



**BIRDING TOURS TANZANIA:
GENERAL INFORMATION**



Yellow-collared Lovebird, an attractive Tanzanian endemic.

Preparing for your Tanzania birding tour

Step out into the vast open plains that dominate much of Tanzania and you suddenly feel very, very small. And so you should. You've just joined one of the largest, wildest animal populations in the world. Wildebeest, monkeys, big cats, and crocodiles might be encountered as we search for birds.

You will find that Tanzania's people are so very friendly, despite the poverty experienced by the majority of the country's inhabitants.

On our "Introduction to Africa" tour we visit the touristy north, which has a good infrastructure. On our 19-day tour in addition to the north we also go "off the beaten track" to find the endemics and specials of the mountains to the south. It is important to note that almost a third of this tour is in remote areas, sometimes with basic accommodation. If you are joining the extension to Pemba, then you can experience a little time in a tropical paradise.

DOCUMENTS

Please have your passports and air tickets handy on arrival. Visas are required by all and can be obtained on arrival in Tanzania. If you choose to get your visa on arrival, just complete the visa form/card at the immigration desk, pay cash (USD or EUR), and there you go. We recommend you also keep a photocopy of the important pages of your passport in a safe place in case of loss. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is now required for Tanzania and recommended for all of East Africa. Please also bring your travel insurance certificate. Kindly ensure you have visas for other countries in which you may be overnighing en route.

MANDATORY GOVERNMENT TRAVEL INSURANCE

All foreign visitors entering Mainland Tanzania are required to have valid Inbound Travel Insurance. The insurance costs USD 44 per adult (with discounts for children) and covers emergency medical treatment, medical evacuation, repatriation, and loss of luggage, for up to 92 days. Visitors arriving in Mainland Tanzania should obtain the insurance through the official National Insurance Corporation (NIC) portal **before travelling** or upon arrival. Visitors arriving in Zanzibar first should obtain the Zanzibar Inbound Travel Insurance instead. Please retain a copy of your insurance certificate for verification. Click [here](#) to apply for Tanzania inbound travel insurance.

ARRIVAL

It is recommended to try to get near the front exit of your aircraft on arrival, so you do not end up at the back of a queue. The time taken to pass immigration with or without a pre-arranged visa is usually similar. On arrival look for a driver with a Birding Ecotours sign.

MONEY AND BANKING

Each East African country has a different currency, but most tourist services also accept US dollars and euros. If you do have US dollars you need to ensure that the notes are recent, as older notes are viewed with suspicion and may not be accepted. All USD bills should have been printed or issued after the year 2006.

Currency is TZS (Tanzanian Shillings).

Cash is obtainable at ATMs in most major towns en route, and there are exchange bureaus in the main cities and airports. Traveler's Checks/Cheques are not accepted/used these days and exchanging them is only generally possible at a few private bureaus. Some hotels will exchange cash too, but often at poor rates. VISA and MasterCard are widely accepted and can be used for drawing local cash.

Credit Cards are accepted at many tourist shops and at many hotels (for souvenirs, laundry, drinks, etc.).

TIPPING

In East Africa wages are low, and tips are generally very welcome (but not compulsory of course). Tips and gratuities are not part of the package price of our tours, so should a guest/client wish to give a tip to the driver and guides at the end of the trip or to individual crew at the accommodations it is received with thanks. Many lodges will have a tip box for all. However, there is no obligation to tip anyone.

Below is a sample tipping scheme as a guideline

Airport/hotel/lodge porter: USD2 or TZS5,200

Room attendant: USD2 or TZS5,200

Safari Driver/Guide/Tour Leader: many people give about USD5 per day, but the amounts vary greatly. A lot of people tip nothing and that is also OK.

Site guide (if any): USD10 or TZS26,000

Quite often an entire group will tip USD5-30 per day for the driver and for the guide.

We only give these tipping guidelines because most people ask us to provide them – not because anything is expected.

COMMUNICATIONS

Cell phones/mobile Phones are now very common throughout East Africa. They even work in the middle of remote reserves such as the Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Crater.

This is a round-up of the bands available in the country Tanzania: GSM 900 and 1800 MHz; Limited 3G in Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Moshi

WEATHER

Weather patterns have become noticeably unpredictable in recent years, so the information below is just a vague overview of the seasonality of the region; it rains when it traditionally shouldn't and sometimes doesn't rain when it is expected...

January to March: dry season

April and May: short to long rains but not usually a problem, and these are two of the very best months for the wildebeest migration.

June to September: dry season

October to November: short rains

December: dry season

The rainy seasons can give a false impression; even in these seasons rains are not constant and might generally fall in short or consist of heavy showers in the late afternoon or evening, if at all. In the rainy season it usually rains at night or around dawn (of course, this is tough to predict, though, especially with the climate change that East Africa seems to have experienced recently – which affects the timing of the wildebeest migration profoundly).

On our tours there are big changes in altitude, and the higher you get, the more likely it is that rain will occur, and the temperature will also drop with altitude of course. In the highland areas rain is more frequent and can fall at any time. The Ngorongoro Highlands and the Usambara Mountains are good examples.

