

Into the Maasai Lands

An Expedition with the Maasai Tribe



Introduction

This remote bush trek takes place in the Great African Rift Valley, northern Tanzania. The region is home to several Maasai communities. Perhaps the most revered of the great African nomadic tribes, the Maasai originated in the Nile basin and migrated south through Ethiopia to Kenya and Tanzania in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They were then known as the fiercest of warriors. Now they struggle to retain their modest lifestyle.

Beginning with a trek up to the viewpoint on Mt. Longido, a sacred Maasai mountain, you will then drive and trek across the floor of the Great Rift Valley. Your destination is the magnificent mountain massif, the Crater Highlands, and the world famous Ngorongoro Crater. Here you will be able to see many of the major animal species of Africa, including lion, elephant, and antelope. Your journey ends with an evening of celebration at a special bush camp near Laibone, overlooking Lake Manyara.

The Maasai will travel with you as your guides during this unique expedition. They know this region better than anyone, and will guide you across the often difficult terrain. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the fascinating geology of the Rift Valley region, with its varied terrain of desert bush, volcanoes, fumaroles, and mountain ranges – all distinctive features of the East African Highland Plateau. In addition, students will have the chance to learn about the Maasai themselves, their unique way of life and fascinating culture. They will learn about the Maasai's nomadic past, and, by way of contrast, they will have the opportunity to visit their present-day settled communities.

Please Note: *This programme can be adapted for longer time in country, and the ratio of walking to driving during the programme tailored according to the groups' ability. It will also be possible to undertake specific studies relevant to aspects of the school curriculum, for instance geography, geology, or anthropology. The area is very poorly mapped and so cartography could make a useful contribution. During the course of the expedition students will also have the chance to visit a number of community projects in the area, including a newly built school and women's vocational centre in Gelai Village, a project organised through the charity Community Projects Africa, of which we are sponsors.*

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Itinerary

Day 0: Night flight to East Africa

Depart UK this evening and arrive East Africa next morning.

Day 1: Drive to Tanzania and trek to Longido Camp

Arrive Nairobi 06:30am. This morning you will either continue by air to Tanzania and then drive up to Longido, or you will depart by bus for the frontier at Nmanga (approx 3 hours), cross into Tanzania and then drive a further half hour to a rendezvous point with the Tanzania support team. On arrival, you will trek up to one hour to your first camp, located in the foothills of the dramatic Mt. Longido. Here you will have a welcome lunch and briefing.



You will then have an afternoon trek in the surrounding area to help further acclimatise you to the African bush, allow you to test your equipment, and also to give you a real insight into typical African acacia bush country. Up to 10kms trekking today. In the evening be sure to look out for the incredible star canopy.

Day 2: Trek to Longido Viewpoint, drive & walk to Kitumbeine Camp

Begin today with an early breakfast (0600hrs), and then a tough trek up into the foothills of Longido. We trek up to the view point (5487ft). If the weather is clear, you will have great views to Meru, Africa's 4th highest mountain, south-east to Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, and west across the floor of the Rift Valley stretching to the Crater Highlands on the very distant horizon.

This will be your first African mountain on this expedition and learning walking security will be very important. The forested slopes of Longido are rarely visited and they are home to many wild animals including buffalo. It is very important to remain close to the local guides who know this mountain well.



Descend to meet the vehicles. Your transfer vehicles will take you across the Arusha-Nairobi main road and onto a rough track. You will drive further into the bush for 1 hour heading west to a picnic lunch point in the shade. After lunch drive a short distance and then leave the vehicles and proceed to walk to Kitumbeine Village and Kitumbeine Rocky Camp, two kilometres outside the village. Alt. of camp 4070ft. Walking distance ranges from 10kms to 20kms today, depending on the strength and wishes of the group.

Your climb, drive and trek today will give you a real understanding of how hardy the Maasai, who walk these distances regularly, really are.

