

TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK

TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK

Covering an undulating 2,600km², 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 bypassed 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 comprises 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.

Fly-camping in Tarangire

Like the fly-camping trips in Selous Game Reserve (see page 177), we can organise fly-camping trips in Tarangire from Oliver's Camp. They use 'tents' made of mosquito mesh, which allow you to sleep beneath the stars – a real wilderness experience, though not a luxurious one. One or two nights of fly-camping can easily be combined with days spent on walking safaris.



A chalet at Tarangire Treetops





Topi (or tsessebe) are one of the fastest antelopes

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 are not common. 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 near the Tarangire River, **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 ten large, rectangular tents, each with a flush toilet and hot outdoor 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. The central lounge and dining area are furnished with lovely leather chairs and a small library.

Oliver's is located in a wilderness area where walking, night drives and fly-camping are allowed. A guide training school is being run in association with Oliver's, so game activities will often include trainee guides with their highly experienced trainers.

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 tortillis* trees and ancient baobabs. It has 12 solid tents, each with an en-suite toilet and both an indoor and shower to the rear, and a polished wooden deck to the front. The camp's central area, incorporating a lounge, dining area and campfire, 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.

Tarangire is well-known for its huge herds of elephant



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

In the north of the national park, **Mawe Ninga 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 from the dramatic campfire, sited across the small central bridge on the edge of a large rounded boulder.

Mawe Ninga'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 Ninga has no

Tarangire Private Mobile Camp

As with the region's other main parks, we can arrange for an exclusive private mobile camp inside Tarangire National Park. This would be largely identical to our Serengeti Private Mobile Camp (see page 211). It would have its own guide, chef and 4WD vehicle for game drives; the tents are small dome tents, using proper mattresses; and there's a small mess tent, a friendly campfire and separate, shared short-drop toilet and bucket shower.



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

resident guides, so you must arrive with your own driver/guide.

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. **Tarangire Treetops** organises safari drives in the park and night drives and walking safaris on the concession outside.

Twenty minutes' drive from Tarangire, and 50 minutes from Lake Manyara, **Chem Chem** sits on a private 40km² concession with eight luxurious tents which have been built to a high specification. In addition to visiting the parks, activities on the concession include walking, off-road driving, night drives and horseback riding. We were unsure as to how prolific the game would be on the concession, but were

pleased to see plenty of plains game.

Though costs are relatively high, a wider-than-usual range of activities, and relatively little large, dangerous game, will help it appeal to families with children in search of a stylish retreat.

Kirurumu Tarangire is a simple tented camp located in a concession area just outside of Tarangire National Park. The 10 tents are raised on a stone base and suspended under thatch, lending a permanent feel to them. With red polished floors and chunky wooden furniture they feel quite rustic in design and though not luxurious they are comfortable.

The relatively large **Tarangire Safari Lodge** (35 en-suite tents and five bungalows) 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.