A lot of East Africa is quite high in altitude (Ngorongoro is at 2700 meters or almost 9000 feet, Arusha is at 1400 meters or over 4000 feet, etc.). This means it is often cooler than most people expect in Tanzania, especially in the evenings (daytime average: 18-26 °C or 78 °F, sometimes dropping a lot at night).

ELECTRICITY

Electricity is 230-240V, 50Hz throughout the region. Tanzania usually uses three-square-pin plugs (UK), but a three-round-pin plug is also used, ITA type G/D.

Power cuts (outages) are common, and several hotels have generators to counter this. The voltage can surge, so we would advise against using sensitive equipment whenever possible.

LAUNDRY AND LUGGAGE

There are laundry services at most of the larger hotels. Laundry can often be done on the same day if handed in early in the morning. It is of course best arranged at hotels where there are two-night stays. Small accommodations in the remote countryside may not have laundry services at all.

We ask all participants to try and keep their luggage to a minimum, as the luggage space in the vehicles is not large, at least when the tour is full or nearly full (5 or more participants). We also strongly recommend soft-sided bags/duffle bags, if possible.

Don't bring anything that you would mind getting dusty.

WHAT TO BRING

Clothing

You will need a range of clothes to suit the temperature and weather conditions mentioned above. Stout walking shoes or boots are recommended, although sneakers/trainers are perfectly adequate except in the dewy mornings or in damp or thorny areas. A sweater and/or a fleece are recommended for the cool early mornings and evenings, and light rainwear in case of rain. Otherwise a selection of long sleeved and T-shirts and shorts and long trousers/pants are advised, as well as a hat for protection against the sun.

Medicines and toiletries

Please remember to bring your regular medications, if any, and your personal toiletries, and we usually recommend putting an adequate supply in your hand luggage in case of loss/delay of luggage. Do not forget your malaria tablets.

Optics

We recommend that everyone bring their own binoculars. Spotting scopes are optional, and not required for most of the time, and are a matter of personal choice. There will be many photographic opportunities, and a lot of mammals can be captured using a “point and shoot” camera. Many birds also allow close approach in Tanzania but of course if you’re a serious bird photographer you’ll need a decent camera! We would recommend that you bring equipment to keep your optics clean, as Tanzania gets dusty, especially in the game parks.

The light in this part of Africa is fabulous for photography in the hours after dawn and before sunset; the light becomes “harder” during the middle of the day as the sun approaches and passes its zenith. You might consider bringing some of the below photographic equipment:

A good telephoto lens - 300mm should be sufficient, unless a professional 500mm is a choice for you.

Suitable filters. UV filters are very useful.

Basic cleaning materials.

A protective lightweight bag – the biggest problems are dust and bumpy roads. Rain might also be a problem.

Sufficient Memory cards (available in main centers and some lodges, but the choice may be limited and quite costly).

FIELD GUIDES

Birds

Please see [here](#) (scroll down to East Africa) for field guides and apps.

Mammals

The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals (Princeton Field Guides) is recommended. This guide book is simply one of the best regional mammal guide books in existence. There is a pocket version of this guide, which is very good, as is the larger (but nevertheless not massive) standard version.

HEALTH

There are several potential health risks that you need to be aware of. Most are preventable by vaccination, protection against insect bites, and drinking bottled water while on tour. Please read CDC advice [here](#) carefully.

Being on the equator, the sun is very strong. This is exacerbated by the fact that a majority of East Africa is very high above sea level. This means that sunburn occurs very quickly, even when it feels cool or is overcast. The best prevention of sunburn (and sunstroke) is to keep your skin covered and to treat exposed areas of skin with sun block (SPF 30 minimally). A hat is a sensible precaution, especially in the middle of the day. The light can be very bright, so we advise wearing sunglasses whenever possible.

SAFETY

The majority of visitors to East Africa have a trouble-free time, but there are various dangers, mostly from people. The guidelines below list these dangers. All are rare but should always be borne in mind. A majority of East Africans are friendly and open, and they are accustomed to tourists, and none of the situations below has ever occurred on our tours.

Robbery

This is unlikely to occur in a group situation. However, care should be taken when walking alone. Most hotels have their own compounds and security guards, so you should be safe within their grounds. If someone intent on robbery approaches you, do not attempt to resist. Avoid wearing jewelry and other displays of wealth and remember that you are in a poor country. Do not venture outside the hotel, especially at night, unless with the group. The locals generally abhor thieves.

Carjacking

This occurs sometimes in Dar es Salaam and is usually aimed at single people driving expensive new vehicles and therefore very unlikely to occur (and never has) on a guided tour.

Terrorism

The risk of being involved in a terrorist incident is extremely low, especially since the majority of the time on tour will be in remote places – but terrorism has unfortunately become a worldwide phenomenon.

Inter-tribal conflicts and political rallies

These are not uncommon and are not aimed at tourists, so are generally of little concern. They break out sporadically, usually involving cattle-rustling, and they die down fairly quickly. During the tour the leaders and drivers keep themselves informed of anything that might prove dangerous, and they would alter the itinerary to suit. We obviously avoid any political rallies (if any) on the route.

