SAFARI-TZ.COM
All Tanzania & Zanzibar Bookings

COMPLIMENTARY GUIDE · LEAD-CAPTURE ASSET

The First-Time Tanzania Safari Planner

Your step-by-step guide to a safari that actually delivers — without getting lost in the noise

Most first-time safari planning goes wrong in predictable ways. This guide walks you through the four big decisions in order, gives you realistic itineraries, and shows you the ten questions to ask before you give any operator your credit card. Written by people who actually operate the trips, not resell them.

By the safari-tz.com team · *35 years of safari operations*

FIRST-TIME PLANNER · STEP-BY-STEP

2026

safari-tz.com · +255 740 666 662 · info@safari-tz.com

TATO-REGISTERED ARUSHA OPERATOR · SAFARI OPERATIONS SINCE 1991

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

How most first-time safari planning goes wrong

After 35 years of operating safaris in Tanzania, we see the same three first-time planning mistakes over and over. They are predictable and preventable. If you avoid them, you start your trip with a better itinerary, a better operator, and a better understanding of what to expect on the ground.

01

Booking too late — and getting the leftovers

Peak-window trips (July through October, plus Christmas/New Year) book out 9-12 months ahead. The good lodges in the Northern Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater rim fill up first. By the time most first-timers start serious planning (3-4 months out), the better camps are gone. You end up with whatever's left — which is rarely what you'd have chosen if the full menu was available.

02

Booking through a platform that resells your details

Type "Tanzania safari" into Google and the top results are aggregator platforms — SafariBookings, TourRadar, and similar. They are not operators. They collect your contact details, sell them to 20 operators who bid for your business, and take a 15-25% commission off the top. You get spammed for weeks. The operators bidding on you are cutting corners to pay the platform fee. The actual trip is more expensive and lower quality than booking direct.

03

Over-itinerizing — visiting too many parks, burning out

First-timers often try to cram Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Ngorongoro, Serengeti, AND Selous into 8 days. The result is 6-8 hour drive days, rushed game viewing, and a trip that feels exhausting instead of transformative. Two-to-three parks at a sensible pace beats five parks at a sprint, every time. Quality of time on the ground matters more than the number of pins on the map.

THE THESIS OF THIS GUIDE

Plan in order. One decision at a time.

The four big decisions — when, how long, where, and what style — should be made in that order, not all at once. Trying to lock down everything simultaneously is what makes first-time planning feel overwhelming. Make them one at a time, and the trip plans itself.

© 2026 safari-tz.com · Arusha, Tanzania · TATO-registered since 1991

THE PLANNING TIMELINE

When to start planning — and what to do when

The honest answer to "when should I start planning a Tanzania safari?" depends on when you want to travel. Peak Migration crossings (July–October) and Christmas/New Year need 9–12 months. Calving season (January–February) needs 6–9 months. Green-season trips (March–May, November) can book on 2–3 months. Use the timeline below as your anchor.

12+ months out	Decide the rough month. Block the calendar. Start saving for the deposit (typically 30% at booking).
9-10 months out	Talk to 2-3 direct operators. Get tailored proposals (not platform quotes). Compare itineraries, vehicles, guides. Pay the deposit on your chosen operator.
6-9 months out	Book international flights. Buy travel insurance. Start vaccination conversations with your doctor (yellow fever, malaria, hepatitis updates).
3-6 months out	Apply for your Tanzania eVisa at visa.immigration.go.tz. Confirm internal Tanzania flights (if doing fly-in). Confirm Zanzibar add-on (if any).
2-3 months out	Pay the final balance to your operator. Receive detailed day-by-day itinerary. Confirm guide name, vehicle, and pickup logistics.
4-6 weeks out	Final medical checks. Pick up prescriptions. Start training if you've added Kilimanjaro. Pack 2 weeks out (don't leave it to the night before).
1-2 weeks out	Confirm flights, transfers, and arrival window with your operator. Print copies of all documents (passport, visa, insurance, yellow fever).

BOOKING REALITY

Peak-window camps fill 12+ months ahead

If you want to see the Mara River crossings in August, the camps in Kogatende and Lamai start filling for that window in September of the previous year. The best ones (Sayari, Sanctuary Kichakani, Serian's Lamai) are typically booked by January. If your dream trip involves specific camps, talk to an operator before you've fully locked your dates — they can flag what's still available and help you decide.

© 2026 safari-tz.com · Arusha, Tanzania · TATO-registered since 1991

THE FOUR BIG DECISIONS

In order: when, how long, where, what style

Make these four decisions in this order. Trying to settle all four at once is what makes planning feel impossible. Settle the first, then the second falls into place, then the third, then the fourth.

