KENYA NATIONAL PARKS & GAME RESERVES

❖ Tsavo East National Park
❖ Tsavo West National Park
❖ Amboseli National Park
❖ Shimba Hills National Reserve
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TANZANIA NATIONAL PARKS & GAME RESERVES

❖ Ngorongoro Crater
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❖ Lake Manyara National Park

KENYA NATIONAL PARKS AND GAME RESERVES

❖ TSAVO EAST NATIONAL PARK

Area
Tsavo East National park is 11,747 Km Sq., at the altitude of 150 – 1,200 meters above sea level.

Location
Tsavo East National park is in South-West Kenya.
Climate
The climate of Tsavo East National Park is warm and dry. It is one of the planet’s last bio-diversity strongholds, the park features bushy grasslands, open plains, semi-arid acacia scrubs and woodlands.

Open
The Tsavo East National Park is open daily 6:00 am to 7:00 pm. No entry after 6:15 pm, and no entry allowed at the Tsavo East National Park on foot! Walking and hiking only allowed in designated areas and in the company of a Kenya Wildlife Services ranger.

When To Go
The Park is open all year round.

Theatre of the wild
Tsavo East lies to the east of the Nairobi – Mombasa highway, almost half-way between Nairobi and Mombasa. This beautiful national park offers a vast and untapped arena of arid bush which is washed by the azure and emerald meanderings of the Galana River, guarded by the limitless lava reaches of the Yatta Plateau and patrolled by some of the largest elephant herds in Kenya.

What you may see
- Elephants of Eden
The sight of dust-red elephants wallowing, rolling and spraying each other with the midnight blue waters of the palm-shaded Galana River, is one of the most amazing images of Africa.

- Aruba Dam
The beautiful Aruba dam, located on the north bank of the seasonal Voi River, is visited by thousands of animals, and makes a great game viewing destination.

- Mudanda Rock
This whale-backed rock towers above a natural dam is a draw to hundreds of elephants. It’s 1.5 km long. The heat-shimmering edge of the Yatta Plateau is the
longest lava flow in the world and an ornithological paradise that attracts migrating birds from all over the world.

- **Lugard’s Falls**

Named after Captain Lugard, the first proconsul to East Africa, the falls feature a bizarrely eroded rock neck through which the waters of Galana River plunge into foaming rapids and crocodile infested pools.

- **Spectacular voyages of discovery**

Tsavo East National Park offers some of the most magnificent game drives in the world – vast herds of dust-red elephants, fat pods of hippo, giant crocodile and a kaleidoscope of bird life are set against a blazing backdrop of endless bush.

❖ **TSAVO WEST NATIONAL PARK**

**Area**

Tsavo West National Park is 9,065 sq. km in South East Kenya

**Climate**

The climate in Tsavo West National Park varies from warm to hot and dry. Temperatures range from 20 – 30° C.

Annual rainfall of 200 – 700 mm occurs in the “long rains” of March – May and the “short rains” of October – December.

**Open**

The park is open daily from 06:00am to 06:00pm.

No entry in the park is allowed after 05:15pm. And no entry allowed on foot either. Walking and hiking is only allowed in designated areas and in the company of a Kenya Wildlife Service ranger.

**When to Go**

The Tsavo West National Park is open all year round.
Ancient land of lions and lava
Tsavo West National Park, and Tsavo East National Park combined form one of the largest national parks in the world. Beckoning are the ancient lands of lava and lions, resembling a masterpiece painted on a sprawling canvas of endless skies, emerald hills and palm-fringed rivers. Amidst abundant wildlife, sparkling oases blend with the unforgettable sunrise and sunset backdrop of Mt. Kilimanjaro, “the roof-top of Africa”.

Vast vistas and volcanic views
The immense Tsavo West stretches from the North-East of Athi river to the South-west of Tanzania border. With rocky outcrops in its northern parts, most of this vast National Park is a vast tangled bushland savannah, laced with volcanic ridges and lava beds. With its sweeping hills reaching 1,800 metres high, the Ngulia range offers dramatic vistas, while Chyulu Hills, adjacent to Tsavo West, feed the remarkable Mzima Springs where thousands of gallons of crystal-clear freshwater gushes into palm fringed pools, filled with hippos and crocodiles. Ancient and recent volcanic activity is evident within and around the park. You may want to visit Shetani or Devils lava flow that formed a few hundred years ago when a fiery molten fury spewed from the earth! Or you may want to climb to Chaimu Crater – in a mere 10 minutes. And stop by the eerie “Roaring Rocks”, named after the buzz of the cicadas that inhabit them and the howl of the wind as it rushes past the sheer face of the scarp. From the Park’s many panoramic vantage points, you will absorb the vast vistas as you monitor the movement of the wildlife herds below. The finest of Poachers Lookout, a roofed hut high on a hill with views to eternity.

