

THE SERENGETI

The Serengeti is vast and beautiful, and one of Africa's most captivating safari areas. The sheer amount of game here is staggering: estimates suggest up to two million wildebeest, plus perhaps half a million zebra, hundreds of thousands of Thomson's gazelle, and tens of thousands of impala, Grant's gazelle, topi (tsessebe), hartebeest, eland and other antelope – all hunted by the predators for which these plains are famous.

Some of this game resides permanently in 'home' areas, which are great for safaris all year round. But many of the wildebeest and zebra take part in the annual migration (see our migration maps on pages 206–207) – an amazing spectacle that's one of the greatest wildlife shows on earth.

Sadly, the Serengeti is complex to understand and doesn't always live up to its potential. Some inferior safaris neglect to take into account the wildlife's movements and reach only areas with minimal game, whilst others use sub-standard guides who provide few insights into the environment or the wildlife and destroy any sense of wilderness.

To get the best out of the Serengeti, your trip needs to be planned carefully with an eye for quality. We can help you design the right itinerary for great game viewing, and guarantee you a good guide. Below are some notes, but getting the best from a safari here is complicated; see pages 228–232 for trip ideas and prices and talk to us.

THE SOUTHERN PLAINS

Vast short-grass plains cover the south of Serengeti National Park, stretching into the north of Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the southwest Loliondo and Maswa Game Reserve. Occasionally, small kopjies harbour good populations of resident game, as do the forests around Lake Ndutu and the nearby Lake Masek. However, around these oases of permanent wildlife, most of this area is flat and open. It's alive with grazing wildebeest from around late-November to April, but the game on these plains is sparse for the rest of the year.



Lions prepare for an evening of hunting

Ndutu Safari Lodge is situated on the boundary of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and the Serengeti National Park, overlooking the small soda lake of Lake Ndutu. Founded in the 1960s, it's owner-run and down-to-earth. Its 34 stone cottages are comfortable, en suite and spread in linear fashion from either side of the central bar, lounge and dining area. Birdwatchers will enjoy the flamboyant Fischer's lovebirds which come to drink at breakfast time in the dry season.

Standing atop a kopje, **Kusini Camp** is similar to its sibling Swala Camp in Tarangire (see page 199). It's high-quality with 12 luxurious tents on polished wooden decks, each with an en-suite bathroom. Expect towelling bathrobes and lots of comfort. The lounge and dining area have deep couches and the food here is very good.

Opened in 2010, **Lake Masek Tented Camp** stands on the shores of the area's second lake. Its main dining area is communal and stylish, with views over the lake. Each of its 20 spacious tents is raised on a wooden platform and furnished with large, four-poster double or twin beds. Each has a private veranda, outdoor shower and large bathroom.



Buffalo in the tall grass of the Serengeti plains

THE SERONERA AREA

In the heart of the national park, north of the short-grass plains, Seronera has the best features of the Serengeti but, sadly, also its worst. Scenically, it's lovely – with open plains, occasional kopjies and a few small ranges of hills. The wildlife is phenomenal, with high densities of relaxed leopard, cheetah and lion living off both resident herbivores and migrating game. Seronera's big drawback is that it is always extremely busy.

Northeast of Seronera, at the end of a winding road into the Kyabatero Hills, the **Serengeti Serena Safari Lodge** enjoys panoramic vistas from many of its 66 en-suite rooms. Its papyrus-filled artificial streams are pleasant, but if you're looking for a budget option in this area then the nearby **Seronera Wildlife Lodge** is simpler and probably better value.

South of Seronera in the Moru Kopjies area, the **Serengeti Sopa Lodge** is also a larger property where, though the rooms are slightly dated, the staff are extremely friendly and make for an enjoyable stay. Nearby, **Dunia Camp** is a very comfortable and high-quality tented camp. It is similar in style to its sister camp, Olakira, and one of the few good tented camps to occupy a permanent site in this part of the Serengeti. Dunia has eight large, airy tents – each of which has twin or king-size beds, and an en-suite bathroom with flush toilet and hot shower.

On the western slopes of the Makoma Hills, **Lemala Ewanjan** has just seven spacious tents and provides a good base to explore the central Serengeti throughout the year.

