



Climb Kilimanjaro and Safari with
Bio Bio Expeditions

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Testimonial from Bio Bio Client David Boswell

Hello,

My name is David Boswell. I am the photographer and designer of this E-book, but more importantly I am a Bio Bio client. This trip to Tanzania was my 3rd trip with the Bio Bio crew. The first was in Jan., 2006 to Costa Rica, then Aug., 2006 to Peru, and finally Oct., 2008 to Tanzania. I can say with all honesty there will be many more trips with Bio Bio through the coming years.

Each trip I have been on were well coordinated and thought out. Every guide has been professional, friendly, and knowledgeable. The transportation was dependable and clean. The lodging was all 5 star, or very close. The food was always fantastic and unique. Each trip seemed better than the previous and all were excellent. It is clear that Marc and Laurence have a lot of pride in their business and it shows in all the attention to detail.

What impresses me most about Bio Bio is their concern with your safety. This came into play personally on 2 occasions. On all 3 trips, I was accompanied by my son, Ethan. In Costa Rica we spent 2 days on the Pacuare River. My son was 11 at that time. The trip into the lodge was class 2/3, so not a problem. The 2nd day was class 4 and it had rained for 4 days, so the river was quite high. It was decided that it wasn't safe for my son to raft it, so he hiked the 2 hour trail out, accompanied by 1 of Bio Bio's guides with a ride prearranged to meet them. After rafting the lower Pacuare, I had no doubts about their decision as it clearly would have been unsafe for him to have rafted it.

On my recent trip, to Tanzania, Ethan, now 14, did great up to Barafu. Starting out summit night, he was feeling good until we hit about 16,500 ft. He developed acute mountain sickness and became very nauseated. About 30 minutes later, when it became clear that he wasn't getting better with zofran, the lead guide, Festo, made a decision to send him down. Ethan was accompanied by an assistant guide, in constant radio contact with us, so that I was able to keep climbing but go down if he got any worse. He did fine, and was feeling better when they got back to camp and I was able to summit, without any concerns for his safety. This is in sharp contrast to things I witnessed on the mountain with other outfitters and guides. There were clients basically being carried up the mountain by their guide, clearly in trouble, who had no business continuing on. I never felt at risk once with Bio Bio.

Except for page 4, I have written every word in the E-book, from the perspective of a happy client, who can recommend Bio Bio without any reservations. I really didn't have to write this, it wrote itself.

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An African Adventure with Bio Bio Expeditions

Join us for a climb to the rooftop
of Africa and experience the best
national parks of East Africa

Climbing Kilimanjaro is a reasonable goal for any active person who has always dreamed of reaching the highest point on the African continent. We invite you to come to Africa with us and realize your dream!

We at Bio Bio Expeditions have been leading expeditions in Africa for more than 16 years. We have established an alliance with our Tanzanian guides who run our base of operations in Arusha. Our guides are extremely experienced and are delightful human beings. They know every step of the way and will give you the confidence and pace needed to maximize both your enjoyment and effort. We have been chosen by the Wilderness Medicine Society to outfit all of their trips on Kilimanjaro. Our itinerary has been planned with the help of Dr. Howard Donner, along with other experts in the field of high altitude medicine. With their help, we have created the safest itinerary possible.

After careful consideration of the pros and cons of each route up the mountain, we have decided on a rather unique approach, which offers several distinct advantages and is definitely the most beautiful route. The [Modified Shira Route](#) effectively combines the best of the Shira Route with the most scenic section of the Machame route. This route starts at the Londorossi gate on the northwest edge of the Mt. Kilimanjaro National Park.

The more common route up the mountain, the Marangu-Coca Cola route, only encompasses one section of the mountain and has become quite crowded. The Modified Shira Route may be a little more strenuous and longer than some of the other routes, but the extra hard work will pay off with better acclimatization and less crowded camps. The shorter, "easier" routes have a much lower success rate than our 7 day climb. We have designed our itinerary to include 4 nights above 12,000 feet with two relatively short hiking days in between thus allowing your body to rest and adjust to the altitude.

We carry oxygen, a Gamow bag, a pulse oximeter and satellite phones on all trips. Sometimes it's the small things that help make your trip more comfortable. We bring our own toilet system on the mountain, we use a roomy mountain hardware space station for your dining tent, and our chairs all have backs on them, which are a welcome treat after long days on the trail!

