

Manyara

MANYARA



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 Maasai 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.

Inland of the 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 the diminutive 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 observe 100 of these in one day. Highlights include thousands of pink-hued flamingos on their perpetual migration, as well as other large waterbirds such as pelicans, cormorants and storks.





Lake Manyara National Park



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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

In northern 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.

Getting there

By road, charter or scheduled flight from Arusha, en route to Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater.

To do

Game drives, canoeing when the water levels is sufficiently high. Cultural tours, mountain bike tours, abseiling and forest walks on the escarpment outside the park.

Best time

Dry season (July-October) for large mammals; wet season (November-June) for bird watching, the waterfalls and canoeing.

Accommodation

One luxury treehouse-style camp, public bandas and campsites inside the park. One luxury tented camp and two lodges perched on the Rift Wall overlooking the lake; several guesthouses and campsites in nearby Mto wa Mbu.