With 15 very simple en-suite tents, **Kati Kati** has a less intimate feel than the other tented camps in this area, but is a good option for those where budget is of more concern than luxury.

SEMI-PERMANENT CAMPS IN THE SERENGETI

The Serengeti's **semi-permanent tented camps** are safari camps which can be moved. These are regularly taken down and set up again in a different location; some move every few weeks, others stay in each location for a few months. Most try to anticipate the migration's location when they move, even though most of the sites for these camps need to be booked years in advance. Some feel almost permanent – with proper beds, en-suite bathrooms and comfortable mess tents, whilst others are more simply constructed.

Olakira Camp typically moves between two different areas: from June to November it's in northern Serengeti where the Bolongonja River meets the Mara River. Then from December to March it moves to Ndutu in the southern Serengeti. It has eight large, light-coloured walk-in tents, each with twin or double beds, solar lighting, a clean en-suite flush toilet, brass washbasin, and a bucket shower (hot water on request). Olakira prides itself on imaginative, high-quality food, served in the mess tent or outdoors. It's a smart camp designed to be comfortable, using light fabrics, colourful blankets and rugs on the floor.

Originally designed as an 'overflow' camp for Olakira, **Ubuntu** moves in a similar fashion to its sister camp. It has only six tents which are slightly smaller and simpler in design. Thus visitors enjoy the same great food and levels of service, for a slightly lower cost.



A typical semi-permanent tented camp in the Serengeti



Serengeti Safari

Camp is much simpler in construction and usually moves every three to four weeks. Between about December and April, it is on the short-grass plains of the southern Serengeti; from May to early July, it's normally near the Moru Kopjies or in the Western Corridor; and then from mid-July to November, it's usually on a site near either the Bolongonja or Mara River, in the remote northern Serengeti. Each large walk-in tent is traditional in style, with an en-suite bucket shower, short-drop toilet and candles or storm lanterns for light.

Lemala Serengeti belongs to the same family as Lemala Manyara and Ngorongoro (see pages 197 and 203). From June until the end of October it's known as **Lemala Mara Camp** and is superbly located a stone's throw from the Mara River. From November until March this same camp moves to the southern Serengeti, to become **Lemala Ndutu Camp**. Its nine tents are spacious and luxurious, with two queen sized doubles, or one king size. The

communal areas are quirky, with animal skins, big rugs and enticing leather sofas.

From July until mid-November **Alex's Walker's Serian Camp** is located in the northern Serengeti within easy reach of the Mara River. From December until May the camp moves down to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, bordering the short grass plains of the southern Serengeti - within fairly easy reach of both the Serengeti, as well as the Ngorongoro Crater (a two-hour drive away). The camp has seven spacious and stylish tents with en-suite chemical flush loos and bucket showers.

The Greater Serengeti Ecosystem

The Serengeti National Park itself covers about 15,000km² of mostly flat or gently rolling grasslands, interspersed with the occasional rock outcrop, or kopje. This is the centre of a whole ecosystem which covers more than double that area, and includes Grumeti Reserve, Ikorongo Game Reserve, Loliondo Game Controlled Area, Maswa Game Reserve, part of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and also Kenya's relatively small Maasai Mara Game Reserve. This combined area is often referred to as the **Greater Serengeti area** or the **Serengeti-Mara ecosystem**.

GREAT SERENGETI MIGRATION

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Many of the Serengeti's wildebeest, accompanied by large numbers of zebra, and smaller numbers of Grant's gazelle, Thomson's gazelle, eland and impala, migrate every year – forming what's often known as the Serengeti Wildebeest Migration, or simply the Great Migration. Dictated by the search for fresh grazing and better drinking water, their movements follow a fairly predictable pattern, in line with the year's rainfall. These maps show the positions of the herds in a typical year: when and where the migration is likely to be. That said, weather patterns are increasingly hard to predict, so please use these pages as a rough guide, rather than an infallible timetable.