Wondrous wildlife
The world’s most magnificent game viewing awaits you! Vast herds of dust-red elephant, fat pods of hippo, giant crocodiles, teeming herds of savannah dwellers plus a fantasia of birds and magical flora flourish here. The Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary protects Tsavo’s growing population of endangered black rhino, successfully inching their way back from the brink of extinction caused by rampant poaching in the
1960’s. Beautiful Lake Jipe, straddling the Kenya/Tanzania border, offers memorable experiences of abundant aquatic life and bird watching – from a hired boat!

**Mzima Springs Magic**
The lush, hippo inhabited pools of Mzima Springs are a verdant cooling oasis. An underwater hippo-viewing chamber, two nature trails and some scenic picnic spots provide a refreshing and rewarding adventure. And a romantic spot too!

**Wildlife at the Tsavo West National Park**
Kenya’s largest national park supports all the “Big Five”! It’s home to the country’s largest herd of elephant population. On your safari tour you will see buffalos, lions, leopards, rhinos, Nile crocodiles and hippos too. Herds of giraffe, gerenuk, oryx, zebra and impala range through bush and plains, as do hartebeest, lesser kudu, eland, water buck, Steinbuck, Kirk’s Dik Dik and king springer. Don’t miss yellow baboons and velvet monkeys as they cavort noisily around acacia trees.

**Birds**
Prolific bird life – featuring over 600 recorded species – are a true highlight. Birds of the semi-arid zone, such as Somali ostrich and golden pipit, slip by the more conspicuous white-headed buffalo weaver and its vivid coral rump displayed in flight, or the brilliantly plumaged golden-breasted starling. Raucous hornbill, with their lilting flight, are also prevalent in the park as are hole-nested birds, such as orange-bellied parrot, and Dardanes’s barbet that favour the thick-trunked baobab tress. Roaring Rocks is an excellent spot for raptors: eagles cruise by at eye level and Bateleur comb the rocky scarp for unsuspecting prey. The Ngulia area, due in part to its geographical position, forms a focus for innumerable Eurasian and Palaearctic migrating birds. A Palaearctic migratory bird-banding (bird-ringling) project is at Ngulia Lodge Vegetation.

Ranging from woodland to semi-desert, Tsavo West covers a diverse array of habitats.
For most part of the year, the area is hot and dry, with acacia scrub broken by short grassy plains flecked with thorn trees.
Wild flowers appear after the short rainy seasons, and the ground can be quickly
carpeted with delicate thnubergia, ipomoea and barleria. Watch for the blazing fire and the delonix, a sparsely branched tree with exquisite white blooms, pollinated by nocturnal bats. Rivers are fringed with acacias as magnificent baobabs rise leafless above the shimmering heat.

❖ AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK

Background Information
Amboseli National Park lies immediately North West of Mt. Kilimanjaro, along the Kenya/Tanzania border. Amboseli was established as a reserve in 1968 and became a National Park in 1974. The park covers 392 sq.km and forms part of the much larger 3,000 sq.km Amboseli ecosystem. Large concentrations of wildlife occur here in the dry season, making Amboseli a popular tourist destination. The Amboseli National park embodies 5 main wildlife habitats (open plains, acacia woodland, rocky thorn bush country, swamps and marshland) and covers part of a Pleistocene lake basin, now dry. Within this basin is a temporary lake, lake Amboseli, that floods during years of heavy rainfall. Amboseli is famous for its big game and its great scenic beauty – the landscape is dominated by Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Climate
The climate at the Amboseli National Park is mainly hot and dry. Amboseli is in the rain shadow of Mt. Kilimanjaro. The maximum average temperature of the warmest month is 33°C during the day, while that of the coldest is 27-28°C. An annual rainfall of 300mm per annum is distributed in two seasons: April/May and November/December. Recurrent droughts and potential evaporation of 2200mm per annum typifies the region.
How to reach the Amboseli National Park

- **Roads**
The main road into the Amboseli National Park is from Nairobi via Emali (240 km) on the Nairobi-Mombasa Road. The road is tarmacked from Nairobi all way to Amboseli. Access from Mombasa is mainly through Tsavo West via Kimana (Olkelunyiet) Gate.

- **Park Roads**
At the Amboseli National Park, game viewing roads network covers the park adequately.
Many of the park viewing roads are not usable during rainy seasons, and because of the loose ashy nature of volcanic soil, the roads become very dusty during the dry season.

Highlight of Amboseli National Park

- The beautiful views of Mt. Kilimanjaro
- The views of Mt. Meru across the border in Tanzania
- Observation Hill which allows an overall view of the whole park
- Contemporary Masai culture and indigenous lifestyle

❖ **SHIMBA HILLS NATIONAL RESERVE**

Background Information
A fenced elephant corridor connects the Shimba Hills with Mwaluganje Forest Reserve to the North.
The Shimba Hills are a dissected plateau that ascends steeply from the coastal plains, 30 km South West of Mombasa and just South of Kwale town. The surrounding escarpment rises from around 120m to 300m across the bulk of the plateau and as high as 450m at Marare and Pengo Hills.
The underlying rocks are the Triassic Shimba Griffs, and sands in the North Central part near Kwale town Pliecone Magarini.
Rivers flowing from the Shimba Hills Reserve supply fresh water to Mombasa and to Diani and Ukunda areas in Kwale district.
Location
Shimba Hills National Reserve is approximately 33 km South of Mombasa, in Kwale County of Coast Kenya.

