

A Guide to the Wildebeest Migration

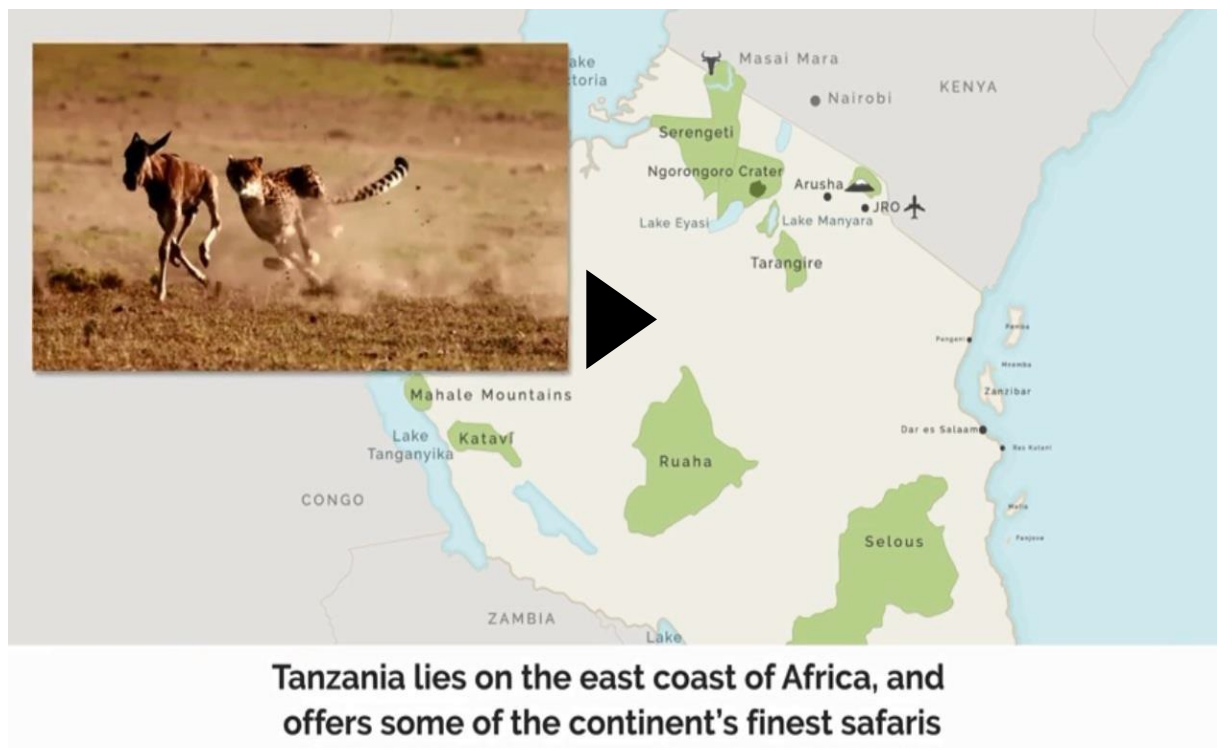
Introduction

We hope this guide will be enough to set you on the right course, without being too detailed, and as such it is not meant to be definitive. For further details we strongly recommend that you look at our vast [website](#) which discusses all the national parks and areas and hundreds of different lodges, all with in-depth reviews, prices, photos and often video.

That said, nothing beats the personal touch so we strongly recommend you either pop into our offices in Putney, London, or phone to discuss.

Introducing our ultimate video guide to Tanzania!

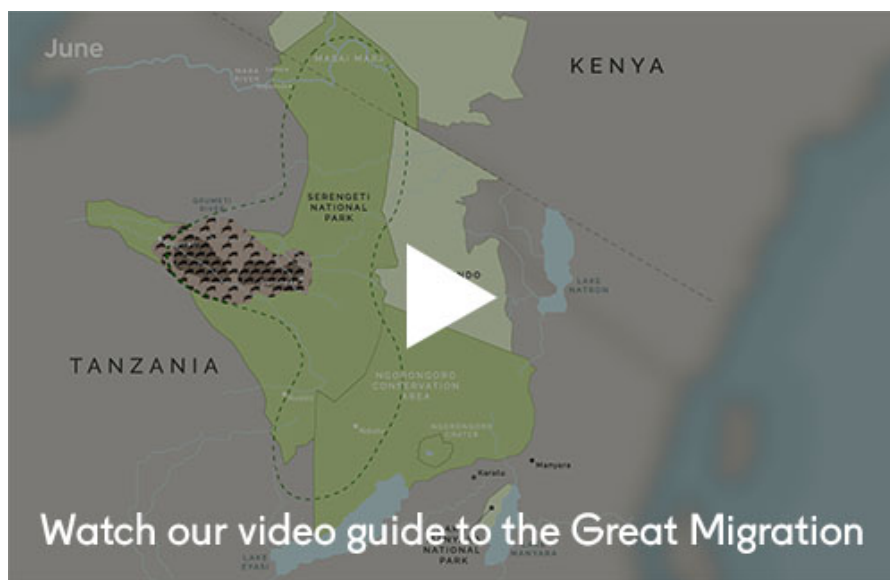
Although no research tool is ever better than talking to one of our experts, we are constantly reviewing how to make safari planning easier for our clients. We have now made an excellent video guide to Tanzania; narrated by our MD Marc Harris, the video takes you through your different options around the country with maps, videos, images, flight routes/times, prices and of course, our trusted opinions and guidance. We hope it is useful – please do just click on the photo to give it a watch!



