

KATAVI NATIONAL PARK

Katavi is exceedingly remote. Its isolation has helped it to remain untouched, but has also meant that it's either exceedingly difficult (by road) or expensive (by air) to visit. Getting there takes four or five hours by plane from Arusha, but the result is that whilst the Serengeti National Park sees around 120,000 visitors per annum, Katavi typically has just a few hundred.

For those who do make the effort, Tanzania's third-largest national park won't disappoint. Two enormous plains of knee-high golden grass – Chada and Katusunga – dominate the park, surrounded by varied woodland. Katavi is at its best in the dry season when the plains fill with thousands of zebra, topi and impala. Hartebeest, giraffe and Defassa waterbuck are also very common, and there's a large population of resident elephants and some impressive herds of buffalo.

It's a great park for watching lion–buffalo interactions; spotted hyena are frequently seen and leopard appear on the woodland fringes, but are more elusive. Wild dog do live here, but tend to stick to the escarpment and are rarely seen on the plains. During the dry season, the Katuma and Kapapa rivers are the only water for miles. As the game files down to drink, hundreds of hippo congregate in the tiniest waterhole and enormous crocodiles sit out the heat in riverbank mud-holes.

Katavi hosts large flocks of open-billed storks, saddlebills, spoonbills, crested cranes and pink-backed pelicans. Raptors are plentiful, and the woodlands are home to species as diverse as African golden

orioles, paradise flycatchers and pennant-winged nightjars.

Katavi is a name to conjure with; it's one of the best parks in Africa. Many safari operations would love to start camps here, but the logistics and costs are difficult. At the time of writing, there are only a few small, permanent safari camps in the park sharing this 4,500km² of wilderness.



Large numbers of crocodiles survive the dry season in Katavi by sheltering in holes in the river bank

Fly-camping in Katavi

With such a big park, it's possible to travel long distances exploring many areas and still not see any other vehicles. To help reach the more distant corners of the park, Chada Katavi's team can arrange one- or two-night fly-camping trips (see page 177 for comments). These are often combined with walking safaris to help you appreciate the sheer scale and remoteness of this park. Staff will go ahead to set up the camp, which consists of small mosquito-net dome tents with comfy mattresses, proper quilts and pillows, a (hot) bucket shower and a long-drop toilet. You'll return from your drive or walk to a cold drink, a roaring fire and a first-class dinner under the stars in one of Africa's most remote locations. Fly-camping should be arranged in advance and commands a supplement of about £149 per person sharing per night.



CHADA KATAVI

Chada Katavi occupies a lovely woodland spot on the edge of Chada Plain. Six large safari tents are set on wooden platforms and widely separated for privacy within the open acacia woodland. These have big gauze windows that can be opened up to the breeze. Inside each, large beds, subtle natural fabrics, palm matting and a writing desk make for a stylish safari interior; outside, canvas chairs on the veranda remind you that Chada isn't about excessive luxury.

Adjoining the bedroom area is a tented bathroom, including an eco-flush toilet and

a bucket shower (hot water available on request).

The camp has a tented library and lounge, and also a separate bar and dining area – the venue for informal meals, after which guests gravitate to the nearby campfire for drinks. Chada is well organised, friendly and very personal. It's also very wild; the camp feels as if it is part of the bush, not insulated from it.

As you'd expect, game activities are the focus here. Chada's knowledgeable guides will lead you on 4WD game drives which might spend a whole day exploring a section of the park, accompanied by a picnic lunch.

Katavi has plenty of open country, including the fringes of its great plains, making it particularly good for walking safaris and fly-camping, which are always accompanied by an armed game scout.

KATAVI WILDERNESS CAMP

Situated on the edge of the huge Katasunga Plains, very close to the park's main airstrip, **Katavi Wilderness Camp** is owned and run by the same team as Ruaha River Lodge (page 184), and currently has eight large walk-in tents built on low wooden platforms, with en-suite facilities and large, shady verandas.

Game congregating on Katavi's vast open plains during the dry season