Usually, the 'short rains' begin in early November. Shortly after this, in **late November and December**, the migrating herds begin to arrive in great numbers on the Serengeti's short-grass *Southern Plains*

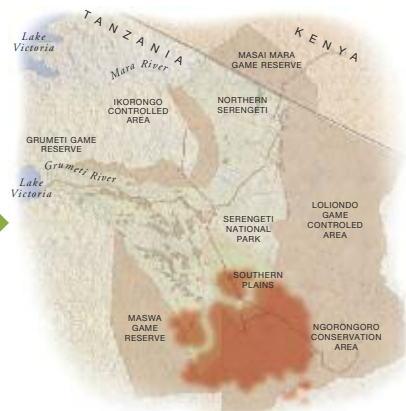
(page 204). These extend all the way down to Ndutu, including the north of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and east all the way to *Loliondo Game Controlled Area* (page 211). Animals are everywhere,

feeding on the fresh, nutritious grasses, and they normally stay here through **January to March**. Most calve in a short window around February. Gradually they spread west across the plains, and by around **April** they begin migrating north.

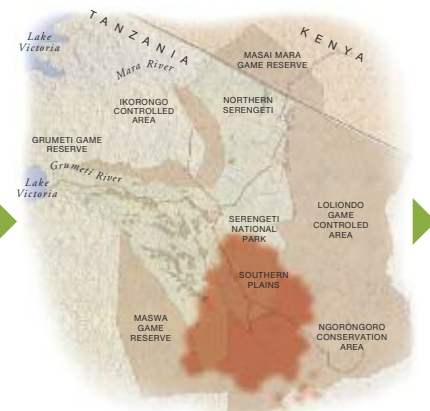
By **May** the area around Moru Kopjies and west of Seronera is hectic with a series of moving columns, often containing thousands of animals. Some head due north of Seronera, but most trek more northwest. Once they start to move, the pace can be quite rapid, and so the central Serengeti or *Seronera Area* (pages 204–205) is a good base to access the areas the



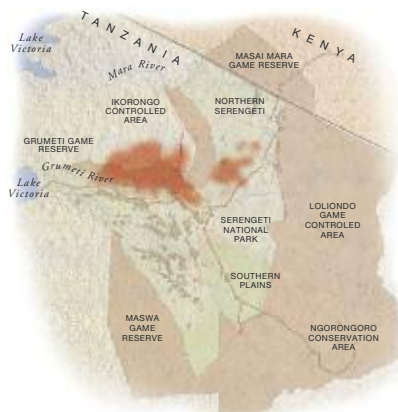
January: the herds are on the short grasses of the *Southern Plains*, southern *Loliondo Game Controlled Area* and the northern *Ngorongoro Conservation Area*.



February: the herds spreading out across the short-grass plains – most calve within a 2–3 week window.



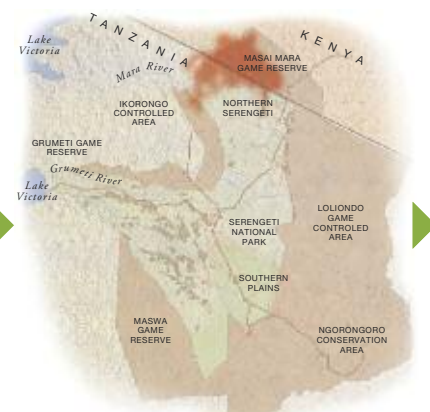
March: still spread over the *Southern Plains*, but starting to move slightly west.



July: once north of the river, the herds continue through *Grumeti Reserve* towards the *Northern Serengeti*.



August: the migration continues through *Ikorongo* into the *Northern Serengeti*.



September: the herds are in the *Northern Serengeti*, with some moving into the *Masai Mara* in Kenya.

To see these as a series of moving maps explaining this in detail, visit our webpage www.expertafrika.com/tanzania/info/serengeti-wildebeest-migration

herds are likely to be. Around **June** they are usually halted in the *Western Corridor* (page 209). Here they'll often pause, congregating south of the remaining pools in the Grumeti River's bed, before funnelling north through gaps where the river is dry.