We will enjoy the beautiful and extraordinarily diverse vegetation that enhances the scenery along this route as we traverse around the mountain, viewing it from many different angles. We would especially like to note that our route allows us to focus not just on the summit, but the journey itself. The Bio Bio Expeditions approach to the Kilimanjaro trek is just as much about getting to know the mountain's many sides and moods as getting to the top. Everyone will reach a summit, whether it is Uhuru Peak, one's own personal highest point, or just the satisfaction of spending 7 days on one of the most spectacular mountains of the world.

The safari includes the best parks of East Africa with very tasteful, high-end safari lodges. With highly qualified guides and 6 people to a Land Rover, you will be sure to see an abundance of wildlife, in style and comfort.



A Yellow Weaver





Mt. Kilimanjaro

Mt. Kilimanjaro is the highest free-standing mountain in the world, one of the highest volcanoes, and the highest point in Africa. It has 3 separate peaks: Shira (3962 m, 13,000 ft), Mawenzi (5149 m, 16,890 ft, and the third highest peak in Africa), and Kibo (5896 m, 19,340 ft, the highest peak on Kilimanjaro and pictured on the previous page).

As you pass through the Londorossi Gate, the sense of excitement and anticipation begins to grow. The scene appears chaotic, people and gear scattered everywhere. There is an order to the chaos as everything is readied for the coming week. Once you are checked in and the gear has been sorted and packed, it is a short drive to the starting point of the trek.



The Londorossi Gate



Porters undergoing an inspection, checking that their gear is adequate



The first day starts out above the treeline, on the Shira Plateau, with a short 3 hour hike to your first camp. The experienced, friendly Bio Bio guides provide you with a wealth of knowledge about ecology of Kilimanjaro. Bio Bio guides Rachael (back row, left) and Festo (back row, third from the left) lead the group below on their first day on the mountain.

The first day's hike is a slow paced, gradual slope that allows you to ease into the acclimatization process. It is here that you will get your first close view of Kibo and it's crowning glaciers.



Travelling, porter style



The first day on the Shira Plateau, with Kibo in the background

When you arrive at camp at Shira 1 (3610 m, 12,033 ft), you will find your roomy, comfortable tent set up, waiting for you to unpack. In the communal dining tent, hot drinks and snacks will be ready on your arrival. The spacious dining tent is the center of camp activity, with comfortable chairs (with backs to rest those aching muscles) and a continuous supply of hot water for drinks.

Your only responsibilities at camp are to unpack and pack your personal gear, eat, rest and hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. You will have use of a toilet system Bio Bio provides (pictured below, right), rather than having to use the communal outhouses. It is cleaned every morning and one look in the dark, dank outhouses will make you appreciate the toilet (and the porters assigned toilet duty) even more.



The second night's camp at Shira 2



Enjoying some company and drinks in the dining tent

With all the hard work spent on the trail, you will need energy to sustain your efforts. That is where the cooks enter the picture. You will be treated to meals made from scratch, ranging from eggs, toast, and potatoes in the morning to homemade soups, pastas and casseroles at night. Bio Bio's cooks are experts in gourmet camp meals that rival the meals provided at the luxury safari lodges you will also be staying at later in the trip.





The clouds roll in on the Shira Plateau



Bio Bio Guide Festo with a client in front of a giant groundsel

Your second day on the mountain is another relatively short day, with 4-5 hours of hiking to Shira 2 (3800 m, 12,600 ft). As you hike, you will learn about the unique high elevation plants and of the geology of the mountain from your knowledgeable Bio Bio guides.

Your friendly porters are ever helpful, never forgetting to remind you “pole, pole” (slowly, slowly). You will feel pampered as you are served coffee or tea in your tent in the morning, come into camp to hot water to wash with, and are served a delicious dinner by the Bio Bio staff.





A full moon at night, at Shira 2



Guide Rachael leading a young client on the trail to the Lava Tower

After a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast it is on to the third day's hike, the ~8 mile trail that climbs to the Lava Tower, an imposing rock structure at 4600 m, 15,333 ft, and then drops approximately 2000 ft to Barranco Camp. Day 3 is the second hardest day on the mountain and is a good preparation for the summit attempt. It begins with a steady climb that affords stunning views of the surroundings if the weather allows.

As you get closer and closer to the tower, the air begins to get thinner and each step takes a little more effort. This gives you a small indication of the effort that will be needed on summit day.

In good weather climbing the Lava Tower is an option. But, alas, on this trip the weather didn't cooperate.

Once at the Lava Tower it is time for a bit of rest and lunch.



