

NGORONGORO CONSERVATION AREA

Written by Administrator

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This vast protected area stretches from Lake Natron (the breeding ground for East Africa's flamingos) in the northeast, to Lake Enyasi in the south, and Lake Manyara to the east. The area includes the still active Ol-Ndoinyo Lengai (meaning "Mountain of God" in Maa, the language of the Masaai) volcano (which last erupted in 1983), Olduvai Gorge and the NGORONGORO CRATER, the largest unbroken caldera in the world. It has been described as one of the great natural wonders of the world. Eight million years ago, the Ngorongoro Crater was an active volcano but its cone collapsed, forming the crater that is 610 meters deep, 20 kilometres in diameter, and covers an area of 311 sq. km. Spectacular as it is, the crater accounts for just a tenth of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

The crater is home to many species of wild game and birds. With the exception of impala and topi (due to fierce competition with the wildebeest) and the giraffe (because there is not much to eat at tree level), almost every species of African plains mammal lives in the crater, including the endangered black rhino, and the densest population of predators in Africa. A strange thing is that the crater elephants are mainly bulls. The birdlife, which includes the flamingo, is mainly seasonal, and is also affected by the ratio of soda to fresh water in Lake Magadi on the crater floor.

In the northern, remote area of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area are the Olmoti and Empaakai craters, Lake Natron and Oldoinyo Lengai.

The mysterious Engakura Ruins, the remains of a terraced city and a complex irrigation system, lie on the Eastern side of Empakaai Crater. Their origins are a mystery as there is no tradition of stone building in this part of Africa.

Views from the rim of the crater are sensational. On the crater floor, grassland blends into

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swamps, lakes, rivers, woodland and mountains. You can descend to the floor of the crater in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Only 4WD vehicles are allowed into the crater and game rangers are compulsory for all.

The Maasai are permitted to water their cattle at the permanent lake and can be seen leading their animals in and out of the crater.

Accommodation is at luxury lodges and campsites.