



Oliver's Camp is deep in the remote south of Tarangire National Park



A chalet at Tarangire Treetops

## TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK

Covering an undulating 2,600km<sup>2</sup>, Tarangire National Park stands between the plains of the Maasai Steppe to the southeast and the lakes of the Great Rift Valley to the north and west. The north side of Tarangire is dominated by the perennial Tarangire River, which flows through increasingly incised ravines until it leaves the northwestern corner of the park to flow into Lake Burungi. In the south are a series of vast 'swamps' which dry into verdant plains during the dry season.

Think of Tarangire as part of a much larger ecosystem and you'll understand why its game varies with the seasons. From November to May, much of the game leaves the park; herds of wildebeest and zebra head northwest onto the floor of the Rift Valley, whilst many animals disperse across the vast open areas of the Maasai Steppe. From around June to October, it's dry and the game returns to Tarangire's swamps and, especially, its river system. This is the best time for game-viewing in Tarangire.

Although Tarangire is one of only four parks on Tanzania's frenetic 'northern circuit', it is missed out by the more cursory minibus tours, and even those who do visit don't spend more than 24 hours here. This means that few get beyond the park's busier

northern section, leaving a vast swathe to the south of the park with few visitors and a real air of wilderness.

Tarangire's vegetation is comprised of mostly dry, open woodlands, which include spiky acacia thickets and lots of its signature baobab trees. There are also some beautiful stands of *Acacia tortilis* trees (the flat-topped acacias which are so reminiscent of the film *Out of Africa*) and the occasional palm tree. In the south of the park, amidst these rolling woodlands, is a network of huge, flat swamps. These are impassable during the rains, but dry to a uniform green during the rest of the year.

At its best, the game in Tarangire can be excellent; a particularly large number of elephant herds congregate here, as do many wildebeest and zebra. There are also substantial populations of impala, giraffe and buffalo. Thomson's gazelle, Coke's hartebeest, bohor reedbuck and both greater and lesser kudu are found here. The localised and unusual gerenuk and fringe-eared oryx also occur, though in our experience they are rarely seen. Lion are common throughout Tarangire, as are leopard, whilst cheetah seem to favour the more open areas of the south. Spotted hyena are always around, but whilst wild

dog do sometimes pass through, sightings of them are rare.

With a range of environments and good game, Tarangire's birdlife is also varied; over 500 species have been recorded here, including ashy starlings and large flocks of beautiful yellow-collared lovebirds, both of which are endemic to Tanzania.

In the south of Tarangire, between the Tarangire River and the Lormakau Marshes, **Oliver's Camp**, open from June to the end of March, guarantees good guiding and a classic bush experience. The game is particularly good here in the height of the dry season when the marshes attract huge herds of buffalo, zebra and wildebeest.

There are eight large, rectangular tents, each with an eco-chemical toilet and open-air, bucket shower. The interiors are rustic but tasteful and practical: furniture made from the timber of former dhows, lampshades adorned with Maasai beads, leather-bound books, tree-trunk bedside tables, solar-powered lights and an open canvas wardrobe.

There is a central 'mess tent', whilst the acacias over the central boma offer great birdwatching: flycatchers, superb starlings, morning thrushes, and even a pair of yellow-winged bats. You will also find a separate lounge tent, with lovely leather furniture and a small library. Oliver's is located in a wilderness area where walking and fly-camping are allowed. A guide training camp is being run in association with Oliver's, so game activities will often include scheme participants with their highly experienced trainers.

Nearby and relatively new, **Nomad Tarangire** is a romantic little safari camp with only four stylish tents, which feels highly personal. Its design has been influenced by Bedouin camps – expect canvas arches, richly woven rugs, carved Arab furniture, glowing lanterns and hot bucket-showers under the stars. Catch the breeze in the 'open mess tent', chill in a hammock, and enjoy tailored safari activities on foot or in an open vehicle. Fly-camping is also available for more adventurous guests.

### Fly-camping in Tarangire

Like the fly-camping trips in Selous Game Reserve (see page 100), we can organise fly-camping trips in Tarangire, based out of Oliver's Camp or Nomad Tarangire. These use 'tents' made of mosquito mesh, which allow you to sleep beneath the stars – a real wilderness experience, though not a luxurious one. Nights fly-camping can easily be combined with days spent on walking safaris.



A herd of impala passing between the tents at Swala Camp



Lion sitting out the heat of the day amidst Tarangire's acacia woodlands

On the edge of the Gursi Swamp, in the west of Tarangire, **Swala Camp** is usually best visited with your own driver/guide. This smart, permanent tented camp sits in an area of open grassland, under an elegant grove of tall *Acacia tortilis* trees. It has nine solid tents, each with an en-suite toilet and powerful shower to the rear, and a polished wooden deck to the front. The camp's lounge, dining and campfire area has great views of a waterhole which attracts good resident game – including frequent herds of impala, elephant and waterbuck – and excellent birdlife. Meals here are invariably high quality and Swala will also happily prepare delicious picnic lunches for whole-day safaris exploring far from camp.

In the north of the national park, **Mawe Nyinga Tented Camp** is a short distance southwest of the park's main riverside area. It has an impressive location on a high kopje, overlooking the soda lake of Lake Burungi, with Lake Manyara in the far distance. The best vista is across the small central bridge to the dramatic campfire, sited on the edge of a large rounded boulder.

Mawe Nyinga's 12 canvas tents are raised on high wooden decks. Some are cantilevered from boulders to lend vertiginous, but spectacular, views from small verandas. The tents are internally divided to create a bedroom and bathroom/dressing area, and facilities are very basic: log beds, a coat stand, small lamps, a small canvas shower and chemical toilet. Mawe Nyinga has no resident guides, so you must arrive with your own driver/guide.



Learn about smaller wildlife on a walk in Tarangire – like this golden orb web spider

An hour's drive northeast of the national park's boundary, **Tarangire Treetops** stands on Maasai land in the Lolkisale Concession Area. Perched in a stand of impressive baobabs, the 20 suites are raised on extraordinarily high stilts, literally in the treetops. From this elevated position, the gauze-fronted rooms and fabulous wrap-around decks afford incredible views across the surrounding bush. Inside, polished floors, crisp linen with forest-green throws, simple furniture and twin showers are all high quality.

The sunken lounge, large dining area and beautiful baobab bar are under cool thatch, from where steps lead down to a small pool overlooking the waterhole: a popular spot for elephants in the dry season. Being outside the national park, Tarangire Treetops organises night drives and walking safaris in addition to the usual daytime safari drives.

The relatively large **Tarangire Safari Lodge** (40 en-suite tents) is in the north of the park, where there are a lot of vehicles. It does, though, have a superb situation, on the escarpment ridge with great views over the Tarangire River – where game is lured to the water in the dry season. If you stay for a few days, and take whole-day trips to explore the park, then it's a good budget option; families may particularly enjoy the swimming pool and relaxed air.

On the eastern side of the Tarangire River, near Boundary Hill Gate, the 75-room **Tarangire Sopa Lodge** offers comfortable, chain-hotel-style accommodation and facilities – another possible option for those on a tight budget.

