

TANZANIA

A land of plains, lakes and mountains with a narrow, low-lying coastal belt, Tanzania is East Africa's largest country and also one of the most diverse. Tanzania is home for more than 100 different ethnic groups, mostly of Bantu origin, each with its own language and customs. Tanzania has one of the largest, wildest animal populations in the world. Wildebeest, monkey, antelope, lion, cheetah, crocodile, gazelle, and flamingo - you name them. Blessed with some of the world's largest game reserves, the country also has one of the highest concentrations of elephant, buffalo, hippo, hunting dog and chimpanzee.

Its spectacular topography includes The Great Rift Valley, Mt Kilimanjaro and famous parks such as the Serengeti and the wonderful crater of Ngorongoro.

Offshore are idyllic islands with beautiful palm-fringed beaches and turquoise seas that wash pristine coral reefs. The archaeological treasures of Tanzania include hominid fossils, which is more than 300 million years old. Tanzanian music and dance dominates much of East Africa. Strong in rhythm and renowned for hard-hitting lyrics, the country's Swahili-based sounds are kept very much alive by a thriving dance-band scene. *Nyama choma* (barbecued meat) has taken over in a big way, especially in restaurants with attached bars. But on the coast and in Zanzibar and Pemba islands, there's a decent range of traditional Swahili dishes based on seafood.

Recorded history begins around 1800, when the Masaai warrior tribes were migrating from Kenya to Tanzania. It wasn't until the middle of the 18th century that Arab traders and slaves dared venture into Masaai territory in the country's wild interior. European explorers began arriving in earnest in the mid-19th century, the most famous being Stanley and Livingstone. The famous phrase 'Dr Livingstone, I presume', stems from the duo's meeting at Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika. Tanganyika won independence in 1961 with Julius Nyerere as the country's first president. Nyerere, whose secret ingredient was radical socialism, gained widespread respect and is seen as one of the most influential leaders Africa has had. Zanzibar was stuck for another two years, after which the mainland forged a union comprising Zanzibar and the nearby island of Pemba. Thus Tanzania was born. There is a wide range of optional activities to make your experience in Tanzania absolutely unforgettable. Some great views can be experienced while floating in a hot-air balloon over the Serengeti. And swimming with dolphins is all the rage on the island of Zanzibar. Snorkeling and scuba diving is equally popular around the world-class coral reefs off nearby Pemba and Mafia islands. Ngorongoro Conservation Area Being one of the largest calderas in the world, 20 km (12.4 miles)-wide, 600 m (1.968ft) tall, with a variety of animals and vegetation, Ngorongoro Crater is one of Tanzania's most visited areas. The vegetation includes grasslands, swamps, forests, salt pans and a freshwater lake and has been compared to Noah's Ark and the Garden of Eden. You will have no trouble finding lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo and many of the plains herbivores such as wildebeest, Thomson's gazelle, zebra and reedbuck, as well as thousands of flamingo wading in the shallows of Lake Magadi, the soda lake on the floor of the crater. Within the steep walls of the crater you will find considerable movement of animals and you may well come across local Maasai tribes people, who have grazing rights here, tending their cattle.

Lake Manyara National Park

Lake Manyara National Park sits at the base of the Great Rift Valley escarpment and is one of the most scenic parks in Tanzania. There are stunning views of the park from every direction. From the east, the Rift Valley escarpment emerges on the horizon with the lake forming a glistening background. On the southern side of the park, you will find the hot springs of Maji Moto, which are about 60°C. At the top of the escarpment from the west, the park stretches across a ribbon of green with the lake shining in the sun. And, like most Rift Valley lakes, the water is alkaline. This attracts vast flocks of flamingos, which form pink foam against a silver background of water. Altogether, this area offers beautiful views as you take in the massive lake with its silver shimmer and surrounding vegetation. The major landmark is the spectacular rift wall, where the plains give way to cultivated uplands of Mbululand. The Great Rift Valley is part of a fault in the earth's crust. This fault stretches 8,000 km from Turkey to the mouth of the Zambezi River in Mozambique. The fault is so massive that astronauts can see it clearly from space. Measuring only 330 sq. km, of which the lake occupies 230 sq. km, and located only 130km from Arusha, this park often gets day visitors, who come to enjoy the endless views and variety of mammals, reptiles and birds, as well as the varied vegetation, flora and fauna. The diversity of its features makes the lake a particularly memorable place to visit. Animals found in the area include zebra, elephant, hippo, monkey, wildebeest, waterbuck, warthog, gazelle, impala, buffalo, wildebeest, waterbuck, warthog, hyena, baboon and giraffe. Manyara is also known for its tree-climbing lions. These majestic animals find shelter from the heat and biting flies in the branches of trees, and can easily kill buffalo, which is far greater in weight and size than their own. There are also over 350 species of bird life, with a variety of local species inhabiting the forest and bush, including pelicans that waddle around next to short grasses on the shore of the lake.

Tarangire National Park

The Tarangire National Park covers 2,600km² and habits the highest concentration of wildlife outside the Serengeti ecosystem. You can watch huge herds of wildebeest, eland, zebras, buffalo, impala, gazelle, and elephants walking through this rolling countryside and taking a rest under a vast number of baobabs or drinking at the lagoons and the river. But not only at the ground can be spot something fascinating. Have a look at the branches of the trees after lions, leopards and pythons or observe the other 550 bird species.

Serengeti National Park

Serengeti, which sprawls across 14.763 km² (5.757 sq miles), is Tanzania's largest and most famous national park. The chief herbivore of Serengeti is the wildebeest of which there are up to two million. The amazing annual migration of wildebeest herds is one of the biggest attractions of the Serengeti. It begins at the Serengeti National Park near the Kenyan border, when huge herds of wildebeests head for greener pastures in Kenya. Starting in April each year, these animals migrate across the Serengeti's southern plains accompanied by zebras, antelopes, gazelles, lions and tourists. The park is also famous for its lions, which can be tracked due to the fact that many have collars fitted with transmitters, as well as cheetah and large herds of giraffe