Climate
The climate is hot and moist but is cooler than that at the coast with strong sea breezes and frequent mist and cloud in early mornings. Annual rainfall is 855mm-1682mm. Average annual temperature is 24.2°C.

Common Vegetation
The Shimba Hills hold one of the largest areas of coastal rain forest in East Africa after Arabuko Sokoke. The vegetation consists of forested scarp slopes and undulating grasslands interspersed with woodland clumps and ribbons of riverine forest in the steeply cut valleys.

❖ NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

Location
Nairobi County, and in middle of Nairobi city.

Size
Nairobi National Park was the first National Park to be established in Kenya in 1946, covering an area of 117 sq.km

Climate
January to March is hot and dry; April to June is hot and wet; July to October is very warm and wet.

Major attractions
Black and white rhinoceros; diverse birdlife; large predators such as lion, leopard, hyena and cheetah; large herbivores such as eland, buffalo, zebra and wildebeest;
ivory burning site monument; walking trails at hippo pools; Nairobi safari walk and spacious picnic sites.

Wildlife
Over 80 recorded species including rhino, buffalo, lion, leopard, crocodile and hippo (no elephants in Nairobi National Park)

Birds
There are over 400 recorded species in such a small National Park in middle of a city.

❖ MASAI MARA GAME RESERVE

Location
Masai Mara Game Reserve is located in the Great Rift Valley in southern part of Kenya on the border with Serengeti in Tanzania.

Area
Masai Mara Game Reserve covers 1,500sq km, and stretches over large open grasslands that are ideal for viewing wildlife.

Climate
Highest daily temperatures between 26 and 30 degrees Celsius. Rainfall is bimodal with the main dry period from mid-June to mid-October, and a short dry season in January and February. Long rains from March to June and short rains in November and December. Rainfall is between 800 and 1,200mm.

Masai Mara Wildlife
95 species of mammals, amphibians and reptiles and 400 bird species recorded, including annual migration of wildebeest involving over 1.5 million animals.
**Masai Mara Access**

- **Road**
  
  main roads are all-weather and all-season roads. Game viewing tracks can be used only by 4×4 vehicles in the rainy season.

- **Fly in Safaris**

  Various airstrips serving different safari lodges and tented camps dot the Masai Mara game reserve. The main airstrips are Musiara, Keekorok, Olkiombo.

**Best time to visit**

All year round with emphasis on July through October when the great wildebeest migration happens at the Masai Mara.

The Masai Mara goes beyond description. It is not just an interesting tourist destination in Kenya; it is “The reason” to be in Kenya and the region.

The Masai Mara ecosystem hosts the highest concentration of wild animals per square km than any other national park in the region.

The tree studded savannah offers the best game viewing opportunities in East Africa. Masai Mara is home to the famous Masai tribesmen, Africa’s most celebrated tribe.

Accommodation at the Masai Mara is varied. From 5-star luxury lodges and camps to the budget camping utilities dotted within the reserve and its neighbouring towns.

❖ **LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK**

**Area**

The Lake Nakuru National Park is 188 sq.km, at the altitude of 1,756 meters above sea level.

**Climate**

Typical African savannah, dry and warm. Rainfall peaks around April, August and November delivering an annual average of 1,000 mm.
**Opening hours**
Daily 6:00 am to 7:00 pm. No entry after 6:15 pm. No entry allowed on foot. Walking and hiking only allowed in designated areas and in the company of a Kenya Wildlife Service ranger.

**When to Go**
The Lake Nakuru National Park is open all year round.

**Shimmering Flamingo Realm**
The pulsating pink tinted glow of a million flamingos feeding within blue hued alkaline waters create the greatest bird spectacle on Planet Earth. Lake Nakuru is an ornithologist paradise, and its National Park is an equally rewarding game viewing arena and sanctuary for rare black and white rhinos. Within the ancient landscape, known as the cradle of mankind, the Lake’s pink-frosted shores and sky-mirrored waters shape unforgettable memories crowned by some of the most stunning scenic images of Africa.

**Amidst magnificent views**
Especially at Baboon cliff, Lion hill or the Out of Africa site, the park offers prolific birdlife, remarkable plants, plus a vibrant range of wildlife. The park’s easy to follow topography, good roads and clear sign-posting make driving pleasurable and game viewing richly rewarding. A visit to Lake Nakuru makes for an action-packed day trip, an adventurous weekend or an enjoyable extended stay.