The Great Migration: Clearing up confusion

The Great Migration is an ongoing event in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park where a huge herd of 2 million big grazers (wildebeest, zebra and various antelope) make their way around the park following the rainfall in a roughly circular route in search for fresh pastures. It is often heralded as the most spectacular natural event on the planet today.

For those who prefer visuals to words please watch our detailed animated guide of the great migration below:



We will go in depth in the pages below, but as a brief overview, the wildebeest begin their journey from December – March in the south of the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area (Ndotu) for calving season. In April - June they begin to make their way up the western corridor (and some move through the central Serengeti Seronera region), and by July they are usually expected up in the north (Kogatende/Lamai) where you get the Mara River crossings in the Serengeti (and some herds carry on to Kenya's Masai Mara) all the way through to October/November, when they begin their descent south again in time for calving season. And so the cycle repeats itself! Now this is just a rough overview, but scroll down for a breakdown of where the wildebeest *usually* are at any given time of year and where you can base yourself to maximise your chances of catching the mega herds.

There are a few common misconceptions surrounding The Great Migration which we should clear up before going into detail about the different areas and times of year to see the herds.

Scroll down to see our maps which highlight the points made below. Below we are first focusing on clarifying the river crossings (July – October) as this is a particularly confusing time of year to understand due to the herds also making their way into Kenya's Masai Mara.

- 1) The Mara River is **NOT** the border between Tanzania and Kenya

The wildebeest never cross the river from Tanzania into Kenya as the Mara River is not the border between the countries (see map below for clarification). They only ever cross the river from **TANZANIA TO TANZANIA** (Kogatende to the Lamai Wedge) or from **KENYA TO KENYA** (Masai Mara to Masai Mara).

- 2) The Migration is **ALWAYS** in Tanzania (The Serengeti) and only **SOME** herds are **SOMETIMES** in Kenya (The Masai Mara)

Some of the Wildebeest are only ever in Kenya (The Masai Mara) **AT SOME POINT** between July – October when the herds make their way to the northern Serengeti in search of fresh pastures. The Masai Mara is as such an extension of their Serengeti route, and not an integral part of their circular journey.

As you can see from Map A below, when some of the herds are in Kenya, they are not in Kenya exclusively – they are **ALWAYS** in Tanzania even when **SOME** are in Kenya. The Masai Mara, as you can also see is relatively small in comparison to the Serengeti (of which this map only shows a tiny bit)! Because of this, The Masai Mara can be extremely busy with lots of tourists packing in to the park to catch the crossings (which only ever happen in a very small window anyway), so it really is best to avoid the Masai Mara at this time and focus on seeing the crossings in the Serengeti.

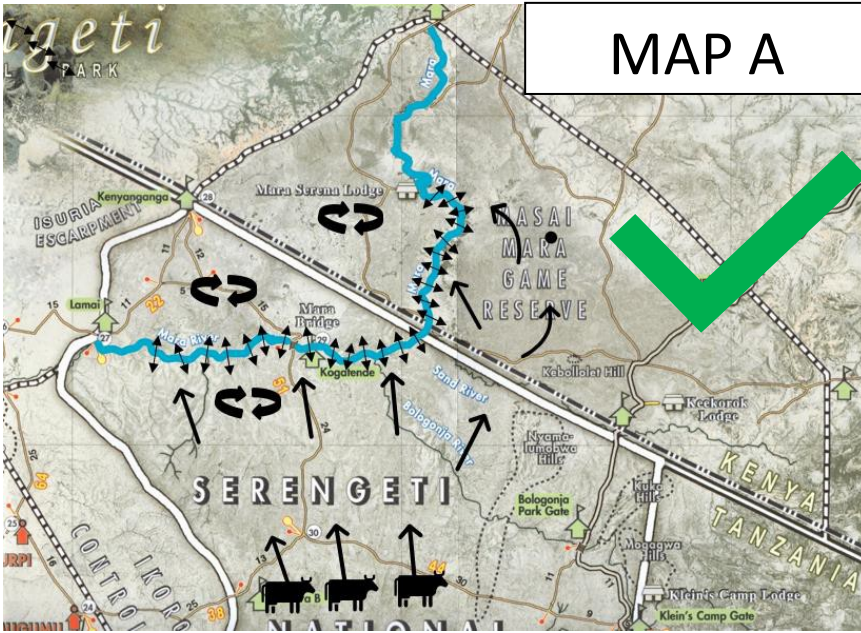
- 3) The Migration is **not** a single mass movement crossing the Mara River and returning months later

