

Parks and Game Reserves

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 400 visitors travel southwest to more remote [Katavi Plains National Park](#), Tanzania's third largest, even though it offers many times the biomass (wildlife per acre) than 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. Zambia, incidentally, is in the fortunate position where [South Luangwa](#) as the premier destination 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 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 the true quiet nature experience and personal care as well as expert guidance.

Large establishments

Unfortunately not all the authorities in the region have resisted the temptation to bolster revenues by allowing large hotels within the park. [Serengeti](#) in Tanzania and [Maasai Mara](#) and [Tsavo](#) in Kenya are steadily being taken over by large establishments—the most recent being a 150 bed resort in the very center of Serengeti.