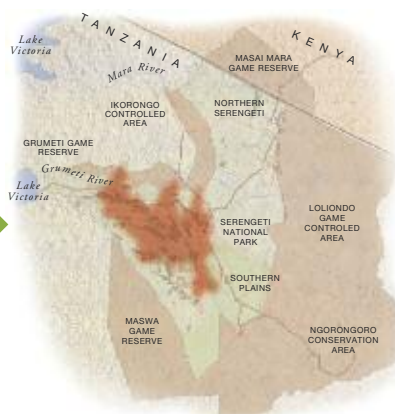
During **July** the herds continue moving across a broad front: some northeast through *Grumeti Reserve* (page 210) and Ikorongo, others north through the heart of the Serengeti National Park. From **August**, the *Northern Serengeti*, including the Lobo area (page 209) sees the migration pass through as the herds head for the far north and Kenya's Maasai Mara – where **September and October** sees them spread out. The fast-flowing Mara River, which flows westwards from the Maasai

Mara into the Serengeti before ending in Lake Victoria, provides the migration's most spectacular obstacle. Animal numbers here often build to an incredible density before wave after wave of panicked and confused crossings ensue: the annual feast for the Mara's large and patient crocodiles.

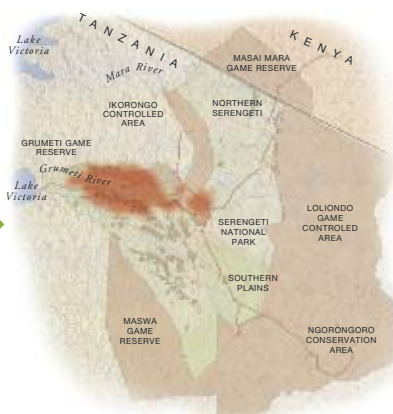
By **November** the herds are again moving with more accord: heading south through *Loliondo Game Controlled Area* (page 211) and back through the Serengeti National Park's Lobo area (page 209). They are returning for the green shoots that follow the rains on the short-grass plains of the *Southern Plains* (page 204), arriving in late **November to December** – when the cycle begins again!



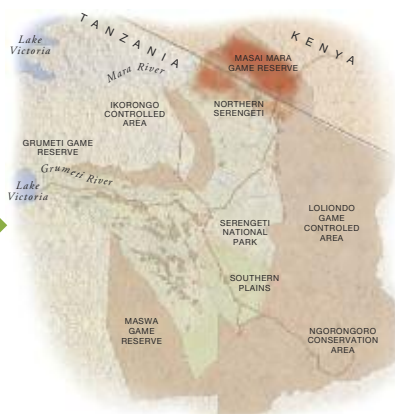
April: the herds gradually begin to move north towards the central Serengeti's *Seronera Area*.



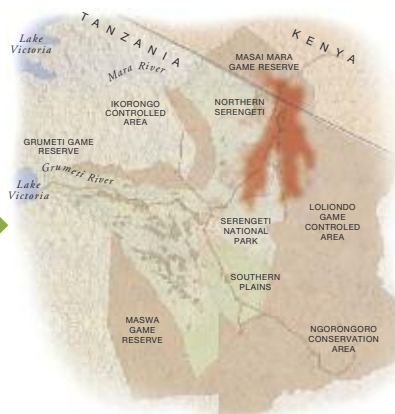
May: the migration is on the move, past the *Seronera Area*, towards the *Western Corridor*.



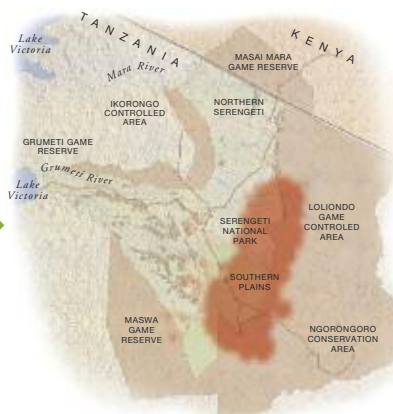
June: the herds gather in the *Western Corridor*, halted briefly by the patchy pools and streams of the Grumeti River.



October: the wildebeest graze on either side of the Mara River, often crossing back and forth.



November: as the rains start in the *Southern Plains*, the herds migrate south through *Loliondo Game Controlled Area*, and the east side of the Serengeti National Park.