The Migration is not a single mass movement of wildebeest marching in side-by-side in the same direction. It is slightly more chaotic than this! Although they generally follow the same routes, the herds tend to be somewhat dispersed at certain times of the year. As a rule of thumb, they become more concentrated when the park is drier and for calving season (July – October & December – March) and then disperse when there is plentiful grass (November & April – June). It is important to understand that even when they are concentrated, although they all head in a similar direction, they still zig zag along the way and can be late or early, making it difficult to predict their exact location at any given time.

The wildebeest's zig-zag tendency is never clearer than when the herds are in the northern Serengeti plains and crossing the Mara River; some wildebeest crossing one way, some crossing the other, and many just mulling around Kogatende, sometimes without crossing the river at all! If one wildebeest decides to cross (north to south or south to north), so may another 10, or another 10,000. Once they have crossed, they may suddenly decide to cross back an hour or a day later. The wildebeest probably know where/when they are going about as much as we do! This means that the common misconception that they systematically head north, cross over the river, go into Kenya, and stay there until October before crossing back to travel south again is a good logic (see Map B)... But is simply not true!

Clarifying the wildebeest's movements from July – October

WHAT THE WILDEBEEST DO:

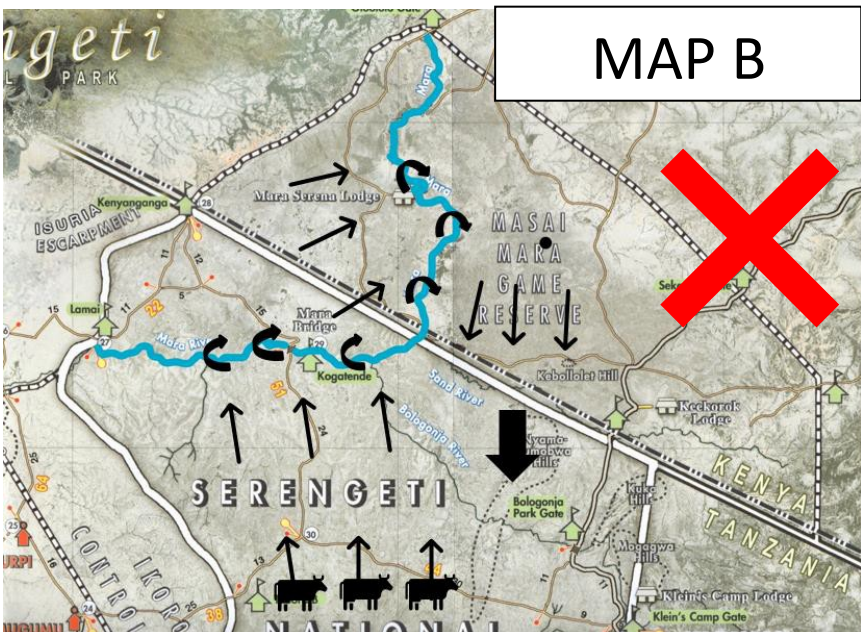


VIDEOS OF MARA RIVER CROSSINGS

To demonstrate the confusing zig-zag effect of the wildebeest, please [click here](#) for a video of a river crossing taken by a member of our team in October 2018. Sometimes you can be waiting at a crossing point for hours before they decide to cross over, and this really is only because one decides to go and others follow!

Many times the crossings can be absolutely out of this world dramatic – please [click here](#) to see a video shot a few years back – just wow! This was in November, which just shows, you can go to see the crossings in the peak seasons of July-August, but often amazing and unexpected things can happen when you least expect it- and that is just the way safari works! Therefore, sometimes revolving your whole safari around the unreliable migration can sometimes be a mistake...

WHAT MANY PEOPLE THINK THE WILDEBEEST DO:



Crossing point 3 is shown [here](#), also shot in October 2018 – a dramatic long stretch of river for the herds here. A particularly big leap of faith is shown at 01:42 by a particularly bold little calf!

See [here](#) for crossing point number 4, where the wildebeest create a huge dust cloud encapsulating both their harrowing search for fresh pastures, but also the rumble underfoot when the migration is on the move!

Hectic scenes [here](#) from crossing point number 8, as all the wildebeest seem to just hurtle head first into the Mara River all at once – amazing scenes from the Serengeti.

Understanding Serengeti accommodation options

Should I stay in a permanent lodge or mobile camp?

