

**Tanzania and Zanzibar
September 20th till October 4th, 2017**



Many who safari to Africa report back that such a trip got in their blood and changed their lives. I join them with that evaluation. Africa is immense with thousands and thousands of acres covered with just animals and birds. Nighttime skies are filled with stars unfamiliar to North Americans. It is glorious, stupendous, awe-inspiring, spell-binding, and, at times, just a little scary. It was the best vacation I ever had.

We journeyed with 10 others under the auspice of the Smithsonian Institution. Bruce and I traveled with the Smithsonian folks before so we knew they would fill our days with exciting new experiences. But we never expected all the excitement we witnessed. One day a jeep ahead of us broke down at a watering hole which was filled to the brim with hippopotami. Across the watering hole were two huge lions who kept all of us in their sight. One driver had jumped out of their jeep to jack it up while other drivers came to the rescue to straighten the tire rim. So...was it possible that if the hippos didn't get us the lions would? Trust me, the drivers watched those lions and

hippos more than they paid attention to repairing the jeep! Another time our driver had to stop the Toyota Land Cruiser to relieve himself. He barely got out of the vehicle when a huge lion started for him! African animals are not pets! We stayed in the Land Cruiser all the time, no one had to lecture us against taking a stroll across the savanna.

Tanzania gained independence in 1961 and in 1964 it joined Zanzibar to form one country. The country is overwhelmingly agricultural but over one-third of the people live in extreme poverty. Forty-one percent of the people are malnourished. Twenty-five percent cannot read or write. The poorest people live without electricity, running water, windows in their homes, or even walls. Even though Tanzania continues to be at the bottom of lists ranking the worlds' economies, there is hope living standards will improve because of tourism. It is the big money-maker. The million+ tourists who come here every year are treated very very well.

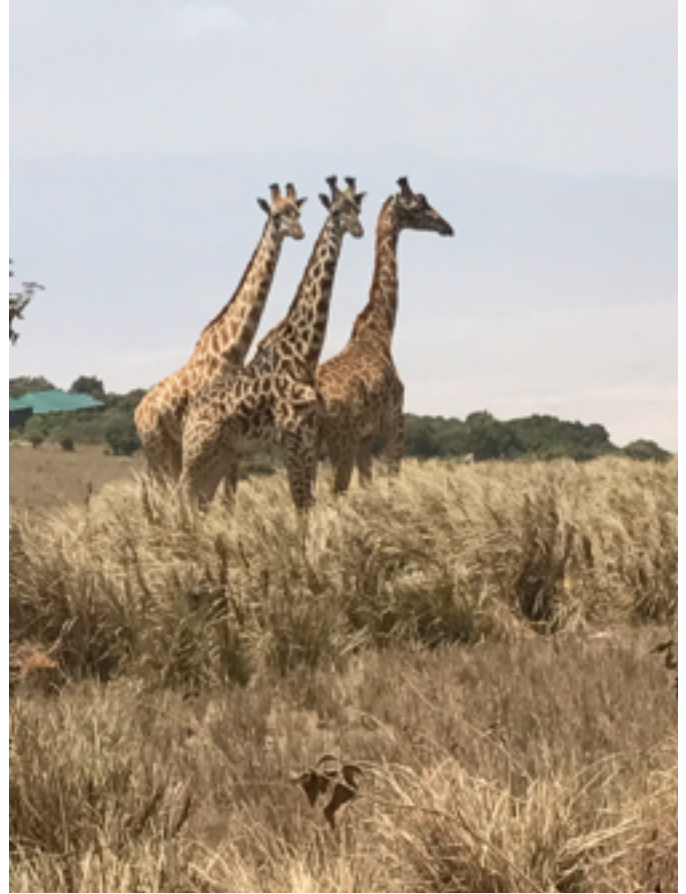


The people here seem committed to notions of extended family, generosity, consideration, and compassion towards others. We did not see anger, mistreatment, nor isolation of family members from one another. Family is everything to these people.

Studies have shown women do 85% of the work required to support the family so I am not moving there any time soon. The country, unlike many others in Africa, has enjoyed almost uninterrupted peace, free of civil war or violent coups. Most people in Tanzania are Christians or animists, while Muslims make up most of those in Zanzibar. An aside, Muslim women often are covered head to toe in black garments we would find oppressive. But we could not help but smile when told these women appear religious, but they take off this garb when they get to the discos and end up dancing in rather revealing clothing! Crime is uncommon in Tanzania, while the opposite is true in Zanzibar (we were advised not to leave the hotel grounds in Zanzibar).

Tanzania has one of the highest proportions of parkland of any country in the world; 35% is protected by a government committed to its wellbeing. Poachers exist and are violent when apprehended, but such violence is not as common as in other African countries.





