



*A trip to Tanzania wouldn't be complete without a safari, but given the multitude of options, where to? The so-called Northern Circuit has the world famous and unforgettable Ngorongoro Crater, the Serengeti and its massive migration, and the lesser known but most enjoyable Manyara and Tarangire National Parks. The former is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve and home to the lake of the same name and huge flocks of flamingos and pelicans and its famous tree-climbing lions, the latter has its massive and fantasy-world baobab trees, herds of elephants, and over 500 bird species. Both are also excellent for most African mammal species, though the UN World Heritage Site Ngorongoro Crater is the only place where black rhinos can be found in Tanzania.*

The north also has treks with donkey portage through the Ngorongoro highlands to splendid Lake Natron and its flamingos, the Olduvai Gorge where a 1.8 million year old hominid fossil was unearthed, and Ol Doinyo Lengai, a 2878-metre active volcano, up the 4566-metre Mount Meru in Arusha National Park, and of course, the climb to Uhuru Peak, the highest point on the continent atop Mount Kilimanjaro. Whilst they are all available as stand-alone trips from Arusha, off-the-shelf tours rarely tick all the boxes. To truly appreciate the north, a longer stay combining your specific interests is the best way to get the most out your trip.

The south is home to the luxury very accessible Mikumi National Park and the beautiful and little-visited gem of Ruaha, the country's second largest National Park. This rolling wilderness, studded with the great angular-branched baobab trees, and intersected by the Ruaha river, is known for its magnificent elephant population, huge herds of buffalo

as well as for other mammals and, in particular, its bird life. With personal park fees at 25 USD instead of 100 USD, and being accessible from Dar-es-Salaam by vehicle, Ruaha and Mikumi are an attractive option.

Departing from Dar in the morning, we had a picnic lunch sitting on the open roof of a Landcruiser watching a herd of female elephants and offspring hosing themselves down with muddy water. The flat open savannah makes game viewing easy with dazzles of zebras grazing, a kaleidoscope of giraffe lolloping across the plain, impalas pronging, a pride of lions in the short grass with a mum offering her teats to her cubs before they indulge in some play fighting not more than 15 metres away. Mikumi has no rhinos or cheetahs, but makes up for it with the abundance and accessibility of its other signature species.





After a night in comfortable thatched bandas, Ruaha beckons. Passing through Iringa’s jacaranda-lined streets and then a red-walled valley along a sun-baked ochre road, arrive in time for an afternoon game drive through the green rolling hills.

As well as being a Big Five park and hosting 450 bird species in its abundant trees, Ruaha is also home to the elusive and rare, stinky but beautiful African hunting dog. With a varied landscape there is also a good chance of spotting a cheetah stalking on the open savannah, and encountering the majestic sable antelope. We

arrived in Ruaha for an afternoon game drive, and spent the next day slowly driving around this majestic park.

A vehicle safari can cover the ground and will deliver you to concentrations of animals – you can count yourself unlucky if you don’t see a large pride of lions here - but walking safaris take you closer, both physically and spiritually, to the soil. Walking with a park ranger alongside the river the next morning, hearing nothing but the wind rustling the vegetation and your own footsteps makes the bush an even more intimate place. With so few tourists around and

covering such a vast area, you are no longer visiting the bush, you are the bush. Sightings of distant crocodiles and, by keeping downwind, nearby giraffes, zebras, and antelope are the norm, but you can also look at the bizarre, sprawling nest of the hammerkop, a large stork-like bird that buries its eggs in a three-roomed nest decorated with old bones; inspect spoor (field guide talk for prints and poop) of some of the bush’s unseen nocturnal inhabitants like the aardvark and the genet, the choggy footprint of a hippopotamus and an impressively large lion paw; and prod biscuit barrel sized elephant pats.



And all this before lunch and driving back to Mikumi for the night and a final dawn and morning game drive before heading back to Dar for dinner.

There are tourist-priced lodges and cheaper rustic but decent bandas inside both parks and excellent value for money lodges and hotels priced for locals on the outskirts of both parks. A private five-day safari from Dar to Ruaha via Mikumi can cost as little as 850 USD in a combination of bandas and lodges, based on two sharing through Indigo Safaris, who can also organise all your diving and internal flight requirements.



Tailor-made safaris, treks, and dive trips throughout Tanzania and the Zanzibar Archipelago for all budgets with excellent value-for-money