As you will have probably already gathered, the migration is a moving feast (literally!), covering hundreds of kilometres. There are a few permanent lodges or permanent camps in each of the main areas through which it travels, while the alternative is to stay in a mobile tented camp that moves seasonally to be in the (hopefully) right location.

A common misconception is that these mobile camps quite literally follow the migration around day to day, or week to week – they do not. They have set positions which are pre-planned, and set dates when they move to these positions and as such are not completely flexible! Most mobile camps move twice a year between Ndutu for calving season from December – March, and then to the northern Kogatende region for the river crossings from July – October. Some mobile camps also make the most of the transitional times of year (such as June and November) by moving between three or more locations throughout the year; these mobile camps are Serengeti Safari Camp (an office favourite), Legendary Camp and Serengeti Under Canvas.

Although staying at a mobile camp gives you a good chance of being well placed for the migration, because their locations are not flexible, it does not guarantee it. It may be that at a certain time of year, the mobile camps are set up close to some of the permanent lodges (especially in the northern Serengeti), in which case, you would not benefit by going mobile in regards to your location for the migration.

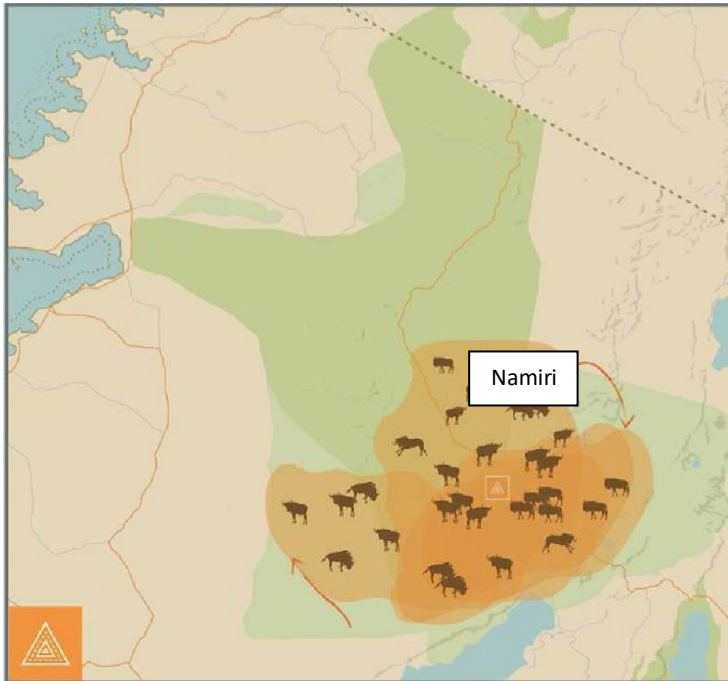
Permanent camps and lodges tend to be able to offer an elevated level of amenity, while mobile camps emphasise location as a priority. However, it's safe to assume that in a mobile camp you will enjoy great food, good service, a comfortable bed and a hot shower (normally the safari-style bucket shower). Most camps also now have flush toilets, sometimes fully plumbed in and sometimes the short-flush "eco" variety which is better for water conservation.

For many people, the novelty and adventure of sleeping under canvas is part of the safari experience and they'll opt for a tent every time. You may want to think about combining a mobile camp (such as Serengeti Safari Camp) in one location with a lodge (such as Lamai Serengeti) to both increase your chances of seeing the migration and enjoy the benefits of both styles of camp.

These days, mobile camps are a more cumbersome than they were in the past, catering to the demand for more creature comforts, and their movement is further restricted by availability of camp-sites which often have to be booked up to a year in advance. Most mobile camps take around 4 days to move to a new location, and the choice of location is guided by decades of experience. While 95% of the time the camps get it spot on, they are at the mercy of the vagaries of nature. That said, we continue to sell seasonal mobile camps in the Serengeti because we still feel that it is the best way to view this transient spectacle, and is more of a vivid safari experience in general.



December – April: Southern Serengeti Plains and Ndotu, NCAA



December: This is a tricky month to predict exactly where the main bulk of the wildebeest will be at any one time as the November short rains makes the grass a little greener everywhere, and as such the wildebeest disperse. As they are moving down to the south for calving season, some may be lingering in Namiri Plains, others may be to the south west in Kusini, and by the end of December many would have made it to Ndotu.

January: At the beginning of the month, most of the herds are settling in around the Ndotu area of the NCAA where life begins for half a million wildebeest during the calving season. Although not as concentrated as in February, this is a great time to avoid the crowds and still catch some very explosive predator action with vulnerable calves on the way.

