

Staying safe on the road in Africa

When travelling to a country for the first time or an unfamiliar destination that is very different culturally, terrorism, political unrest and kidnapping aren't all a traveller is worried about. David Boers, GM at Secure Drive, explains: "Although an executive may have experience earned over years of travel, they may not know the nuances and intricacies of emerging markets, many of which are still adapting and changing their norms and requirements to ever-changing conditions."



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Keep up with Kenya

The main concerns for visitors to Kenya are road safety, access to good medical care, and, in the more remote areas, exposure to terrorism.

"Driving conditions in Kenya are challenging as the road infrastructure is under-developed and local drivers have their own interpretations of the rules of the road," Boers explains. "If you're brave enough to hire a self-drive car in Nairobi – and you're probably not – you've got to share the roads with frustrated drivers using poor infrastructure, all while trying to figure out the local approach to traffic signs and signals."

The developing road conditions mean that accidents happen often, with that first golden hour of critical care after a serious accident being impossible if an ambulance must fight its way through chaotic traffic to get to the scene. Medical insurance is of no help if the medical professionals can't get to an accident victim. This combination of factors makes it smart for

visitors to choose locally experienced and vetted transportation providers who are trained in defensive driving and first aid, and who can take decisive appropriate action if there is an incident.

Visitors to the northern parts of Kenya, bordering Somalia, should be aware that terrorist groups like Al Shabab frequently target busy areas like markets and establishments that are obviously frequented by Western nationals. Avoiding busy public areas is the wisest option for visitors from abroad, but local, experienced drivers will be able to confidently suggest the best destinations for visitors to experience local food, tradition and culture.

Nigeria – bigger, faster, more

Nigeria is very much a commercial country and visitors framing their expectations of the country in this light will be best prepared for its dynamic environment, starting with the abrupt officials typical of the immigration process on arrival. While travelling in Nigeria has similar points to note as Kenya, such as road conditions and driving, as well as limited access to medical care, Nigeria is bigger, faster, and there is more to be concerned about, depending on where you travel within the country.

“Kidnapping is particularly common in the oil regions around the Niger Delta, where kidnappers are mostly willing to negotiate the return of their victims in exchange for ransoms,” Boers explains. “If you’re kidnapped by the likes of Boko Haram, however, the perpetrators do so to make a radical religious or terrorist statement more than to make money, and victims are less likely to ever be released.”

Generally, Nigerian road infrastructure has not kept pace with the country’s rapid economic growth, which means that drivers in its main cities also struggle with poor road conditions, apart from Abuja, which has well-developed infrastructure and wide highways. However, the local driving style is as challenging as it would be anywhere else in the country.

Where next?

While Kenya and Nigeria have typically attracted more attention from foreign investors, business is thriving in several other countries on the continent, with many opportunities for those willing to embrace the challenges of each unique local environment.

“Mozambique is set to boom, but South Africa-registered vehicles are often targeted as it is a widely held view that these drivers are a soft touch for bribes,” Boers explains. “Angola has long been the place to watch with its abundant oil deposits, and its government is implementing positive change, but local conditions can be challenging to those unfamiliar with the country’s nuances.

“Wherever you travel, whether it’s in developing or developed parts of the world, you’re likely to have a less stressful, more peaceful, and more fruitful experience of a country, and a more productive business trip, if you work with a vetted service provider that is well versed in local conditions and requirements, and how best to respond if any type of incident occurs.”

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