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The Complete Tanzania Safari Planning Guide 2026

Plan your safari with confidence — destinations, costs, timing, and what to expect

Produced by safari-tz.com
Arusha, Tanzania
Operating since 1991 · TATO Registered

2026

CHAPTER 1

Best Time to Visit Tanzania

Tanzania's wildlife calendar is one of the most dynamic on Earth. Knowing when to go is the single biggest factor in determining what you'll see — and what you'll pay. The good news: there is no genuinely bad time to visit Tanzania. Every season has a different offer.

The Dry Season (June – October)

This is peak safari season, and for good reason. Vegetation thins, animals concentrate around permanent water sources, and dust-free skies give you outstanding photography light. The Great Migration river crossings in the Masai Mara/northern Serengeti are typically at their most dramatic from July through September. Expect higher lodge rates and more vehicles at popular sighting spots — book 6 to 12 months in advance for this window.

The Short Dry Season (January – February)

January and February bring one of Tanzania's most extraordinary wildlife events: the Great Migration calving season on the short-grass plains of the southern Serengeti and Ndutu area. Up to 8,000 wildebeest calves are born each day, drawing lion, cheetah, hyena and leopard in numbers rarely seen anywhere else. The weather is warm and mostly dry. This is a genuine alternative to peak season — and prices reflect the difference.

The Green Season (March – May)

The long rains fall across much of Tanzania between March and May. Some lodges close for maintenance. Roads in remote areas can be difficult. But for those who come, the rewards are real: lush landscapes, newborn animals, exceptional birdlife (many migratory species present), dramatically lower rates, and a near-empty bush. Tarangire is particularly spectacular in the green season — enormous elephant herds, huge skies, and very few other tourists.

Month-by-Month Overview

Month	Season	Wildlife	Crowds	Price
January	Short dry	★★★★★ Calving	★★★ Moderate	★★★ Mid
February	Short dry	★★★★★ Calving	★★★ Moderate	★★★ Mid
March	Long rains begin	★★★ Good	★★ Low	★★ Low
April	Long rains	★★ Variable	★ Very low	★ Lowest
May	Long rains end	★★★ Good	★ Very low	★ Lowest
June	Dry season begins	★★★★ Very good	★★★ Building	★★★★ High
July	Peak dry	★★★★★ Migration	★★★★★ Peak	★★★★★ Peak
August	Peak dry	★★★★★ Migration	★★★★★ Peak	★★★★★ Peak
September	Dry season	★★★★★ Excellent	★★★★ High	★★★★★ Peak
October	Dry season ends	★★★★ Very good	★★★ Moderate	★★★★ High
November	Short rains	★★★ Good	★★ Low	★★★ Mid
December	Short rains end	★★★★ Very good	★★★ Building	★★★★ High

CHAPTER 2

Choosing Your Safari Destinations

Tanzania has more protected wilderness than almost any country on Earth. The challenge is not finding wildlife — it is choosing where to focus your time. Here is an honest comparison of the four most important safari destinations.

Serengeti National Park

The Serengeti is Tanzania's flagship park, and it earns the reputation. At 14,750 km² it is vast enough that you can spend multiple days without repeating a route. All Big Five are present year-round. The Great Migration — 1.5 million wildebeest and 200,000 zebra moving in a continuous circuit — is the largest overland wildlife movement on the planet. The central Seronera area is accessible and wildlife-dense; the more remote northern and western corridors reward longer itineraries. If you have only one Tanzania park on your itinerary, it is the Serengeti.

Ngorongoro Crater

The Ngorongoro Crater is a collapsed volcanic caldera — a self-contained ecosystem with a permanent water source, permanent resident wildlife, and the highest density of predators in Africa. All Big Five live on the crater floor, including an estimated 25–30 lions and one of Tanzania's last healthy black rhino populations. The views descending into the crater are unforgettable. A single full-day game drive on the crater floor is typically sufficient; most visitors combine Ngorongoro with the Serengeti or Tarangire.

Tarangire National Park

Tarangire is chronically underestimated. In the dry season (June–October), the Tarangire River becomes the only water source for hundreds of kilometres, drawing the largest elephant concentrations in Tanzania — regularly 300+ animals visible from a single viewpoint. Ancient baobab trees define the landscape. The park is less crowded than either the Serengeti or Ngorongoro, and considerably more affordable. Tree-climbing lions have also been recorded here. For an uncrowded, elephant-focused experience, Tarangire should be on every itinerary.

Selous / Nyerere National Park (Southern Circuit)

The Selous Game Reserve — now gazetted as Nyerere National Park — is one of the largest protected areas in Africa. The southern circuit feels genuinely remote. Activities include boat safaris on the Rufiji River (hippo, crocodile, elephant at the bank), walking safaris, and some of the best African wild dog sightings on the continent. The wildlife density is lower than the

northern circuit, but the sense of wilderness is unmatched. Fly-in access from Dar es Salaam makes it a natural add-on for longer itineraries.