February: We cannot stress enough that February is the best (and only) time of year you can guarantee seeing the herds if you base yourself in the right place – the rest of the year is not quite so easy to predict as the herds can often be late or early. However, calving season doesn't wait! So being in these green grasses around Lake Ndotu is crucial to catch the herds, as they linger here to give the young calves the best start in life. Go for a mobile tented camp in the Ndotu area and you will find yourself surrounded by millions of brown specks spreading across the sweeping acacia dotted southern plains (not to mention the biggest concentration of predators anywhere in Africa ...)

March: As March is still calving season, the herds linger on this nutrient-rich grass, stretching from the southern extreme of the Serengeti National Park (SNP) and into the Ndotu area of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCAA). They can begin to disperse a little if it begins to rain towards the end of the month, so February is generally considered a better time for those who don't want to get a bit wet!

April: As the food resources are depleted, the herds venture very gradually west and north around as their epic journey begins. There is a chance of rain in April which can put people off, but it is in fact a very clever time to go, as the Serengeti is ghostly quiet, and you may get some phenomenal sightings all to yourself. Because of the chance of rain, it is slightly more difficult to predict where the big herds will be than in preceding months, but they are still likely to be south, if not moving north.

Where to stay from December - April?

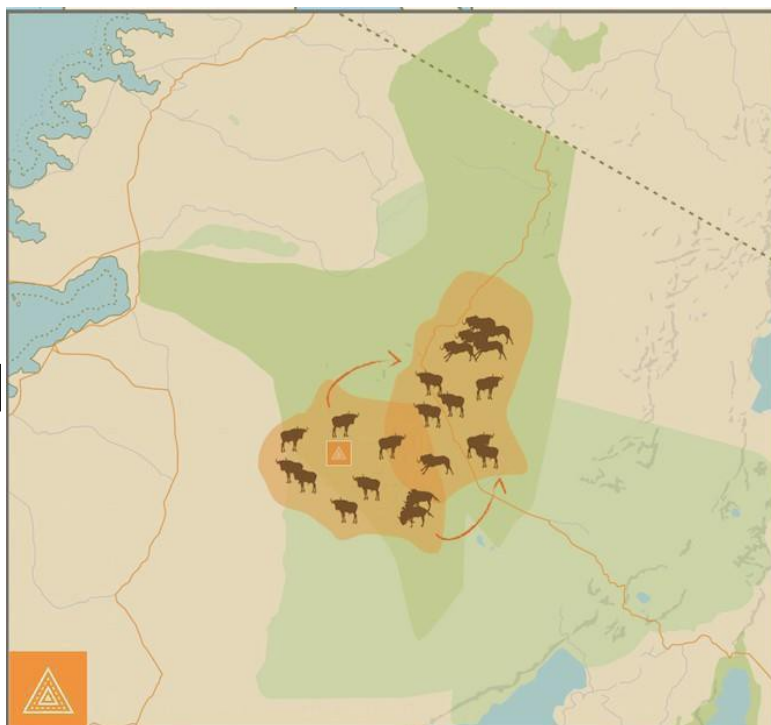
Permanent Lodges:

[Namiri Plains](#) | [Mwiba](#) | [Kusini](#) | [Ndotu Lodge](#) | [Kati Kati](#)

Mobile Camps:

[Olakira](#) | [Kirurumu](#) | [Serengeti Under Canvas](#) | [Lemala](#) | [Nomad Serengeti](#) | [Serian](#) | [Chaka](#) | [Legendary](#) | [Ubuntu](#) | [Kimondo](#)

May: Central Serengeti



So starts a period of transition as the herds start to move north heading ultimately for the Mara River. May usually sees the herds move into the Moru kopjes and central Seronera Valley areas of the Serengeti National Park, but depending on the rains, we may also see herds further south still, or approaching the western corridor.

We would recommend if you are set on seeing a big herd placing yourself in two different locations; in a mobile camp (see below) in Moru, and in a more permanent structure in the Seronera region (in which there are many). This will give you a nice contrast in accommodation, but importantly the best possible change to see the migration. If you are in Tanzania in May, the chances are you are a serious safari enthusiast (as the rains usually put people off!), so spending your time in two different

landscapes is a welcome idea, migration or no migration... The resident predators and wildlife in Seronera is also phenomenal year-round, and if you go in May you will miss the crowds too which is a bonus.

Note: The below three mobile camps are the only ones which set up in three or more locations throughout the year, as opposed to all the rest which are set up only in the North and then down to the South to catch the “main migration events” of the river crossings (in the north), and the calving season (in the south). These three are the only ones which venture to Moru and as such they get booked up quite far in advance. Give us a ring and ask us which one would suit you the best as although all mobile camps, they are all very different!

Where to stay in May?