Heading into the clouds below the Lava Tower

The day isn't done, you're only halfway to camp. At least it's downhill the rest of the way. When you arrive at Barranco Camp (3950 m, 13,166 ft), 8 hours after you started the day, it is time for hot tea and popcorn. Then another delicious dinner to replenish all the calories you have burned. It is with a sense of accomplishment that you lay down in your sleeping bag for a well deserved night of sleep. And a good night's sleep will be needed, for the Breakfast Wall awaits you in the morning.



On the flanks of Kibo at the third camp, Barranco (3950 m, 13,166 ft)



Your fourth morning starts with another hearty breakfast. You stare at the line of people looking like ants as they climb the Barranco Wall, affectionately known as the Breakfast Wall (pictured below left), an hour long climb to start your day. You face a 4 hour hike to the 4th camp, Karanga at 3963 m, 13,210 ft. Most of the people on the wall are going all the way to the high camp at Barafu, 3 hours farther, therefore requiring an early start.

Since you are only going to Karanga today, you can afford a later start, missing most of the crowd on the wall.



Ready for the Breakfast Wall



The porters will continually amaze you with their skill of balancing loads while climbing the wall, reminding you "pole, pole" as they go by.

After the wall, the trail is more gentle, with some shorter climbs. 3 hours later you arrive at Karanga Camp, ready for some hot tea and popcorn. It is amazing how good popcorn tastes after a hard day on the trail.



Karanga Camp is on the southern flank of Kibo, with stunning views of the surrounding lands below. Maybe you will be looking out over a sea of clouds, held below by an inversion layer (as in the photo below, right). The 5th day will be short, only 3 hours or so, but it's no walk in the park. Today you will be climbing a total of 2100 ft to the high camp, Barafu (4600 m, 15,333 ft).

A slow, steady pace ensues so you don't burn too much energy, for tonight the summit attempt awaits. As you climb higher the porters remind yet again to go "pole, pole (pronounced polee)." The air gets thinner and oxygen harder to come by. Yet, you feel good after spending the past 4 days on a carefully planned route to maximize your acclimatization.



Kibo, from Karanga Camp

"It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."
- Sir Edmund Hillary



Waterfalls seen from the Barranco Wall



Above the clouds at Karanga



Climbing towards Barafu

You will arrive at Barafu in time for a warm lunch and hot drinks. Then it is time to relax, hydrate, and especially rest. The start of the summit attempt will be at 11:30 p.m. that night. There is an increased chill in the air that was missing from the lower camps. The air is much thinner and simple tasks have become harder. Conserving energy is the key to success. That and hydrating til you don't think you can ever drink water again.

There is a sense of anticipation and excitement that spreads throughout the camp and between groups. You talk to people who have just come down from the summit and are preparing for the afternoon descent to the low camp, Mweka. You gaze up at the ice fields and glaciers seemingly just above you. You hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. And you rest..



Enjoying the sunset at dinner, Barafu Camp



The sun sets on Barafu

Dinner time arrives and you sit down to a another delicious, made-from-scratch meal, trying to load as many calories as possible.

You might be sitting outside the dining tent, enjoying your dinner as the sun sets on Kibo.

After dinner is time to hydrate (see the recurring theme here) and try to sleep.

10:30 p.m. comes too soon, it seems, and you get dressed for the cold night ahead.

You have already replaced the batteries in your headlamp, assembled your gear for night and packed your pack.

After getting dressed, it's time for some tea and snacks before the 11:30 start. Maybe it will be a full moon, and no headlamp will be needed. It is 4 miles and 4000 ft to the summit and will take you 8-10 hours to complete.

You go "pole, pole" up the steep slope, barely a snail's pace. Periodic breaks for hydration, snacks, bathroom, and clothing adjustments are brief, as the temperature hovers just above 0 degrees. The oxygen seems to evaporate as you ascend, every step becoming an effort. In the dark it is hard to judge how far you have come, or how much more there is to go yet you feel good, your acclimatization complete.



Barafu Camp (4600 m, 15,333 ft)



Barafu Camp at sunset



The Eastern Ice Field, just before sunrise

Shortly before sunrise you reach Stella Point, and the slope of the trail eases significantly. You are in the home stretch, now 45 minutes from the summit. You take a break on Stella Ridge, watching the sun rise over the clouds. Watching a sunrise at 19,000 ft, using only your own energy to reach that point, is a feeling hard to find the words for. A sense of calm and awe for mother nature fills your mind. You gaze upon the snows and glaciers of Kilimanjaro in the dawn light. The feeling is ethereal and you now know why you chose to climb this mountain.



