

The Southern Tanzania Safari: A Closer Encounter with Africa's Wildlife

Tanzania is one of Africa's top wildlife safari destinations. Wildlife lovers have a choice of two very different safari routes- referred to as the northern and southern circuits. The contrast is most obvious in the topography, habitat and climate. The southern safari route is anchored on Dar es Salaam, and covers Ruaha, Mikumi, Udzungwa Mountains National Parks and the Selous Game Reserve...



Lion Resting At Selous Game Reserve –Southern Tanzania

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1. The Southern Tanzania Safari: A Closer Encounter with Africa's Wildlife

The southern circuit is more discreet, less accessible and has fewer visitors. Adventure lovers and those who seek closer contact with some of Africa's most complex ecosystems will be rewarded. Here you can view game in a variety of new ways- walking, riding and boating. If you have not had the privilege of getting up close to wild animals in their natural habitat, it is an exciting and refreshing experience. For this encounter, the park authorities require that an armed ranger escort you. It is therefore not as dangerous as it may first appear.

Mikumi National Park is the most accessible of the southern game sanctuaries. It is 283 km to the west of Dar es Salaam – Tanzania's coastal commercial capital. Occupying 3,230 sq km, it carries a variety of wildlife including elephants, lion, giraffe, impala, warthog, zebra, buffalo, wildebeest, hartebeest and eland. Wild dogs- considered an endangered carnivore species -are found here in good numbers. Other resident animals are crocodiles, hippos, and monitor lizards. Birds are most plentiful in the wet season when up to 300 species gathers here. Many of these are Eurasian migrants, exercising to the full, the freedom that comes with wings.

The Mikumi flood plain is the dominant feature of the park, which is bordered on one side by the Uluguru Mountains and on another by the Lumango range. Mikumi forms the northern border of the Selous Game Reserve and is part of a vast wilderness ecosystem covering 75,000 sq km. Open grasslands stretch on the plains, while the miombo woodlands cover higher ground.

The park is accessible year round- unlike some of the sanctuaries in the southern circuit. To get to Mikuni from Dar, you spend 4 hours on road or 1 hour by air. Budget travelers take a bus ride to park gate, from where game drives are organised. There is limited accommodation at a few luxury lodges and tented camps and at 3 campsites. If you find yourself in Dar on a weekend, this is where you head to see wildlife.

The 1,990 sq km Udzungwa Mountains National Park is 348 km west of Dar and 65 km southwest of Mikumi. The mountains are part of the Eastern Arc Mountains that fall southeast of Kilimanjaro. The park is unique in Tanzania, having been created primarily to conserve plant life. The pristine mountain forest habitat hosts numerous rare plants. There are six primate species, out of which two species are endemic - the Iringa red colobus monkey and the Sanje Crested Mangabey.

At the plateau area, you find elephants, lions, hunting dogs and buffalos, though not in as large numbers as in some of the other Tanzania parks. Birds also do well here, and indeed the park ranks as one of Africa's most important bird conservation areas. Scientists have in recent times come across at least four previously unknown bird species. The best time to visit is over the dry season between June and October. The hiking trails over the wet season are slippery, which can be quite a nuisance.

The Ruaha National Park is rightly named after its lifeblood- the Great Ruaha River. Occupying 12,950 sq km, it is Tanzania's second largest national park and its biggest elephant sanctuary. Home to numerous crocodiles and hippo, the Great Ruaha draws many thirsty waterbuck, leopard, buffalo, reedbuck, wild dogs, lion and hyena to its banks. Plain animals such as zebra, greater and lesser kudu, sable and roan antelope, impala and giraffe are found on the plains stretching from the rivers edge.

The topography is agreeable to hiking and walking safaris are allowed. In wet season months of March to April and October to November the bird population peaks and the park has over 370 bird species, including some Eurasian migrants. The flora is very diverse and over 1650 plant species flourish here. The Ruaha has the unique distinction of having plant and animal life found in both eastern and southern Africa. The climate here is hot and dry and temperatures can reach 40°C in October.