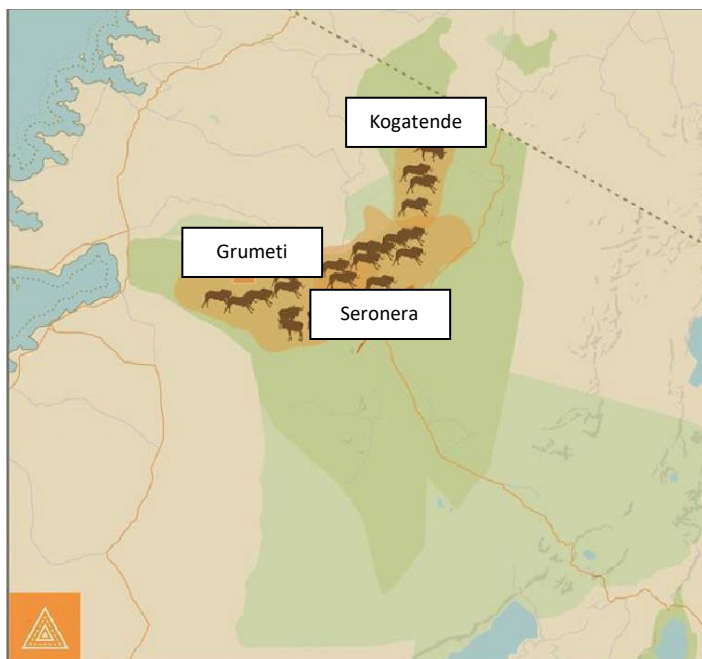
Permanent Lodges:

Dunia | Namiri Plains | Sopa | Serena | Kiota | Ewanjan

Mobile Camps:

Serengeti Under Canvas | Nomad Serengeti | Legendary

June: Western Serengeti



The transitional period continues, with June frequently being a superb time to see the migration in the western corridor, and here the herds face their first major obstacle in the form of the Grumeti River with its mighty crocodiles.

Weather patterns at this time of year have a huge impact on migration movements and the herds can split up to follow different migration routes, double back on themselves to Seronera and Moru, spread out and generally provide a challenge for our guides. If you do catch the migration though, this is a fantastic time to be in the middle of the herds as it is rutting season – which can get very noisy!

In very dry years, the approach to northern Serengeti can be accelerated with the first wildebeest arriving in northern Serengeti as early

as late June. At this time of year we strongly recommend a combination of camps to secure the best migration viewing as with May, but maybe more so at this time.

Although the Mara River crossings are phenomenal, it would be a mistake to solely look at a camp in Kogatende in hope for a June river crossing – it is a risky approach! This is why we would suggest looking at two different camps; from June 1st – 15th focus on one in the Grumeti region and one in the central Serengeti Seronera region, and only in late June should you combine a northern Kogatende camp and one in either the west or central Serengeti. It is a difficult time of year to predict! The good news is though that if you are focusing on a combination of camps, you benefit from two very different locations and landscapes, as well being in fantastic locations for The Serengeti's exceptional year-round wildlife – it is not all about the migration!

Where to stay in June?

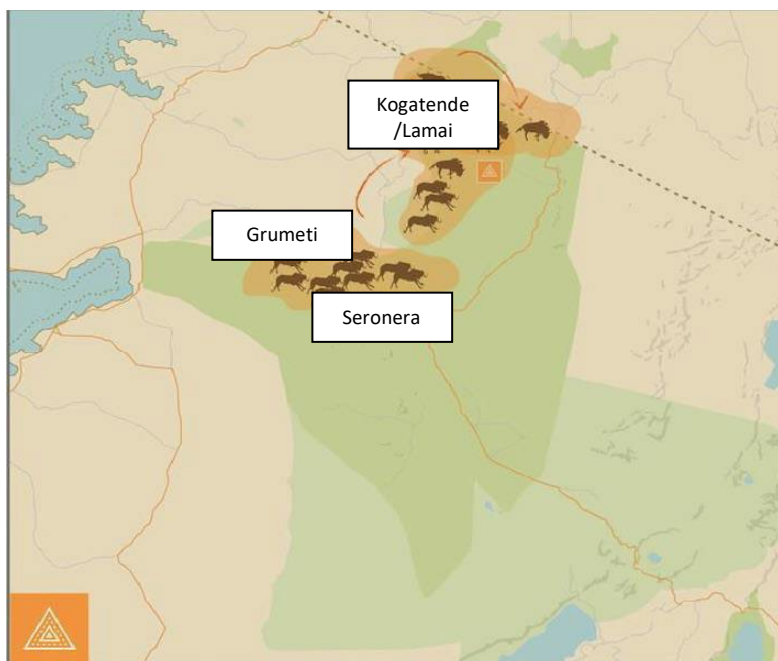
Permanent Lodges:

[Sasakwa](#) | [Mbalageti](#) | [Grumeti](#) | [Singita Faru Faru](#) | [Singita Sabora](#) | [Singita Serengeti House](#)

Mobile Camps:

[Serengeti Under Canvas](#) | [Nomad Serengeti](#) | [Legendary](#) | [Singita Explore](#) | [Ubuntu](#)

July - October: Northern Serengeti and Masai Mara



The arrival of the migration to Northern Serengeti depends purely on weather conditions each year. When there is plenty of food and water the herds will take their time and spend longer in western Grumeti and central Seronera areas, arriving in the northern Kogatende and Lamai regions as late as early August. If conditions are dry, the first wildebeest will forge north towards the Mara River, a permanent water source, and a reliable supply of green grazing, and arrive as early as late June or early July. In recent years, the wildebeest have been arriving a bit earlier, but this changes from year to year so going off this basis can be a mistake.

