

SELOUS GAME RESERVE

Covering 45,000km² of wild grassy plains, open woodland, mountains and forests, the Selous Game Reserve (pronounced 'Seloo') is one of Tanzania's three World Heritage Sites. In the north, the Rufiji River flows from west to east, bisecting the park. Stemming from this is a network of channels, lakes and swamps that form one of the most outstanding ecological systems in East Africa. These waterways provide the lifeblood of the park.

The Selous has only a handful of safari camps, so you can often drive out on safari and not see another vehicle. All offer trips through the park by boat, open 4WD vehicle and on foot. Boat safaris allow you to drift on the lakes and channels, approaching birds and animals closely. You pass pods of hippos and thousands of crocodiles, whilst on the lakeshores baboons comb the Nile cabbage for insects.

Over 440 bird species have been recorded in the Selous. On the lakes you'll find pink-backed pelicans, African skimmers and giant kingfishers. The sandbanks are home to white-fronted bee-eater colonies, whilst ibises and palm thrushes nest in the borassus palms.



Sightings of hippos are common on the Rufiji River

RUFJI RIVER CAMP

Rufiji River Camp is situated beside the river, with impressive views across to the Rufiji Plain. It's well organised, unpretentious and relaxed, with 14 secluded tents shaded by thatch. Totally rebuilt in 2010, it now offers much more space and privacy. Each tent has two king-size beds, a private veranda, and an outdoor seating area with views up the river. En-suite bathrooms are spotlessly clean, with flush toilets, solar-heated showers and a washbasin.

Rufiji River's guides are experienced Tanzanians, most of whom have been guiding here for years, and working as game scouts before that. They know the bush well and through chatting with them you can glean insights into their various cultures.

Activities at Rufiji include river safaris in small motorboats, game drives and guided walks. Boat safaris explore the nearby lakes, whilst game drives venture further. Whole-day drives are often possible, incorporating a leisurely picnic lunch in the bush. Rufiji offers a good-value, simple safari in a great wilderness area.

SABLE MOUNTAIN LODGE

On the northern boundary of the park, **Sable Mountain Lodge** is perched in the north of the Beho Beho Hills. Its accommodation consists of eight simple, stone 'cottages' and five, more luxurious tented suites. Two of these are honeymoon suites, offering more spectacular views and a tiny plunge pool. In 2011 two further rooms were added: The Rooftop with one bedroom, and The Villa with two bedrooms. Each is perched on a hill and has its own small lounge area.

The lodge's dining area is open with good views, and there's a spring-water swimming pool and a man-made watering hole with a hide. Activities include 4WD safaris, walks and boat trips on Lake Tagalala; often you'll take a picnic and head out for the whole day.

In previous years, when there was a reliable train to the Selous from Dar, Sable Mountain proved very convenient. It's one of the few camps which can be booked on a full-board basis, without activities – so is ideal for those on a budget. However, it's a long drive from the best game-viewing areas, so is best combined with a camp deeper in the park.

LAKE MANZE CAMP

Hidden away beneath a scattering of tall doum palms, **Lake Manze Camp** sits on the shores of its namesake. It opened in June 2007, and has consistently proved to offer both great value and an excellent experience, especially for those wanting something slightly different.

Like its sister camp in Ruaha, Mdonya Old River Camp (see page 186), Lake Manze Camp has ventured away from luxury and superfluous style and has tried to remain more natural in feel, impacting as little as possible on the environment. It is still a very comfortable camp with 12 en-suite walk-in tents, yet its unadorned décor, rustic style and lack of electricity (apart from in the camp's office) are reminiscent of older, traditional safari camps.

As a result of this simple approach, travellers are able to experience the bush as naturally as possible, with minimal separation between the camp and its surroundings. The sheer volume of game that strolls through, especially elephant, is an indication that Lake Manze is succeeding in its goal.

Rufiji River Fly-camps

If you're visiting Rufiji River Camp for more than a few nights, then consider adding a night or two at a satellite fly-camp. When fly-camping here, you'll head out with your own guide, perhaps walking or driving, to a simple camp beside one of the lakes.

