

English

NGORONGORO

TANZANIA



Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority

HEAD OFFICE

PO Box 1, Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

Tel +255 27 253 7006

Tel +255 27 253 7019

Tel +255 27 253 7046

Fax +255 27 253 7007

www.ngorongorocrater.org

LIAISON OFFICE

PO Box 776, Arusha, Tanzania

Tel +255 27 254 4625

Fax +255 27 250 3339

Produced by: Fotografx, Stäfa, Switzerland. www.fotografx.biz

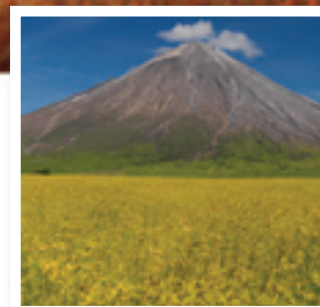
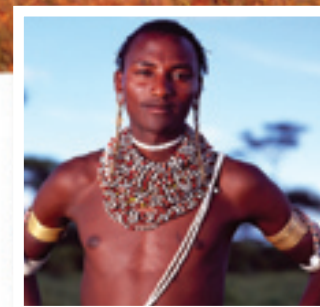
Designed by: Steven Dutton

Photography: David Pluth

Text: Philip Briggs ©2008

Translations: ABC Translate, www.abctranslate.com

Design and photography ©2008 by Fotografx



English

INTRODUCTION

A thin mist swirls through an enchanted forest of lichen-draped trees. Hundreds of metres below, a hazy expanse of savannah dips towards an oval lake whose edges shimmer pink with countless flamingos. As the mist dissipates, an ant-like formation is revealed weaving slowly across the grassland: A herd of hundreds upon hundreds of wildebeest setting off on its daily perambulations. Another day is breaking over Africa's most spectacular natural arena: the Ngorongoro Crater.



Ngorongoro is the world's largest intact volcanic caldera, and its 304 sq km floor is the ultimate 'Big Five' destination, home to elephant, lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo and other safari favourites. It is the centrepiece of the 8,292 sq km Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), an easterly extension of the greater Serengeti ecosystem whose western plains attract up to 2.5 million antelope, zebras, buffalo and wildebeest seasonally.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and an International Biosphere Reserve, the NCA contains many archaeological sites of international importance, and its traditionalist Maasai, Datoga and Hadza communities co-exist alongside the prodigious wildlife. Tourism plays an integral role in the ongoing viability of this vast conservation area, by helping to fund schools, hospitals, roads and other amenities vital to local communities living within its borders.

Geology and History

Two main geological rifts run through the area. Nine volcanoes in the Ngorongoro highlands were formed during the past four million years. One of these, Oldoinyo Lengai, is still active.

Over the millennia, the ash and dust from the volcanic eruptions has been carried by the winds to form the fertile soils of the Serengeti plains.

The earliest sign of human ancestors in the NCA is at Laetoli where hominid footprints are preserved in volcanic rock 3.6 million years old.

Our Vision

Our vision is to reconcile environmental conservation and human development.

Our Mission

Our mission within the Conservation Area is:

- The conservation and development of natural resources
- Promotion of tourism
- Promotion of the interests of local communities engaged in cattle ranching and the dairy industry
- Promotion of infrastructure development

What Makes Ngorongoro Unique?

Humans and our ancestors have lived in the Ngorongoro ecosystem for more than three million years. Evidence of hunter-gatherer culture dates back 17,000 years and various tribes have migrated in and out of the area up to recent times.

NCA aims to maintain the historic balance of people and nature in a way that has not been possible in most parts of Africa. Unlike national parks, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area allows people and wildlife to live together without harm or destroying each other's habitats. At stake are the rich biodiversity and ecology of the Serengeti plains, the Ngorongoro highlands, the major paleontological and archaeological sites, as well as the increasingly vital water catchment areas. By careful management and continuing research, the delicate balance between humans and nature is successfully managed.

Ngorongoro

Introduction

Crater Landmarks

The dazzling jewel in Tanzania's peerless northern safari circuit, the Ngorongoro Crater floor is dominated by open grassland. The Crater is 19.2 km in diameter, 610m deep and 304 sq km in area.

