



At the foot of Mount Meru, Arusha National Park has lush forests – here being explored during the rainy season

ARUSHA

Arusha stands in the foothills of Mount Meru at an altitude of about 1,500m. It's a bustling town where every other vehicle is heading on safari. There are two airports nearby: Kilimanjaro International Airport, 40km northeast of town, and Arusha Airport, on the town's western fringes. Although the town is not usually a destination in itself, some travellers need to overnight here to make transport connections work.

In the middle of a working coffee estate, **Arusha Coffee Lodge** is a 10-minute drive from Arusha Airport. The lodge has 18 spacious, split-level chalets with timber interiors. Each has french doors onto a raised deck, whilst inside is a wood-burning fire – great on cold evenings. The lodge's restaurant is popular with locals and expats, eating under parasols in the shady garden, or by the dining room's fire.

Thirty minutes northeast of Arusha, close to Kilimanjaro Airport, the owner-run **Rivertrees Country Inn** is a rural haven, where lush gardens lend an air of calm and harmony. The pool is inviting, and the more energetic might go horse-riding. There are 10 en-suite rooms, furnished in 'country' style: gingham fabrics, rocking chairs, vases of fresh roses and solid timber four-poster beds. Beside the water's edge, two River Cottages are larger, each with a

comfortable lounge area, a log fire, a private deck and indoor/outdoor showers. Rivertrees also has a new, two-bedroom, exclusive-use villa with its own private gardens.

Opposite Rivertrees, **Mount Meru Game Lodge & Sanctuary** has accepted visitors since 1959 as a means to fund its animal rescue and rehabilitation scheme. There are 17 en-suite bedrooms in simple painted buildings and a few varnished log cabins. All are individual in style, featuring wrought-iron beds, white linen, natural mats and tasteful touches. Each room has its own small veranda, but meals and fireside nightcaps take place in the main house.

Onsea House is a lovely, low-key option for an overnight stop in Arusha. Your hosts are the Janssens-Onsea family, who welcome you into their home as guests. The lodge is divided into two buildings opposite one another – the main house sits above the road and houses two bedrooms, the restaurant, bar and lounge. Below the road, a further house contains two rooms and in the garden, the outdoor pool.

Onsea House has a simple style, which isn't overly luxurious but is comfortable. This, twinned with a friendly atmosphere and some of the best food in Arusha, makes it a very good option for a night's stay.



The whole Hatari lodge has a great retro 60's style

ARUSHA NATIONAL PARK

Just outside Arusha, the beautiful Arusha National Park is often overlooked by travellers rushing to the more famous sights of the Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti. However, with a little time, Arusha National Park offers some lovely walking in the foothills of Mount Meru and canoeing on the Momela Lakes, plus gentle game drives. You can visit the park from Arusha, but it's better to stay here.

Hatari Lodge is a quirky and unique lodge located on the northern edge of Arusha National Park. It is named after the famous 1960s' blockbuster film, *Hatari!*, starring John Wayne, which was filmed in the surrounding area. In fact one of the stars of *Hatari!*, Hardy Krüger, was so captivated by this area whilst filming that he bought a farm and lived here for 13 years.

Hatari Lodge now stands on the site of that farm, and its design faithfully follows a 1960s' retro theme. It is run by its owners, Joerg & Marlies Gabriel, and makes a great base for exploring the park. Every corner is filled by a unique piece of art or fantastic handmade piece of furniture. Separate to the main building, and amongst well-kept gardens, are nine bedrooms. Each is different, although they all share the same retro theme. Everything from the quality of the fittings to the food and service is of a very high standard; we are very impressed with it!



Maasai cattle market on the edge of Arusha town



Zebra grazing on Lake Manyara's floodplain, with flamingos on the lake behind

LAKE MANYARA NATIONAL PARK

Covering about 330km², of which about two-thirds is underwater, Lake Manyara National Park is small by African standards. However, it's also very beautiful and contains a tremendous diversity of habitats and wildlife.