The Mara River crossings that take place over this period are the stuff of wildlife

documentaries and make for especially dramatic viewing. They can happen at any point during this time of year, as herds criss-cross back and forth chasing the clouds; but they are elusive, rapid and unforgettable experiences. An experienced, patient guide is essential to give the best chance of catching a crossing as you could be waiting for the wildebeest to cross for hours as they mull around on one side of the river, before one suddenly decides to take the leap of faith and the others follow.

We hope that our maps at the beginning of the guide have helped clear up common misconceptions about the river crossings. Although we try to make this guide and our website as detailed as possible, it really is best just to call for a chat with one of our experts – this is by far the best way of clearing up any confusion!

Where to stay from July – October?

Permanent Lodges:

[Lamai](#) | [Sayari](#) | [Kuria Hills](#) | [Singita Mara](#)

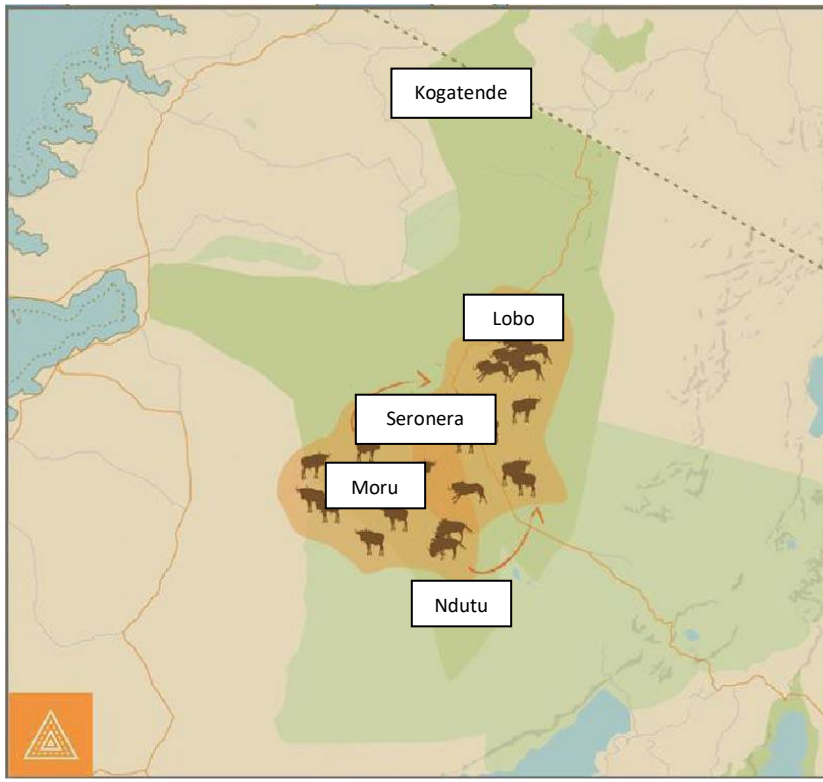
Mobile Camps:

[Olakira](#) | [Kirurumu](#) | [Serengeti Under Canvas](#) | [Lemala](#) | [Nomad Serengeti](#) | [Serian](#) | [Chaka](#) | [Legendary](#) | [Ubuntu](#) | [Kimondo](#)

Where to Stay in the Masai Mara from July – October?

[Kichwa Tembo](#) | [Angama Mara](#) | [Mara Plains](#) | [Rekero](#) | [Governors](#) | [Serian](#)

November: Central Serengeti



As the short rains fall, renewing more fertile grazing further south, the herds begin to move with it. November is another very unpredictable month when herds can be as far south as Ndutu or remain in the north as Kogatende for much of the month. The herds will often split and take several different routes to the south and central Serengeti/Moru can be an excellent base to reach sizeable herds. Combining locations over this period is often a smart way to keep up with the herds as when they decide to push south, they can often move quite quickly.

Again, when there is uncertainty about the herd's location in a transitional month like November, it is a good idea to stay for a few nights in one of the mobile camps which move three or

more times a year, and another maybe more permanent structure in an excellent wildlife viewing location like Seronera to give you diversity in your locations and wildlife experiences. In these transitional months, we can not stress enough that although positioning yourself well for the migration is a good idea, to focus solely on this is a mistake.