Large animals

There are obvious dangers with megafauna, but you are unlikely to come into close contact with them, except from the safety of vehicles. However, hippos do graze on some lodge ground lawns at night. Avoid getting between these animals and the water.

The lodges on the crater rim at Ngorongoro have old, lonely elephant bulls, and buffalos can lurk on the hotel grounds - do avoid getting between them and the rooms and do accept the assistance of a guard to escort you to your room at night!

Also, do not venture too close to water – here, crocodiles wait for food.

We also visit forest areas which hold elephant, lion, leopard and buffalo, so stay close to the leaders and follow their advice if they sense any presence (uncommon – these animals certainly do try to avoid people where possible).

Baboons are quite common on lodge grounds and can be a menace; they should be avoided wherever possible. Always keep your lodge doors closed.

Small animals

Vervet monkeys are not uncommon and are fairly fearless, although they will generally keep out of your way unless food is about. They can and do bite, though, so don't be tempted to offer them food, however cute they look.

Snakes are unlikely to be seen, as they can sense your approach some distance away, but try to be aware of where you step. They will not usually bite unless trodden on or cornered; adders sometimes do not move, even if they sense your vibrations.

Scorpions are unlikely to be seen unless you go turning over stones, but there is a very small possibility that you might see one at night. It is a sensible precaution to store your footwear above ground level and to shake it out before putting it on, as scorpions will see a shoe on its side on the ground as a nice hiding place.

Spiders are also unlikely to be seen or to be a danger. But do be aware. In general most people are surprised by how few insects and other invertebrates they see.

DELAYS AND ANNOYANCES

East Africa is third world, so do not expect the same services you receive at home. You are also traveling well away from towns, and a birding safari should be viewed as an adventure.

Road conditions can be poor, and this takes its toll on vehicles. Punctures are common.

All this, along with various local bureaucracies, can cause delays. Obviously, we do our best to minimize these, and most tours go smoothly.

BEGGING AND GIVING MONEY

East Africa is not a wealthy region. In towns and cities visitors may come across people genuinely asking for money or other items. While the giving of money is a matter of personal preference or conscience, in our opinion it is best to give a donation to a proper charitable entity, as opposed to freely giving cash to individuals. Please ask your tour leader/guide where it is accepted to give a donation or money.

FITNESS

This tour is fairly easy-going apart from a handful of days.

Should you have any fitness problems please consult your doctor before travel. Also note that participation in any day's events is purely optional, with the obvious exception of days when activities take place en route from one location to another. Should you not be willing to participate in any tour activity let your guide know about this the evening before. This is *your* holiday!

THE DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

Typically (but not a hard and fast rule by any means) each day will often begin with either an optional bird walk in the hotel grounds at say 6/6:30, followed by a 7:00–8:30 birding session. Sometimes an early breakfast is indicated when we hope to get moving by 7:00 or so. In most forest areas we will opt for the early breakfast and hope to start birding by 7:30, as prior to this the birds don't move much, as it is dark in the understory. Daylight hours are around 6:30–19:00, and for safety reasons we try to avoid driving after dark wherever possible. Due to park regulations we do not drive before 6:30 and after 18:30 in the parks.

ACCOMMODATIONS, MEALS AND DRINKS

Accommodations are generally good (but that is always relative); generally we of course try to provide en suite bathrooms. Accommodations have been carefully selected as the best for birding and big game opportunities for the tour.

Electricity is unreliable in Tanzania.

The exact times of arrival and departure at the lodges usually depend on how good the birding is before departure from an area.

All meals are included on our tours. Bottled water is provided in the vehicle. If you buy bottled water or other drinks at mealtimes it is for your own account.

Tap water is untreated and not safe to drink. Avoid drinking running piped water in the hotel rooms or tents. To avoid traveler's diarrhea fruit and vegetables should be peeled before consumption and beware of salads.

CHANGE OF ACCOMMODATIONS

During the months of December–March and July–September, the peak tourist visiting seasons, it may be difficult to get reservations at the accommodations mentioned in the itinerary. Thus we sometimes will have to book into the next-best available accommodation in the same range as the one originally planned and listed in the itinerary.

Unfortunately hotels may be overbooked or temporarily closed following a decline in tourism traffic or due to seasonal upgrading (often in the low tourism season when we run our birding tours). We thus sometimes are, again, forced to change accommodations.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Participation in this tour is subject to the standard terms and conditions shown [here](#).

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

If you experience any problem on the tour, please speak to the tour leader/guide immediately. Usually the problem can be fixed fast (we are usually able to do magic). It's better to tell us immediately as we prefer to solve potential problems as they occur.

PARK REGULATIONS, ETC.

On tour, please do respect the authority of the guide/tour leader concerning national park regulations, local government laws, and social/cultural lives of the people of East Africa.

Conservation is very important to us. Our small groups help minimize disturbance, and we ask all participants to leave the environment as they found it, for others to enjoy. Our drivers are trained to do their utmost to minimize damage to the environment by vehicles, and they will always work within eco-guidelines and according to the national park regulations.

LANGUAGE

English and Swahili are Tanzania's official languages.