> **Destination Recommendation Matrix**
>
> **3 nights:** Serengeti + Ngorongoro Crater — the classic northern circuit combination.
> **7 nights:** Add Tarangire — elephants, baobabs, and a very different landscape.
> **10+ nights:** Add Selous / Nyerere — boat safaris, wild dog, true wilderness.

CHAPTER 3

What Does a Tanzania Safari Cost?

Tanzania is not the cheapest safari destination in Africa — and for good reason. National park fees are among the highest in Africa, operators must maintain high-specification 4WD vehicles, and the infrastructure required to deliver a safe, high-quality bush experience has real costs. What you get in return is world-class wildlife in protected wilderness that genuinely feels wild.

BUDGET / CAMPING

$150 – $250

per person / per day

Public campsites. Group departures. Older vehicles. Basic meals. Authentic experience at lower cost.

MID-RANGE LODGE

$350 – $600

per person / per day

Permanent lodges or private campsites. Private or semi-private departures. Full board. Newer vehicles.

LUXURY TENTED CAMP

$800 – $1,500+

per person / per day

Private concessions. Exclusive areas. Butler service. Fly-in transfers. All-inclusive.

Sample 7-Day Private Safari — Total Cost Estimates

Tier	Daily Rate (pp)	7-Day Total (2 pax)	Includes
Budget camping	$150 – $250	$2,100 – $3,500 pp	Park fees, camping, meals, guide
Mid-range lodge	$350 – $600	$4,900 – $8,400 pp	All above + lodge accommodation
Luxury tented	$800 – $1,500+	$11,200 – $21,000+ pp	All above + flights, exclusive areas

What Drives Safari Costs Up

Park fees — Serengeti fees alone are $82/person/night for international visitors (2026). A 4-night Serengeti stay for two people means $656 in fees before a single meal or vehicle is paid for.

Season — peak dry season (July–September) commands 20–40% premiums over shoulder season at most lodges.

Group size — a private vehicle for two costs roughly the same as for six. Smaller groups pay more per person.

Drive-in vs fly-in — flying between parks saves days of driving but adds $300–$600+ per person in charter costs.

Note: All prices are 2026 indicative ranges based on current park fees and operator rates. Actual costs depend on specific lodges, dates, group size, and itinerary. Contact safari-tz.com for an exact, itemised quote.

CHAPTER 4

How to Choose a Licensed Operator

The difference between an exceptional Tanzania safari and a disappointing one often comes down to a single factor: your operator. Tanzania has hundreds of licensed tour companies. A significant proportion are either intermediaries reselling other operators' capacity, overseas-based agencies adding a margin on top, or companies that appear reputable online but lack the ground-level accountability that protects you when things go wrong.

What TATO Registration Means

TATO — the Tanzania Association of Tour Operators — is the recognised industry body for licensed Tanzania safari operators. TATO membership requires compliance with legal licensing requirements set by the Tanzania Tourism Board, adherence to professional and ethical standards, and accountability through a complaints process. When you book with a TATO member, you have recourse if something goes wrong. Verify membership directly at **tato.or.tz** before you commit.

5 Questions to Ask Any Tanzania Operator Before Booking

1. **Are you TATO registered?** Ask for their TATO member number and verify it independently at tato.or.tz. Legitimate operators will welcome this request.
2. **Are your guides certified by KINAPA / TANAPA?** Tanzania's national park authorities certify professional safari guides. Uncertified guides cannot legally operate inside parks.
3. **Is your vehicle owned or subcontracted?** Operators who own their fleet control vehicle maintenance, safety standards, and driver selection. Subcontracted vehicles introduce a layer you cannot verify.
4. **What is your cancellation and refund policy?** Legitimate operators have a clearly written policy. Be cautious of any operator who cannot provide this in writing before you pay a deposit.
5. **Can I speak directly with a guide before I book?** An Arusha-based operator should be able to connect you with your guide before departure. This is a strong signal of operational accountability.

Arusha-Based vs Overseas-Booked

Many travellers book their Tanzania safari through a European or North American agency. This is convenient, but it adds a layer of cost (typically 15–30% margin) and, critically, a layer of accountability. When your vehicle breaks down at 5am inside the Serengeti, you need someone in Arusha who picks up the phone — not a sales agent in London or New York. safari-tz.com has operated from Arusha since 1991. Every booking is handled directly by our team on the ground.

CHAPTER 5

Tanzania Safari Packing Checklist

The golden rule: pack neutral. Olive, khaki, tan, grey, and brown colours blend into the bush and avoid disturbing wildlife. Leave white, black, and bright colours at home for game drives — they attract insects, startle animals, and mark you as an inexperienced visitor to your fellow safari-goers. Bold items below are non-negotiable.