December: they arrive back in on the short grasses of the *Southern Plains*, southern *Loliondo Game Controlled Area* and the northern *Ngorongoro Conservation Area*.

The numbers of wildebeest in the migration can reach over 1.4 million

Semi-permanent Camps

There are a number of semi-permanent camps that are lightweight and designed to move. This is to ensure that they are in the best location for the migration at different times of the year. See page 205 for a list of these camps, and then talk to us about which one may suit you at a particular time of the year.



THE WESTERN CORRIDOR

Stretching west, almost to Lake Victoria, the Serengeti narrows into the Western Corridor. Here two rivers, the Grumeti and the Mbalageti, run almost parallel, each supporting a band of moist, evergreen forest.

This area sustains a good permanent game population, including plenty of zebra and wildebeest, all the predators, and also forest 'specialists' like colobus monkeys. The birdlife is particularly varied and the migration passes through between about May and July – pausing before crossing the hazardous, crocodile-filled waters of the Grumeti River into the Grumeti Reserves.

Grumeti River Camp is funky rather than cutting edge, with playful interiors using psychedelic colours. It has ten large, ivory tents under thatch, each with an extravagant bed and comfy chairs; flush toilets are en suite and showers are under the stars.

Grumeti's dining room and relaxed lounge feature moulded concrete and beaten-tin furniture, strewn with cushions and intriguing artefacts. The swimming pool and a bar overlook a river carpeted by emerald water-lettuce.

Mbalageti Camp stands on Mwanyeni Hill. It's a large, high-quality camp with quirky features and commanding views from its outdoor terrace and swimming pool.

It has 14 very ordinary 'standard' or 'lodge' rooms, 24 luxurious tented chalets and two impressive suites. The lodge rooms are simple, but all are en suite and have a veranda. The chalets and suites are much more stylish, constructed of canvas, stone and thatch and including claw-foot baths. Mbalageti's large lounge/dining area is a very comfortable, spacious place to relax.

Kirawira Camp is one of the smallest and smartest of the Serena chain of hotels, and has an imposing hilltop location: on a clear day you can see for miles across the plains of the Western Corridor.

Kirawira's 25 spacious tents are a little dated, but fitted out with quality. Expect silver service, good food and a lovely swimming pool with great views.

Cheetah resting in the bushes in southern Serengeti

NORTHERN SERENGETI

Stretching from north of Seronera to the Kenyan border, the northern Serengeti is gently rolling country, broken by small rivers and occasional hills. There are good permanent populations of wildlife in several areas here.

This part of the park is far from its main entry gate in the south and so receives relatively few visitors. Even when the migration is here, between about August and October, it's still possible to watch spectacular crossings of the Mara River with no other vehicles around. A particularly stunning area is the wild Lamai Wedge – the stretch of land between the Mara River and the Kenyan border. This is also the only part of the national park where off-road driving is allowed.

On the south side of the Grumeti River, west of Lobo, **Migration Camp** makes the most of its elevated position on a kopje. It's a high-quality camp with 20 canvas rooms, raised on individual wooden decks. Each room is spacious and stylish with a fan, well-chosen fabrics and leather furniture. The en-suite bathroom has a good shower, twin washbasins and a flush toilet. The extensive dining and lounge areas are open to the view.

Perched in a superb position between the huge boulders of the lovely Lobo Kopje, **Lobo Wildlife Lodge** is one of a series of formerly government-owned lodges that were built in Tanzania in the 1970s. With 75 functional rooms it's not exclusive, but if you accept that you're just here to sleep and eat mediocre buffet food – then it's good value and a great location.

Close to the Mara River, near the wild Lamai Wedge, is the smart **Sayari Mara Camp**. It has 15 spacious tents, each with stunning views, king-size beds and its own private veranda. The en-suite bathrooms have flush toilets, hot showers and a bathtub. There is also a special honeymoon suite which has a large private deck, and a granite bath with views across the Serengeti. Sayari has excellent resident guides, and works well on a fly-in trip, or as the highlight of a guided safari. It is also one of the few properties in the Serengeti which offers walking safaris and fly-camping.

