

Lake Natron



Further Links

- Fascinating geology and volcanic scenery
- Ol Donyo Lengai - an active volcano
- Good trekking country in the surrounding hills
- Masses of flamingos on the lake
- Meet remote tribes people

Situation

Northern Tanzania in Maasailand about 5 hours drive from Arusha.

Activities

Hiking, village visits, geology walks, climbing Ol Doinyo L'Engai (when safe).

Lake Natron is one of the most interesting geological features of Africa's rift valley in a remote part of Northern Tanzania with fascinating volcanic scenery and a soda lake which provides a breeding ground for flamingos.

Although the rift valley is full of interesting scenery there are a few sites that are particularly fascinating in terms of their dramatic volcanic origins and Natron is one of them. Roughly 1.5 million years old, Natron is a result of the same volcanic movements as the Ngorongoro Highlands and Mount Gelai, the latter is an extinct volcano on the eastern lake shore. Natron is a large lake which is low lying at an altitude of just 610m and shallow at around a maximum of 50cm deep. Little rain falls in this region and it is constantly hot and dry, feeling markedly warmer than other areas of the rift valley. The skyline from Natron is dominated by Ol Donyo Lengai, more than 2000m above the floor of the valley and Tanzania's only active volcano, which has been 'puffing' more than usual during 2007 and 2008.

The lake is alkaline and extends from the Kenya border near Mount Shompole (see Shompole Lodge in the Kenya section of this website to access Natron from there). There is a high saline content because of the ash and lava deposits from Ol Donyo Lengai. Because of its hostile water, little survives here, the main inhabitants of the lake being the flamingos which feed on the salt loving spirulina, a type of algae.

Natron is the only breeding location for East Africa's 2.5 million Lesser **Flamingos** which congregate from August to October. The nesting site being centrally located in the lake means the birds are safe from predators and humans in the middle of the salty waters. Natron also attracts other migrant waterbirds during the European winter.

A few mammals exist in the area surrounding Natron such as zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, gazelles and a few lion and cheetah.

There is a small lakeshore village called **Ngare Sero** (which means black water or clear water), this is a Maasai settlement where dusty streets are flanked by mud huts, goat herds and small shops. There is no public transport. Various walks can be enjoyed around the village, the lake shore and into the highlands. Roads do link Ngare Sero with Serengeti to the north (via a stunning road up the rift valley escarpment) or through the highlands to Lake Manyara.

On the **southern lakeshore** there is a picturesque walk looking over volcanic rocks in the lake and where you can view many waterbirds including pelicans, egrets and herons as well as the flamingos.

The Ngare Sero River forms several waterfalls and the two lowest can be accessed fairly easily. The **waterfall walk** involves a hike of about an hour through a gorge to a cool pool where you can enjoy a swim.

Oi Donyo Lengai is estimated to be about 350,000 - 400,000 years old and in the Maasai language means 'Mountain of God'. It is one of East Africa's youngest volcanoes and one of the most active. It only emits carbonate lava which is highly fluid and has almost no silicone content, meaning that it is about 50% cooler than most lava at around 500C. When the mountain is inactive, it is possible to arrange treks but this is extremely strenuous and recommended only for experienced climbers.

