

Visiting lake manyara, tanzania: history and wildlife



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Introduction

Lake Manyara is a sparkling body of water that glitters in its glory. And indeed, Lake Manyara National Park has often been described as a gem amongst the Tanzania's northern tourism circuit. The Park forms a vital part of the larger Tarangire - ecosystem and serves as a dry season refuge for migratory animals. The park is safely nestled between the lake on the eastern side and the Gregory Rift Escarpment on the West, offering dramatic scenery that change with the seasons. During the rainy season the lake fills up and the surroundings become lush and green. During the dry season the lake partly dries up leaving a broad rim of bright white salt residue, making equally beautiful scenery. The park includes a unique forest that is fed by underground streams, rivers and springs. The forest is located on the South - Western part of the park in Mbulu plateaus. It is an important evergreen catchment forest, a source of important permanent rivers of which some of them pour their water in Lake Manyara thus bringing life to the park and the surrounding areas.

The Park is home to the rare blue monkey and numerous bird species. It is quite simply, a MUST DO for bird-lovers and keen wildlife photographers.

History

The name Manyara is derived from the maasai word "*emanyara*" referring to the Finger Euphorbia plant (*Euphorbia tirucalli*) meaning a plant which is a succulent. The park was first declared as a Game Reserve in 1957 mainly to protect its rhino and elephant populations. Sadly, rhino does not exist anymore because of poaching. In 1960 it was officially declared a National

Park covering only 100km². It was later on extended to the southern part towards Magara River. Between 1972 and 1990, two farm units were acquired and added to the park thus bringing its size to 330km². Currently the park is 648.7km² in size following the annexation of the Marang' Forest Reserve in 2009. Dry land is 428 km² and 220km² is the lake- the wetland area. At its full size the lake covers about 470km².

Location

Lake Manyara National Park lies between 3° 20'S, 35° 50'E and 3° 49'S, 35° 44'E as well as 3° 35'S, 35° 53'E and 3° 33'S, 35° 32'E (South) and between E3533 and E3532 (East). Park is located approximately 111.5km (from clock tower to the main gate) south- west of Arusha city. The park has two gates; one is Lyambi in the southern part of the park connecting it with Tarangire, and the other is the main gate which is close to Mto wa Mbu town. Mto wa Mbu is a small densely populated busy town which is multi ethnic with different cultural values of interest for tourists while on their way to Manyara, Ngorongoro and Serengeti. The town is the continuation of the main road to Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.

Elevation

The altitude varies from 960m above the sea level at the edge of the lake to 1,600m above the sea level along the valley walls of the Gregory Rift.

Rainfall

Like other areas in Northern Tanzania, annual rainfall pattern consists of short rains between October and December, followed by a dry season in January and thereafter long rains from February to June with the highest rainfall in April. However, Manyara has an erratic and unreliable rainfall patterns, ranging from 250mm to 1600mm per annum. Lake Manyara is highly alkaline and shallow, without any outgoing rivers. Even in rainiest months the depth doesn't reach more than 1.5m, almost dropping to zero in the dry season. The reason why the ground water forest can survive years of extreme drought is because of springs that emerge at the escarpment base.

Temperature

Temperature in Lake Manyara is fairly mild, being at its highest from December to February with a mean maximum of 34 °C. Temperatures are lower from June to July with a minimum of 11 °C. It can become a bit cold when it rains.

Humidity

Humidity in lake ranges from 45% to 85%

Attractions

Attractions of Lake Manyara National Park include a unique ground water forest that is fed by underground streams and the Great Rift Valley Escarpment. The park also lesser and greater pinkish flamingos, hot water springs, wild animals like rare blue monkey, buffalo, wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, elephant, lion, baboon, leopard, antelope, cheetah, dik-dik and many

more. The park is endowed with about 400 species of birds and varieties of insects. On inland of the floodplain there is a narrow belt of acacia woodland.

The park is favored by the legendary tree-climbing lions and impressively tusked elephants. 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.

Tourism Activities

Visitors can engage themselves in the following activities:

- Day Game Drive
- Night Game Drive
- Canoeing when the water level is sufficiently high
- Wilderness walking safaris
- Bird watching (November-June)
- Bush meal
- Cultural tour or cultural program at Mto wa Mbu village (outside the park)

Accessibility

By air

Fly to Lake Manyara Airstrip, which is at the top of the escarpment. Your ground operator will pick you at the airstrip and drive to the park main gate which is about 3km.

It is possible to arrange connection flights to the other game parks from there. If your time is limited, this is the ideal option.

By road

Lake Manyara National Park lies on the main road to and from Ngorongoro. The park may be accessed on way from Arusha, Ngorongoro or Babati. From Arusha, drive West on the main Dodoma road for 84km until you get to Makuyuni village and if you are from Babati drive Makuyuni as well. From here turn right [west] drive on the main road leading to Ngorongoro gate for 26. 5km until you get to the town of Mto -wa- mbu. About 1km from the village centre you will see a well marked park entrance gate on your left. The four wheel vehicle is feasible for park game drive.

Shopping

Mto wa Mbu town is a good place to buy various souvenirs. Also there are various small restaurants which offer typical Tanzanian food and beverages. It is important to fill up your vehicle at one of the filling stations at Mto wa Mbu as there are no fuel stations in the park.

Accommodation-Inside the park

The park has facilities for accommodation which include public tourist houses (bandas), and campsites ideal for budget visitors (prior booking is required). However there is one luxury tree lodge and one tented camp which are privately owned.

Accommodation-Outside the park

Luxury tented camps and lodges are available on the rift wall overlooking the Lake. In addition, guest houses and campsites are available in the nearby Mto wa Mbu town.

Best time

The park can be visited all-year round, however the dry season (July-October) is good for watching large mammals. On the other hand, the wet season (November-June) is good for bird watching and canoeing. Bird life is outstanding all year round; however it is probably better from September to April when migratory birds arrive.

Park rules and regulations

- Game drive is allowed between 0600h and 1800h.
- Conservation fee to be paid at the entrance gates.
- Fees are for 24hrs single entry.
- Foreign visitors pay in foreign currency (USD)
- Payment is made through credit or debit cards(Visa card, Master card & TANAPA cards-Exim & CRDB banks)
- Camping is only allowed at authorized sites
- Speed Limit is 50kph (30mph) on all roads
- Off road driving is strictly prohibited
- Harassment of animals is strictly prohibited
- Loud music and noise are not permitted
- Littering is strictly prohibited.
- Getting out of your vehicle is not allowed except at designated picnic sites, view points and campsites

- It is strictly prohibited to introduce or remove any natural objects, plants or archeological artifacts.
- Domestic pets are strictly not allowed.
- Fires are only allowed at designated camping sites “ Put fire out after use”.
- You enter the park at your own risk. Park management will not be held responsible for loss of property, life or damage of the same under any circumstances.
- Weapons, traps, poison and items of similar nature are strictly not allowed into the park.
- All accidents must be reported immediately to park officials.
- Adhere to instructions from park officials.

Park contacts:

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