

Itinerary

DAY 1

En route

We dream of safari while we soar through the skies, bound for Africa.

DAY 2

A coffee plantation in lovely Arusha

The Arusha Coffee Lodge, an old-fashioned island of quietude tucked away in a plantation, is a great place to unwind after the rigours of long flights.

Arusha is only 3 degrees south of the equator, but its 4,500-foot elevation encourages floral luxuriance and gentle airs. So we'll be more or less surrounded by enthusiastic greenery as we sit on our Plantation Suite's veranda—perhaps after a relaxing swim—looking up at massive Mount Meru, a 14,977-foot volcanic colossus that looms beneficently over this quintessentially African city.

DAYS 3 & 4

The luxurious treehouses of Tarangire

After a breakfast topped off by some of the freshest and best coffee we'll ever imbibe, we'll be briefed by our Safari Director and set off on a marvelously African drive to Tarangire and our home for the next couple of nights, Tarangire Treetops. Our first experience of luxury life in the bush couldn't be more spectacular. Treetops' main lodge, built around a thousand-year-old baobab, is only the beginning. The lodge's 20 famous, lovingly crafted tree houses, elevated for sweeping views of the park, are extraordinarily large, airy, and utterly magical.

And from our tree house's balcony, we look out at Tarangire's wonderfully varied landscapes of rocky outcrops, rolling hills, and golden savannah generously strewn with acacias and baobabs, home to just about the entire cast of wild African characters— and some rare stars, like kudu and oryx — in addition to 2,500 or so elephants. We'll make early-morning and afternoon game drives, perhaps take a walking safari with a local Maasai guide, visit a village, and, if we're still keen to see more all-star creatures, we can go out on a night drive, always a revelation.

DAYS 5 & 6

The Ngorongoro Crater, a lush natural masterpiece

The drive from Tarangire north to the Crater Highlands and the world-wondrous Ngorongoro Crater is a delight, a dazzlingly scenic game drive. We pass Lake Manyara, then begin the zigzag ascent to the rim and our reposeful cabins of Neptune Ngorongoro Luxury Lodge.

We'll drive to the crater floor for an extraordinarily rewarding morning game drive, exploring the caldera's 100 square miles, spotting lions, elephants, black rhinos, just about all of East Africa's faunal celebrities, and return to our cabin's private terraces, followed by a lovely dinner overlooking one of the world's most magical places.

DAYS 7 & 8

Gazelles by the gazillion in the Serengeti

We end this short, but undeniably spectacular, safari in the Serengeti. "There is a lightening of the spirit," Cyril Connolly wrote about the vast plain. We're invited to a rare, deep-rootedly serene idyll. The sky is huge and blue and as pure as the day the earth was born. (And on the southern horizon, over the Crater Highlands—"That's Ngorongoro, just behind that big green mountain," we'll say

knowledgeably, affectionately—clouds pile up in grandly crazy towers, looking like computer-generated special effects.) The Serengeti's kopjes are the creation of a cosmic bonsai master, and on a flat brown rock atop one of them, a lion rolls over and warms its fluffy white belly in the sun.

We'll spend two idyllic Serengeti nights in Migration Camp, tucked away in kopje-esque rocks just above the Grumeti River. The main lodge has a split-level lounge, a swimming pool, and a dandy restaurant, and each of Migration Camp's 20 tents is encircled by a deck, a private sanctuary from which to gaze out at the natural extravaganza below and beyond. Those of us who can't quite believe that hippos really exist—that's how otherworldly they sometimes seem—are delighted that rumbling pods of them disport on the Grumeti, along with many single-minded crocodiles; the great migration funnels into a crossing of this river, and the crocs bide their time like the pleistocenic beasts they are.

DAYS 9 & 10

Gameviewing, back to Arusha and homeward

After a final game drive, we'll head back to Migration Camp for breakfast. Maybe we're close to sighting the Little Five, and need just a little luck to complete the list. The identities of these mini-masterpieces: rhinoceros beetle, buffalo weaver, leopard tortoise (not so mini, really; they can weigh as much as three standard bowling balls), ant lion, and the extremely shy elephant shrew, which weighs not much more than an elephant's tear.

In any case, it's time to say good-bye to the Serengeti and Tanzania's spectacular bush. We fly back to Arusha, relax in day rooms at the Coffee Lodge, maybe take a pre-flight swim, and board our homebound planes in the evening, arriving back home on Day 10.