The largest patch of woodland is Lerai Forest, whose yellow-barked fever trees provide shelter to elephant, eland, monkeys and colourful birds.

Lake Magadi is shallow alkaline body whose ever-fluctuating shore, usually lined by immense flocks of flamingos, is a favourite stalking ground for spotted hyenas, cheetahs and other predators.

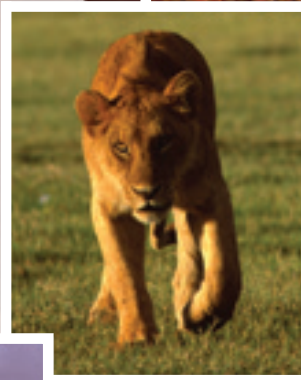
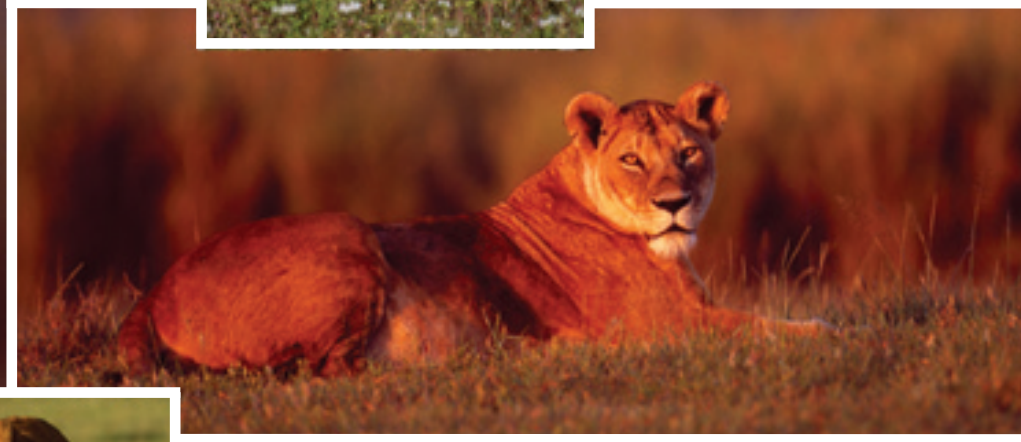
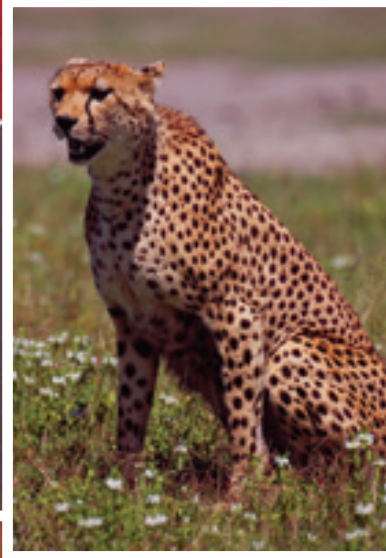
Rising from Ngoitokitok Springs, the lush Gorigor Swamp is frequented by semi-submerged elephants and pods of grunting hippos, as is the more northerly hippo pool verging Mandusi Swamp.



Crater Landmarks

Big Cats

Big cats top the wish list of most safari-goers, and here Ngorongoro truly excels. The crater supports the world's densest lion population, with up to 90 well-fed animals staking out their territories at any given time. The world's fastest land animal, the cheetah, is exceptionally common on the short-grass plains around Ndutu, but is often seen in the crater. The elusive leopard is commonest on the forested rim but also occurs within the crater along Munge stream.