Climbing Stella Ridge, with the Eastern Ice Field in the background



The Rebmann Glacier

You feel a sense of gratitude that you were able to see Kilimanjaro's glaciers before they are gone. Having researched the mountains before the trip you know that the glaciers of Kilimanjaro have become symbolic of the havoc global warming and deforestation is causing. You know that since 1912, Kilimanjaro has lost over 80% of its glacial ice and that it has been estimated that they will completely disappear sometime between 2020 and 2050. You have learned that it is probably decreased precipitation, rather than increasing temperatures, that is the cause.



The Eastern Ice Field in the morning light

As you climb Stella Ridge in the growing morning light you marvel at the grandeur of the surrounding glaciers. While the air is thin and the oxygen sparse, the slope is gentle and a welcome change from the steep climb throughout the night. You can see the people ahead of you gathered on Uhuru Peak, the high point at 5896 m, and you realize you will be there shortly.



Climbers preparing for the last few meters to the summit at Uhuru Peak, the highest point on Kibo. The Southern Ice Field is seen in the background



The Eastern Ice Field

When you finally arrive at the summit 8 hours later there is a sense of accomplishment that is undeniable. You feel deservedly proud as you stand on the rooftop of Africa, gazing out over the clouds, the crater, and the glaciers.

There is no other view like it in the world. After a brief time at the summit, it is time to start the short 2 hour descent back to camp.



The melting surface of the Decken Glacier



The Furtwangler Glacier, in the crater below Uhuru Peak. The Northern Ice Field is seen in the background

Once back at camp it is time for a nap then a hot lunch. After lunch you start the 5 hour trip down to the low camp, Mweka, and the last night on the mountain. Mweka is at 3100 m, about 10,300 ft and is below the treeline, in the cloud rain forest on the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro. The next morning it is time to say goodbye to the porters and spend the last 4-5 hours on the mountain as an easy stroll through the rain forest. You marvel at the change from the slopes above. The air feels almost thick, after a week above 12,000 ft. Once off the mountain it's time for lunch, and a bus back to Arusha. It's time to prepare for the Safari.

Every man's life ends the same way. It is only the details of how he lived and how he died that distinguish one man from another.

-Ernest Hemingway



The Southern Ice Field, with Mount Meru in the background

Climbing Kilimanjaro is a serious undertaking. The weather can be erratic with storms, rain, and snow possible. The temperature can range from balmy to -20 degrees F. Approximately 10 climbers and 10-20 porters die each year on the mountain. In 2005 there were 997 evacuations from the mountain and helicopter evacuations are not available. Many, if not most, of the incidents are directly related to a lack of preparation and/or safety. Climbers who sign up with groups on the streets of Arusha are not always advised of the weather, gear and clothing needs, or how strenuous the climb is. They are taken up the mountain too quickly, by guides who are more concerned with the size of the tip than the safety of the clients.



A group of climbers gather on the summit



Climbers at Uhuru Peak, the highest point on Kibo, seen from Stella Ridge

This is where Bio Bio excels. You will be led by experienced, knowledgeable guides who place a priority on your safety. The guide to client ratio will match or exceed that of any other group on the mountain, allowing for people to travel at different speeds and for clients to return to camp with a guide, as needed by the circumstances. You will never be asked to do anything you are not capable of and will never be pushed beyond your limits. Bio Bio is one of the few, if not the only guiding service that carries both supplemental oxygen and a gamow bag. They make sure every client reaches their own personal summit, whether that is at the physical summit or not, in a safe, friendly, and encouraging environment. Bio Bio will provide you with information and preparation that will give you the best chance for success.



Success-The view at the top, and what a view it is

Kilimanjaro Trivia

While inactive, Kibo still has fumaroles in the crater that emit sulphur gas. In 2003, scientists concluded that molten magma is a mere 400 m (1300 ft) below the surface of the crater.



Your success depends on the people gathered here, the porters, cooks, and guides. Don't forget to thank them



The author celebrating success with Rachael and Festo



Enjoying a stroll through the rain forest

Lodgings

While at Arusha and on safari your accommodations will be first class. Each lodge is unique, with spacious, comfortable rooms set in stunning surroundings. This trip included stays at the Ameru River Lodge outside of Arusha (pictured here), the one-of-a-kind Kikoti Tent Lodge at Tarangire National Park, Ngorongoro Farmhouse outside Ngorongoro Crater, and the Serena Serengeti in Serengeti National Park.

