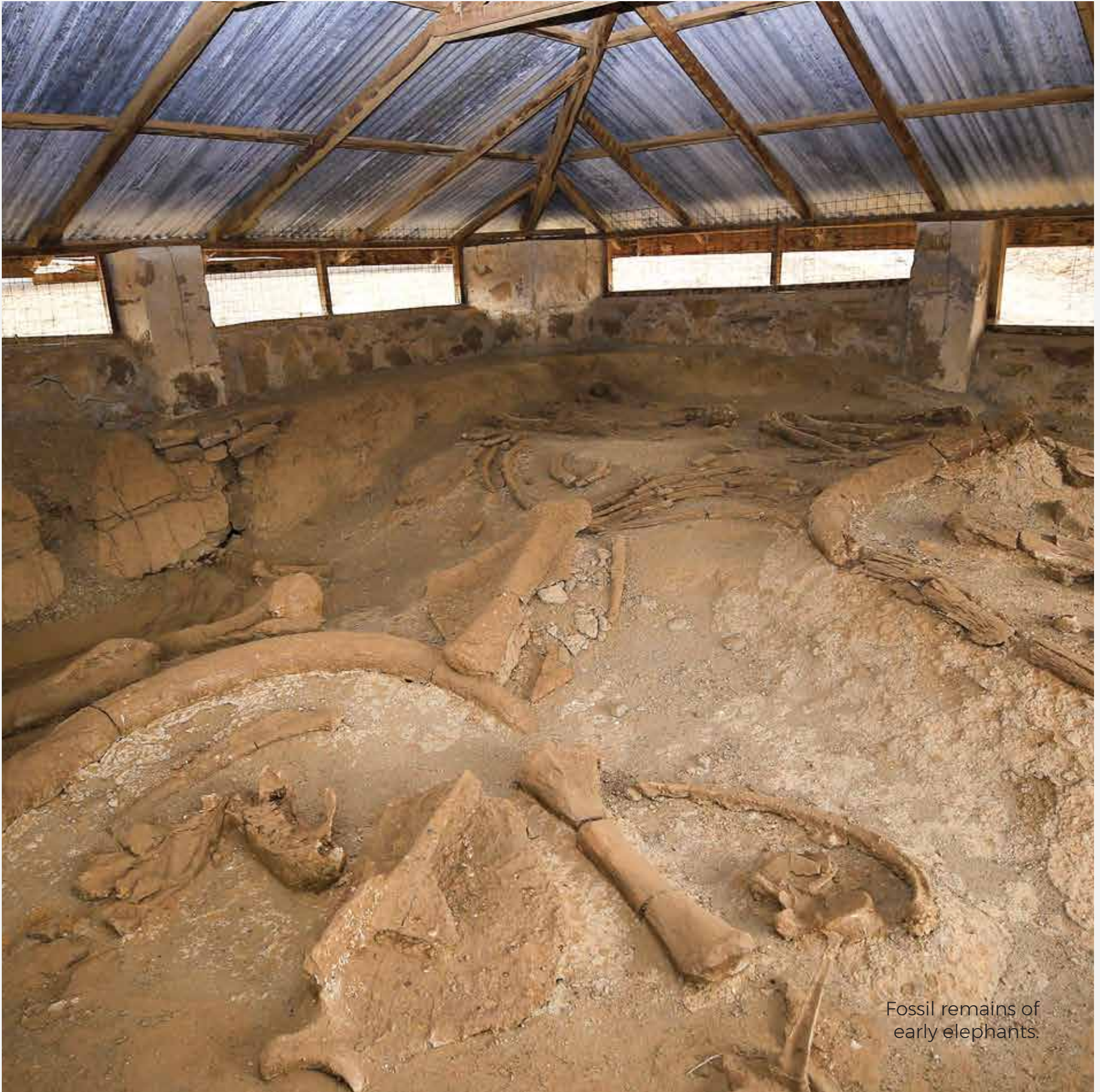
Sibiloï was listed as one of the 15 locations in the world that would experience a total solar eclipse on November 3, 2013. The total solar eclipse would have lasted a maximum of 1 minute and 39 seconds. About 1,000 tourists flocked to Sibiloï national park to get a glimpse of the rare occurrence.

### **THE PETRIFIED FOREST**

The forest is approximately 5 km away from the Karsa Gate (the main entrance to the Sibiloï National Park). There are signs inside the park so it shouldn't be too difficult to drive there. The Petrified Forest is the only one of its kind in Kenya.

Petrified wood (from the Greek root *petro* meaning "rock" or "stone"; literally "wood turned into stone") is the name given to a





Fossil remains of early elephants.





special type of fossilized remains of terrestrial vegetation. Petrified wood is formed when the organic matter in plant material is gradually replaced by minerals. This process is called permineralization. The plant material gets buried by sediment and mineral rich water flows through the sediment replacing the original plant material with inorganic matter such as silica.

## KOObI FORA PRE-HISTORIC SITES

Northern Kenya holds an unsurpassed archive of human prehistory. It holds the world's richest record of human pre-history, the longest and most complete record of human ancestry spanning over 27 million years and a rich fossil heritage stretching back over 100 million years into the dinosaur age. And it's from this that the county of Marsabit got its name as the "cradle of mankind". This is the largest and most-well documented collection of human related fossils that exists and is unmatched anywhere in the world, and can only be found at the Koobi Fora Museum and the National Museums of Kenya Headquarters.

The museum hosts replicas of the fossils found in the park and also has a collection of photos of the people of Northern Kenya plus some of the wildlife that used to inhabit the park before the climate of the area changed.









## CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE

Marsabit has 14 diverse communities that call the county home. The communities have diverse cultures, languages and traditional customs that they religiously adhere to. Every year, the Marsabit Lake Turkana cultural festival celebrates the diversity of these communities Loiyangalani on the shores of Lake Turkana. The communities are; The Rendille, Samburu, Turkana, Burji, Borana, Gabra, Konso, Wayuu, El Molo, Gareh, Somali, Sakuye, Dasanach, and the Sidamo.









## LIST OF HOTELS IN MARSABIT

Sand & Rock Resort	Marsabit Town
Chicho Hotel	Marsabit Town
Nomads Resort	Marsabit Town
Silvia Inn Resort	Marsabit Town
Jey Jey Center	Marsabit Town
Imperial Dale Hotel	Marsabit Town
Saku Guest House	Marsabit Town
Gof Hotel	Marsabit Town
Jirime Resort	Marsabit Town
KWS Bandas & Campsites	Marsabit Town
Bongole Resort	Marsabit Town
Palmshade Resort	Loyangalani
Tilamari Resort	Loyangalani
Oasis Lodge	Loiyangalani
Desert Museum Villas	Loiyangalani
El Molo Lodge	Loiyangalani
Malabo Resort	Loiyangalani
Palmshade Resort	North Horr
Catholic Guest House	North Horr
Kalacha Highway Villas	Kalacha
Kalacha Bandas	Kalacha
Chalbi Cottages	Kalacha
Camp Ndoto	Ngurnit
New Golbo Camp	Ngurnit
Lasamu Campsite	Ngurnit
Holale Resort	Moyale
Al Yusra Hotel	Moyale
LA Tahzan Hotel	Moyale
Abuya Resort	Moyale





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