



The sun sets over an acacia tree in the Serengeti



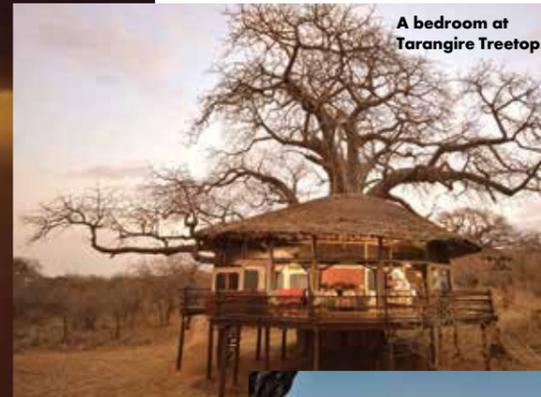
Zebras gather in Tarangire National Park



A giraffe crosses the savannah



Fiery skies over Tarangire



A bedroom at Tarangire Treetops



A chef prepares an outdoor dinner

# Tanzania: BUSH TO BEACH

*Tanzania offers time-poor travellers the perfect sampler of what Africa has to offer, as Richelle Harrison Plesse discovers*

She is beautiful, staring at us from behind long lashes and craning her neck as she studies us from afar. The young female giraffe is an early wildlife sighting in **Tarangire National Park**, the first stop on our 15-day bush-to-beach safari through Tanzania, which kicks off on the northern park circuit before winding up on ‘Spice Island’ Zanzibar. Despite being only a two-hour drive from Arusha, the gateway to the Tanzanian wilderness, Tarangire seems a world away from civilisation. The baobab-studded landscape is at once mysterious and magical — the giant, majestic trees dominating the savannah like silent sentinels.

The park’s dirt tracks are no challenge for our **Duma Explorer** driver-guide Hashim, who effortlessly pilots our 4WD along the uneven roads, all while using his eagle-eye vision to point out various species of flora and fauna, including those that aren’t immediately visible to us. We pass the odd waterhole, where small groups of zebra, impala and warthog gather for a dip and a drink, see a cheetah and her cub playing in the grass and spy a lone leopard snoozing in a tree, his tail and paws casually dangling over the branches. On the banks of a marshy swamp we spot our first ‘king of the jungle’, or queen, in this case — a lioness clutching her prized kill: a bloody zebra carcass.

Home for the evening is **Tarangire Treetops**, a secluded luxury lodge in the neighbouring conservation area. Each room is in fact a treehouse, wrapped around the trunk of a magnificent baobab or marula, creating a whimsical, enchanted forest feel. Inside, no detail is spared, from the room’s total privacy, to the plush king-sized bed

and ‘his and hers’ rain showers. At the heart of the property is an open-air lounge bar — the enormous trunk of a 750-year-old baobab its stunning centrepiece — which overlooks a swimming pool and waterhole, the latter frequently visited by animals eager to quench their thirst.

Before dinner under the stars, we set off for sundowners atop Sunset Hill, a rocky outcrop boasting 360-degree views across the conservancy. The Treetops staff have brought wine, nibbles and a couple of chairs, and for the next hour or so we’re alone as we watch the sun sink behind the baobabs. The following morning we’re treated to a private bush walk, rising early enough to see the first rays of sunlight cast a golden glow across everything they touch. The dry, brittle grass crunches underfoot as we move slowly in single file, flanked by a rifle-toting guide and a spear-carrying Maasai warrior who point out plant and animal species and animal tracks. Despite crossing our fingers for a close encounter, the dik-diks scurry away, the elephants keep a safe distance and the impala and zebra throw suspicious glances in our direction.

Back on the road, we weave through the leafy Ngorongoro Highlands en route to the **Serengeti National Park**. The lush vegetation disappears as we move deeper into the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where flat top acacias and Maasai *bomas* (group of traditional huts, or *manyattas*) dot parched valleys, these giving way to arid plains sprinkled with Maasai tending



Tarangire Treetops’ swimming pool offers respite from the African sun



Crystalline waters in Zanzibar





The view from bed at Chaka Camp



Tanzania is a superhighway for migrating wildebeest



Chaka Camp moves its location at least twice a year, but is always well stocked



Lemala Kuria Hills



A luxuriously appointed room at Lemala

to their livestock. Our first glimpse of the Serengeti ecosystem is under the driving rain. As lightning slices through the sky our hopes are dashed of seeing anything in such dreadful weather. Cutting short the game drive we make our way towards camp, but not before spotting three young male lions with short, sandy-coloured manes, seemingly unfazed by the heavy downpour.

