

## LAKE MANYARA NATIONAL PARK

Covering about 330km<sup>2</sup>, of which about two-thirds is underwater, Lake Manyara is a small national park 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 guinea fowl.

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 the afternoons. To see this park at its best, stay inside the park itself at Lake Manyara Tree Lodge, Lemala Manyara or a Private Mobile Camp (see box on page 197). Or spend two nights somewhere close, entering the park early for a full-day safari.

At the southern end of the park, tucked in a dense forest, **Lake Manyara Tree Lodge** is the only permanent 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 ten 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 furniture. Large gauze patio doors access a private terrace, and there's a claw-foot bath and a powerful outdoor shower.



### 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](http://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'.

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), with lounging by the secluded pool and in-room massage as added bonuses.

In the middle of the park, **Lemala Manyara** is a new semi-permanent tented camp just over an hour's drive south of the main gate. It's been built in the same style as Lemala Ngorongoro (see page 203), with nine tents, including a family tent – all with en suite flush toilets, bucket showers, running water, solar-powered lighting and proper beds with duvets. This is a good base for a night or two to explore this park properly – and opens up the possibility of walking safaris beside the lakeshore; ask us for the latest news.

Outside of the park, at the end of a dusty track and 12km from the main road, **E Unoto Retreat** lies in an oasis of green at the foot of the escarpment. In the past, the local Maasai community was closely involved in the running of the lodge, and nearby Losirwa Village had a direct share in its profits. On past visits we found a tremendously positive vibe, but on our last visit in 2011 it was a different story. The relationship with the local community seemed to have deteriorated and a manager had been brought in from outside. The lodge looked tired and though the staff we encountered were friendly and helpful, we felt that E Unoto Retreat had lost the soul that made it so special. As a result, we are not currently recommending it, but ask us for the latest information.

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 page 202 for more on these lodges.

#### Lake Manyara Private Mobile Camp

If you prefer a more elemental safari experience, we can arrange an exclusive private mobile camp for you inside this national park. This will have exactly the same style as our Serengeti Private Mobile Camps (see page 211) – using its own guide, chef and vehicle, with proper mattresses in small dome tents, a basic mess tent, a friendly campfire and separate, shared short-drop loo and bucket shower.



*Buffalo grazing on Lake Manyara's floodplain, with flamingos on the lake and the escarpment behind it to the right*