The newest permanent camp in the north is **Lamai Serengeti**, which opened in June 2011. Standing just south of the Mara River the camp is divided into two parts: Main



Camp has eight tents, whilst the smaller Private Camp has just four (and is booked out exclusively by small groups). The tents combine canvas, plaster and wood to create a very airy, open and natural style. With some of the best views in the Serengeti and high standards of guiding and service, Lamai is already proving very popular.

Serengeti Bushtops has 13 vast tents each sat on a broad deck, with sunken baraza seating, a private dining area, outside shower and a hot-tub. One has been adapted for families, with two tents sharing one platform. It's a smart camp, with a TV in the central area, phones in the rooms and three resident masseuses. The emphasis in this camp is firmly on luxury.

A new permanent camp, **Lemala Kuria Hills**, is due to open in July 2012. A sister camp to Lemala Manyara, Ngorongoro and the seasonal Mara and Nduu camps, this camp looks set to be much more luxurious.

Serengeti Mara Camp, a sister camp to Kigelia in Ruaha (page 186) is currently the only camp situated in the Lamai Wedge, affording it instant access to this stunning area. There are six en-suite tents with bucket showers and flush loos. For guests who have an interest in culture, the camp organises excursions to a village outside the park, Gibaso. A donation of \$10 per person is included in the nightly rate.

The views from Lamai Serengeti are stunning



Saddle-billed stork

GRUMETI RESERVE

The private Singita Grumeti Reserve runs along the north side of the Western Corridor, covering almost 1,500km². Within this are three very different luxury lodges and a mobile camp. All offer a high degree of exclusivity for watching the migration as it journeys north around late-June to August, and all channel profits into local conservation and community-development initiatives.

Set atop Sasakwa Hill with stupendous panoramic views of the plains below, **Sasakwa Lodge** is the grandest of the three properties. Built in the style of an African manor house, it has plush interiors filled with antiques and African objets d'art, broad sweeping verandas and manicured gardens. Ten stylish air-conditioned 'cottages' each have their own infinity plunge pool. Aside from the fabulous central infinity pool, a small gymnasium, a spa area, tennis courts (clay and all weather), a billiards room and a lounge,

The views from Sasakwa's pool are mesmerising

Sasakwa offers 4WD safaris and top-class horse-riding safaris.

Sabora Tented Camp is a beautiful, 1920s style tented camp set out on the plains. The main tent is filled with Persian rugs, 'campaign furniture' pieces and interesting antiques. Each of its nine air-conditioned tents has a four-poster bed, a wardrobe and bureau, and velvet curtains – as well as an en-suite toilet and outdoor shower. There are three library lounges, and a central swimming pool and tennis court. When the migration passes through, wildebeest and zebra surround this camp – both a marvellous wildlife sight and a phenomenally noisy affair!

Faru Faru Lodge's nine river-stone, canvas and glass suites have expansive mirrored room dividers and huge picture windows that look down onto a permanent waterhole. The Grumeti River, which changes from sand to fast-flowing water depending on the season, passes very close by, and in the dry season guided walks take place here. Faru Faru is a great



The migration passes through the Grumeti Reserve in June and July

camp, especially if you love minimalist modern design.

Singita Explore is a new tented operation within the Grumeti Reserve. It offers very comfortable fly-camping in large walk-in tents and allows you the chance to experience some of the more remote locations within the reserve.



LOLIONDO GAME CONTROLLED AREA

East of the Serengeti National Park, between the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and the Kenyan border, the area known as Loliondo Game Controlled Area belongs to the Maasai tribes who live there. The western side of Loliondo, beside the park, is very much part of the Serengeti's ecosystem. It has plenty of resident game and also hosts the migration – from about October in the north, through to February–March on its southern plains. There are several camps here which, being outside the national park, can offer night drives and walks (often using Maasai guides), as well as optional visits to local Maasai villages.