01

WHEN — Migration phase + weather

Tanzania has two dry seasons (June–October, December–February) and two wet seasons (March–May, November). Dry seasons are peak — best game viewing, most expensive, most crowded. Wet seasons are quieter, greener, cheaper, with harder driving conditions. If you want the Mara River crossings, July–October. If you want calving, January–February. If you want quiet and value, March–May or November.

02

HOW LONG — 5, 7, or 10+ days

5 days is the floor: arrive Arusha, three game days, depart. Tight but workable. 7 days is the sweet spot: includes Ngorongoro Crater and 3-4 Serengeti days at a comfortable pace. 10+ days lets you add Zanzibar, or a Kilimanjaro climb, or a deeper Northern Circuit visit. More than 14 days starts hitting fatigue diminishing returns for most first-timers.

03

WHERE — Northern Circuit vs Southern Circuit

Northern Circuit (Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tarangire, Lake Manyara) — world-famous, well-developed lodge infrastructure, Migration access, 95% of first-time safari demand. Southern Circuit (Nyerere/Selous, Ruaha) — wilder, less crowded, larger reserves, walking safaris allowed, no Migration. First-timers usually do Northern. Second-time visitors often do Southern.

04

WHAT STYLE — Budget, Mid-range, or Luxury

Budget safaris ($150-250/person/night, basic tented camps or guest houses, shared facilities, dependable but no frills). Mid-range ($350-500/person/night, permanent tented camps or comfortable lodges, full board, ensuite bathrooms, hot water). Luxury ($800-2,000+/person/night, exclusive camps, private guides, exceptional food, sometimes private vehicles). Most first-timers find mid-range the sweet spot — comfortable without ostentation.

© 2026 safari-tz.com · Arusha, Tanzania · TATO-registered since 1991

+255 740 666 662 · info@safari-tz.com

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

What a 5, 7, and 10-day trip actually looks like

Real itineraries with real drive times. Tanzania is bigger than it looks on a map and the road conditions outside main towns slow everything down. The pacing below reflects what we actually deliver, not what marketing copy promises.

5-Day Express — Northern Circuit Core

Day 1	Arrive Kilimanjaro Airport (JRO). Transfer to Arusha (~1hr). Overnight Arusha hotel.
Day 2	Arusha → Tarangire (2.5hr drive). Afternoon game drive. Overnight Tarangire.
Day 3	Tarangire → Ngorongoro Crater (3hr drive). Afternoon Ngorongoro highlands. Overnight crater rim.
Day 4	Full-day Ngorongoro Crater descent. Wildlife at peak density. Overnight crater rim.
Day 5	Crater → Arusha (3.5hr drive). Lunch + transfer to JRO. Depart.

7-Day Classic — Northern Circuit Sweet Spot

Day 1	Arrive JRO. Transfer Arusha. Overnight Arusha.
Day 2	Arusha → Tarangire (2.5hr). Afternoon drive. Overnight Tarangire.
Day 3	Tarangire → Karatu (2hr). Overnight Karatu lodge near crater entrance.
Day 4	Ngorongoro Crater full day. Overnight Karatu.
Day 5	Karatu → Central Serengeti (5hr drive, or 1hr fly). Afternoon drive. Overnight Seronera.
Day 6	Full-day Serengeti game drives. Overnight Seronera.
Day 7	Morning drive. Fly Serengeti → JRO. Depart.

10-Day Combo — Northern Circuit + Zanzibar

Days 1-7	As 7-day Classic above.
Day 8	Fly Serengeti → Zanzibar (ZNZ). Transfer to north coast. Beach.
Day 9	Stone Town day trip + spice tour. Overnight north coast.
Day 10	Beach morning. Fly ZNZ → home (often via Doha, Dubai, Nairobi).

© 2026 safari-tz.com · Arusha, Tanzania · TATO-registered since 1991

+255 740 666 662 · info@safari-tz.com

WHAT A REALISTIC BUDGET LOOKS LIKE

The cost framework — what drives the price

We have a separate Cost Breakdown guide that walks through specific 2026 figures (park fees, accommodation tiers, vehicle costs, operator margin). This page gives you the framework. A Tanzania safari has five main cost layers, in roughly this order of significance.

01 · Accommodation — the biggest single driver

Where you sleep is the biggest variable in the total cost. The same exact itinerary at budget tier ($150-250/pp/night) vs luxury ($800-2,000+/pp/night) can be 5-10x different in total price. Most first-timers find mid-range the right balance — comfortable tented camps with ensuite bathrooms, full board, professional service, without the extreme premium of luxury exclusives.

02 · Park fees — non-negotiable government layer

Tanzania's parks charge entry fees per person per 24 hours, plus a separate vehicle fee, plus VAT. For non-resident adults, expect $60-83 per person per day depending on park. These pass through unchanged — no operator can discount them. A 7-day safari with 5 park days = roughly $400-500 per person in park fees alone.

