Kikuyu woman in Nakuru, Western Kenya.

KENYA:

The Hawaii Of Africa

There are vast deserts to the North, the warm salt water of the Indian Ocean to the East, and the majestic Mount Kenya and Mount Elgon to the Northwest. Kenya is known for its wildlife, with all - day safaris to stalk game with a camera one of the key attractions.

By Emmett George

Jomo Kenyatta monument in Nairobi, Kenya.

Kenya is one of the few remaining countries in the world where waiters still make a fuss over tourists.

"Jambo bwana" is the customary greeting in Swahili. It simply means, "Hello sir." After a few days in the country, you will learn to respond, "Mzuri," meaning, "I am well."

These friendly words typify the Kenyan people. Whether they are spoken along the white, sandy beaches of Mombasa, in the sleepy mountain valley town of Nakuru in western Kenya, or in the teeming capital, Nairobi, they carry the same friendly ring.

Kenya sits on the East African coast facing the Indian Ocean. This Texas-sized nation of 14 million people is bordered by Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and the Sudan. The official language of Kenya is English but Swahili is widely - spoken as a second language.

The 8th Century

Anthropologists have found bones and stone tools dating back over two million years in this part of the world. Kenya's history is that of the inland migration of Cushitic, Bantu and Nilotic people.

Arab traders and slavers explored Kenya as far back as the 8th century, and seven centuries later the first Portuguese appeared, followed years later by the British. In 1920, Kenya became a British protectorate.

In 1961, Kenya became independent under its long-time President Jomo Kenyatta who was the country's only president until he died in August.

Kenyatta's moderate political and economic policies launched Kenya down a capitalist path of development, which stressed economic development through free enterprise and a flourishing tourist trade.

Despite the outward signs of growth in the major cities, Kenya is a nation of farmers who rely heavily upon tea, coffee and other agricultural exports for their livelihood. Tourist often delight in sampling these beverages and even with returning home with sample products.

The local beer is also quite good and goes well with a national food, "ugali," a doughy bread made from grounded corn flour. The Kenyans also prepare roasted beef or goat which is cooked into a stew. The ugali is rolled in the palm of the hand and used like a utensil to assorb the stew.

Local Culture

Tourists also purchase the famous camel hair bracelets, colorful shirts, animal tooth necklaces, wood-carvings and tapestries, which depict local tribal culture.

Kenya is probably best known for its wildlife. Thousands of tourists from Europe and the United States and other parts of the world arrive each year for safaris.

They can be seen boarding vans and landrovers daily in front of the major hotels for trips to the interior. All-day safaris provide for the stalking of wild animals with a camera instead of a gun as Kenya has passed stiff laws to protect its animal population.

There are also junkets available up-country that can take anywhere from two hours to two weeks.

The longer safaris are available to the beautiful Lake Victoria area, the Masai Mara Game Preserve in the west, the Mountain National Park near Mount Kenya; the Amboseli Preserve to the south; and to the Tsavo Salt Licks, southeast of Nairobi.

5,000 Nationals

Although Americans know little about Kenya, some 5,000 U.S. nationals reside in Kenya and thousands more visit the country each year. In addition, some 140 American firms have opened offices in Kenya.

The appeal of the western-styled cities leave much of the interior untouched by tourism.

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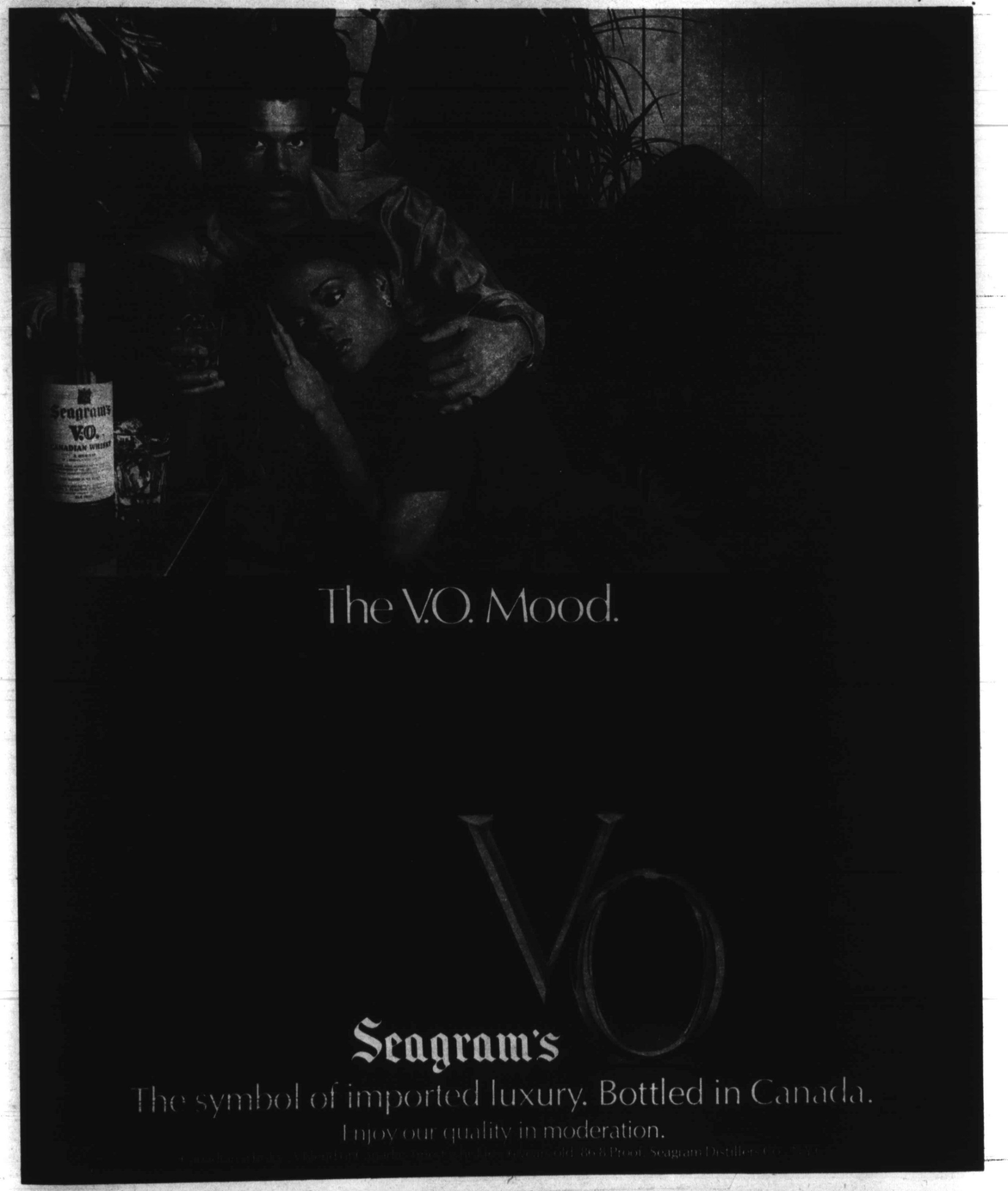
Skyline of the city of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.