**Wildlife**
Initially established as a bird sanctuary, the park’s careful management and re-introduction program has since ensured a thriving mammal fauna which includes some of Kenya’s most rare species. Rare Rothschilds giraffe and endangered black and white rhino are common in the park, amidst large herds of Cape buffalo, ranging through the woodlands and grasslands.
The acacia woodlands shelter herds of graceful Impalas, shaggy waterbucks and shy bushbuck, while rocky hillside provide a perfect habitat for rock hyrax. To the South of the lake, herds of Thomson’s and Grant’s gazelle dot the plains. Carnivores are well represented by lions, leopards, cheetahs, spotted and striped hyenas, serval big cats as well as the silver-backed and side-stripped jackals, civets, genets and mongoose. The most visible primates are the sombre olive baboons and the mysterious black-faced velvet monkey, while dignified troops of colobus monkey often prance among the trees. As Kenya’s first established rhino sanctuary, the park holds one of the largest black rhino concentration in the country. Two species thrive here; the square-lipped or white rhino, preferring to graze in the short grass of the plains, and its more nervous browsing cousin, the black rhino, that tends to keep to the cover of thicker bush.

**Birds**

Over 500 bird species have been recorded in the Lake Nakuru area. Most striking, numerous and colourful of the avian residents are the flamingos. Living alongside pink flamingos are flamboyant pelicans – the great white pelican and the pink-backed pelican – as well as colourful waterfront birds; dark geese, heron, stilt, sunpiper and plover. Birds of prey also abound at Lake Nakuru. The African fish eagle, whose haunting scream and precision swoop shutter the calm of the lake, is striking. Other members of the avian cast include the flouncing ostrich, iridescent sunbird, starling, swooping bee-eater, chattering weaver and the jaunty ox-pecker that rides the necks and backs of larger mammals.

**Plants**

Covered by a mosaic of acacia woodland and bush with patches of forest in the higher areas, the park’s flora is a great attraction too. Pure stands of yellow-backed acacia (fever tree) fringe the lake while the eastern hillside is cloaked in some of the largest stands of euphorbia candelabrum in Africa.
On the wet hillsides, croton bushes and olives form gnarled stands mixed with scented, silver leaved ol-leleshwa on rocky slopes. The shallow alkaline algae water supports a dense blue-green alga which provides the staple diet of the flamingos and gives the lake it’s sparkling sapphire blue hue.

**Insects**
Aquatic insects such as midges, primitive crane flies and water boatmen thrive in the lake.
A stunning diversity of beetles, butterflies, ants, bees, and termites, all play their essential role in maintaining a healthy balanced eco-system by re-cycling nutrients and providing food for other creatures.

**Reptiles**
The cliffs and crevices, reeds and rocks of the park suit snakes, lizard, chameleons and tortoises.
They include the legendary African rock python which is capable of swallowing an Impala whole, plus the aptly named leopard tortoise and the sky blue and coral headed agama lizard, often seen basking and bobbing in the sunshine.

❖ Samburu National Reserve

**Location**
Samburu national reserve is situated at the Southern corner of Samburu District in the Great Rift Valley Province of Kenya. It is on the border with Uaso Nyiro river in the South, which separates it from the Buffalo Springs National Reserve.

**Size**
The reserve covers an area of 170 sq km. Distance from Nairobi to Samburu is only 345 km to Archer’s gate (main entrance to Samburu National Reserve).
Climate
The climate in Samburu varies from arid to semi-arid with hot days and cool nights. Annual average temperatures vary between 18 and 30 degrees Celsius. Annual average rainfall is 345 mm with peaks in November and April.

Wildlife
This national game reserve is rich in game, with many rare species including Grevy’s Zebra, Somali ostrich, reticulated giraffe, gerenuk, beisa oryx (also referred to as the Samburu special five), elephants (a minimum of 900), lion, (kamunyak the miracle lioness that adopted the baby oryx is a resident in the reserve), leopard, cheetah, wild dogs and over 450 species of birds are recorded here. Birds of the arid northern bush country are augmented by a number of riverine forest species. The lesser kestrel and the Taita falcon which are species of global conservation concern are both found in this reserve. Five species categorised as vulnerable have also been recorded here. These are the African darter, great egret, white headed vulture, martial eagle and the yellow billed ox-pecker. The critically endangered pancake tortoise (malacochersus tornieri) is also found in Samburu National Game Reserve.

Best Time to visit
You can visit this beautiful game reserve any time of the year.

Activities
There are various activities that visitors can engage in while at the reserve. These include; game drives, bird watching, sundowners, bush breakfast, nature walks, river rafting (depending on the water level) and the Samburu cultural experience.

❖ ABERDARE NATIONAL PARK

Area
767 sq km with an altitude of 1,829 – 4,001 metres above sea level.

Location
180 km from Nairobi, in the central highlands, West of Mt. Kenya.
Climate

Cool and misty. Year-round rains average 1,000 mm on the drier north-western slopes and up to 3,000 mm in South-West.

