Central Tanzania

Well off most tourist itineraries, central Tanzania has long gotten a bad rap. Its semi-arid climate and lack of permanent rivers discouraged early settlement. More recently, crowds have stayed away due in part to a terrible (albeit now improving) road network. But the region has long historical roots – some of Tanzania’s earliest peoples were at home here – and for hardy travellers looking to head off the beaten path, it offers several attractions. Prime among these are the enigmatic Kolo-Kondoa rock art paintings - now a Unesco World Heritage Site. Mt Hanang is another draw, as Tanzania’s fourth-highest peak and gateway to the colourful Barabaig and other local tribes. Dodoma – Tanzania’s legislative capital and seat of the Bunge (parliament) – makes an amenable stop, with good facilities and a paved road link to Dar es Salaam. Well northwest are Singida, with its pretty lakes, and the gold - and diamond-mining areas around Shinyanga.

Central Tanzania’s main appeal, however, is the window it offers on areas little-touched by visitors, and its constantly changing panoramas. South of Lake Victoria, the green, open landscapes of Usukuma (home of the Sukuma people), with small lakes, egrets, long-horned zebu cattle and round, thatched Sukuma-style houses, give way to drier, baobab-studded tracts around Shinyanga and then the countryside around Singida, notable for its massive boulders, lakes and water birds. Dodoma itself is flat, arid and in part treeless, but to the north, the terrain becomes densely wooded and hillier, opening to beautiful vistas around Kondoa. Further north, around Babati, are lush farmlands edged by the soaring wall of the Rift Valley escarpment. If you’re prepared to rough things with transport and accommodation, you’ll undoubtedly have a memorable time here.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting the enigmatic Kolo-Kondoa rock art sites (p236)
- Enjoying the comparative creature comforts of Dodoma (opposite), and getting a glimpse of its new parliament building
- Getting to know the Barabaig and other peoples around Mt Hanang (p236)
- Experiencing the colourful mnada (auction/market; p236) near Katesh
- Relishing travel completely off the beaten path in Singida (p239) or Shinyanga (p238)
Getting There & Around
There are flights between Dodoma and Arusha, and sometimes between Dodoma and Dar es Salaam on Coastal Aviation, and Precision Air stops in Shinyanga on some of its flights in and out of Mwanza. Otherwise, all travel in central Tanzania is by road – generally rough, although the network is slowly being improved. The Dodoma to Arusha trunk road has been recently graded in part, and paving work is underway between Nzega, Singida and Dodoma. From Nzega to Shinyanga and on to Mwanza is also paved. Buses run on all major routes; allow plenty of time, and expect the occasional breakdown.

DODOMA
8026 / pop 150,000
Arid Dodoma sits in not-so-splendid isolation in the geographic centre of the country, at a height of about 1100m. Although the town was located along the old caravan route that connected Lake Tanganyika and Central Africa with the sea, it remained little more than a large village until the construction of the Central Line railway just after the turn of the 20th century.

Since 1973 Dodoma has been Tanzania’s official capital and headquarters of the ruling CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi) party. According to the original plan, the entire government was to move to Dodoma by the mid-1980s and the town was to be expanded to ultimately encompass more than 300,000 residents, all living in smaller independent communities set up along the lines of the ujamaa (familyhood) village. The plans proved unrealistic for a variety of reasons, including a lack of any sort of viable economic base and an insufficient water supply, and have therefore been abandoned. Today, although the legislature meets in Dodoma – hence the periodic profusion of 4WDs along its dusty streets – Dar es Salaam remains the unrivalled economic and political centre of the country.

There’s little reason to come to Dodoma, but if you find yourself here it’s not a bad place to spend a day or two. With its grandiose street layout and the imposing architecture of many church and government buildings – all sharply contrasting with the slow-paced