In this Maasai region you will see the traditional temporary villages with mud-built houses and thorn hedges, where young Maasai boys herd cattle and goats as their forefathers have done for centuries. In time the settlement into towns and the control of local government fell mainly to the Bantu tribes who prospered by virtue of their hard work in the rich agricultural lands around Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Meru. The Maasai were marginalised to areas outside the national parks and away from the town and their agricultural catchment areas. Their traditional lifestyle has been threatened by modern life. Your trek will bring important community funds to the Maasai regions you pass through. By displaying an interest in their culture, you will help encourage the Maasai in their wish to retain their traditions, while at the same time co-existing with other Tanzanians in an emerging economy and a developing education system. Maasai tradition must be allowed to exist alongside modernisation. It is a difficult goal to achieve, but community based, eco-friendly tourism, such as your trek, plays an important part.



Day 3: Kitumbeine Mountain and Villages, transfer to Ngarirat Camp

This morning you will trek part way up Kitumbeine Mountain to a viewpoint on a ridge at 6300ft. The trail is dusty and rocky to start, but soon leads onto a goat trail. Temperatures should reduce as you pass midday and gain altitude. Later you trek back down and meet the vehicles for a short drive to the Ngarirat swamp, a largely dry ancient swamp bed, where wild animals come to graze.

Later this afternoon enjoy a Game viewing trek across Ngarirat before heading to Ngarirat Camp for overnight. The views from the camp across the Rift Valley floor to the Maasai Mountain of Ol Doinyo Lengai are simply breathtaking. Up to 16kms walking today.

Day 4: Across Dustpans of Ngarirat to Gelai Camp

Today you will trek to Gelai Village and our camp nearby. You can expect to see more wild game today. In particular look out for zebra, gerenuk, and giraffe. The birdlife is rich along the entire route; you will be fascinated by the nests of the weaver birds. The superb starlings, the "Go Away" bird, hoopoes and numerous raptors are also seen in the area.

Expect to be captivated by the sheer beauty of this region, which is known as "The Cradle of Mankind". Tonight you will camp at Gelai Village Camp site.

NB. While at Gelai, the group may choose to visit the local school and the women's vocational centre, projects that we support through the charity Community Projects Africa. Students will have the chance to interact with the local school children, and perhaps even take part in a football match!



Day 5: Trek & Drive to Sunken Crater Camp

Today you will begin to pack up camp very early and trek west across untamed bush towards the Sunken Crater. You will cross a beautiful plain marked by dead volcanic vents, your journey bringing you ever closer to the escarpment of the Rift Valley, which rises from the bush up to the Ngorongoro Crater Highlands. Today is likely to be hotter than previous days, so wear lots of sun block, reflective clothing and wide-brimmed hats. We hope to reach the impressive Sunken Crater for a late lunch, and will be camping overnight near the crater. Time allowing, you can explore some of the interesting features of the area including the volcanic cones; and even descend into the Sunken Crater. In the evening temperatures drop.

Day 6: To Engaruka - approx 15-30kms (dependent on group strength)

This morning you will have an early breakfast, then start trekking under the lee of the Rift Escarpment towards Engaruka. You will cross the Ol Kerii Plain, passing by small settlements along the way, until you reach the final trek point.

Here will be a vehicle transfer to Engaruka village and the campsite, situated very near to the ruins of the ancient Engaruka settlement. Reckoned to be about 500 years old, the evolved Engaruka civilisation, which had stone built houses and an irrigation system, was probably wiped out by nomadic tribes moving into the area. It is worth walking with a local guide just beyond the boundaries of the camping place up into the rock outcrops above the camp, where are found the ruins of the ancient settlement.



Day 7: To Ngorongoro Crater and then to Laibone

After a very early breakfast, you will drive (2 to 3 hours) to Ngorongoro Crater, where you will enjoy a game drive. The views at the rim of Ngorongoro Crater are sensational. On the crater floor, grassland blends into swamp, lakes, rivers, woodland and mountains – all a haven for a host of wildlife, including the densest predator population in Africa. The crater is home to up to 25,000 large mammals, mainly grazers - gazelle, buffalo, eland, hartebeest and warthog. There are a small number of black rhinos here too and large herds of elephant.

After approximately 4 hours in the Crater (with picnic lunch) you will head back for your last night in the bush at a special camp near Laibone, where a celebration dinner with Maasai festivities will be prepared.

