

Africa: Day Ten

A beautiful yet cacophonous chorus of squawks and screeches brought a night of peaceful rest to a definite and excited end. There is no way a person could sleep through all the noise and I can't imagine that anyone would want to. The birds made sure that we were wide awake for another day of safari, this time in the great Serengeti National Park!



We crammed as much gear as we could into

the back of the trusty Toyota and balanced the rest on the roof. The long drive to the Park took us through the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. A roadside overlook granted us a glimpse of what lay in store for us two days ahead – the Ngorongoro Crater.





Ngorongoro Crater



The Serengeti is a vast (14,763 sq. km.) and wild place. The expansive plains serve as a theater to what is known as the “Great Migration.” The promise of greener pastures drives scores of hoofed animals into

a frenzied march searching for subsistence garnered by the rain. The eclectic collection of beasts is a study in contrasts. The graceful gazelle and the gangly giraffe, the awkward ostrich and the villainous vulture, the humongous hippo and the dainty dik-dik are prime examples. In the game of survival that is life in the Serengeti, the wildebeest is undoubtedly the sacrificial pawn. More than one million of these bewildering creatures are said to live here, joining the ranks of over 200,000 zebras. At the height of calving season for the wildebeest, 8000 of these ugly beings are born each day. Within four months of birth, 40% of these animals will be dead; many will have been eaten by the crocodile, cheetah, lion or leopard.





On family vacations when I was younger, I remember my Dad attempting to keep us kids occupied by promising to dish out a quarter for the first person to spot an elk, a dollar for a moose and five smackers if we could find a bear etc. The safari made me feel like I was



playing that game again. Our guide's two eyes proved to be more effective than our 14 eager eyes at spotting wildlife. Somehow, he knew which spots in the distance to stop for, and when to just keep driving. Sometimes, all we had to do was find a parked vehicle – usually they were stopped for a reason. The first big find of the day was a pair of cheetahs lounging on a berm. We sort of stumbled upon them by blind luck. They, I'm sure, had been well aware of our presence from a long ways off...





It's good to be king!







As the sun was making its way to the horizon, our guide earnestly drove through each stand of trees he could find looking for the most elusive prize find of the Serengeti – the leopard. This was the last of the large animals native to the Serengeti that we had yet to see. The leopard hunts primarily in the evening, so the most likely time to see one would be now. After extensive searching, we were ecstatic to find one poised in the crotch of a tree. As we observed this fabulous feline, it proceeded to climb out of the tree and lazily saunter towards our vehicle. As if we weren't there, the leopard walked right past the Toyota, across the dirt road and onto a downed tree. It continued to pose for us in the fading light until we headed back towards camp. We were abuzz with excitement and reveling in all that we had been allowed to see. What the Serengeti lacked in foliage, it made up for with all of the cats!

The Seronera camp would be our home for the night, right smack in the heart of the Serengeti! Seronera is not a particularly pretty place to camp, but that did not matter to me. I was so excited to be sleeping in such a raw, untamed environment. What a thrill it was as the cries of the hyenas resounded through the night! This was livin'!!



