

Practical information and Books

Report in 3 parts: part 2

1. Arusha area 14th December 2000 to 9th January 2001 & Morogoro and Loshoto 4th to 8th January 2001
2. Northern circuit safari, Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Serengeti & Ngoronogoro 21st to 27th December
3. **Practical information**

We took two organised trips:

- The northern safari circuit.
- Mount Meru and Arusha National Park

Considerations when booking – bus travel

The northern safari circuit

We did this with Sunbird Safari (<http://www.sunbirdsafaris.com/index.htm>) which doesn't seem to exist anymore (2005). I had regular contact with Patrick Degroote for several years after 2001, but could not get hold of him in 2004 or 2005. This was a relatively new company owned and run by a Tanzanian-French couple, Hanifa and Patrick Degroote. The choice fell on this company through a lot of leg-work by Brita and from personal recommendation. We were well pleased by this trip and the service offered, and most importantly, the treatment we received when something did go wrong (illness). Patrick has 15 years experience working in the business from Arusha.

Brita visited several other reputable companies (as recommended in all our travel guides, some of which possess websites - but I've haven't collected the links) who can offer a similar trip. Our impression is that some of these other companies would also have given us an excellent trip - having seen them on safari. Safari trips are not cheap but the guidebooks say that you pay for what you get. A six-day safari does not leave a lot of change from a 1000 dollar bill, if you chose a reputable company. What you pay for is less hassle and hopefully an easier time. We feel we paid for better food than the cheaper companies, and also good enthusiastic staff. We think we also got good places to stay (obviously we didn't try others), but we think one has to be very clear about what one wants from a trip, so the organiser understands exactly what has to be done to keep you happy. If you are birding, walking and photographing a lot as we were, then it is clearly an advantage to travel as a small family group as we did, and that was very different than if one just wanted to see the big 5 (which of course we saw). David would not wish to inflict his fanaticism on anyone else! John agrees.

Mount Meru and Arusha National Park

The purpose of this trip was to climb Mount Meru. This involves a different set of parameters than a safari trip. There are only two places to stay, one at 2400m, the other at 3500, and you stay there irrespective of whom you go with (unless you camp). The first 100 USD per person goes to park fees and the like (such as rescue "insurance"). Each group has to employ a Guide-cum-Park Ranger who carries a gun because of the danger of buffalo and elephant. None of the rangers we talked to had ever used their gun "in anger". Thus the only thing the safari company is doing is arranging your food and porters. So we went for a relatively cheap option with a company which is listed as being reputable in the Lonely Planet Guide "Trekking in East Africa". We also met a couple who turned up at the park gate with two rucksacks and arranged their own trip. We went for the 4 day option since we did not fancy climbing 1100 m before dawn then descending 3000m the same day (with the four-day trip, the last 900m or so is reserved for the fourth day). Make sure that a 4 day trip also includes a safari drive round Arusha National Park in the price. This was for 3 hr., and a pleasant end to the climb, and costs no more in fees.

How do you chose a reputable company?

Unfortunately, this is not easy as some of the reputable companies (according to the "Lonely Planet" guide) have gone downhill. Our advice is not to book with anyone who hassles you for business on the streets. Having visited a few companies and determined the pricing level, then visit the tourist office and check whether the company is (still) reputable. We were caught out by the fact that Arusha was essentially closed between Christmas and New Year in 2000 due to the end of Ramadan which reduced our choice for our Mt. Meru trip somewhat, and we were unable to check with the tourist board. So we settled for a company which was listed in the guidebook, and charged a rate which the guide book says is sensible. A certificate from the tourist board dated 1999 was hanging up in the office. However, we were unable to get independent credentials for them. The prices quoted for a 4 day Mt. Meru trip were from 350 to 600 USD per person (for 3). We paid 400 USD. For the extra money, we would have had decent food and, presumably, a cook (as representative for the company) who at least outwardly gave the impression that he cared for our well-being. It transpired that this company is no longer welcome in the National Parks as they have not paid all their bills to the park service. So we were perhaps lucky to be let into the park at all – the reason was that the cook had written the name of another company in the book when he booked us into the park! We are not going to give the name of the company on the net (partly as we sure the same applies to several other companies, and we have informed the tourist board), but if you follow these guidelines then you can avoid falling into this pitfall. Despite this, we had an excellent trip, thanks to our determination and the National Park Guide/Ranger, Frederick Simon Msembe who did an excellent job.