We have selected a truly special location for your last night in the bush in Tanzania. From your camping place there are views down to Lake Manyara, one of the most famous and beautiful of the Rift Valley Lakes. Sat around the campfire at leisure this evening, you'll be able to look back on what you've achieved during the past week.

Day 8: Trek to viewpoint, lunch, and drive to airport for flight home.

After breakfast, there will be time to take a short trek to a magnificent viewpoint. From this viewpoint high above the camp you can look back across the area you have trekked over the previous week and down to Lake Manyara.

Then descend in time for lunch in camp, before driving to the airport for your overnight flight home.

Key Points

Location

The Rift Valley and Crater Highlands of north Tanzania are just under 3 degrees south of the Equator. The time zone is GMT+3.

Elevations

The region is part of the highland plateau of East Africa. Our starting point at the foot of Mt Longido is 4000ft/1220ms elevation. Longido itself is 8950ft/2730ms. The trek will mostly be between 2500 and 4000ft. The final drive up to Ngorongoro Crater will take us over 10000ft/3000ms. The risk of altitude sickness is very low.

Geology

The region is characterized by the intense tectonic and volcanic activity which began 30 to 40 million years ago and over time formed the African Rift Valley and the giants of Kilimanjaro, Meru and the Crater Highlands. Ngorongoro Crater itself is the remnant of a vast, sunken volcano. During the trek we shall see several majestic volcanoes including Kilimanjaro in the distance and Meru to the south; but more importantly we shall trek close by Kitumbeine, Gelai, Ol Doinyo Lengai and Kerimasi, as well as numerous small parasite volcanoes.

Climate & Geography

The climate of north Tanzania is tropical with two monsoon seasons each year. The elevations in the trek area allow for comfortably cool nights (similar to a warm summer evening in the UK) but day time temperatures can reach as high 35 degrees – you should expect to be trekking in 25 degrees and over once the day warms up. The trek area is mainly in a rain shadow so hot and dusty conditions are to be expected.

The itinerary region is acacia bush, dustbowl, volcanic lava plains, and the rainforested slopes of Longido and the Crater Highlands.

Local Culture

This journey takes place in the wild African bush, home to several Maasai communities. Perhaps the most revered of the great African nomadic tribes, the Maasai originated in the Nile basin and migrated south through Ethiopia to Kenya and Tanzania in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We shall also encounter other tribes' people such as the Chagga and the Meru tribes.

Wildlife

The densest population of African wildlife will be seen in Ngorongoro Crater on the last day, and this will likely include lion, elephant, buffalo, antelope, and the elusive rhino. During the trek itself we can confidently hope to see



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giraffe, antelope, and zebra. Keen twitchers will be pleased to know that over 250 species of birds are found in the trek region!

Educational Opportunities

There is the potential for geography, geology, and cartography (the area needs re-mapping) field lessons, and, of course, the expedition works well for DoE Awards.

General Information

- **Language** – English and Swahili although there are over 100 tribal dialects
- **Time** – 3 hours ahead of GMT
- **Flight Time** – from UK approx. 10 hours
- **British Embassy in Tanzania** - Umoja House, Ground Floor, Garden Ave, PO Box 9200, Dar es Salaam (255 (0) 22 229 0000)
- **Electricity** - Square three pin plugs on 220 –240 volts 230v 50AC, but surges of up to 310v and troughs of 150v are common. In Arusha, though this can vary from 160v to 240v and surges are common.
- **Currency regulations** - The Tanzania shilling is a soft currency and you cannot obtain shillings before leaving the UK. US dollars are accepted in most places and should be used in country. Tanzanian Shillings cannot be exported, therefore should be reconverted against your currency declaration form.
- **Exchange** - The Bank of Tanzania performs all currency transfers; all other offers of currency exchange are illegal. There are also foreign exchange bureaus in most towns and cities where you can change cash or travellers' cheques at the prevailing free market exchange rate. The most widely accepted currency is the dollar (US). For up to date currency exchange, go to: <http://www.xe.com/>

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