The Ruaha is located 128 km west of the central Tanzania town of Iringa. It was previously inaccessible, but there is now year round road access. From Dar, road travel is a backbreaking 10 hours while a charter flight takes 1 ½ hours. The best time for a safari is over the dry season- May to December. Then, the Ruaha River is magnetic to the animals and right at the banks, the drama of their daily life is on display- feeding, fighting, courting and mating. The accommodation is currently limited, but there is a luxury lodge, and a few self-catering chalets and campsites.

Selous Game Reserve is the star of the southern safari circuit. The reserve is named after the intrepid Fredrick Courtney Selous, a celebrated Victoria era explorer and naturalist. He met his end here in a sideshow of the First World War. The Great War had spilled over from Europe as the Germans then ruled parts of today's Tanzania. Located 500 km to the southwest of Dar, the reserve occupies a staggering 55,000 sq km – larger than Switzerland- and is the largest of its kind in Africa.

The Selous was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982 due to the significance of both its flora and fauna. This immense wilderness has a diversity of habitats including savanna woodlands, swamps, open grasslands and forests.

Over 2,100 species of trees and plants have been recorded. The mighty Rufiji River is the lifeblood of the reserve and its numerous tributaries and oxbow lakes are ideal for boat safaris. The wildlife to see here includes buffalo, hippo, black rhino, lion and wild dog. Elephants in particular are numerous and are estimated to number over 60,000.

Other inhabitants of Selous are bush back, waterbuck, reedbuck, impala, eland, giraffe, baboon, zebra, and greater kudu. Birders will also find a trip to Selous worthwhile – over 420 species are on record. In the very large game sanctuaries of the south - Ruaha and Selous in particular, game is scattered and a slow pace is advised, with at least 3-4 days in each. Photographic safaris can be very rewarding here. Most visitors take the time to visit to Stiegler's Gorge, which also happens to be a spot favoured by leopards.

From Dar, you arrive after a 1-½ hour charter flight or by traveling for 7 hours by road. Travel by road is not advised, except for the most adventurous souls. Selous is near the coast and is just a few hundred feet above sea level. The climate is hot and humid, particularly between October and March. Part of the reserve is closed in the wet season between March and May. The best time to visit is over the dry season period of June to October. Then on safari you can walk, boat and ride a 4WD vehicle. Accommodation is limited to just a few luxury tented and no-frills camps.

The typical southern safari will usually combine Mikumi, Ruaha and Selous. After the safari, a stay in [Zanzibar](#) rounds off an unbeatable holiday experience. It is generally recommended you take an escorted [southern Tanzania safari package](#) that includes transport, guide, park fees and accommodation. Particularly in the large sanctuaries of the southern circuit, tour guides bring valuable useful local knowledge - where to find the animals, and how to get where you are going.

On safari, avoid bright colours as this may get you in trouble with wild animals. If you are wise you will pack brown, beige and khaki clothing. It rarely gets really cold on the southern circuit and short sleeve shirts, shorts and trousers for men are adequate. For ladies, short sleeve blouses, slacks and skirts are ideal. But carry a jacket or sweater for possible chills in the evening and early mornings. Sunglasses will shield you from the at times harsh tropical glare; and a hat can save you from sunstroke. Bring along a sensible pair of shoes that will allow you to walk comfortably in the bush. Binoculars will come in very handy for spotting animals.

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2. Destination Facts: Tanzania

Full Country Name: United Republic of Tanzania

Area: 945,045 sq km

Population: 35 million (2000 UN estimate)

Capital City: Dodoma (Administrative), Dar es Salaam (Commercial)

Other Major Towns: Arusha, Mwanza, Zanzibar

Peoples: Native African (over 100 tribes), Asian, European and Arabic

Language: Swahili, English & indigenous languages

Religion: Christian, Muslim and traditional religions

Government: Republic

Time: GMT + 3 hours

Currency: Tanzania Shilling (TSH)

Electricity: 230/240 V, 50 Hz

Weights & Measures: Metric

Economy: Mining, agriculture, tourism

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3. Travel Basics: Tanzania

Health

Visitors entering Tanzania from yellow fever infected areas require yellow fever international certificate of vaccination. Exemptions are made for visitors arriving from non-endemic areas such as Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The northwestern forest region is considered a high-risk area for yellow fever. Malaria is common in Tanzania. Visitors are strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication commencing two weeks before travel.