In the central Serengeti, **Chaka Camp** (*chaka* comes from the Swahili word for bush) is a mobile campsite which changes location at least twice a year. The camp looks deceptively simple but represents low-key luxury at its best. Although situated in the middle of nowhere, the nine tastefully decorated tents come with all the luxuries you'd expect (hot showers and flush toilets mean you won't slum it in the savannah). The mess tent is stocked with books, board games and a full-to-the-brim drinks cabinet — perfect for rainy days — while the hearty meals and hot-water bottles are just what we need after many hours on the road. But come nightfall, the disturbing howl of a hyena, the mighty roar of a lion or even a deafening zebra stampede are stark reminders that out here, we aren't alone.

By morning the skies have cleared and many animals have emerged to bask in the sun. In the space of an hour we spot a leopard stalking a lone gazelle, a family of hyenas lolling in mud puddles and hippopotami napping in the shallow waters of palm tree-lined swamps. The birdlife is impressive too; from the dazzling blue and jade-green Superb Starlings, to the rainbow-hued Lilac-Breasted Rollers, who put on spectacular aerial displays to attract a partner. As the sun begins to set, we

witness more seductive behaviour — this time from a pair of mating lions, oblivious to the hordes of binocular-clutching wildlife-watchers jostling for a good view.

The scenery changes once again as we move on to the wild and mysterious northern Serengeti. Its dramatic landscape is scattered with *kopjes* (granite rock formations) and it's here we spot our first wildebeest herds migrating north to Kenya's Maasai Mara in search of greener pastures. Set among the rock fig trees is **Lemala Kuria Hills**, an intimate lodge overlooking verdant valleys and the ancient Wogakurya Hills. Our room — boasting a private deck with plunge pool and outdoor shower — is perfection, while the charming staff are never without a smile. After checking in, we sip pre-dinner drinks around the campfire as we watch the sun fade over the horizon. The faint, incessant bleating of wildebeest in the distance is the only noise disturbing the silence.

The pristine vistas of the Serengeti under the early morning light are unlike anything we've ever seen. By tracing the nearby Mara River, we hope to witness a wildebeest crossing but it's a question of being in the right place at the right time, as Mother Nature has a mind of her own. Hashim tells us to keep an eye out for any dust clouds which could indicate wildebeest movement *en masse*. As luck would have it, barely five minutes later, one of nature's grandest spectacles unfolds before our eyes, and we are the sole audience. Thousands of wildebeest move in a steady tide towards the river's edge, their constant grunting creating a thunderous chorus. One after the other they take the plunge, making

the mad dash across the river, hoping to avoid the crocodiles lurking beneath the water's surface.

Our final stop on the northern circuit is the **Ngorongoro Crater** — a volcanic caldera spanning some 20km. Our base is the opulent **andBeyond Ngorongoro Crater Lodge**, whose stilted, handcrafted banana thatch suites enjoy a lofty position on the crater rim. As decadent as the rooms are (chandeliers, wooden antiques, jewel-toned fabrics), the lodge is all about the views, and they can be admired from anywhere, thanks to numerous floor-to-ceiling windows. The cosy chalet-like setting seems at odds with the location, but thoughtful touches such as a lit fireplace, red rose petal path and hot bubble bath all waiting for us upon arrival are the ultimate in luxury.