These fly-camps use good-sized A-frame tents, a hot bucket shower and a toilet, yet they retain a very remote feeling. They need to be booked in advance, and have a supplement of about £176 per person.

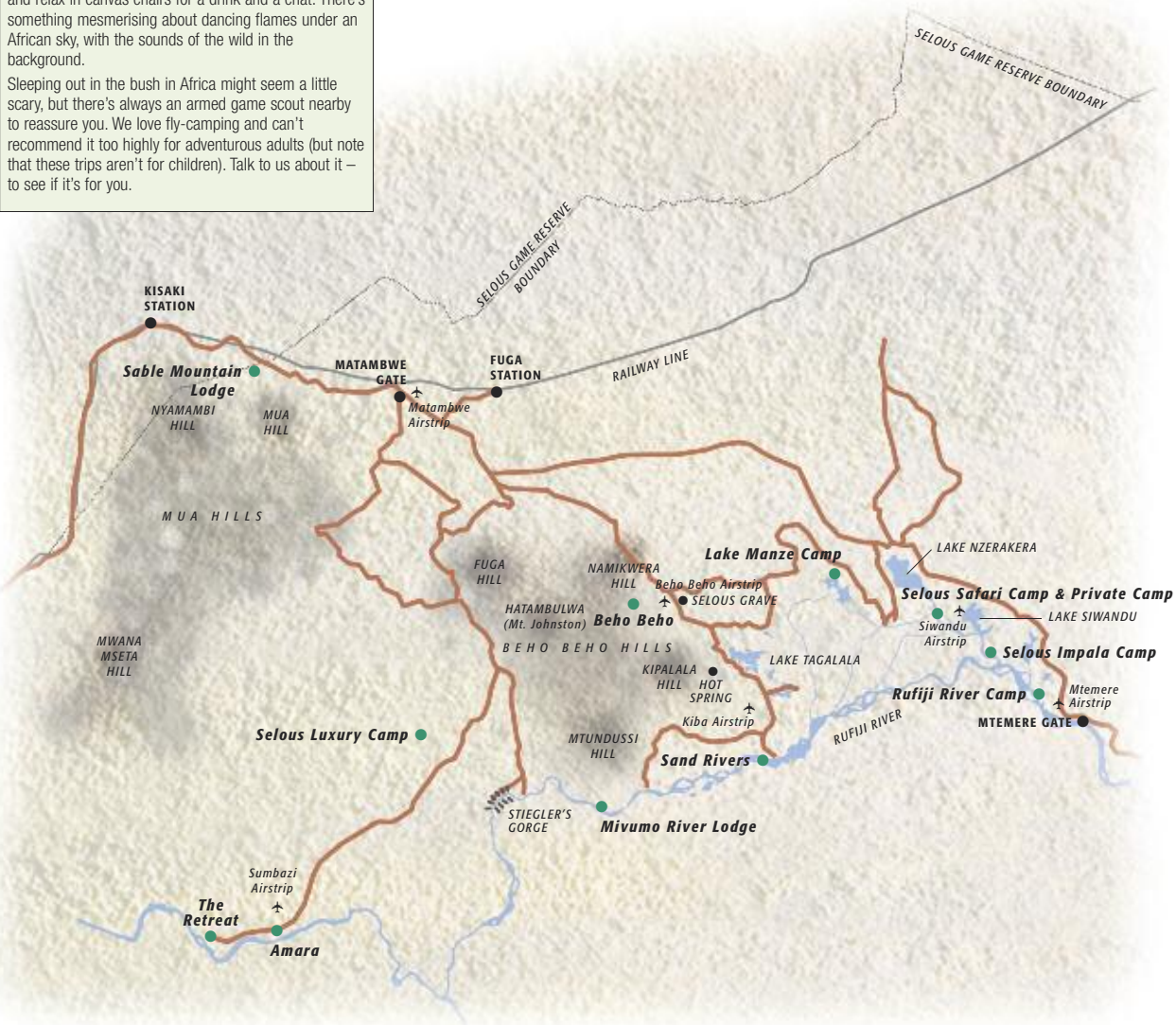
Fly-Camping

Several of the safari camps in the Selous (notably *Impala Camp*, *Rufiji River*, *Selous Safari*, *Sand Rivers* and *Beho Beho*), and *Chada Katavi* in Katavi, operate fly-camps. We're not sure where the name 'fly-camp' comes from. It might derive from the term 'fly by night', as these are small, temporary camps. It might even come from the word 'flysheet', which describes the outer canvas of a tent. It's nothing to do with any winged insects though! Wherever the name comes from, a fly-camp is a small, temporary camp. Staying in one is reminiscent of simple boy-scout camping, but someone else cooks and does the chores for you. The tents vary: some are small dome tents; others are purpose built out of mosquito netting. Dinner is cooked on an open fire and served nearby – after which it's natural to gather around the campfire, and relax in canvas chairs for a drink and a chat. There's something mesmerising about dancing flames under an African sky, with the sounds of the wild in the background.

Sleeping out in the bush in Africa might seem a little scary, but there's always an armed game scout nearby to reassure you. We love fly-camping and can't recommend it too highly for adventurous adults (but note that these trips aren't for children). Talk to us about it – to see if it's for you.



The Selous offers one of the best chances of seeing wild dogs in Africa



Lion-tracking on a walking safari



Malachite kingfisher resting on a branch

SELOUS IMPALA CAMP

Between Lake Mzizimia and Lake Siwandu, **Selous Impala Camp** stands beside the Rufiji River in a grove of borassus palms and tamarind trees. It's been open for about seven years and is one of the park's smallest camps, with just eight Meru-style tents.

Impala is a sister camp of Lake Manze Camp and Mdonya Old River Camp in Ruaha (see page 186). It has been built with much more luxury in mind, but still retains a natural approach and uses good-quality materials and fabrics. Each comfortable tent is built on a raised wooden platform, affording stunning views over the river and hills beyond. Inside, they are tastefully furnished in an old-Africa style, complete with a dressing area and an en-suite bathroom. The camp also has a lovely swimming pool for cooling dips.

