

AFRICAN SAFARI 2014

Part of the tour package when climbing Mt Kilimanjaro was a three day safari to three different National Parks in Tanzania, Africa.



The parks included Tarangire, Ngorongoro Crater, and Lake Manyara. Our group of three were chauffeured in a Toyota land cruiser by a knowledgeable tour guide who spoke decent English. We toured with Ahsantetours, a local African company.

Safari in Swahili means Journey. A Safari is not just wildlife viewing and appreciating nature, but also a cultural experience, meeting and learning about the local people who live in this part of Africa.



Tanzania is home to 50 million people. There are more than 100 different ethnic groups and as many languages that are spoken.



The most famous tribe is the Maasai, whose territory includes the safari lands where most tourists visit. They are semi-nomadic people with cattle at the heart of their economy. We were in Tanzania in September, which is the dry season. Young herdsman, with a stick in one hand (and often a cell phone in the other!) moved their cattle, looking for patches of grass and water in the parched landscape.



Some Maasai communities live in kraals, an enclosed village. This kraal was open to tourists to learn more about their way of life, including song and dance. They are famous for their beaded jewelry, made from natural resources including clay, bone, wood, copper, brass, as well as glass. They are extremely colorful. Women wear large, beaded collars.

Most Maasai wear the color red because it symbolizes their culture (and they believe it scares away lions). Men usually wear a red robe called a shuka. Women and children keep their hair shaved or cut short. Young men often wear braids that may be dyed red.

Our first day was to Tarangire National Park, located in the north central part of the country. The park is named after the Tarangire river which is the primary source of water for animals during the annual dry season. The park is part of the Tarangire Ecosystem, which is defined by the long distance migration of wildebeest and zebra. Thousands of animals concentrate in the Park area during the dry season...to be near the water of the Tarangire river.



We entered the park and proceeded to a crowded parking lot full of 4 x 4 vehicles where our guide checked us in. My initial thought was that this was going to be like visiting the San Diego Wild Animal Park. But honestly, once we dispersed and drove out into the park and saw wild animals where they were meant to be it was like entering another world!



Tarangire is home to many baobab trees. These strange looking behemoths have massive trunks and relatively small branches. They can live to be a 1000 years old. They are known as the 'tree of life.' It is a giant succulent; up to 80% of the trunk is water. The bark and flesh are soft and fibrous. During times of drought, the tree is a valuable source of water for both humans and large animals, especially elephants. The leaves and fruit can be eaten as well.





Tarangire is known for its large elephant population. During the rainy season they migrate throughout the Rift Valley and Maasai Steppe.

But when the rains end, several thousand return to the Park to seek out the water from the Tarangire river. Thousands of other ungulates do likewise.



Massasi Giraffe

Drinking from the Tarangire river. Common throughout the Park.

