

The Wanderlust Effect



What It's Like to Travel to Tanzania During COVID

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... and why tourism is more important than ever

Let's be honest: Tanzania has been a little less than transparent about their COVID figures. For some people, that leaves major question marks about reality on the ground. Is the virus running rampant through the streets or is it actually relatively non-existent like the Tanzanian government would have you believe? I received many emails and messages during our trip to Tanzania simply asking about the travel experience, the state of the country from a traveler's perspective, the arrival process, and the departure experience. If the country doesn't consider COVID a threat do they even have tests needed to return to your home country? I'm sharing all of that and more below for anyone planning – or considering planning – their trip to Tanzania. Plus, read up on why trips to Africa are more important than ever.



Tanzania is a bucket list destination for many as it embodies that raw East African safari feel. So, why should you visit Tanzania now? Do you want me to start with the selfish reasons? Yes, let's start there in case you need convincing. At Alex Walker's Serian Camp in Lamai, we jokingly toasted that we were the rarest species in the Serengeti this year. **That's true.** We observed river crossings during the Great Migration with thousands of wildebeest stampeding across the Mara with virtually zero other cars in sight. On our side of the river, there were never more than 3 or 4 cars nearby (all Serian vehicles for the most part), and on the opposite side of the river, we'd occasionally see up to 6 or 7 vehicles. In recent years there had been as many as 100+ vehicles on either side watching these moments. In Ngorongoro Crater with Nomad Tanzania, we were one of 6 or so vehicles in the crater, which is practically *unheard* of. Many of our friends on the ground had mentioned that while Ngorongoro is great, it's generally overrun which takes away from its luster. This year was the exception to that... and it spoiled us for life. Going now means that you'll likely have a vehicle to yourself – even with camps that don't standardly offer this – and it means that you're going to witness some of the most amazing scenes in nature with few other visitors around. It's a spectacular experience that we probably will never be able to replicate again. Let's be real: Africa is always wonderful and even being around other visitors doesn't take away from its natural beauty and wow-factor, but there's a sense of raw wilderness that you'll experience now that is hard to capture when other travelers descend on the region during peak times.

Considering climbing Kili? There are normally hundreds of people climbing Kilimanjaro each day (35,000 people per year attempt the climb). The folks we'd met who'd climbed it on this trip had private caravans or would see fewer than a dozen other hikers en route.



With the Nomad team at their Entamanu Camp.



With Sam, our guide at Serian

Now let's get to the **real reasons you should travel to Tanzania - and other parts of Africa - now.** There's no need to mince words: lives depend on tourism. Human lives depend on tourism and animal lives depend on tourism, and we're seeing both of those things being compromised due to COVID.

There were nights at certain camps where we were the only couple; this reality during a time where the camp would traditionally be filled. For the two of us, there was a full staff – cooks, managers, guides, the works – and my initial instinct was to feel guilty to have this entire team there *just for us!* It didn't take long for my perspective to flip. There was so much gratitude. People were thankful to have the opportunity to work, they were thankful to us for being there, for us taking the initiative to travel during a downtime. A couple we met that was climbing Kili had hired a caravan privately for their weeklong climb. That trip alone helped over a dozen people who were employed through this, and those wages and tips trickled down to their families as well.

As someone working in hospitality, I see this in two ways: firstly, yes, people are obviously thankful for the income from their wages and the gratuities that travelers leave, which can get them through for weeks or more. Secondly, I think this is a huge boost for the human psyche and for morale. There's a sense of hope on the horizon seeing guests begin to visit again and there's something incredibly special about that sentiment.

Beyond the human lives impacted, **animal lives are threatened with the downturn in tourism** and the thinning of conservation dollars that accompany it. All parks have a nightly conservation/park fee (this can range hugely) which goes towards conservation and park efforts. So, what happens when international tourists drop off and dollars disappear? There's less money going towards conservation efforts to fund anti-poaching, desnaring, and more. Plus, fewer tourists simply means fewer safari vehicles around and fewer boots on the ground to have eyes in the field. Many of our guides were heavily involved with anti-poaching projects on the side and were passionate about wildlife conservation, but with fewer people out in the wild being able to assist with these efforts, poaching can go on unnoticed or unmitigated. When we think of poaching, we often think of elephants being killed for their ivory or rhinos being poached for their horns, but it goes far beyond that with many protected animals also being killed for bushmeat. Every single one of us matters in tourism: our dollars speak loudly in helping sustain livelihoods around the world and with preventing wildlife poaching. What a beautiful thing to be a part of the solution while experiencing travel during this rare moment in time.

