

# THE NEW NAIROBI

TRAVELERS ONCE CONSIDERED THE KENYAN CAPITAL A MERE PIT STOP EN ROUTE TO A SAFARI. NOW, STYLISH HOTELS, CHIC BOUTIQUES, AND A BURGEONING CULTURAL SCENE ARE TRANSFORMING THE CITY. **BY LAURA BEGLEY BLOOM**



A Penny Winter-designed necklace on display in the lobby of Ngong House. Left: One of the six guest rooms at Hogmead, a new country-house hotel. Inset: A view of Hogmead. Below: A giraffe at Nairobi National Park.



**ROOMS** “There’s been a burst of creativity—Kenians are coming together in everything from fashion to the arts,” says Shamim Ehsani, co-owner of **Tribe Hotel** (Limuru Rd., Gigiri; 254-20/720-0000; [tribe-hotel.com](http://tribe-hotel.com); doubles from \$280). With its rooftop hookah bar and proximity to the U.S. Embassy, the hotel attracts a mix of hipsters and diplomats. Close by, the emerging Westlands neighborhood is home to the Africa-meets-Asia **GREAT VALUE Sankara Nairobi** (Woodvale Grove; 254-20/420-8000; [sankara.com](http://sankara.com); doubles from \$199) and an Angsana spa from the Thai wellness group Banyan Tree. Near the genteel suburb of Karen—named for *Out of Africa* author Karen Blixen—the latest place to stay is **Hogmead** (Kikenni Rd., Langata; 254/712-

579-999; [thesafariconservationcompany.com](http://thesafariconservationcompany.com); doubles from \$600), run by the Safari & Conservation Company, which owns lodges throughout East Africa. The patrician country-house hotel has wood-paneled soaking tubs, leather club chairs, and a famous neighbor, photographer Peter Beard. Down the road is **Ngong House** (60 Ndovu Rd., Karen; 254/732-891-856; [ngonghouse.com](http://ngonghouse.com); doubles from \$840, including breakfast and dinner), a tree-house-style boutique hotel, where costume designer Penny Winter sells her gemstone-studded necklaces and handmade caftans. Nearby, you can go on safari without leaving town: the eco-chic **Nairobi Tented Camp** (Nairobi National Park; 254/771-977-404; [nairobitentedcamp.com](http://nairobitentedcamp.com); doubles from \$770, all-inclusive), set in a 28,800-acre park teeming with animals, offers wildlife drives and overnight stays in luxury tents. »



**SHOPS** The high-end malls popping up across Nairobi may not seem novel to Westerners, but for Kenyans they are a brand-new phenomenon. **Yaya Centre** (Argwings Kondiek, Westlands; 254-20/271-3360; [yaya-centre.co.ke](http://yaya-centre.co.ke)) looks like something you'd find in L.A., with boutiques such as **KikoRomeo** (254/722-516-317; [kikoromeo.com](http://kikoromeo.com)), for tribal-chic dresses and statement-making jewelry from young artisans. At the open-air **Village Market** (Limuru Rd., Gigiri; 254-20/712-2488), the focus is on authentic African designs. In a sweet little thatched-roof bungalow, **Kooroo** (General Mathenge Dr., Westlands; 254/728-293-897; [koroos.com](http://koroos.com)) is the brainchild of two friends who use local fabrics for their fashion line. Make an appointment at the **Anna Trzebinski Studio** (94 Kikeni Lane, Karen; 254/733-788-851; [annatrzebinski.biz](http://annatrzebinski.biz)) to get a behind-the-scenes peek at artisans beading bracelets, jeans, and even pashminas. Another by-appointment designer: **Nike Kondakis** (Peponi Gardens, Westlands; 254/737-115-507; [kondakis.biz](http://kondakis.biz)), who works in a wooden cottage, crafting gowns out of recycled parachutes and bangles from trees knocked down by elephants.



Nike Kondakis with her designs, above. Right: An artisan at work in Anna Trzebinski's studio, in Karen.



A painting by Timothy Brooke at Carol Lees's gallery, the Loft.

**ART & CULTURE** One of Nairobi's most significant galleries is the **Loft, One Off Gallery** (16 Rosslyn Lone Tree; 254/722-521-870), set on the grounds of curator Carol Lees's own residence. She carries a variety of work, from Peterson Kamwathi's politically charged prints and drawings on paper to mobiles made out of recycled bottles by James Mbuthia. You'll see artists at

work at the cutting-edge **Banana Hill Art Studio Gallery** (Limuru Rd., Gigiri; 254/733-882-660), which represents more than 50 up-and-coming African painters and sculptors. It's worth the trek to the **Go Down Arts Centre** (Dunga Rd., Industrial Area; 254-20/555-770; [thegodownartscentre.com](http://thegodownartscentre.com)), on the gritty outskirts of Nairobi: the mixed-use space hosts exhibitions, theater performances, and poetry readings. On the other end of the spectrum is the recently overhauled **Nairobi National Museum** (Museum Hill, Central; 254/374-2131; [museums.or.ke](http://museums.or.ke)), founded by the East Africa Natural History Society in 1910. Don't miss the adjacent Nairobi Snake Park. If you're in town on the first Sunday afternoon of the month, head to **Blankets & Wine** (Leisure Gardens, Mamba Village, Karen; [blanketsandwine.com](http://blanketsandwine.com); tickets from \$10), where top musicians from across the continent perform in a local park.

**FOOD** Nairobi's chefs are marrying indigenous ingredients with flavors from around the globe. At the white-on-white **Seven Seafood & Grill** (ABC Place, Waiyaki Way, Westlands; 254/737-776-677; dinner for two \$60), chef Kiran Jethwa slow-cooks cracked chili crab in roasted red pepper and coriander pesto. Try the orange-soy glazed pork belly at the bi-level **Sierra Brasserie** (Yaya Centre, Argwings Kondiek, Westlands; 254-20/806-8459; dinner for two \$50). Sample an artisanal ale and marinated goat skewers on the rooftop terrace of **Brew Bistro & Lounge** (671 Ngong Rd., Karen; 254-20/386-4041; dinner for two \$20). Prefer wine? The former manager of the Fairmont Mount Kenya Safari Club has opened **WWW Shop & Bar** (Ngong Rd., Karen; 254/724-919-193; dinner for two \$40), a combination tapas bar, wine shop, and tasting room. In a 1920's bungalow in Karen, **Talisman** (320 Ngong Rd.; 254/203-883-213; dinner for two \$40) serves dishes such as roast duck with wild rice and bok choy. Coming soon: a 40-room Talisman hotel.



Presenting a grilled spotted bream, the catch of the day at Nairobi's Seven Seafood & Grill.

**GETTING AROUND** In Nairobi, it's smart to hire a guide. **Micato Safaris** (800/642-2861; [micato.com](http://micato.com)) can organize hotel stays, excursions, and city tours with local experts such as Nathan Obara (left). Ask to be taken to the Mukuru slum to visit **AmericaShare** ([americashare.org](http://americashare.org)), Micato's initiative that's helping to transform the lives of young Kenyans by providing education, meals, and more. +