Many of our travellers have commented on Impala's friendliness and personal approach, which is reflected in the range of flexible activities on offer, including game drives, walks and boat trips on the Rufiji River. Unlike most camps in the park, Impala has separate rather than communal dining for its guests.

Impala has established itself as a quality camp offering remarkably good value. It works well on its own for 3–5 nights or as the first stop on a longer safari in Southern Tanzania.

Selous Impala Camp fly-camps

For the adventurous traveller, a few days out at Selous Impala Camp's remote fly-camp is a wonderful and exciting experience. With your specialist fly-camping guide, explore the surrounding area before returning to the camp where you can expect comfortable dome tents, hot bucket showers, inviting campfires and a real sense of wilderness. Fly-camping at Impala is available from June to the end of October and is a supplement of £108 per person per night.

SAND RIVERS SELOUS

Deep inside the Selous, **Sand Rivers** overlooks a wide curve in the Rufiji River. The thatched lounge has sumptuous cushions, large sofas and chairs; beside this a curved swimming pool lies under a large baobab tree and offers panoramic views of the river and wilderness beyond. In the evening, three-course meals with fine wines add to the ambience.

Sand Rivers Selous has five Riverside Rooms, which are large thatched cottages with stone floors, king-size beds and spacious en-suite bathrooms. The front of each room is open, affording views of the riverine forest and river beyond. It's a lovely touch, encouraging a fresh breeze and allowing birds to fly in and out.

There are also three Hillside suites, which offer a little more space than the Riverside Rooms; each has its own lounge area and private plunge pool.

Kiba Point is a new satellite camp, a few kilometres from the main Sand Rivers. It is available only for the exclusive use of one family or group of up to eight people. There's a private guide and chef on hand and, in addition to a central swimming pool, each of its four cottages has its own private plunge pool.

The varied activities at all of these places include motorboat trips through the towering Steigler's Gorge, and walks and 4WD safaris to explore the plains and lakeshores. Often you will combine a 4WD trip with a short walking safari, and a spot of fishing is also possible, or a relaxing soak in the Tagalala Hot Springs. The

standard of guiding at Sand Rivers is generally very high, thanks in part to a positive approach to ongoing guide training.