So, you're ready to jet? Here's what to expect when you travel to Tanzania now in terms of arrival, departure and lodge experiences.

Requirements for Arrival in Tanzania



Tanzania is making their arrival process incredibly straight forward which has most of us questioning whether we're missing a step. Surely it must be more difficult to get in that just applying for the standardly required visa, right? As of now, Tanzania is *not* requiring a negative PCR test upon arrival and they're also not banning specific nationalities from entering. You still need to apply for your visa in advance or upon arrival if required (verify whether your nationality needs this or not), and you'll notice an additional station at the airport when you arrive that's responsible for gathering health information. For us, upon arrival at Kilimanjaro airport (JRO) this meant showing proof of our yellow fever vaccine (a requirement if you're coming from or transiting through a yellow fever country) plus getting a quick temperature check. Masks are required inside of the airport and you'll see some extra sanitizing stations throughout as well.

Lodge + Hotel Experiences in Tanzania



With our guide, Salum, at Little Chem Chem

The arrival experience felt more or less on par with our other brushes with [international travel during COVID](#). The biggest difference you'll notice is when you're collected by your driver after leaving the airport. Masks aren't required within taxis like they are in many other places, though most vehicles we were in had windows open and fresh air flowing. That said, if you want to further mitigate your personal risks you can bring a mask to wear in enclosed spaces. The beauty of Tanzania is that there are very few places that are enclosed so the alfresco – and socially distant – environment makes for a very comfortable situation.

At operating camps and lodges, you will find that most properties have additional COVID protocols in place for sanitation. Whether that's by thoughtful design on the camp's part for guest comfort, by government mandate, or a mix, we found most lodges had similar offerings and policies for sanitizing. Upon arrival, we universally found handwashing stations set up for guest and staff use, plus additional handwashing facilities throughout more expansive properties. At many places, especially lodges where there was an enclosed component, staff wore masks when dealing with guests.

If you're on safari, your experiences are naturally socially distanced and safari vehicles, by design, are open air. We never felt uncomfortable or enclosed at all during our journey as we were largely out in the wild, just us. For anyone traveling to Tanzania during COVID, you'll likely feel more at ease there than you will in your home country, though major cities like Dar may be an exception given the denser population (we didn't pass through Dar). Not all lodges standardly provide private safari vehicles, though some of the lodges we stayed at *do* provide that as part of their standard

offering (this is a huge, HUGE plus). With tourism down across the globe and Tanzania being no exception, we had private vehicles every step of the way which was an added layer of comfort.

The biggest area where you'll notice COVID coming into play is when it comes to **community interaction**. Generally, we incorporate village visits, local shopping excursions, etc. into our itineraries but the one common thread throughout international travel in general (this was the case in Greece, too) was that local experiences were off-limits. At Gibb's Farm, that meant that amongst their host of activities on offer that village visits were no longer available. With properties like Little Chem Chem, where community engagement and philanthropy is a major focus through their Chem Chem Association, seeing the projects in action was difficult. That in mind, I think that gives most of us comfort in the sense that there are boundaries in place to protect local communities, which I was particularly thankful for. Plus, it's another reason to return ASAP.

Departing Tanzania – Where Do I Get a COVID Test?



So then came our dilemma: [to return home to Anguilla](#) a negative PCR test was required 3 – 5 days prior to arrival on the island. We had anticipated getting this test done in transit in the Paris or Amsterdam airports but with ever-changing policies, this was a no-go by the time we were looking to travel. Could we even get this test done in Tanzania?!