Opening hours

Daily from 6:00 am to 7:00 pm. No entry after 6:15 pm. No entry allowed on foot. Walking and hiking only allowed in designated areas and in the company of a Kenya Wilde Service ranger.

Best time to visit

The Aberdare National Park is open all year-round. This is a place where majestic moorlands, peaks and falls encircle Kenya’s third highest mountain range, and where elephants roam through lichen-hung forests as spectacular waterfalls plunge into churning pools, cascading into trout-filled streams amidst mossy dells.

Aberdare is truly a haven for anglers, walkers and lovers of solitude. If you want to have an amazing African safari experience, come with us to Aberdare Nation Park, exhale as you savour the unspoiled glories of the Aberdare range, unwind in some of Kenya’s most famous lodges, and absorb the breath-taking vistas of Mount Kenya’s glittering coronet surrounded by the sparkling lakes of the Great Rift Valley.

Peaks and moorland

The 70km long Aberdare range is a narrow massif stretching from North to South with its southern end just 80 km North of Nairobi.

The moorland covers gigantic hills, bogs, clear mountain streams, many waterfalls and magnificent views. The highest peaks of the Aberdare mountain range are: Oldonyo Lesatima (4,001 m) to the North, and II Kinangop (3,906 m) to the South. Other notable peaks are Chebuswa (3,364 m), Table Mountain (3,791 m), Rurimeria (3,860 m), Maratini (3,698 m) and the Elephant Hill (3,590 m).

Spectacular waterfalls

The Aberdare National Park is renowned for its torrential waterfalls plunging from cloud-shrouded heights to spray-filled ravines. Gura waterfall, which cascades 300 m
into an impenetrable ravine, is the most precipitous fall in Kenya while Karura Falls is the longest (273 m), occurring in three steps of 117 m, 26 m, and 130 m. Chania Falls, Maragua Falls and Queens Cave are also very popular sites to visit.

**Mountain climbing, hiking and walking**

You don’t have to be a professional mountaineer to climb Aberdare’s peaks; most of them can be conquered by any average amateur walker, but you have to be aware of the high altitude.

There are countless panoramic moorlands hikes and shady forest walks to be enjoyed if you don’t want to go hiking in high mountains.

You can also enjoy excellent mountain stream fishing; brown and rainbow trout abound in cool mountain streams and provide excellent angling.

A fishing license can be obtained at the Aberdare National Park gates upon entry.

**Wildlife**

Here you will find about 2,000 elephants that roam the clouded hills and misty glades, some rare Bongo antelopes and giant forest hogs too. Black rhinos are also present in the park, but they are not many.

Amidst the forest and moorlands, herds of Cape buffalo browse, while the forest depths provide sanctuary for the dainty blue duiker and bushbuck as primate troops of colobus, black-faced velvet rustle through the trees and lush stands of bamboo. In this national park sombre olive baboons patrol the forest and grasslands, fearfully avoiding leopards.

Other carnivores you will find in this place are the African wild cat, spotted hyena, African civet and the rare golden cat. More often heard than seen are also lions which were introduced to the park some years ago.

Some people have also seen serval cats in this national park, but they are very rare, with many being melanistic (black) due to their adaptation to this higher altitude. Tumbling mountain streams are home to the African clawless otter, who compete with anglers in pursuit of brown and rainbow trout.
**Birds**

Abundant Aberdare birdlife greets most dawns with a chorus of birdsong that pours out of the forests in the early hours of the day.

Over 290 species have been recorded including the Aberdare cisticola that is critically endangered, and the Jackson’s francolin which is regionally endemic. Often encountered are the bold silvery-cheeked hornbill with their raucous cry casqued beaks, as well as the scarlet-winged flash of the Hartlaub’s turaco. Many birds of prey include augur buzzard, African goshawk, hawk eagle and the magnificent African crown eagle which prey on monkey, francolin and guinea fowls.

Within the forest glades are the cinnamon-chested bee-eater and African paradise fly catcher, while the bamboo glades or higher moorlands are the domain of numerous species.

**Plants**

The forest of the Aberdare ranges are globally renowned for their botanical richness. At varying altitudes are a wealth of flora: from the top while descending, alpine and sub-alpine species such as senecio lobelia, erica helichrysum and tussock grass give way to bamboo and mountain woodlands, mainly junipers podocarpus and nuxia congesta forest on the western and north-western slopes. Ocotea forest are found in the south-east, and mixed podocarpus forest on the east and on Kipipiri. Pockets of hegenia forest also occur in sheltered patches on the rolling moorlands of Aberdare National Park.