Although the above map shows the herds congregating around the Lobo area (to the east) and central Seronera regions, huge river crossings have been known to happen in early November, so setting yourself in the Kogatende region can be a good idea (if you are not going there for the sole purpose of seeing a river crossing!). See our video of an especially dramatic river crossing taken in November, which just shows that no matter how many satellites are taken or how many predictions are made, you can never tell on safari when or where nature is going to explode into action, which we think is part of the whole fascination with safari.

Where to stay in November?

Permanent Lodges:

[Kleins](#) | [Migration Camp](#) | [Kiota](#) | [Ewanjan](#) | [Namiri](#)

Mobile Camps:

[Serengeti Under Canvas](#) | [Nomad Serengeti](#) | [Legendary](#)

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE WILDEBEEST AREN'T AROUND?

Many areas of the Serengeti are home to rich resident wildlife including giraffe, zebra, impala, topi, hartebeest and predators such as lion, cheetah, hyena, leopard and sometimes wild dog. There is a plethora of fascinating small mammals like mongooses and bat eared foxes as well as a huge number of beautiful birds. The scenery is varied; wooded thickets suddenly open up to great rolling plains studded with lone trees or rocky outcrops, or dizzying plains stretching to the horizon. All of this is here regardless of where the wildebeest are and it's worth coming expecting to enjoy everything that the Serengeti has to offer.

WHAT IS AN AVERAGE DAY IN THE SERENGETI?

There is no average day! Your guide will be constantly talking to other guides finding out where the herds are and will decide with you each evening what the following day's plan will be.

Sometimes the herds will be literally around the camp or within half an hour's drive away; at other times you may pack a picnic breakfast and/or lunch in order to travel further afield. These days out are always an adventure with lots of other wildlife seen along the way.

HOW DO I PLAN YOUR TRIP TO THE SERENGETI?

A safari to the Serengeti is often part of a larger Tanzanian itinerary that may include other wildlife areas or an extension to the coast. We recommend a minimum of 4 nights in the Serengeti to make the most of it. Remember that the animals move according to short term weather patterns (within a broader general circuit), and the distances they cover can be vast and rapid. It therefore pays to allow your-self a little extra time, or to combine two camps in two different areas in order to have the best possible chance of seeing everything (this is especially important between April and June and during November which is a time when herds are particularly prone to unexpected behaviour).

Consider including a private guide and vehicle in your itinerary as this will give you maximum flexibility to plan your days as you please and to focus on the things that interest you. This is particularly true for river crossings which require all guests in the vehicle to be patient and committed to the challenge!

Although this is an introductory guide, there is still a lot of information we can clarify for you over the phone, so for more information please do not hesitate to give us a ring!

Why Tanzania Odyssey?

Independent advice from experts

We really know our stuff. We have been arranging luxury travel to Africa since 1999, and we have close relationships with all the suppliers. We have stayed at all the lodges many a time, so we can match an itinerary to your requirements very precisely. You may have come across a fabulous lodge on [TripAdvisor](#) – but if there's an even better (more intimate, more authentic, less expensive) one just round the corner, we'll tell you about it. And if anything goes wrong during your trip, we know who to call and how to get things sorted.

Independently owned and operated

We are not accountable to anybody but you. We don't work on commission. Our only objective is to arrange the best possible trip for you, within your budget, and to ensure that you have a wonderful time.

Industry credentials

Our MD, Marc, is a board director of the [Africa Travel and Tourism Association](#), the UK trade body covering all aspects of travel and tourism to Africa. He is also a judge of the highly respected [Good Safari Guide](#). One of our consultants, Annie, has written the [Cadogan guidebook to Tanzania and Zanzibar](#), now in its 2nd edition. Most importantly we pride ourselves on the quality of our consultants, many of whom are native to their specialist country, and all of whom know the countries backwards.

Testimonials

Countless thousands of clients have been delighted with our service. [Here](#) is what some past clients have had to say about their trips and about us, and we receive regular reviews on [Trust Pilot](#).

Your Money

Our price promise

Booking through us will cost no more - and often considerably less - than booking the same trip with all the individual suppliers directly. We are able to negotiate excellent rates with suppliers, which results in savings for you. In the very unlikely event that you get a cheaper quote for the same trip from a reputable UK bonded tour operator, we will match that quote.

Financial protections

We are [ATOL](#) bonded (ATOL 5397) so whatever might happen to us, your money is protected.

No surcharge for currency fluctuations

Once your itinerary is confirmed and your deposit has been paid, we guarantee that we will make no surcharge for currency fluctuations, whatever happens to exchange rates before you actually travel.

In summary, we are able to package a holiday for less than you will be able to arrange directly, without any exchange risk, and you will benefit from our decades of experience in arranging similar trips, our impartial opinions, and the financial security that our ATOL bond offers!