Overlooking the national park from a perch on the rocky Kuka Hills, **Klein's Camp** is a permanent luxury lodge set in its own 100km² wilderness concession within Loliondo. It's an upmarket lodge, beautifully styled with attentive service. The ten rock-and-thatch cottages all enjoy immaculate facilities and great views from private verandas. There's a cosy, open-sided lounge-bar for sunset drinks or lazy afternoon card games, an elegant dining room and a swimming pool. With excellent permanent game in this area, activities focus on 4WD and walking safaris, with night drives and trips to visit a Maasai village also available.

Buffalo Luxury Camp is a permanent tented camp with 15 suites, and five smaller chalets, on the north side of Loliondo. The suites are smart and quirky, with dark leather armchairs, animal skin cushions, recycled aluminium beds, and unique wooden lampshades. The chalets are more rustic and have lots of character – and we prefer them! The central areas have stunning views towards the Serengeti, and the manager has set up some easels and paints should anyone be inspired by the view!

Tented camps in Loliondo

Like the semi-permanent camps in the Serengeti (see page 205), there are also a few very comfortable tented camps in Loliondo that move seasonally. You will often stay at these with your own private vehicle and guide, who will lead all your activities, and the camps also have close links with the Maasai communities.

Nduara Loliondo Camp moves twice during the year: from June to December it is located in the north of Loliondo near

Ololosokwan village; then from December to around May it is in southern Loliondo, in the Piaya area.

The six tents at Nduara incorporate elements of a traditional Maasai boma and a Mongolian 'yurt'. These yurts are quite stylish: large, round structures with holes in the centre of their roofs. The interior design is an unusual mix of brightly coloured fabrics and animal skin. It looks contemporary and interesting, whilst avoiding being gaudy. Nduara's beds are very comfortable, and each yurt has an eco-flush toilet (with proper seat) and hot bucket shower. Activities include full-day safaris, enlightening excursions to a nearby Maasai village, safari walks and night drives. This is now the only tented camp that operates in northern Loliondo between June and December.

Also in the Piaya area, between December and March, we can recommend **Piyaya Camp**. This camp is designed to move much more often than the semi-permanent camps, so is simpler in structure, yet still very comfortable, with spacious walk-in safari tents, a central mess tent and good-quality food and service.

SERENGETI WALKING MOBILE CAMPS

Currently only part of the Serengeti National Park is easily accessible; large tracts of it contain no public roads. A few of these undeveloped sections have been designated as 'wilderness areas', where only walking safaris are allowed. There are no permanent camps in these areas, so visitors stay in simple, temporary fly-camps – using small dome tents with mattresses. A basic mess tent for dining, separate shared tents nearby for a short-drop loo and a bucket shower, and a hospitable campfire complete the camp. Each **Serengeti Walking Mobile Camp** is exclusive, so you'll generally drive into camp using a private access track – in a vehicle with an experienced walking guide, a chef and a camp assistant or two.

Currently there are two wilderness areas we use for walking: *Kilimafeza*, north-east of Seronera; and *Western Kogatende* with 20km of riverfront on the south side of the Mara River. We usually recommend Kilimafeza from December to May, and Western Kogatende from June to November – with a proviso that the grass can be very high here before the migration passes through. The camp becomes your



base for days spent exploring on foot, and as these areas are vast you are unlikely to see anyone else. Talk to us about incorporating a Serengeti Walking Mobile Camp into your safari, as exploring on foot with your guide is an unforgettable way to experience the Serengeti.

SERENGETI PRIVATE MOBILE CAMPS

These small camps are almost identical to the Serengeti Walking Mobile Camps described above – using canvas dome tents and having a shared bucket shower, short-drop toilet, dining area and campfire – but they are set up in areas where only driving is allowed. These camps are private, too, which means that yours will have its own chef, guides and vehicles. Note, however, that sometimes the campsite will be shared with another private group, using a separate staffed mobile camp.

These **Serengeti Private Mobile Camps** can also be moved into one of the walking concessions to become a Walking Mobile Camp – giving great flexibility if you like this style of travel. They can even be located at sites in Lake Manyara National Park, Tarangire National Park or the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, though if you want your mobile camp to move between parks, then we'd normally include a few nights between at a lodge, so that the camp team has time to make the move.

Mobile camps can be packed up and moved in one day



Female hyenas weigh more than male hyenas