**Insects**

The Aberdare National Park vegetation shelters more insects than any other living creature! Common around in Aberdare forest are large, noisy carpenter bees. And in the moorlands, and in the forest too, you find a huge variety of butterflies such as large swallowtails and blue charaxes. Other charaxes species include the forest king charaxes, the white bird charaxes and the black bordered charaxes while the lively little painted ringlet is found only in the bamboo zone.
Reptiles

The Aberdare forest is home to a large number of snakes, frogs and lizards. Snakes of interest feature, the montane egg-eater, a slender bird egg lover, the Kenya stripped skaapsteker, a resident of the high grasslands of the Kinangop plateau and the endemic Kenya montane viper, are all found at high altitude areas of the Aberdare and Mt. Kenya.

The broad array of lizards includes the stripped skink, the alpine meadow skink, the variable skink and the grass top skink which can often be seen wriggling through tuossock grass clamps.

Roads

The salient portion of the Aberdare National park has a good road network but over tough terrain that is more suitable for 4WD vehicles.

The rest of the park is mainly navigated on gravel and dirt roads, more suitable for 4WD vehicles.

MERU NATIONAL PARK

Meru National Park is a savanna ark, 35km East of Maua town in the North-Eastern lowlands below the Nyambene hills.

Meru is part of a complex of protected areas along the Tana River that includes the adjacent Bisanadi and Mwingi National Reserve (to the East and South respectively), Kora National Park and Rahole National reserve. The North-Western area is hilly, with rich volcanic soils. The land flattens towards the East, where grey alluvial volcanic soils appear.

The Meru National Park area is crossed by numerous permanent streams, draining from the Nyambene and flowing in parallel between tongues of lava, south eastwards towards the Tana River. As well as the many streams that cross it, the park is bounded by three large rivers, the Tana river to the South, the Ura river to the South West and the Rojeweru river to the East. There are several prominent inselbergs of basement rock, notably Mughwango and Leopard rock.
A section of the Meru National Park has been designed as a wilderness area where there are no roads.

**Climate**
Rainfall is 635-762mm in the west and 305-356mm in the east.

**Roads**
Access from Nairobi (348 km) is via Nyeri-Nanyuki-Meru or Embu. All roads are good and passable in all seasons. Access into the park from Maua to Murera Gate (35km) and 348km from Nairobi.

The other access is via Embu to Ura Gate (120 km), 290 km from Nairobi- but this route is not accessible at the moment.

**Airstrips**
If you want to fly in, there are a few airstrips in the national Park, and the main airstrips are, Kina, Mulika, next to Meru Mulika Lodge, and Elsa’s Kopje airstrip

**Roads in Park**
The road network in the park has recently been upgraded. However due to the nature of soil, some roads are easily destroyed by vehicles during the rain seasons.

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❖ **MOUNT KENYA NATIONAL PARK**

**Background Information**

Mt. Kenya is an imposing extinct volcano dominating the landscape of the Kenyan Highlands, East of the Rift Valley. Mt. Kenya lies about 140 km North, North-East of Nairobi with its Northern flanks across the Equator. The mountain has two main peaks – Batian (5200m) and Nelion (5188m). The mountains slopes are cloaked in forest, bamboo, scrub and moorland giving way on the high central peaks to rock, ice and snow. Mt. Kenya is an important water catchments area, supplying the Tana and Northern Ewaso Nyiro Systems.

The park includes a variety of habitats ranging from higher forest, bamboo, alpine moorlands, glaciers, tarns and glacial moraines.
The park, which was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1997 and is also a Biosphere Reserve, covers 715 km², and includes the Peaks consisting of all the ground above 3200m with two small salient points extending lower down to 2450m along the Sirimon and Naro Moru tracks. Surrounding the park is Mount Kenya National Reserve with an area of approximately 2095 km².

TANZANIA NATIONAL PARKS & GAME RESERVES

❖ NGORONGORO CRATER NATIONAL PARK

The Ngorongoro Crater is a world heritage site, the world’s largest intact volcanic caldera, and is commonly referred to as the 8th wonder of the world.

The 2,000 feet high walls of the approximately 10-mile-wide crater create a natural amphitheatre for the densest populations of large animals anywhere in the world.

It is a microcosm of the vast Serengeti National Park, and in one day it is possible to see a staggering array of East African wildlife including all the big carnivores.

The crater lives up to its reputation with abundant and easily accessible wildlife and offers a reasonable chance to see lion, hyena or cheetah in action.

The Crater is truly awe-inspiring, and will surely be one of the highlights of your African safari. The rim of the Ngorongoro Crater ranges in altitude from about 7,000 feet to 8,000 feet above sea level. Down below, the relatively flat floor of the Crater rests at an elevation of about 5,500 feet.

Ngorongoro Crater Wildlife Summary

The Ngorongoro Crater’s rich soil and abundant water provide an ideal habitat for a variety of animals. The Crater is not a self-contained ecosystem and some animals do migrate in and out but only in small numbers.