Set beneath the spectacular backdrop of the Great Rift Valley's steep western escarpment, this long, narrow park protects an area between the escarpment and Lake Manyara. The park's namesake is a shallow, alkaline lake which expands and contracts with the seasons. Adjacent to it are wide, grassy floodplains and, further away, bands of mixed acacia woodland. Hugging the escarpment, patches of enchanting evergreen forest are sustained by perennial groundwater springs.

Lake Manyara's game includes good numbers of elephant, buffalo, wildebeest and giraffe. Look more carefully for zebra, warthog, impala, Kirk's dik-dik, waterbuck in marshy areas, and klipspringer on the rocky slopes. The broken forests and escarpment make it good country for leopard, whilst Manyara's healthy lion population is famous for climbing trees. (Whilst unusual, this isn't as unique as is often claimed.) Huge troops of baboons, which often number several hundred, are widely regarded as Africa's largest.

As with the habitats, the birdlife here is exceptionally varied. Flocks of pelicans and the pink-shading of distant flamingos are often seen on the lake, whilst the margins and floodplains feed innumerable herons, egrets, stilts, storks and spoonbills. The woodlands are productive, but it's in the evergreen forests that you'll see more-entertaining species like raucous silvery-cheeked hornbills, crowned eagles and crested guineafowl.

The entrance gate at the north of Lake Manyara National Park is easy to access: it's about 90 minutes' drive from Arusha and barely 45 minutes from Ngorongoro. Consequently, the park's northern side gets very busy, especially during afternoons. To see this park at its best, either stay at Lake

Manyara Tree Lodge, or spend two nights somewhere close, entering the park early for a full-day safari.

At the southern end of the park, in dense Cape mahogany forest, **Lake Manyara Tree Lodge** is the only safari lodge within the park. It is a striking, contemporary lodge with exceptional service. The main area is a multi-level, open-fronted structure overlooking the sandy boma. Meals are served from the stylish open kitchen or fresh from the tandoori oven.

The 10 spacious, timber-clad suites are set on raised decks in the forest. The open-plan interiors are a warm mix of coffee and honey hues, with banana leaf ceilings, panelled walls and stylish built-in furniture. Large gauze patio doors access a private terrace, and there's a claw-foot bath and a powerful outdoor shower. Thoughtful touches – Wellington boots, dried fruit snacks, deep-pile dressing gowns – make this a delightful place to stay. Activities centre on 4WD safaris, including night drives (there's an extra park fee, payable locally, of US\$100 per person for these), lounging by the secluded pool and in-room massage.

At the end of a dusty track, 12km from the main road, **E Unoto Retreat** lies in an oasis of green at the foot of the escarpment. The local Maasai community is closely involved in the running of the lodge, and nearby Losirwa Village directly shares in its profits. This generates a tremendously positive vibe: the local staff are clearly proud of their lodge and keen to assist visitors.

E Unoto's central areas form a cluster of open-sided, thatched rondavels, overlooking the pool and the palm-fringed lake below. From here, the 25 guest rondavels snake up the hill amid flowering poinsettias, hibiscus, oleander and frangipani. Each has a small terrace and simple Maasai-inspired décor which is stylish and original, including cattle heads carved in the bed-heads. Leather armchairs and a cleverly concealed draughts board encourage in-room relaxation. Hikes to

waterfalls and bat caves are easily arranged, as are trips to the village and mountain biking.

To explore the Lake Manyara area, you can stay at one of these lodges, or at a lodge on the Rift Valley Escarpment. From the latter, you can also visit the Ngorongoro Crater with ease. For example, **Kirurumu Tented Camp** and the **Lake Manyara Serena Hotel** are about 20 minutes' drive from the gate of Lake Manyara National Park – whilst even the Rift Valley's furthest lodge, the **Farmhouse Lodge**, is less than an hour's drive. See pages 116–117 for more on these lodges.



Satellite Maps Online

To put this area into context, see the online satellite map of Lake Manyara; simply click 'Maps' on the menu at www.expertafrika.com. You can see the amazing geological features of the Great Rift Valley and the precise locations of all our camps and lodges. Then link through to more detailed reviews of these, and to examples of costed trips under 'Trip ideas'.