- Don't take the cheapest.
- Get an answer from companies charging more about what you are paying for.
- Insist on a printed itinerary.
- Check on the company at the tourist office.
- Try and talk to other who have travelled recently.

- If it sounds too good, it probably is!
- Bus travel

We travelled from Arusha to Morogoro and back via Mombo (for Loshoto) with Islam. No complaints. This 600 Km journey only took 8h by bus as there is an excellent road with virtually no traffic on it – apart from buses and lorries (main roads are usually paid for by expect to be able to get on a long distance bus half way along the route unless you have booked in advance. We bought our ticket for the Mombo to Arusha leg in Morogoro, and the bus stopped for us. It did not stop for anyone else who tried to flag it down.

Books

Birds

I used, and thoroughly recommend:

- Zimmerman, Dale; Turner, Don; Pearson, David (1999): Field Guide to the Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania, Christopher Helm ISBN 0-7136-5079-6

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This is the abbreviated version of:

- Zimmerman, Dale; Turner, Don; Pearson, David; Willis, Ian; Pratt, Douglas (1996) Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania Christopher Helm. (£ 40.00)
This is too big for field use.

I also took:

- Van Perlo, Ber (1995) Collins Illustrated Checklist: Birds of Eastern Africa (£ 15.99 (reduced from 19.99 until 31/03/2001)
but didn't need it.

In 2004-2005 I preferred:

- Fanshawe, John; Norman Arlott, John Gale, Brian Small Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa Academic Press, Inc.; ISBN: 0856610798 £27.00

Reference:

- I started to subscribe to the Brown et al's Birds of Africa when volume 1 came out. Too heavy to take with you, but a great reference!

Mammals

I subsequently obtained, and used in 2004-5

- Kingdon, Jonathan (1997) The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals, Academic Press.

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I actually used:

- Dorst, Jean; Dandelot, Pierre. (1970) A field guide to the larger mammals of Africa. SBN 00 212078 x which I have possessed since 1974.
This is still in print, and has the advantage of price, but it suffers from the classic field guide problem of having plates, text and maps spread liberally (though to be fair, in order of appearance) through the book. The plates are good, and there is a lot of useful and detailed information, however, the taxonomy is out of date.

Also recommended, but I have not seen it:

- Haltenorth, T. and Diller, H. (1992) A Field Guide to the Mammals of Africa Including Madagascar (New Holland). Out of print in 2001

Guide Books

- Eu, Geoffrey 1998 East African Wildlife Insight Guides ISBN 9 62421 276 7 £15.00
The first half of the book comprises a lot of informative journalistic articles about African wildlife and is my only source of information about the reptiles. The second half has a lot of useful information about individual parks.
- Williams, J.G., Arlott, Fennessy, R. 1967 Collins field guide: National parks of East Africa Collins ISBN 0 00 219215 2
Good maps, detailed checklists for each park, though no status information for the birds. As good as Dorst for identification of individual mammals. Hopeless for the birds.

Sounds

I bought from the following from Wildsounds after my return:

- African Forests and Savannas, Published by Roché, CD £10.00
- African Sounds at Dusk, Published by Walker, CD £10.00
- Wild Africa, Published by Matheu, CD £10.00

There is also a 5 CD birdsounds set available, but I balked at the £50.00
Suppliers:

- NHBS <http://www.nhbs.com/>
- Subbuteo <http://www.wildlifebooks.com/>
- WildSounds <http://www.wildsounds.co.uk/>