Each lodge provides a distinct atmosphere and feel. The Ameru is a relaxing lush lodge that serves as the home base on arrival to Arusha and between the Safari and the climb. There is internet access here, as well as fantastic food, a pool, and friendly staff.



Photographed by Christine Peters





The Kikoti Tent Lodge lies on the outskirts of Tarangire National Park. The Kikoti provides you with the feel of the African bush and the comfort of a 5-star resort.

The rooms are luxurious tents, with all amenities. The setting is in the bush, with stunning views of the park and the setting sun.

Friendly Maasai staff the Kikoti, providing for your safety and comfort. The food is served buffet style and is plentiful. In my opinion, the Kikoti is the highlight of the lodging and says "This is Africa!"





Sunset over Tarangire National Park, taken from the Kikoti Tent Lodge



At the Kikoti Tent Lodge, you will have the opportunity to meet and dance with local Maasai.



The Ngorongoro Farmhouse (pictured here) is an active coffee plantation just outside Ngorongoro Crater. If you like luxury, then the Farmhouse is for you. The rooms are the size of small apartments and the grounds are green, lush, and beautiful.

The Serena Serengeti is located inside the Serengeti National Park. The bungalow type rooms are nestled in the woodlands, with wildlife prevalent and plentiful. Awake to vervet monkeys playing outside and dik diks (small antelopes) grazing within eyesight as you enjoy coffee on your patio.

Both lodges have internet access and amenities such as a lounge, pool, and massages. The food is fantastic and served buffet style, with more choices than you can count. Live, local entertainment is frequently provided in the lounges.





Tarangire National Park

Baobabs (tree pictured on the preceding title page) dot the vast landscape of Tarangire National Park, which stretches southeast of Lake Manyara, along the Tarangire River, in northern Tanzania. It is one of the least visited of the northern parks, with the Serengiti and Ngorongoro Crater having a much higher profile, yet is well worth the time spent here.

Tarangire is a classic dry season destination (August thru October) when it has one of the highest concentrations of wildlife of the area parks. Large herds of zebras, wildebeests, African buffalo, and elephants roam the park through October, obtaining water from the Tarangire River. When the short rainy season begins in November many of the animals migrate to fresh grasslands.

It is here that your Safari begins. You just finished the 2 hour drive from Arusha, checked in, and had lunch. Time to pop the top of the Land Cruiser. The Land Cruiser will comfortably seat 8, not including the driver, but Bio Bio places only 6 per vehicle so you always have a great view. Your driver is certified, friendly, and speaks excellent English. He is a wealth of knowledge about the ecology and wildlife of the area. The vehicles are roomy and clean, a perfect way to see such a concentration of wildlife, found no other place in the world.

As you crisscross Tarangire you will see herds of elephants wading through the high grass in search of water. Zebras wallow in a mud hole. Giraffes grace the grasslands, stretching for their meals in the high acacia trees. Lions stalk the grasslands in search of prey. If you are lucky you will come on a fresh kill. If you are even luckier you will see a kill in action.



An ostrich, roaming the grasslands of Tarangire



Lions and zebras along the Tarangire River

Vervet Monkeys

Vervet Monkeys are widespread and adaptable. Each troop is composed of females that defend the home range, which was handed down from generation to generation, and males who fight for bragging rights and access to the females.

You will see vervets both at the lodges outside of Arusha and at the national parks. At the parks they are frequently close to the designated picnic and rest areas.



Time to relax

Vervet monkeys are native to sub-Saharan Africa; their range extends from Ethiopia to South Africa.

A small population, taken as pets by slavers, exists in the Caribbean, on the small islands of Barbados, Saint Kitts, Nevis, and Saint Maarten.



A juvenile vervet monkey



A mother vervet breast-feeding her infant





A vervet monkey in portrait



Zebras under an umbrella acacia

Olive Baboons

Olive baboons are the most widespread of all baboons, being found in 25 African countries. Olive baboons (along with vervet monkeys) will be among the most plentiful primates you will see during your safari.

Baboons are very formidable foes, sporting 5 cm long canines and the ability to kill a leopard. Yet their best defense appears to be running up a tree and launching liquid excrement at their enemies.



Olive baboons inhabit the savanna, steppes, and woodlands. They live in groups of 15-150 composed of a few males, many females, and their young.

Baboons are omnivorous, not limited to a single food source and able to adapt with different foraging tactics, leading to widespread success. They have a complex social hierarchy, where female dominance is hereditary and male dominance established by force.