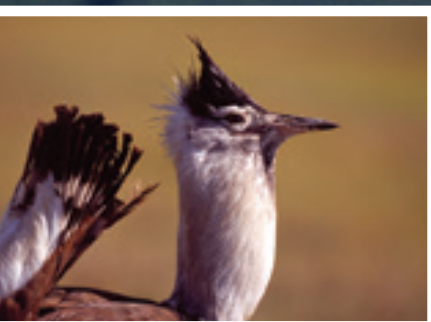
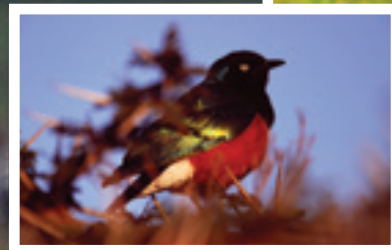
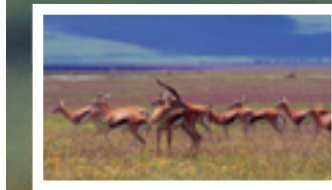
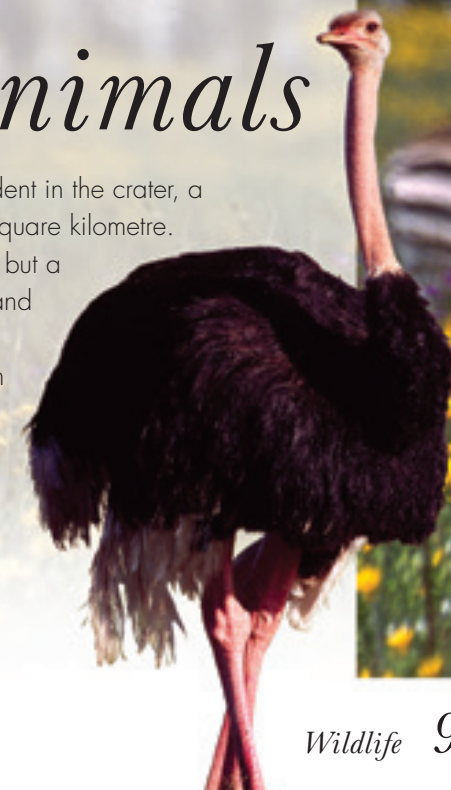
Big Cats

Predators

Some 400 spotted hyenas live in the crater, communicating nocturnally with their eerie far-reaching whooping call. Regularly seen in daylight, these oft-maligned creatures are adept hunters – indeed, ecologists reckon that Ngorongoro's hyenas kill 90% of their prey and are regularly scavenged by lions. Endearing bateared foxes and jaunty jackals are often seen in open grassland, while the more elusive serval cat and genet are present but seldom seen in daylight.

Birds & Grazing Animals

Up to 25,000 plains grazers are resident in the crater, a density of around 100 animals per square kilometre. Buffalo, wildebeest and zebra dominate, but a diversity of antelope includes Thomson's and Grant's gazelles and the mighty eland. The grassland and marshes support a rich variety of birds, from the outsized kori bustard and preening crowned crane to the exquisite rosy-throated longclaw. Thousands of lesser flamingo often congregate at Lake Magadi, a dramatic sight below the tall crater wall.



Elephants

Ngorongoro is a retirement home for elephant bulls, and swamps on the crater floor support some utterly magnificent old gents, with ground-scraping tusks of a stature elsewhere sacrificed to the ivory trade. Larger breeding herds occasionally descend to the crater floor, but are more likely to be seen on the forested crater rim, which has more suitable food.

Rhinos

The crater floor is one of the last strongholds for black rhino in northern Tanzania, and the best place to see this globally endangered creature. Thanks to anti-poaching patrols, the resident population of around 20 black rhino is relatively safe and stable. The rhinos tend to overnight in Leraï Forest and to emerge at dawn to spend their day on the plains south and east of Lake Magadi.



Empakaai Crater

Set below the smouldering peak of Ol Doinyo Lengai, the Empakaai Crater is utterly magnificent, yet its remoteness means it is reached by very few tourists. A 300 metre deep volcanic caldera with a diameter of 6km, it is dominated by a deep emerald soda lake that attracts a wealth of waterbirds. Much of the 32 km long crater rim can be walked, providing spectacular views and the opportunity to see blue monkey, buffalo, bushbuck and other forest wildlife.