Most of the animals in the Crater are resident and remain year-round. There are approximately 20,000 large mammals at any given time within the Crater walls. Herbivores that you will likely encounter include elephant, black rhino, hippo, buffalo,
eland, zebra, wildebeest, hartebeest, waterbuck, warthog, Grant’s gazelle and Thomson’s gazelle.

Giraffe, impala and topi are strangely absent from the Crater floor, though they are common in the nearby Serengeti. Although giraffes may find the descent into the Crater difficult, it is more likely that they are absent because there is not enough acacia to browse. It is not clear why topi or impala are missing.

Primates you will find in Ngorongoro Crater include baboons and velvet monkeys. Carnivores that you will likely encounter include lion, cheetah, hyena and jackal. Leopards, servals, and bat eared foxes. Ratels are also resident within the Crater but they are much more elusive.

**Ngorongoro Crater Wildlife Variations**

Over the past 50 years since the early 1960s when long term studies began, the Crater has undergone drastic changes. Wildebeest have historically made up at least half of the large animal population. However, their numbers have been declining since the 1970s. Alternatively, buffalo have been on the rise as wildebeest numbers have decreased.

It is thought the departure of the Masai and their livestock in the mid-1970s triggered this shift in wildebeest and buffalo populations. Masai regularly burned the grass in the Crater creating fresh green grass for their cattle, which may have benefited the wildebeest. Now that the Masai have departed, the grass is longer and coarser favouring buffalos.

This fluctuation in large herbivores may have led to a decrease in lion and hyena numbers which in turn allowed cheetahs to thrive. The one thing that is for certain is that the Crater is truly a dynamic and ever-changing ecosystem.

**The Ngorongoro Crater Floor**

The Ngorongoro Crater is sometimes called a microcosm of the Serengeti because there are five distinct habitats located in the relatively small area of the crater floor (100 square miles) that mirror the major habitats of its enormous neighbour, the Serengeti ecosystem (15,000 square miles). These habitats are as follows:
**Lerai Forest** in the southwestern section of the crater. Lerai is a Masai word referring to the tall yellow barked acacias that dominate the forest. The forest is beautiful and is home to an array of animals including baboons, velvet monkeys, waterbucks and bushbucks. The forest is especially well known for its small population of giant tusker bull elephants. Lerai Forest is also home to the only leopards in the Crater. The leopards here are spotted on occasion but remain very much elusive. The best time to visit Lerai Forest is in the early morning.

In the central-western area is **Lake Magadi** (also known as **Lake Makat**), which plays host to thousands of migratory flamingos. The lake can be full of water or a dry expanse of white soda depending on the season. The south-eastern and north-western sections of the crater are home to two large seasonal swamps. These areas are excellent for hippo and many species of water birds.

Spread throughout the central area of the crater is the **short grass plains**. These plains are home to thousands of wildebeest, zebra and Thomson’s gazelle. In the eastern section of the Crater are the longer grasslands where thousands of buffalos roam. One of smallest carnivores, the serval cat, is commonly found here in the tall grass.

The Ngorongoro Crater is said to be the second-best place to visit in Tanzania (perhaps in all of Africa) and to view the large carnivores. The Serengeti is significantly better for large carnivores, but nothing can simply compete with the Serengeti. Lion, cheetah, leopard, hyena, serval, ratel, jackal and bat eared fox all inhabit the Ngorongoro Crater. Lions, cheetahs, hyenas and jackals can usually be spotted but the other predators are much more elusive. As of 2004, it was estimated that there are 25-30 lions, 10-12 cheetahs and 50-60 hyenas inhabiting the Ngorongoro Crater. Note that these numbers do not include any cubs but refer strictly to adults, which are much easier to estimate. There are four prides of lions and six clans of hyenas on the Crater floor. It is interesting to note that all of today’s crater lions are descended from only 15 lions that either survived or invaded the crater after a plague of biting flies in 1961.

As discussed in the ‘Wildlife Variations’ section above, the Crater is a dynamic place and populations of certain species fluctuate widely over time. The increase of buffalos and decrease in wildebeest may have had a detrimental impact on both
lions and hyenas as buffalos have been known to trample the young of both species. This has in turn allowed cheetahs to thrive in the Crater as lions are the number one cause of cheetah cub mortality. In the past, cheetahs have not regularly settled in the Crater and lion and hyena numbers have been historically higher.

❖ SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK

A million wildebeest... each one driven by the same ancient rhythm, fulfilling its instinctive role in the inescapable cycle of life:

A frenzied three-week bout of territorial conquests and mating; survival of the fittest as 40km (25 mile) long columns plunge through crocodile-infested waters on the annual exodus north; replenishing the species in a brief population explosion that produces more than 8,000 calves daily before the 1,000 km (600 mile) pilgrimage begins again.

Tanzania’s oldest and most popular national park, also a world heritage site and recently proclaimed a 7th world wide wonder, the Serengeti is famous for its annual migration, when some six million hooves pound the open plains, as more than 200,000 zebras and 300,000 Thomson’s gazelles join the wildebeest’s trek for fresh grazing.