Impalas are medium-sized African antelopes, weighing ~75 kg (160 lbs). Impalas are adaptable, grazing in some areas and browsing in others. Their herds can number up to 200.



Impala

Giraffe

Giraffes are comprised of 9 sub-species, with the Maasai giraffe of Kenya and Tanzania (pictured here) as one of the distinct sub-species.

You will see an abundance of giraffes on safari, both in Tarangire and the Serengeti (Giraffes don't live in Ngorongoro Crater).



The giraffe is the tallest land-living animal. The males can be as tall as 16-18 ft and weigh as much as 3800 lbs. The record male, shot in Kenya in 1934, was 19.2 ft tall and weighed 4400 lbs. Giraffes inhabit savannas, grasslands, and woodlands, preferring areas of acacia growth.

Your knowledgeable drivers are experts at spotting and identifying wildlife as well as the biology and ecology of the parks.

African Elephant



African Elephants are the largest living land animals, weighing 8000-12,000 lbs for a male and living 50-70 years. The largest reported elephant was shot in Angola in 1956 and weighed 26,000 lbs. There are 3 species of elephants. Africa has distinct species, the forest and the savanna (the largest and pictured here). The 3rd species is the smaller Asian elephant.

You will have many opportunities to observe and photograph these magnificent mammals, frequently from a very close distance. Bio Bio's Land Cruiser are particularly well suited for watching and photographing the abundant wildlife. All the vehicles are equipped with roofs that raise, providing an unobstructed 360 view and shade from the sun at the same time. In Bio Bio's vehicles, every seat is a window seat.



In Musth



Bull elephants have a gland between the eyes and the ears whose function has never been fully explained. It secretes a substance with a musky smell once a year. The gland becomes inflamed and the animal's behavior and temperament changes, with the male becoming aggressive and unpredictable. They are said to be "in musth." The condition has some yet to be discovered role in mating and reproduction and usually last about a week. It appears that the bull to the right is rubbing the musk on the tree.







A mother's love—a zebra and her young

Lion

Lions are the second heaviest large cat, behind the tiger. The lion population is in decline, with a 30-50% decrease in numbers over the past 2 decades. While the cause of the decline is not well understood, loss of habitat and confrontations with humans are felt to be the greatest concern.

All 3 parks have a large number of lions that you will be able to observe from the safety of the Land Cruisers. This young nomadic male was seen about 10 yards from the road, resting after recently killing a zebra.





Hidden in the grass—a male lion watches over his pride

Leopard

Knowing how difficult they are to spot, you watch the leopard with awe. It is full of grace and power as it descends one tree and climbs another. Your driver spotted a tail hanging down from a branch and there it was.

It was initially difficult to spot, but today is your lucky day as the big cat begins to effortlessly descend the tree, trot across the grassland to another tree, then climbs it with ease.



The leopard is the smallest of the 4 large cats (tiger, lion, jaguar, leopard). Once distributed from Korea to South Africa, leopards now are mainly found in sub-Saharan Africa. They are powerful, adaptable predators with the ability to run up to 60 km/h (37 mph). They are particularly known for their climbing ability, spending most of their day in the trees. They primarily hunt at night and are difficult to spot during the day.

Reminds me of my safari in Africa.
Somebody forgot the corkscrew and for
several days we had to live on nothing but
food and water.
-W. C. Fields



Leopards are opportunistic hunters, preferring mid-sized animals but willing to eat anything from dung beetles to the giant eland. They generally lead a solitary life, with infrequent interactions except for mating. Leopards silently stalk their prey and can carry up to 3x their own weight up into a tree.



Ngorongoro Conservation Area

The centerpiece for Ngorongoro Conservation Area is Ngorongoro Crater, the world's largest intact, unflooded caldera. The crater formed when a giant volcano exploded and collapsed on itself some 2-3 million years ago. It is 610 m (2001 ft) deep and its floor covers 260 square km (102 square mi). A population of 25,000 large animals and a large population of predators inhabit the crater. This includes the rare black rhinoceros (~15 individuals reside at Ngorongoro) and hippos. Large herds of zebras, wildebeests, and gazelles dot the crater floor. Ngorongoro Crater also harbors one of the densest known lion populations, numbering 62 in 2001. You will likely see some large healthy elephants wandering the grassy floor. Large flocks of birds such as storks and cranes flank the permanent waters. Impalas, giraffes, and crocodiles are conspicuously absent.