& Olmoti Crater

Olmoti is an extinct volcano, whose forested rim rises to 3,099 metres altitude, immediately north of Ngorongoro. The Maasai name Olmoti - 'Cooking Pot' – refers to its shallow crater, whose grassy floor supports eland and bushbuck along with Maasai herders and livestock. A small but spectacular waterfall exits the south side of the crater to form the Munge Stream, which feeds Lake Magadi on the Ngorongoro floor.

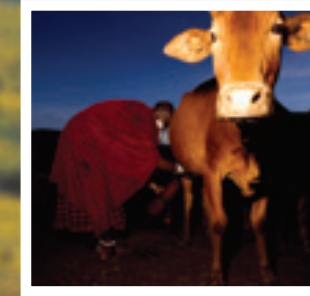


Empakaai & Olmoti Crater

Culture

Formerly part of Serengeti National Park, the NCA was created in 1959 as a pioneering experiment in multiple land use. Unlike national parks, which legally exclude their former human inhabitants, the NCA is a Biosphere Reserve, which means that local people co-exist with the protected wildlife. Today, some 42,000 Maasai pastoralists live in the NCA, grazing their livestock seasonally on the plains, woodland and mountains, as do smaller numbers of Datoga and Hadza people. The one restriction on Maasai movement is that while they are permitted to bring livestock to the crater floor, they may not live or cultivate there.

Instantly identifiable with their toga-like red blankets, ochre-dyed hairstyle and colourful beaded jewellery, the Maasai arrived in the Ngorongoro area from the north about 200 years ago, and practice a traditional cattle-herding lifestyle that places few demands on the environment and its wildlife. Visitors are welcomed at several designated Maasai cultural bomas - three along the road between the crater rim and the Serengeti, and another at Irkeepusi near Sopa Lodge.



Culture

Oldupai Gorge

One of the world's most important palaeontological sites, sometimes dubbed the Cradle of Mankind, the Oldupai Gorge runs for 40km through the plains west of Ngorongoro Crater. It was here, in 1959, that Louis and Mary Leakey unearthed a jawbone that pushed the known timescale of human evolution well past the 1.5 million-year mark. The site has since yielded many more hominid fossils and Acheulean stone tools suggesting continuous inhabitation for over a million years. A site museum is open daily.

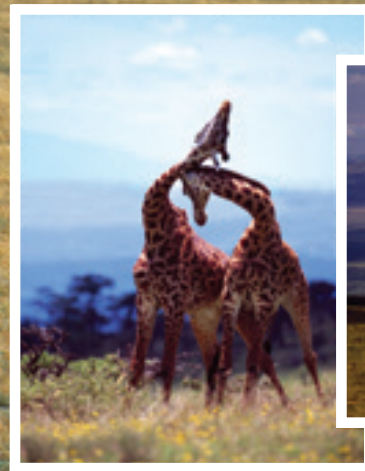
& Laetoli

The earliest sign of mankind in the NCA is at Laetoli where three separate tracks of a small-brained upright-walking early hominid *Australopithecus afarensis* are preserved in volcanic rock dating back 3.6 million years. A replica of the Laetoli footprints is displayed in the Oldupai museum.



Gol Mountains

Northwest of the Ngorongoro Highlands, the ancient pink granite cliffs of the Gol Mountains are book-ended by Olkarien Gorge, a nesting site for Rüppell's griffon vulture, and the 80-metre tall monolithic Nasera Rock. Here, the harsh Salei Plains support only the hardest animals during the dry months, but attract huge herds of wildebeest and zebras during the migration months of March and April. Further south, Shifting Sands, a tall black dune composed of magnetic volcanic sand from Ol Doinyo Lengai, is being blown westwards across the plains at an average rate of more than 1.5 metres per year.



Gol Mountains

Gol Mountains

Lake Natron

Northeast of the NCA, Lake Natron is a primordial sump whose caustic shallows forms the main breeding ground for Africa's flamingos. Towering above the lake is Ol Doinyo Lengai, the Maasai 'Mountain of God', an active volcano that experienced major eruptions in 1966, 1983 and 2007-8. South of Natron, the terraced walls and abandoned irrigation ditches of Engaruka are all that remains of a mysterious city that housed 30,000 people in its mediaeval prime.