Selous Walking Safaris

If you love walking in the wilderness with big game, then consider a private mobile walking safari, led by top walking guides from Sand Rivers Selous. Your mornings and evenings are spent walking, tracking game or sometimes taking a boat trip, whilst you relax in the shade back at the fly-camp during the middle of the day. Evenings end with three-course meals under the stars, before drinks around the campfire.

Trips take a maximum of six people and the tents are the same as those used for the fly-camps. These walking safaris start on any day and last for a minimum of three nights; they are available only during the dry months, from June to the end of October.

Fly-camping from Sand Rivers Selous

It's easy to pre-arrange a night of fly-camping from Sand Rivers for you. (See page 177 for a general box: Fly-camping.) This commands a supplement of £149 per person sharing per night.

When fly-camping you'll set off with your guide in the afternoon, usually mixing driving with walking. Around dusk you'll arrive at your fly-camp, generally in a dry, sandy riverbed. It will be set up in advance by the camp's team, with a fire, hot water for bucket showers and cold drinks at the ready! A high quality three-course dinner is cooked on the fire.

Later you'll retire to your comfortable bedroll under a cube of mosquito gauze; your armed guide will be sleeping close by. The (shared) toilets are long drop and the team also brings a dome tent, in case anyone feels nervous!



Nature up close: fly-camping in the Selous, from Sand Rivers



BEHO BEHO

High on a hill, **Beho Beho** was the first camp in the Selous and it still has a unique position. In 2004 it was rebuilt and reinvented, to establish itself as one of the best camps in Africa. It is privately owned

with the air of a smart, slightly eccentric home – where else would you find a slate-bedded billiards table in this park?

Each of Beho Beho's eight spacious stone-and-thatch bandas is rustic, yet stylish and very comfortable. All have airy bathrooms with good showers, flush toilets and twin

basins. The bedrooms have romantic, canopied king-sized beds, fans and 24-hour electricity. Each has a separate area that is part lounge, part veranda, and open at the front. Like the rest of the camp, these verandas all have panoramic views of a verdant valley and the plains beyond.

The food is excellent, amongst the best we've had on safari, and is served imaginatively in various locations – including the elegant dining area and the pool-side sundeck.

Beho Beho was refurbished at the end of 2011 resulting in a newer, fresher look, though with its same homely signature style. However, to dwell on the high-quality comforts here is to miss the point. Beho Beho's team of accomplished guides currently includes two FGASA 'Level 3' guides – the top level awarded by the highly regarded Field Guides Association of Southern Africa. Hence the camp's focus is firmly on its expert wildlife guides, with activities including 4WD game drives, boat trips on Lake Tagalala and superb walking safaris. Beho Beho is relatively costly, but it consistently delivers a superb experience which makes it fantastic value for such a good camp.

Relaxed lions lying in the shade of a tree



Open-sided lounge at Beho Beho: comfort in the bush

Beho Beho's Bush Nights

Travellers who stay for a minimum of four nights at Beho Beho can opt to take one of these as a 'Bush night'. These are spent away from camp, usually beside a sand river, fly-camping in tents made mostly of insect-proof gauze. This is opulent camping, with first-class meals, a stylish, candlelit tent with a proper double bed, and an en-suite shower and toilet. Bush nights are an additional (and substantial) £183 per person sharing.



Giraffes live for 20–25 years on average

SELOUS SAFARI CAMP

Selous Safari Camp is tucked away beside the beautiful Lake Nzerekera, noted for the towering borassus palms that rise from its waters. Approaching by boat, all you see of the camp over the treetops are the tall apexes of the main lounge/dining banda, which has been built on high stilts. Advancing more closely, you'll realise that the rest of the camp has been built within a terminalia woodland.

Selous Safari Camp is a professional operation that pays great attention to detail. The luxury tents are raised up a few feet from the ground on wooden platforms, and are spacious and very private. All have an en-suite bathroom with basin, flush toilet and a romantic open-air shower for admiring the stars as you rinse off the dust. In the midst of these is a central dining room and a comfortable lounge/bar that is a great spot for relaxing – if you're not chilling beside the swimming pool.