03 · Vehicle + guide + fuel

A custom 4x4 Land Cruiser with pop-up roof, professional guide, and fuel runs roughly $300-450/day operational cost. This cost is fixed regardless of group size — which is why a couple pays significantly more per person than a family of four sharing one vehicle. Group size is the single biggest lever you have on per-person cost.

04 · Internal flights (if using)

Fly-in safaris (Cessna Caravan flights from Arusha to Serengeti bush airstrips and back) typically run $400-600 per person per leg. Trade-off: saves hours of driving on rough roads but adds significant cost. Most 7-day Northern Circuit trips fly one leg (out or back) and drive the other. Fly-in fly-out doubles the flight cost.

05 · Operator margin — the layer nobody discusses

Legitimate operators run 15-25% margin on safaris. Below 10% is unsustainable (corner-cutting incoming). Above 35% means platform markup. Direct booking with an Arusha operator typically saves you 15-20% vs the same trip booked through a SafariBookings-style aggregator.

© 2026 safari-tz.com · Arusha, Tanzania · TATO-registered since 1991

+255 740 666 662 · info@safari-tz.com

VETTING AN OPERATOR

Ten questions to ask before you give anyone your credit card

These ten questions filter out the platform tier, the resellers, and the corner-cutters. A legitimate Tanzania operator will answer all ten without hesitation. If they hedge, redirect, or refuse to answer any of these, walk away.

01 Are you TATO-registered?

The Tanzania Association of Tour Operators is the industry licensing body. If they're not on the TATO register, they're operating outside the legitimate market. Verifiable at tatotz.org.

02 Who is my actual guide — by name?

Real operators name their guides. Resellers and platforms can't, because they don't know yet who they'll subcontract to. The named guide is the trip's quality anchor.

03 What vehicle will I be in?

Custom 4x4 Land Cruiser with pop-up roof is the standard. Minibuses, regular SUVs, or 'whatever's available' are red flags.

04 Are park fees included in your quote or extra?

Honest quotes include park fees explicitly. Hidden-fee operators quote low to win the booking, then add park fees later. Ask for an itemized quote.

05 What's the group size?

Private safaris should mean just your party. 'Small group' often means 6-8 strangers sharing a vehicle. Clarify before you commit.

06 Are you the operator, or do you resell?

Aggregator platforms (SafariBookings, TourRadar, Booking.com safari section) are resellers. Real operators run their own vehicles and employ their own guides.

07 What happens if I need medical evacuation?

Flying Doctors Society coverage is standard with any legitimate Tanzania operator. If they don't include it or recommend it, that's a serious gap.

08 What's the deposit and refund policy?

Industry standard: 30% deposit at booking, refund minus admin fee if cancelled 60+ days out. Non-refundable deposits or vague policies are warnings.

09 Can I talk to recent clients?

Real operators have repeat clients happy to vouch. Resellers and scammers don't. References should be available on request.

10 How long have you been operating in Tanzania?

Tanzania safari operation requires deep local knowledge. New operators (under 5 years) may be fine, but 10+ years means they've survived multiple bad seasons.

FOR THE RECORD — HOW WE ANSWER THESE

safari-tz.com is happy to answer all ten before you book

TATO-registered. Named guides: Geoffrey Komba, William Mwasimba, Isaac Munuo. Custom 4x4 Land Cruisers with pop-up roofs. Park fees itemized in every quote. Private safaris are private — no group sharing. We operate our own vehicles. Flying Doctors coverage available. 30% deposit, refund policy in writing. Client references on request. Operating in Tanzania since 1991 — 35 years.

READY TO START PLANNING?

Book direct with the team that's answered these questions for 35 years

If this planner has helped you think through the four big decisions — when, how long, where, and what style — the next step is talking to an operator who can turn those decisions into a tailored proposal. We do not run group departures. We do not buy your details from platforms. Every trip we operate is built around the specific dates, interests, and budget of one client party.

Send us your dates and your answers to the four decisions (even rough answers are fine — we'll help you refine them). You'll get a tailored proposal back within 24 hours, with itemized costs, named guides, and a real human on the other end of the conversation.

SEND US YOUR DATES — WE'LL TAKE IT FROM THERE

A tailored proposal within 24 hours.

No platform markup. No agent fees. No group sharing.

WEBSITE
safari-tz.com

WHATSAPP / PHONE
+255 740 666 662

EMAIL
info@safari-tz.com

TATO-registered Arusha operator since 1991 · 35 years of safari operations · Named lead guides: Geoffrey Komba, William Mwasimba, Isaac Munuo