& Lake Eyasi

Southwest of the NCA, the shallows of Lake Eyasi are hemmed in by the steep Rift Valley escarpment. The remote Eyasi Basin is home to the Datoga, pastoralists who arrived in the Ngorongoro Highlands at least 300 years ago but were subsequently displaced by the Maasai. This harsh, dry landscape is also the haunt of the semi-nomadic Hadza, sole remaining practitioners of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle that predominated in Tanzania until 2,000 years ago.



Lake Natron & Lake Eyasi

Migration

West of Ngorongoro Crater, a rutted road descends verdant slopes into the vast expanse of open grassland known to the Maasai as Serengit - Endless Plain – and to outsiders as the Serengeti. The legendary short-grass Serengeti Plains are split more-or-less evenly between Serengeti National Park and the NCA, running southward from Oldupai Gorge and Lake Ndutu to the escarpment above Eyasi. These near-treeless plains play a vital role in the annual migration, with up to 2.5 million head of wildebeest, zebra and antelope dispersing across them every November. Come February, the wildebeest enter the calving season, replenishing the species at an astonishing rate of 8,000 calves daily over the space of a few weeks, before finally they head back westward in May, to embark on their 1,000km annual pilgrimage all over again.



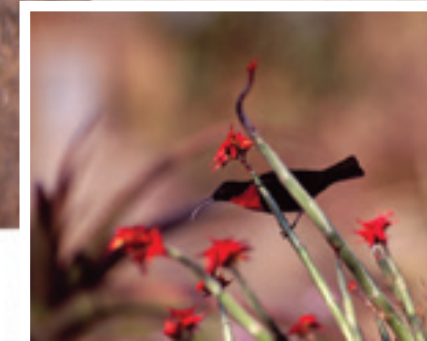
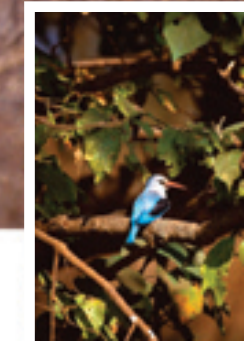
migration
Migration

Walking Safaris

The NCA is one of the few places in East Africa where tourists are encouraged to walk through areas teeming with wildlife, provided that they do so with a local guide. Short hikes can be organised through any lodge or at the NCA headquarters. Adventurous overnight hikes are even more rewarding but entail some planning. Recommended routes include the hike from Olmoti to Empakaai and down to the Rift Valley, the Northern Highland Forest Reserve, and the eastern Serengeti Plains around Nasera Rock, Gol Mountains and Olkarien Gorge.

& Bird Watching

A varied mixture of forest, canyons, grassland plains, lakes and marshes provides an ornithological extravaganza, with 550 bird species recorded. The crater floor is most rewarding in the rainy season, when Eurasian migrants such as white stork and yellow wagtail mingle with resident ostrich, kori bustard and crowned crane. The crater rim supports a wealth of forest birds, including the eagerly sought bart-tailed trogon and the dazzling trio of tacazze, bronze and golden-winged sunbirds, while the western plains are alive with colourful dry-country specials such as purple grenadier and red-and-yellow barbet.