Yet even when the migration is quiet, the Serengeti offers arguably the most scintillating game-viewing in Africa:

Great herds of buffalo, smaller groups of elephant and giraffe, and thousands upon thousands of elands, topi, kongoni, impala and Grant’s gazelle. The spectacle of predator versus prey dominates Tanzania’s greatest park.

Golden-maned lion prides feast on the abundance of plain grazers. Solitary leopards haunt the acacia trees lining the Seronera River, while a high density of cheetahs prowls the south-eastern plains.

Almost uniquely, all three African jackal species are found here, alongside the spotted hyena and a host of more elusive small predators, ranging from the insectivorous aardwolf to the beautiful serval cat.
But there is more to Serengeti than large mammals. Gaudy agama lizards and rock hyraxes scuffle around the surfaces of the park’s isolated granite koppies.

A full 100 varieties of dung beetle have been recorded, as have 500-plus bird species, ranging from the outsized ostrich and bizarre secretary bird of the open grassland, to the black eagles that soar effortlessly above the Lobo Hills.

As enduring as the game-viewing is the liberating sense of space that characterises the Serengeti Plains, stretching across sunburnt savannah to a shimmering golden horizon at the end of the earth. Yet, after the rains, this golden expanse of grass is transformed into an endless green carpet flecked with wildflowers. And there are also wooded hills and towering termite mounds, rivers lined with fig trees and acacia woodland stained orange by dust.

Popular the Serengeti might be, but it remains so vast that you may be the only human audience when a pride of lions masterminds a siege, focussed unswervingly on its next meal.

**About Serengeti**

**Size**

14,763 sq km (5,700 sq miles).

**Location**

335km (208 miles) from Arusha, stretching North to Kenya and bordering Lake Victoria to the west.

**Activities**

Hot air balloon safaris, walking safari, picnicking, game drives, bush lunch/dinner can be arranged with hotels. Masai rock paintings and musical rocks.

Visit neighbouring Ngorongoro Crater, Olduvai Gorge, Ol Doinyo Lengai volcano and Lake Natron’s flamingos.

**When to visit Serengeti**

If you want to follow the wildebeest migration you must make your trip between December and July. But if you want to see predators in action, it would be better to visit in June-October.
Please note that the route and timing of the wildebeest migration is unpredictable. Make sure that you allow at least three days to be assured of seeing them on your visit, and stay a bit longer if you want to see the main predators too.

❖ LAKE MANYARA NATIONAL PARK

About Lake Manyara National Park

Stretching for 50km along the base of the rusty-gold 600-metre high Rift Valley escarpment, Lake Manyara is a scenic gem, with a setting extolled by Ernest Hemingway as “the loveliest I had seen in Africa”.

The compact game-viewing circuit through Manyara offers a virtual microcosm of the Tanzanian safari experience.

From the entrance gate, the road winds through an expanse of lush jungle-like groundwater forest where hundred-strong baboon troops lounge nonchalantly along the roadside, blue monkeys scamper nimbly between the ancient mahogany trees, dainty bushbuck tread warily through the shadows, and outsized forest hornbills honk cacophonously in the high canopy.

Contrasting with the intimacy of the forest is the grassy floodplain and its expansive views eastward, across the alkaline lake, to the jagged blue volcanic peaks that rise from the endless Masai Steppes. Large buffalo, wildebeest and zebra herds congregate on these grassy plains, as do giraffes – some so dark in coloration that they appear to be black from a distance.

inside this floodplain, a narrow belt of acacia woodland is the favoured haunt of Manyara’s legendary tree-climbing lions and impressively tusked elephants.

Squadrons of banded mongoose dart between the acacias, while small Kirk’s dik-dik forages in their shade.

Pairs of klipspringer are often seen silhouetted on the rocks above a field of searing hot springs that steams and bubbles adjacent to the lakeshore in the far south of the park.
Manyara provides the perfect introduction to Tanzania’s birdlife. More than 400 species have been recorded, and even a first-time visitor to Africa might reasonably expect to see 100 of these in one day. Highlights include thousands of pink-hued flamingos on their perpetual migration, as well as other large water birds such as pelicans, cormorants and storks.

**About Lake Manyara National Park**

**Size**

330 sq km (127 sq miles), of which up to 200 sq km (77 sq miles) is lake when water levels are high.

**Location**

Lake Manyara is situated in the North of Tanzania. The entrance gate lies 1.5 hours (126km/80 miles) West of Arusha along a newly surfaced road, close to the ethnically diverse market town of Mto wa Mbu.

**Activities**

Game drives, night game drives, canoeing when the water level is sufficiently high. Cultural tours, picnicking, bush lunch/dinner, mountain bike tours, abseiling and forest walks on the escarpment outside the park.

**When to visit**

Dry season (July-October) for large mammals;

Wet season (November-June) for bird watching, the waterfalls and canoeing.