Adjacent to the main camp is the slightly separate Selous Private Camp, which is available for group or family bookings. It has just six tents, which are the same in

build and style as those in the main camp. Each has high-quality fittings and is built in a hexagonal shape; all open up to make the most of the breeze, whilst remaining very private. The Private Camp can only be booked on an exclusive basis, and has its own vehicles, boats, guides, dining area and swimming pool.

Activities from both include guided walking safaris and 4WD safaris. There are also trips in small motorboats, which start from just in front of camp and explore the area's network of lakes and waterways around Lake Nzerekera and the Rufiji River.



A newborn impala takes its first steps

THE RETREAT

Opened in 2008, **The Retreat** is a luxury tented lodge in the Selous. Standing beside the permanent Ruaha River, in a remote area on the western side of northern Selous, the lodge's central area is built in the style of a fort, inspired by the ruins of the World War I look-out tower on which it is built. Stone walls, tiled floors, furniture and fittings are from India, Arabia and Africa; expect dark woods and bright brass reminiscent of the Swahili style of décor.

The lodge has 12 luxurious tents all made of cream canvas, with solid wooden furniture, billowing silk fabrics and several thoughtful touches. Six Eagle Hill Tents are set atop a hill and close to the main area; a further four River Suites are beside the water's edge, each with its own plunge pool. For added privacy, two tents at Hippo Point are set apart from the main lodge, sharing their own pool, bar and patio dining area. These are usually booked exclusively, and so perfect for families.

The spa at The Retreat has a jacuzzi and two massage areas, one with a Vichy shower. The owner's vision for The Retreat

Selous Safari Camp fly-camping

Selous Safari Camp runs fly-camps (see page 177 for a general box: fly-camping) using small tents. A hot bush shower under a tree and long-drop toilet are set up, and dinner is cooked on the fire (by the cook!) and eaten at a table set with linen, cutlery and glasses. It's all very civilised. Fly-camping must be booked in advance because a room is not kept at Selous Safari Camp for you. As a result fly-camping from here is not a supplement as at other camps; it is actually lower in price than a night at the main camp.



Crocodiles keep their mouth open to cool off

centres on the therapeutic value of the bush, and treatments offered include aromatherapy, stone massages, crystal massages and sound therapy.

When we visited The Retreat, we found a camp with high build-quality; we don't know anywhere else where dry-clean-only 100% silk curtains are used in a safari camp. It's a place to get away from it all, to enjoy spa treatments and to relax in natural surroundings – but be aware that the game may be a little scarce compared with that around the Rufiji's lake system, further east.

SELOUS & MIVUMO

In July 2009 the Serena Hotels chain opened two sister lodges in the Selous; we visited both in June 2010.

Selous Luxury Camp (formerly Selous Wildlife Camp) has 12 tents which are not overly spacious, although they are very comfortable with carpeted floors, phones – and even chandeliers! **Mivumo River Lodge** stands on the banks of the Rufiji River, not far from Steigler's Gorge and with lovely views. The central areas are within an impressive three-tiered structure, complete with pool and plenty of sunloungers to relax on. The 12 conventional, hotel-style rooms, decorated in colonial style, are spread along the river's edge. Each has glass windows, air conditioning and a minibar; you could forget that you were in the bush if it were not for the impressive views of the river from the outside hot tub and shower.

Both camps are located west of the park's best game-viewing areas, so prepare yourself for full-day game drives to get the best out of the park. Overall, the emphasis at both lodges is definitely more on luxury than on any wilderness experience.



AMARA SELOUS

Black-headed herons perform elaborate neck movements when courting

Having opened only in 2010, **Amara Selous** is a comparatively new property in the Selous which we stumbled across almost by accident shortly after it had started. It is trumpeted as the first in a small collection of 'boutique camps' and has certainly been built with a designer's help. The pool is stylish and the furniture mostly solid and leather-clad. The 12 elegant chalets are partly tented and partly built from stone. Each has its own private plunge pool and air-conditioning unit above the bed, although we wonder about its efficiency when used inside a tent with gauze windows.

When we saw it, the camp was new, empty of visitors and was being run by competent old Tanzania hands – but for a relatively young camp it is very costly indeed.



Exploring the Selous' lakes and rivers by boat