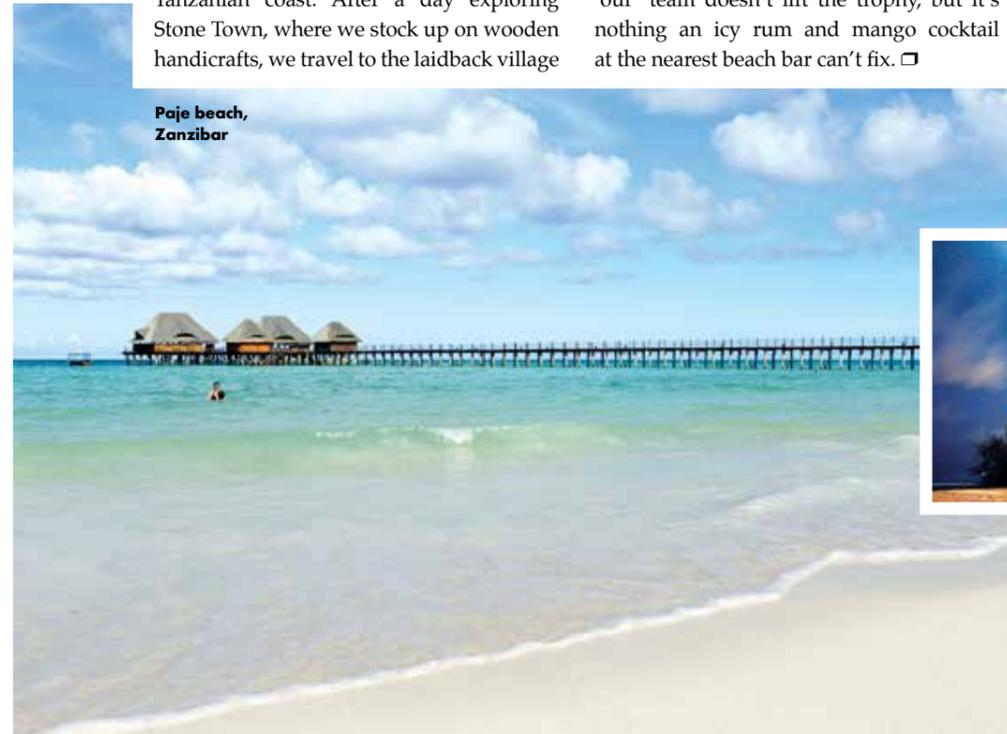
Our excursion to the crater floor requires an early start but it's worth it for the spectacular sunrise over the caldera. As the wildlife is desensitised to the presence of humans and vehicles due to the crater's popularity among safari-goers, we can get close to the animals without scaring them away. Here we see the shy black rhinoceros for the first time, a warthog in his final moments (minutes later pounced upon by a lioness and her cubs) and a male ostrich who laps up the attention as he performs an elaborate mating dance for his partner.

We round off our safari adventure in Zanzibar — nicknamed 'Spice Island' for its production of cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon — located some 25km off the Tanzanian coast. After a day exploring Stone Town, where we stock up on wooden handicrafts, we travel to the laidback village

of Paje, a popular kite surfing spot on the island's east coast. The picture-postcard beach has everything going for it, right down to the powder-soft white sand and swaying palms. But it's at its most spectacular during low tide when the translucent waters recede to reveal vibrant coral reefs, unveiling a real-life, exquisite watercolour.

We're holed up in the very private, very plush **White Sand Luxury Villas & Spa** which sits at the southern end of Paje beach. Our gorgeous one-bedroom villa is only steps from the beach and surrounded by tropical gardens blossoming with hibiscus. The light-filled room and living areas are sleek and airy, but it's the huge private pool, outdoor bathtub and shower, and rooftop deck (with a star bed to boot) that steal the show. While the uneven service and average food leave a lot to be desired, it's hard not to be blown away by the amazing setting.

Whether on a scooter, bicycles or foot, we spend several days exploring. From snorkelling in the offshore Blue Lagoon and feasting on grilled lobster or coconut calamari in neighbouring villages Jambiani and Bwejuu, to spending an afternoon on the deserted beaches of the Michamvi Peninsula — where the only footprints in the sand are ours — we're left absolutely enchanted. But some of the most fun we have is in Paje itself. On our last day, we stumble upon a group of local children playing football. Half the village cheer them on and we join in, chanting and dancing as if we were at the World Cup. Unfortunately 'our' team doesn't lift the trophy, but it's nothing an icy rum and mango cocktail at the nearest beach bar can't fix. ☐



Paje beach, Zanzibar

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Zanzibar is also known as 'Spice Island'

