

Eden House
59 Fulham High Street
London SW6 3JJ
ENGLAND



Tel +44 (0) 20 7471 8780
Fax +44 (0) 20 7384 9549
info@tanzaniaodyssey.com
www.tanzaniaodyssey.com

Ngorongoro Crater

The famous Ngorongoro Crater, the world's largest intact caldera, is in an exceptional geographical position, forming a spectacular bowl of about 265km² with sides up to 600m deep. This is the stalking ground of around 20,000 to 30,000 wild animals at any one time, the most densely packed concentration of wildlife in Africa. The Crater floor's environments include grassland, swamps, lerai forest (small patches of forest made up of yellow-barked acacia or 'yellow fever tree'), and Lake Makat, a central soda lake filled by the Munge river. These habitats attract all kinds of wildlife to drink, wallow, graze or hide, and although the animals are free to move in and out of this contained environment, the rich volcanic soil, lush forests and spring-fed lakes on the crater floor incline both grazers and predators to remain. The crater thus holds an astonishing microcosm of East African wildlife within its boundaries. As such, it has achieved renown as the 'eighth wonder of the world', and attracts a growing number of visitors: even if time is limited this natural but accessibly small caldera ensures a rewarding safari. Ngorongoro Crater is one of the areas in Tanzania where you are most likely to see the endangered Black Rhino: a small population is thriving in this idyllic and protected environment—one of the very few areas where they continue to breed in the wild.

However, the popularity of the Crater is creating problems that need to be addressed, as the number of vehicles allowed to cruise its overused paths at any one time continues to increase, and visitors are finding their experience marred by crowding during peak season. It is a shame, because the location has much more to offer: many tourists who come to enjoy a wildlife safari in the Crater overlook the possibilities for walking and exploring in the stunning highlands and smaller craters also included in the conservation area.

When viewed from above the Crater looks vast, with herds of buffalo or elephant reduced to the size of ants. It is an amazing feeling to gaze down from any of the lookouts or strategically placed lodges and campsites on the crater rim and see the complex and numerous lives going on 2,400 ft below. The sensation is one of elemental elevation, a godly perspective that warps all sense of size. But a cunning reverse-Tardis effect takes place as you enter: the famous crater feels surprisingly small once inside, and one day is quite sufficient to drive around. Its size means that you are likely to encounter many other vehicles, and the strict opening hours of the descent road, 7am–4pm, can give the safari experience in the crater a somewhat constricted feel.