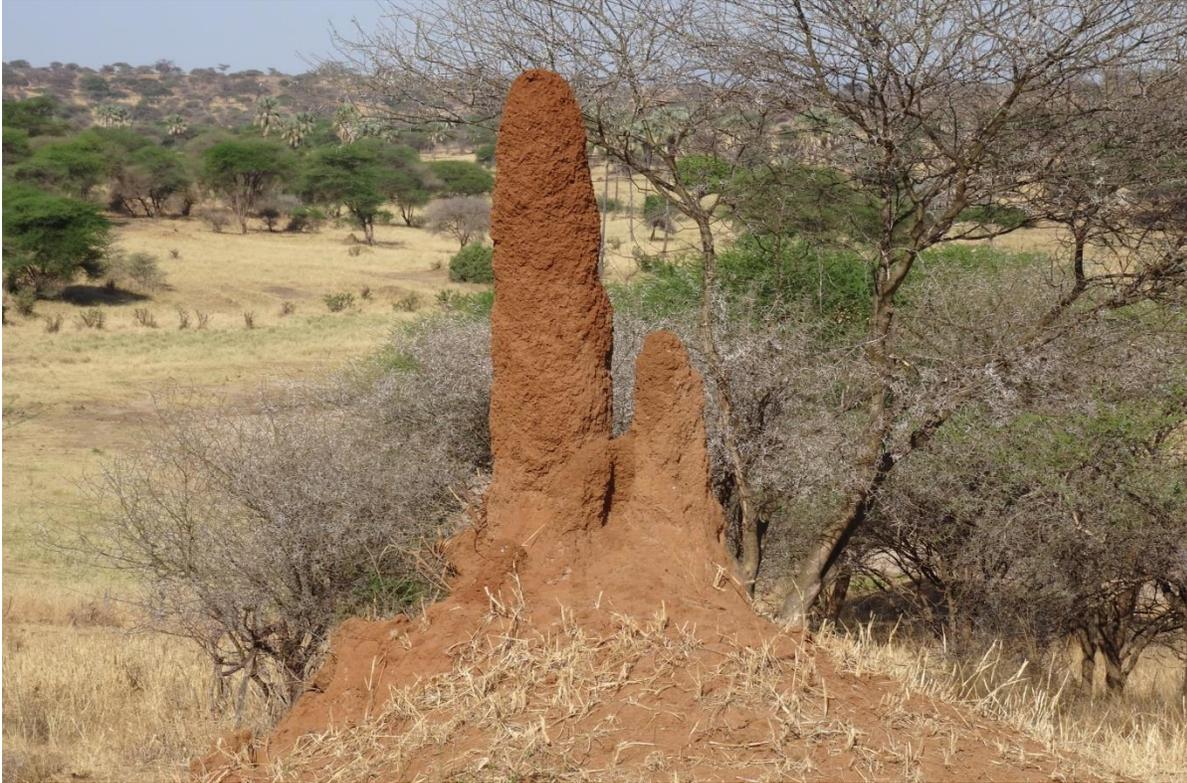
Leopard

Fast asleep on a tree branch, which is where they are usually found. Also common throughout the Park



Waterbuck

A large antelope widely distributed in sub-Saharan Africa.



Termite mounds are abundant everywhere. Some are more than 10 feet tall. But the actual nest is underground, beneath the mound.

Mound building termites have trouble digesting vegetation (cellulose) directly. Instead, workers collect tiny, chewed on pieces of grass, wood, bark, and other plants which are carried into the nest and placed in special chambers. A type of fungi then grows on the plant material breaks down the cellulose. This helps the termites digest the fiber with ease and makes it more nutritious.

The mound itself actually serves as a ventilation shaft which helps regulate temperature and humidity for optimum fungal growth, as well as maintain the health of the colony. It is constructed by the workers using particles of wood, clay, and soil which is bound together using sticky saliva which hardens everything together. Mound construction is a ongoing process and can take years. Pretty amazing for an insect that is also blind!



We spent two nights at a tented campsite. It was much nicer than you'd think. The tents had two regular double beds, shower, and a toilet. The tent flaps could be zipped closed. We were told this was to keep out snakes and other varmints.



I loved the sound of the birds in the jungle as dawn approached. There were no other tourists when we were here. We had a campfire each night. Hardly any mosquitoes or flies. It was very pleasant.



Dinner and breakfast were prepared in the kitchen (building to the right). The dining hut is to the left. We had beef or chicken, rice or pasta, vegetables, and fruit. Bottled water or beer...our choice of Kilimanjaro, Tusker, or Serengeti. No one got sick from the food.

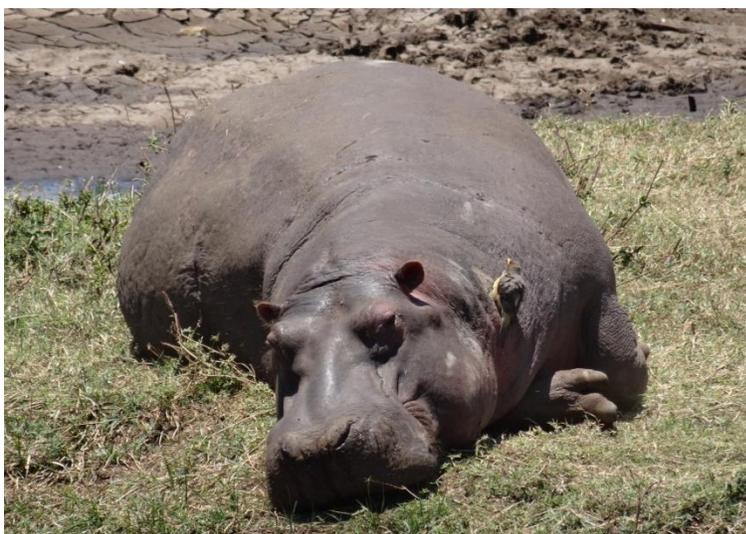


Ngorongoro Crater National Park is a World Heritage Site and the crown jewel of Tanzania's Park system. The crater is part of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The crater is the result of a volcanic explosion several million years ago. What remains is the world's largest intact and unfilled caldera. The area of the crater's floor is 100 square miles of open savannah. The mountainous, forested sidewalls are 2000 feet high all around.





Several streams enter the crater from the surrounding mountains and are the main source of water for the seasonal salt lake known as Lake Magadi. (see above) During the rainy season many flamingos congregate here.



There are several springs near the eastern crater wall that feed into a huge swamp occupied by hippopotamus. The bird seen in this picture is known as an oxpecker. They pick ticks, insects, and parasites from the hides of large mammals.

Birds seen in the crater



Lilac-breasted Roller



Crowned Plover



Oxpecker



Secretary Bird



Cory Bustard



Crowned Crane



Lappet Faced Vulture

Approximately 25,000 large animals, mostly ungulates, live on the fertile savannah plains of the crater. Here's what we saw in one day.