The answer is **YES**. There is testing available in Tanzania and I was amazed at how easy and professional our experience was. You'll obviously need to add in a buffer in either Arusha, Dar, or Stonetown for testing before your departure. There may be other hospital facilities providing this as well, but those three locations are arguably most common for travelers visiting Tanzania. For us, Arusha made the most sense as we were focused in northern Tanzania and flying out of Kilimanjaro Airport (JRO). Here's the step by step process on how to handle testing:

👉 Go to **Selian Lutheran Hospital** in Arusha – this is a gorgeous private facility that we found super efficient and helpful. Bring a mask as they're required — and you'll want to wear one for obvious reasons! Alternatively, you can probably get this test done at Mount Meru Hospital but we didn't have experience with that.

👉 At the hospital, head to the main desk and let them know you're there for a COVID test. You don't have to make an appointment in advance. A nurse will take your temperature and escort you to an area where someone will gather your details so you can set up a profile at the hospital. The team was *so friendly* and so helpful and English was widely spoken so if your Swahili is rough, don't be worried! We had a few steps during this process but it didn't take more than 30 minutes or so. The document you'll fill out is brief, asking for your name, DOB, address, and your 'tribe'. You can leave 'tribe' blank (unless it's relevant).

👉 From there, you'll need to pay for the test. There are **two payments** required in this instance: a payment to the hospital for taking the sample (about USD \$20, credit card accepted) and then another government payment that needs to be done after your test. The first step is paying the hospital fee so they can take your sample. They'll point you to a cashier window, you'll make the payment and they'll provide a receipt. You're now ready to have your sample taken.

👉 From there, you'll go into another room where you'll wait for your COVID test to be taken. We had one other person doing this while we were there so the process was fairly quick. The sample requires a nose and throat sample, but it'll be over before you know it! From there, you're free to go and done with the hospital. If you're not in Dar-es-Salaam the sample will be sent to Dar for testing, but you'll get results within 72 hours. They'll get your phone number to provide you updates and information via WhatsApp. My mind is BLOWN by this communication and efficiency, by the way!

👉 Once the sample is received in Dar, you'll receive a WhatsApp with your details including a **control number** that you'll need. Once you've received the control number, you'll need to pay the government fee before the test can be released to you. To pay, go to a bank or a bank agent to pay the fee. They'll tell you it's about USD \$50 but **US DOLLARS ARE NOT ACCEPTED**. You must have Tanzanian Shillings for this payment so be prepared with about 120,000Tsh per person to pay for this in cash. If you're prepared, it's a breeze. The payment then gets tied to your account.

👉 **You're done!** Your results – a PDF – will be sent via WhatsApp. You can print this PDF out to take to the airport with you. You do *not* need to collect a physical copy even though they tell you that you do. We spent a couple of hours at Mount Meru Hospital trying to collect our documentation only to find out we never even needed to go in. The PDF sent is valid but you'll need a way to print it to have a physical document to carry with you.

I know that seems like a lot of steps but it's actually quite straightforward and super professional. In all, I would recommend allocating about two hours to the hospital experience though it will likely take less than that. We were impressed with the process and with the hospital, and had results in hand within 72 hours as promised.

Anyone planning on visiting Tanzania now or in the coming year? I have a huge series of posts forthcoming on our time in the Serengeti with Serian, our time in Ngorongoro and Tarangire with Nomad Tanzania, our time at Little Chem Chem in a conservancy, plus the lodges we experienced along the way!

If you have questions about visiting Tanzania, feel free to leave your comments below or shoot me a message and I'd be happy to share insight from our experience!



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More about Shannon Kircher

Shannon Kircher is the founder and editor of The Wanderlust Effect. Founded in 2009, she has continued to document her international escapes as an expat in Europe and the Caribbean. Shannon holds an MSc in Social Policy and Development from the London School of Economics and is a current candidate for WSET Level 3 in Wines & Spirits. In addition to The Wanderlust Effect, Shannon is the Director of Marketing for the Frangipani Beach Resort.

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Shannon Kircher

Welcome and thank you for joining along for my adventures. I began documenting my travels in 2009 on my former site, The Traveling Scholar, and six years later transitioned my globetrotting experiences here as I continue to juggle traveling the world with enjoying a full-time career in hospitality on the Caribbean island of Anguilla. I hope you find inspiration, information and insight in my corner of the world. My name is Shannon and this is my never-ending journey.

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