Ngorongoro Crater will be one of the highlights of your safari, with a concentration of animals not seen any other place. From the viewpoint on the crater rim, Ngorongoro spreads out below you, with jaw-dropping beauty. The road into the crater is straight out of an amusement thrill ride, rough and bumpy, but your driver is experienced and you arrive at the bottom, safe and sound.



Grey-crowned cranes





Good baboons gone bad-a baboon creating mischief at the gate to Ngorongoro Conservation Area



Wildebeests frolic on the grassy plain

At times the numbers will seem overwhelming, as you gaze upon herd after herd of large wildlife. You stop for lunch at the hippo pool, where you will be entertained by the kamakaze black kites, as they dive-bomb unsuspecting picnickers, snatching the food out of their hands.

After a relaxing lunch, it's back to the Land Cruisers for a few more hours of wildlife spotting, then the drive out of the crater and back to the lodge. As usual, your driver is professional, friendly, and a wealth of knowledge about the crater and it's denizens.



A Grant's gazelle wandering the shoreline



A black kite in flight



A spotted hyena drinking, while flanked by zebras and flamingos



An impressionist view of flamingos, photographed at a distance, through the heat waves



A superb starling defending its nest against a black kite

Zebra

On safari, you will see many herds of zebras in all 3 parks you will visit. The herds are frequently intermingled with other large plains animals such as wildebeests.

Zebras are best known for their black and white stripes. Each zebra's stripes are as unique as a human fingerprint. The exact function of the stripes is unknown, but one theory is that they are a form of camouflage against the zebra's main predator, the lion. Lions are color-blind so, while the zebra's stripes stands out to us, to a lion they could blend in with the surrounding grasses and vegetation.

Zebras are closely related to donkeys, but have never been able to be domesticated.



It's a visceral feeling when you first see a lion close up, knowing that if you step out of the vehicle you could wind up as dinner. They are calm and graceful, yet if you see a recent kill or a kill in action, it is clear they are an animal of immense power and strength. At the same time they frequently exhibit a gentle side, such as the 2 lionesses nuzzling each other to the right.



Lions typically live in either of 2 social organizations; prides or nomads. Prides are composed of 5-6 related females, their cubs, and 1-2 males. Prides of up to 30 lions have been observed in the wild. Nomads typically live singularly or in pairs.

Lionesses are the hunters of the pride and use complex teamwork when hunting. Each lioness develops specific skills for her role in the hunting techniques used by the pride.



Serval

The serval is a medium-sized African cat. With long legs, the serval is highly adapted to walking and hunting in the tall grass. The serval mainly hunts small rodents.

Ngorongoro Crater is only a small part of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, which covers 8288 sq. km (3200 sq. miles) and includes the crater highlands together with vast plains, grasslands, bush, and woodlands. It is part of the larger Serengeti ecosystem and includes Olduvai Gorge, the site of many hominid fossils.



A vervet monkey seen in Ngorongoro



Ngorongoro Crater, from the road ascending out.



The Maasai

The Maasai are an African tribe of semi-nomadic peoples of Kenya and northern Tanzania. Living near many game parks, with their distinctive dress and customs, the Maasai are one of Africa's best known ethnic groups. Maasai culture centers around their cattle, which provide for many needs (milk, blood, meat, and hides). They are pastoral nomads, moving based on grass and water availability, and have actively resisted change. They still live in small villages of stick and dung huts, sheltered by a protective wall of brush.

Singing and dancing are important aspects of Maasai culture and ritual. At Kikoti, you will have an opportunity to dance the "adumu," or jumping dance, with the local Maasai. The adumu is used to impress the women and demonstrates the warrior's strength as he attempts to jump as high as possible.

There are an estimated 900,000 Maasai in Tanzania and Kenya.



