



Maji Moto

LAKE MANYARA, TANZANIA

Maji Moto tented camp is set at the southern end of Lake Manyara National Park, close to a set of hot springs of the same name ('maji moto' simply means 'hot water' in Swahili). From whichever direction you approach Lake Manyara, it is a dramatic spectacle. Here, the great wall of the Rift Valley is at its most impressive, with the escarpment of rock dropping over 500m down to the glassy surface of the lake. Wedged between, is a narrow band of acacia woodland, grassy floodplains, and a verdant groundwater forest which make up the traversable part of this small but tremendously diverse national park.

With the exception of Black Rhinoceros, which were poached to local extinction in the 1980s, and Wild Dog which have vanished from most of northern Tanzania in recent years, all of Africa's great game animals are present. It was here at Lake Manyara that Iain Douglas-Hamilton conducted the first detailed study of African Elephant ecology, and their numbers are on the increase after decades of poaching. Despite its small size - the park extends over 330km², although only about 100km² is dry land - Manyara supports an astonishing diversity of birds.

Lake Manyara lies at an altitude of about 950m above sea level, and is typical of the chain of lakes which line the Rift Valley from Ethiopia to Malawi. Manyara has no outlet, so the water which gathers is trapped and subject to intensive evaporation, which results in the accumulation of salts and the distinctive deposits of crusty white soda on the shore. The expanse of water fluctuates in synchrony with the wet and dry seasons, and with the amount of rainfall in the catchment in a particular year. On average, it extends over an area of 390km², of which about two thirds falls within the national park. It is typically about 50km long and 16km wide, but it has been known to shrink back to a point where it is almost impossible to walk across, or to rise up and flood the park's road network.

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