Our first major stop: Ngorongora Crater, a World Heritage Site. It is the largest intact volcanic caldera on the planet stretching across 100 square miles. The animals who live here cannot migrate out of the 2,000 foot deep caldera so there is a good chance you can see them on their home turf. The first night we stayed in this charming hotel totally constructed of stone and overlooking the caldera. One bedroom wall was glass. As we unpacked our suitcases, we were startled by looking out that glass wall and seeing a HUGE Cape Buffalo!!!! (remember, these guys are really dangerous). The next evening we looked out that window to see a HUGE bull elephant RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, knocking down bushes and decimating trees. I was riveted to the floor; my heart beat became anaerobic. It was so frightening because these animals were no further than 15 feet from us. Later, when we walked through the hotel to dinner, it seemed everyone in the hotel had stopped what they were doing to watch this elephant.



The next day we drove down into the crater. Our first sight was three young male lions lying right by the road just staring at us. They are not afraid of the Land Cruisers or the people in them either...they would just attack people if anyone stuck their hands out the windows. We did not do that! We just took picture after picture. On a calmer note we saw families of giraffes, thousands of pink-shaded flamingos in one of the large ponds, marabou storks, and cheetahs climbing rocks to get a better view of the 'next meal' running the other direction.

We visited a nomadic Maasai village and remained mesmerized by their stature and warrior-like appearance; these people are the most visually spectacular of the multiple tribes in Tanzania. While

weight-gain is a visual sign of success throughout Africa, these people are rail thin. Why I am not sure except they walk all the time and perhaps do not have enough to eat either. It is acceptable to have



multiple wives, but I am not sure how they can afford to support more than one family. Violence against women is common here and elsewhere in this country. Maasai are pastoralists who believe all cows in the world belong to them by godly decree. We watched them



milk a cow and mix cow blood into the milk container; it is a source of vitamins for the community, like our vitamin drinks. They make fire by rubbing sticks together and gave us a demonstration of that process. They circumcise their boys at age 15; they did not give us a demonstration of that (thank the Lord!). The wind was blowing strong and it was very cold; they dressed only in long bright red thin cotton blankets thrown over their shoulders and wrapped around their legs. I asked them if they were cold and they said they were not. Guess you get used to that weather. Another reason I am not moving there any time soon.

We left the caldera and drove on even more rutted dirt roads to the Serengeti National Park (another World Heritage Site), which hosts more amazing wild animals than all existing zoos combined. They have more than a million wildebeests and thousands of zebras, Topi (my favorite animal because of its gorgeous brown coloring), elands, waterbucks, baboons, monkeys, hyenas, giraffes, etc. Here is where we saw The Big Five (elephant, lion, rhinoceros, leopards and water buffalo). We looked left, we looked right and at every turn we looked there were animals and birds. They ignored us for the most part, except when we saw The Great Migration happening right in front of us. Here were hundred of thousands of wildebeests and zebras, gazelles, elephants, giraffes, impalas, wart hogs, a rhino, wild dogs, Cape Buffalo, and cheetahs, Secretary Birds, eagles, herons, ibises, spoonbills, kingfishers, flying or running or walking across open range land headed for green grass and water. It was an amazing and beautiful sight, reminding me of what I imaged occurred in the American West when the buffalo roamed. We stayed for days in the Serengeti, watching The Great Migration... Grant Wood's version of The Peaceable Kingdom.



The Serengeti experience I will always remember is driving along in the Land Cruiser over millions of acres of land when we came across this stone out-cropping. We slowed down and there right in front of us were two female lioness nursing their young. At the top of these rocks were two huge male lions...protecting it all. Of course we stopped, starred, and took picture after picture. We were there about 20 minutes, snapping away...mesmerized the entire time. Our drivers, who are in the Serengeti every week with different tour groups, said they never saw a sight like this; they thought it made our particular trip one of the best trips in all their years of working in the Serengeti. Keep in mind that none of these animals paid us any attention.





We were given the choice to also take a day to visit Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake and the largest fresh water lake in the world. Fishermen and their families live next to the lake and provide fish for other



communities further inland. We visited schools there and spoke with the people who lived there. Although we had seen poverty from the beginning of our trip, this was the most extreme poverty we witnessed. Children followed us everywhere.





There is little space now to share impressions of our trip to the Rift Valley Floor to see the Olduvai Gorge, or the thrill of seeing Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain (which we saw from the single engine Cessna which I had the chance to co-pilot!!!).

Just a word about the other 10 people with whom we traveled. They were all lovely. One couple with whom we shared our Land Cruiser every day was particularly delightful and oh, so much fun. The wife and I giggled every day between being awed by gorgeous sites, being thrilled with stunning animals, or being surprised or shocked by both.

I never expect to witness such beauty anywhere again. Life can not get better than heaven on earth.

***Bonnie M. Orkow
October 20, 2017***