**Grant's
Zebra**



Blue Wildebeest (above) Thomson's Gazelle (below)





Cape Buffalo
Black Rhinoceros



Spotted Hyena



Warthog

African lion cubs





Pastoralist tribes such as the Maasai have lived in the land now part of the Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area for a thousand years. When the parks were established over the last 50 years, there

was forcible displacement of Maasai settlements. Land in the Conservation Area is unique however, in that it's the only such conservation area in Tanzania that protects wildlife but still allows some human habitation. Cultivation is prohibited at all but subsistence levels. Maasai herders are allowed to graze their cattle and goats within the crater, but must enter and exit the same day. Notice the Zebra in the background of the picture above.



One last look back into the crater as we depart. This was a fabulous place! On to the last park tomorrow.

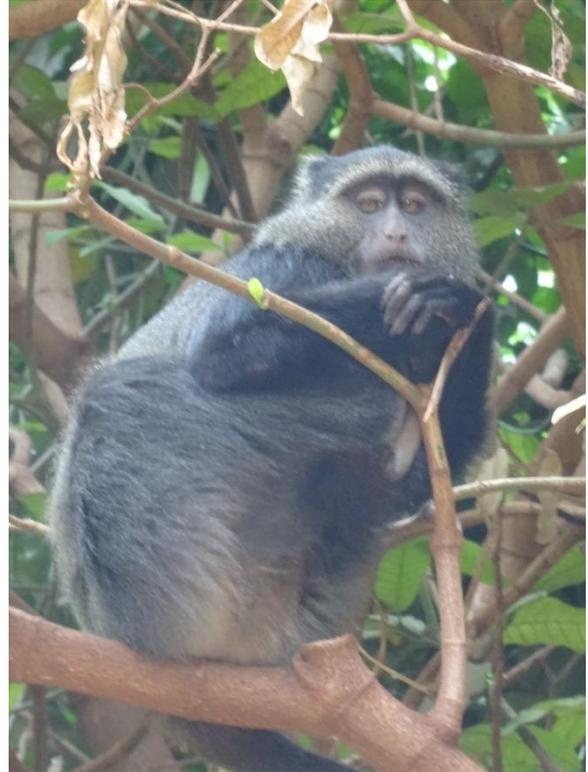
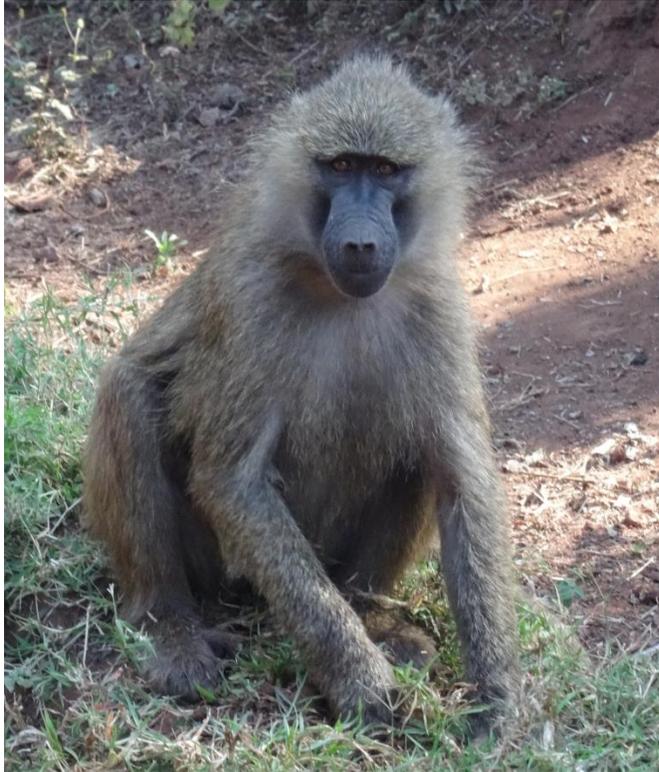


Lake Manyara National Park is relatively small...125 square miles, of which two thirds is underwater during the rainy season. Although home to many large animals, it is especially known for large number of birds, especially waterfowl and shore birds. View of the park with the lake in the distance. Notice the lodge perched high on the cliff.





Most of the safari is on dirt roads thru open woodlands alongside the lake. The area is known for large groups of baboons as seen here.



Baboons move freely where people are. They're are normally not aggressive but you should never make direct eye contact with them. They perceive this as a challenge or threat. Also don't eat in front of them...they'll snatch food away from you. Male baboons can reach 50 lbs. Monkey on right is called a Blue Guenon. Much smaller...20 lbs.



Several elephants were browsing in the woods. Cool picture!



Since it was the dry season, only a small number of Lesser Flamingos were gathered along the water's edge. Other birds we saw included a Grey-headed Kingfisher, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, and the large, strange looking Ground Hornbill.



The Acacia tree has become the legendary symbol of the African savannah. A fitting end to a magnificent safari trip to Tanzania.