It is recommended to take vaccinations against hepatitis A, polio and typhoid. HIV-AIDS is prevalent in the country and I cannot emphasize enough the need for protection measures. Some fresh water lakes and rivers carry the risk of Bilharzia and you are advised not to swim in such areas. Though proof of vaccination is not required, cholera is a risk throughout the country and precautions are necessary. Modern hospitals and chemists are available in Dar es Salaam, Arusha and other major urban centres.

Visas

All visitors require a visa except citizens of some African and commonwealth countries. It is advisable to obtain visa's in advance from Tanzania Embassies and High Commissions as some airlines may require it before allowing you to board. But you can also be issued with a visa on arrival at Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Kilimanjaro international airports and at the Namanga Gate on the Kenya /Tanzania border. Passports must be valid for at least six months.

Nationals of countries exempt from visa requirements will be issued with a free visitors pass at the same entry points. Those traveling to Zanzibar should be aware that the Islands are nominally independent and passports and Tanzania visas are required even for a days visit. Visa requirements however vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

Peoples & Culture

Tanzania is made up of 100 or so tribal groups of mainly Bantu origin. None of these groups comprise more than 10% of the population and this perhaps contributes to the tranquility the country has experienced. The most numerous groups are the Sukuma of Lake Victoria, Chaaga of Mount Kilimanjaro, Nyamwenzi of Tabora, Hehe of Iringa and the Gogo of Dodoma.

Arab and Persian influence is strong in Zanzibar. The interaction of Arabs and Bantu Africans has resulted in the Swahili language now widely spoken in Eastern and Central Africa. Those in the know say that the purest Swahili dialect

is spoken in Zanzibar. Swahili is now the Lingua Franca of Tanzania although English is widely understood in urban centers.

Make sure to experience the traditional food at the coast and Zanzibar. This is quite good and is based on seafood and rice dishes. Food in the mainland is generally a little bit stodgy and less exciting. The most popular drink is a very decent brew known as Safari Lager. Tanzania music and dance is popular throughout Eastern Africa and this attests to its quality. The lyrics are usually in Swahili. Get to listen to some of it and this may even help improve on your Swahili.

Communications

Telephone, fax, telegram, post and Internet services are available in urban centers and locations popular with tourists. Direct dialing to many countries is available at most hotels in urban areas. In rural areas international calling is through the operator. The country code for Tanzania is 255.

Mobile phones are based on GSM 900/1800 network. Coverage is however limited and you are advised to check beforehand whether your GSM phone has access if you are traveling outside the main urban centres. Mobile telephony operators include Celtel, Mobitel, Tritel, Vodacom and Zanzibar Telecom. You can obtain a GSM card that will allow you to make international calls to any country. E-mail is accessible at Internet cafes to be found in urban centres around the country.

Accommodation

You will find good quality accommodation within the main routes popular with business travelers and tourists. This includes Dar es Salaam, Moshi, Arusha and the northern game parks such as Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tarangire and Manyara. In the parks, accommodation varies from 5 star lodges and tented camps at the upper end, to basic camping at the lower end.

In Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar at the coast, there is a wide range of accommodation to meet the needs of most travelers. Camping is however scarce outside the parks. Outside the main urban centres and tourist routes finding rated accommodation is a doubtful proposition. See our [Tanzania Hotels & Lodges](#) page to book accommodation for your business or leisure travel needs.

Money

The local currency is the Tanzanian Shilling (Tsh). Visitors can take in any amount of foreign currency, subject to declaration. Taking out of foreign currency is limited to the amount declared upon arrival. Import and export of Tanzanian currency is however prohibited. Major currencies such as US dollars

and now the Euro and travelers cheques can be converted at major hotels, banks and forex bureaus in the main towns and tourist areas.

In Tanzania plastic is not highly rated and credit cards are not widely accepted. And when accepted the exchange rate is unfavorable. But it is still a good idea to carry your credit cards, as the conversion rate will not matter in case of urgent need. If staying at one of the bigger hotels, however, your card will very likely be honored. Do not be tempted to change money in the streets however favourable the exchange rate may appear.