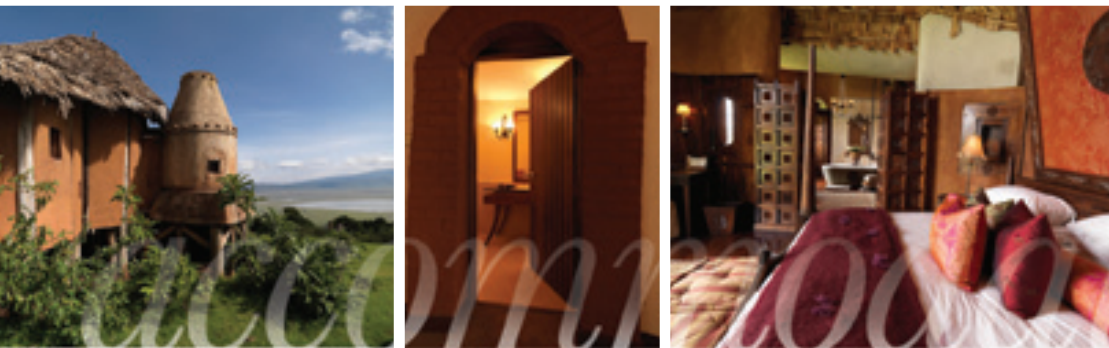


walking safaris
& bird watching

Walking Safaris & Bird Watching

Accommodation

Three world-class game lodges perch grandly on the south-western crater rim, namely Ngorongoro Wildlife Lodge, Ngorongoro Crater Lodge and Ngorongoro Serena Lodge. Also on the south-western crater is the popular Simba Campsite and recently reopened Ngorongoro Rhino Lodge, though the latter is set back some distance from the rim. Ngorongoro Sopa Lodge stands in forested isolation on the eastern rim near Lemala. The NCA is liberally studded with special campsites, including seasonal luxury tented camps, but the only other permanent accommodation within its borders is Ndutu Safari Lodge, on the Serengeti border. Lodges located outside the NCA include Gibb's Farm and Kifaru Lodge in the nearby town of Karatu.



Travel Tips

When to visit

Game viewing in the crater is always good, any time of the year. The wildebeest migration is in the NCA over Dec-Apr, calving Jan-Feb. For birders, Nov-March is best for Palaearctic migrants. The rainy season of March-April can have beautiful sunny days, yet find very few visitors in the Crater.

Getting to Tanzania

Kilimanjaro International Airport lies 45 minutes from Tanzania's Safari Capital of Arusha. Other international flights land at Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, or Nairobi (Kenya), from where shuttle buses and regional airline flights connect to Arusha.

Entry requirements

A passport is mandatory. A visa, where required, can be bought at any international airport or land border.

Getting to and around Ngorongoro

The 180km (110 mile) surfaced road from Arusha to the NCA is covered in about three hours. Roads within NCA are unsurfaced and may require 4x4. Domestic flights link NCA to Arusha, Serengeti and Lake Manyara.

Organised safaris can be booked through any ground operator in Arusha. A reliable bus service runs from Arusha to the crater rim, where game drives and other activities can be arranged.

Olmoti and Empakaai are easy day trips from the lodges on Ngorongoro Crater rim. Lake Eyasi is best visited as an overnight trip from Karatu. Engaruka, Natron and Ol Doinyo Lengai, reached along a dirt road running north from Mto Wa Mbu, are suitable for a 1-2 night trip.

Weather

Tanzania has a varied climate. The coast is hottest, while highland areas are cooler. Within the NCA, the crater rim is warm by day but quite chilly at night, while the lower-lying plains are temperate to warm. The main rainy season of mid-Feb to May is preceded by the 'short rains' over Nov-Dec.

Time zone

GMT+3

Money & banks

Hard currency cash and traveller's cheques can be exchanged for Tanzanian shillings at any bank or bureau de change. New US dollar bills are preferred. Banking hours are 08.30-15.00 Mon-Fri and 08.30-11.30 Sat.

Credit cards

Cards are accepted at most tourist-class hotels, and can be used to draw cash from ATMs in Arusha and other large towns. Elsewhere, they are of limited use. Visa is more widely recognised than MasterCard and American Express.

What to pack

Carry a change of shirt and undergarments for every day on safari. Bring warm clothing for nights on the crater rim. Socks and underwear should be of natural fabrics.

Binoculars are invaluable. Other useful items: Head lamp or flashlight, penknife, alarm clock, mosquito repellent, sunscreen, hat, first-aid kit, bird and mammal field guides.

Photography

A 300mm (or longer) lens is ideal for wildlife photography. Digital devices can be recharged at most lodges, but usually not at campsites. It is unacceptable to sneak photographs of Maasai and other Tanzanians without permission.

Health & safety

The main concern is malaria: Take prophylactic drugs, cover up after dusk, wear repellent, and sleep under a net or burn a coil to reduce bites. Bottled water is widely available. Never approach wildlife on foot, especially potential killers such as elephant, buffalo, rhino and lion.