DRY SEASON (Jun – Oct)

CLOTHING

- ✓ **Neutral lightweight long-sleeve shirts (x3)**
- ✓ **Zip-off safari trousers (x2)**
- ✓ Light fleece or jacket (mornings are cold)
- ✓ **Wide-brim hat**
- ✓ Comfortable walking shoes / boots
- ✓ Sandals for lodge evenings

SUN PROTECTION

- ✓ **SPF 50+ sunscreen**
- ✓ **UV-protection sunglasses**
- ✓ Neck / face buff for dust

CAMERA GEAR

- ✓ **Camera + long lens (200mm+ ideal)**
- ✓ **Spare batteries + memory cards**
- ✓ Bean bag or window mount
- ✓ Dust-proof bag or cover

HEALTH & MEDICAL

- ✓ **Antimalarials (prescribed)**
- ✓ **DEET 50%+ insect repellent**
- ✓ Basic first-aid kit
- ✓ Hand sanitiser
- ✓ Rehydration sachets

GREEN SEASON (Mar – May)

CLOTHING

- ✓ **Neutral lightweight long-sleeve shirts (x4)**
- ✓ **Waterproof lightweight jacket**
- ✓ **Zip-off safari trousers (x2–3)**
- ✓ Warm mid-layer for evenings
- ✓ **Waterproof boots or trail shoes**
- ✓ Wide-brim hat (rain-resistant)

ADDITIONAL RAIN SEASON ITEMS

- ✓ **Compact umbrella or poncho**
- ✓ Waterproof dry bag for camera
- ✓ Extra moisture-wicking socks

DOCUMENTS

- ✓ **Passport (6+ months validity)**
- ✓ **Tanzania e-Visa printout**
- ✓ **Yellow fever certificate (if required)**
- ✓ **Travel insurance documents**
- ✓ Emergency contact card

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- ✓ Binoculars (8×42 ideal)
- ✓ Field guide to East African mammals
- ✓ Kindle / book for lodge downtime
- ✓ Plug adaptors (Type D/G)

Luggage note: Most light aircraft between parks have a strict 15kg soft-bag limit per person. Hard-sided suitcases cannot be accommodated. Pack soft duffels or roll-top bags. Your main luggage can be stored at the

Arusha hotel while you are on safari.

CHAPTER 6

Planning Your Timeline

How Far in Advance to Book

Season	Window	Recommended Booking Lead Time
Peak dry (Jul–Sep)	High demand	**6–12 months in advance**
Shoulder (Jan–Feb, Oct–Dec)	Moderate demand	**3–6 months in advance**
Green season (Mar–May)	Low demand	**2–3 months in advance**

For peak season Serengeti camps — particularly those in the northern corridor for river crossing season — the most desirable properties book out a full year ahead. If you have a fixed travel window, contact us early. We know which camps have availability before they appear on booking platforms.

Visa

Most nationalities can enter Tanzania on an e-Visa, which must be applied for online at **evisa.go.tz** before travel. The cost is **USD $50** for a single-entry tourist visa. Apply a minimum of 4–6 weeks before departure — processing is usually faster, but delays do occur. Print the approval letter and carry it alongside your passport. Citizens of East African Community partner states may be eligible for a different arrangement — confirm with us or your consulate.

Vaccinations

Yellow fever vaccination is required if you are arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever transmission (including Kenya and Uganda). Tanzania border control enforces this — carry your yellow card. Even if not arriving from a yellow fever country, some travellers choose to get vaccinated for ongoing flexibility. Consult a travel medicine doctor or clinic at least 6–8 weeks before departure. Additionally recommended: Hepatitis A, Typhoid, and ensuring your routine vaccinations (Tetanus, MMR) are current. Malaria prophylaxis is strongly recommended for all safari areas.

Flights: Kilimanjaro (JRO) vs Dar es Salaam (DAR)

Kilimanjaro International Airport (JRO) is the correct gateway for the northern safari circuit — Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tarangire, and Lake Manyara. It is 45 minutes from Arusha and directly served from Amsterdam, Doha, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa, with connections from most major hubs. If your itinerary is entirely in the north, fly JRO.

Dar es Salaam International (DAR) is the better gateway for Zanzibar, the southern circuit (Selous/Nyerere, Ruaha), or combined itineraries that include the coast. Connections are wider and some travellers fly into DAR and out of JRO (or vice versa) on a one-way basis. Ask us to check routing options — sometimes this saves significant airfare.

Pre-departure checklist summary: Passport valid 6+ months · e-Visa applied · Yellow fever card (if required) · Travel insurance confirmed · Antimalarials prescribed · Arusha hotel confirmed · Emergency contacts noted · Soft luggage packed within weight limits.

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Ready to book? Talk to our Arusha team.

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