

Africa's Parks

There is no mutually accepted accurate count of the number of national parks and game reserves in Africa's ten premier safari countries. Our map shows what might be considered as full-fledged parks and reserves controlled and regulated by the parks boards in these countries. However, there is a tendency on the part of these authorities to continue adding new regions that hardly sustain any meaningful animal population—certainly not sufficient that would warrant a long trip from overseas.

Number of parks

In South Africa our count of 13 national parks falls way short of the latest official count of 21. While the energetic pursuit of the South African National Parks Board (Sanpark) to add additional parks and World Heritage Sites to its roster is to be admired, foreigners should be aware that many of these offer very limited fauna and flora.

We included only parks and reserves with substantial indigenous wildlife in Southern and East Africa. We further highlight only those that we consider worth the long journey from abroad or as special points of interest for those foreigners who happen to be in these countries on business or pleasure and have time on their hands to go on safari. Undoubtedly the locals will frequent many of the lesser parks in their search for solitude and relaxation at a reasonable cost.

Homo sapien herd

At the same time we do caution against merely following the human herd to widely publicized "must-see" parks. Mention, for instance, a safari in Tanzania and the first name that crops up is Serengeti with its Great Migration. Every year more than 150,000 homo sapiens swarm into the park to catch a glimpse of the tens of thousands of wildebeest and zebra on the move, followed by lions, leopards and other predators. In contrast only about 500 visitors travel southwest to the more remote Katavi Plains National Park, Tanzania's third largest, even though it offers many times the biomass (wildlife per acre) in Serengeti and a much better and varied close-

up wildlife viewing experience. Similarly Ruaha and Selous that are highly rated by us and other safari specialists attract a very limited number of visitors every year.

Prominent parks

Just as safari in Tanzania is associated with Serengeti, Kenya's most prominent destination is the Maasai Mara, Namibia has Etosha, Zimbabwe is known for Hwange, Botswana for the Okavango Delta and South Africa for Kruger National Park. In all of these countries, however, it is worthwhile to look beyond the hype into lesser known, exciting destinations. Even in Rwanda and Uganda where the currently modest traffic points mainly towards the gorillas in Volcanoes National Park and Bwindi, respectively, there are other worthwhile destinations to explore. In Zambia, incidentally the well-known South Luangwa is matched or challenged by several other parks.

Private game reserves

Largely a South African phenomenon, are so-called private game reserves. Several of them on the western border of Kruger National Park offer visitors an array of luxurious lodges and the opportunity to go off-road to get close-up views of the animals. The concept has spread as far as the northern outreaches of Serengeti where American financier Paul Tudor Jones has purchased leasehold to 350,000 acres to establish Grumeti Singita Game Reserve—an exclusive destination for discerning wealthy clients. Apart from its own camps and self-service units most of national parks boards have allowed private operators concessions to establish luxury lodges for clients willing to pay extra for exclusivity. With an average size of eight to twelve units, these smaller establishments assure clients exclusivity, luxury and expert guidance.

Large establishments

Unfortunately not all the park authorities in Africa resisted the temptation to bolster revenues by allowing large hotels within national parks. Serengeti in Tanzania and Maasai Mara and Tsavo in Kenya are steadily being taken over by vast establishments—the most recent being a 150 bed resort in the very center of Serengeti.

AFRICA'S GAME PARKS

Africa's premier safari countries are situated in Southern and East Africa. Between ten of them—Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe—there are hundred or more national parks and game reserves. Click on each of these countries to link to its description and (in the case of major parks) a map and further detail. A mouse click on the country name will also link to a description of the safari opportunities in that specific area.