A typical Maasai village



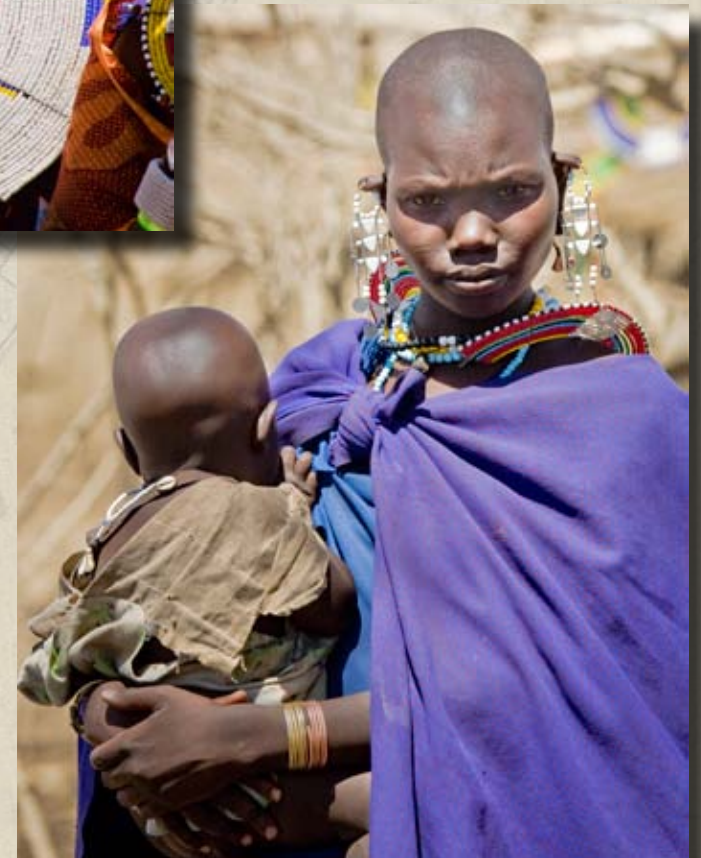
Tourism has affected Maasai culture, for better or worse. It brings in needed income when the tourists pay to enter the village to meet and photograph the Maasai. You will have a chance to visit a Maasai village on your Tanzanian adventure, where you have the opportunity to observe and photograph how the Maasai live, the colorful clothing and jewelry they wear, and witness their dancing. At the end there will be a chance to purchase some of the jewelry and art they have created.



Inside a typical Maasai hut



Maasai society is highly patriarchal, with women playing a distinctively subservient role. Women are frequently married at a young age, through prearranged marriages to older men. Because they are married to older men, many Maasai women are widowed at a relatively young age and typically don't remarry. The women have no rights of inheritance.





The Serengeti

The Serengeti National Park is a vast national park in northern Tanzania and is known for its annual migration of over a million wildebeests and 200,000 zebras. The name Serengeti comes from the Maasai word “serengit” which means “endless plain.” It is Tanzania’s oldest national park, having been established in 1951. The park encompasses 14,763 sq. km (5700 sq. miles) of grassland plains and savanna, as well as riverine forests and woodlands. The Serengeti hosts the world’s largest and longest overland migration, a semi-annual event. Around October, nearly 2 million herbivores will migrate from the northern hills to the plains of the Serengeti, a trip of 500 miles. In April they return to the north. On the northern migration, over 250,000 wildebeests alone will die of injury, exhaustion, or predation.

It is in the Serengeti where you will finish your safari. Think of the Serengeti and you conjure images of vast herds of large herbivores, with predators stalking the fringes. The actual experience does nothing to dispel those images. You will see massive herds of animals, frequently interacting. There will be predators such as cheetahs, hyenas, and lions quietly stalking their prey, hoping to run down an unsuspecting animal who strays too far from the safety of the herd.

Once again, your drivers make this part of the safari exciting and eventful. They seem to have a sixth sense of where the animals are, in addition to a large knowledge base concerning the park and its inhabitants.





The Serengeti is home to a large number of Maasai giraffes. Giraffes have extremely long necks that allow them to forage in the high trees. Despite the length of their neck, giraffes only have 7 elongated cervical vertebrae. The vessels in the giraffe's neck has a mechanism that limits blood flow when they bend down to drink, otherwise too much blood would flow to the head, causing cerebral swelling.

A giraffe heart, which can weigh up to 22 lbs, needs to generate double to normal blood pressure of a large mammal in order to maintain blood flow to the brain.



Hippopotamus

The hippo is a semi-aquatic mammal weighing an average of 3000-4000 lbs. They are one of the most aggressive and unpredictable animals in the world and have been clocked as fast as 48 kmph (30 mph).

You will have the opportunity to observe hippos at both Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.





A spotted hyena



An agama lizard sunning on a rock



An eagle scouting for prey



A chameleon roaming the brush



Two Thomson's gazelles facing off

Wildebeest

Wildebeests are members of the antelope family and are native to the plains and open woodlands of Africa. Wildebeests are the central figure of the massive migrations that occur here and typically live in large herds.

Wildebeests, also known as gnu's, are prevalent in all 3 parks you will be visiting. While they may not be the prettiest of Africa's large animals, there is something primal about seeing a herd of several hundred wildebeests thundering across the plains.





Stalking the Serengeti Plains