Climate

Zanzibar and the coastal areas are hot and humid and average daily temperatures hover in the 30°C range. October to March is the hottest period. Sea breezes however temper the regions' climate and June to September is coolest with temperatures falling to 25°C. In the Kilimanjaro area, temperatures vary from 15°C in May-August period to 22°C over December – March. As you head to the peaks of Kilimanjaro, temperatures can drop to below freezing, especially at night.

The climate is temperate in the northern national parks. The central plateau suffers a dry and arid climate with hot days and cool nights. The highlands in the south and northeast are cool and temperate. For the country as a whole the hottest months are October to February. The long rains fall between March and May and the shorter wet season falls in November.

International Travel

Tanzania's international air gateways are at Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Kilimanjaro (50 Km from Arusha). British Airways flies direct to Dar es Salaam from London, taking about 11 hours. A few European carriers fly to Dar es Salaam or Kilimanjaro via European hubs. Gulf Air and Emirates fly to Dar es Salaam using mid eastern connections. Other airlines flying to Tanzania include Air Tanzania - the national carrier, Air India, Ethiopian Airlines, KLM, South African Airways and Swiss.

Tanzania can also be reached through regional hubs at Nairobi and Johannesburg and to a lesser extent Addis Ababa. There are more flights into Nairobi than Kilimanjaro and a popular route for those heading for the northern parks is to fly into Nairobi and then connect to Arusha by shuttle bus service. There is a ferry service between Mombasa in Kenya and Dar es Salaam. On Lake Tanganyika, a passenger service runs from Kigoma to Bujumbura in Burundi, Congo (DRC) and Mpulunga in Zambia.

The Tanzania – Zambia Railway Authority runs a passenger train service from Dar es Salaam to Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia. But note that you will need to change trains at the border. Tanzania has good road links to Kenya and Zambia. Road connections to Rwanda and Mozambique are poor and are adequate only for those traveling for adventure.

Local Travel

All the major towns in Tanzania are connected by tarmac all weather roads. But outside this network, quality deteriorates. You can enjoy speedy connections by bus or car to Arusha, Morogoro, Moshi, Lushoto, Tanga and Dar es Salaam. It is useful to find out first the quality of the roads and estimated travel time when traveling overland. Between Air Tanzania and Precision Air you will access the main internal routes. Charter flights are available mainly from Arusha, Mwanza, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar to other parts of the country.

Rental cars are reliably available from Arusha, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. See our [Tanzania Car Rental](#) page to do your reservation for a self-drive or chauffeur driven vehicle. Rail service is available to the main towns except Arusha. Long haul bus service can connect you to the main towns in the country. It is advisable to find out beforehand if the quality of rail and long haul bus service is acceptable to you. For short haul travel, the popular way to get around is by means of dalla dalla (shared taxi).

Travel Insurance

Health and the usual travel insurance are recommended. Ensure your travel insurance includes emergency evacuation.

What to Wear

Tanzania never really gets cold and light clothing is recommended. Warmer clothing such as sweaters is however necessary to get you through the evenings and early mornings if you are heading for the highlands. Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro of course requires special clothing and shoes.

On safari, bright coloured clothing may get you in trouble with wild animals. If you are wise you will pack brown, beige and khaki clothing. Short sleeve shirts, shorts and trouser for men are sufficient. For ladies, short sleeve blouses, slacks and skirts are ideal though in the national parks and touristy places such as Arusha and Dar es Salaam you may get along with shorts (not too short) and trousers.

At the coast and Zanzibar where Muslims are predominant, women need to dress modestly so as not to offend local sensibilities. But swimwear is perfectly acceptable at beaches and hotel premises. Nudity is totally unacceptable in the

whole country. It is advisable to travel light and some safari and air charters have a baggage limit of 10-15 kilograms maximum.

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4. About Africa Point

Africapoint.com is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya.

The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

What services do we offer?

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you.

Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.

- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of "Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.

I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

What is the experience of other travelers with us?

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

5. Forward This Report

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!