



# Tanzanian Traveler Safety Tips

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*Note: this is not provided as the definitive guide to safety while traveling in Tanzania. There is no set of rules that can keep anyone absolutely safe, anywhere on earth. But with some simple precautions you can increase your enjoyment and safety while traveling in Tanzania.*

## Introduction

Life presents risks at all times and places but they are different from place-to-place. New York is different than London is different than Moscow. When you are out of your familiar places you can make three common mistakes:

1. Imagine danger lurking everywhere – it's usually not, but this is a common effect of culture shock. For example, some people start washing excessively; others get feelings of anxiety; small problems may seem to be large; etc.
2. You may fail to recognize places or situations of potential danger. Consider that native New Yorker's know their city, its places and the times of day when things are less safe. Non-natives can wander carelessly into the path of possible danger.
3. You may act in ways that put you at increased risk. Sometimes certain actions make you a target for thieves or put you at greater risk of illness or injury. Some people adopt a holiday attitude and do things they would never do at home, even though the consequences may be far riskier.

Being 'out-of-place' has more unexpected consequences the farther you are away from your own geography, culture and experiences. Keep in mind that the developing world has a very different set of conditions and potential consequences than the developed. But a little awareness can help make your trip safer and more enjoyable. And make sure you get a good travel insurance policy to help with anything unexpected.

**Good news: in many ways, Tanzania is safer than America. There are fewer fire arms, lower crime rates for most crimes (especially violent ones), and seemingly more people looking out for others.**

## 10 Quick Tips

1. Get travel insurance.
2. Look both ways before stepping off a curb.  
Traffic is on the opposite side.
3. Be careful about what you eat and drink.
4. Avoid bug bites.
5. Keep away from animals, including cats and dogs.
6. Don't go barefoot.
7. Don't swim in fresh water.
8. Secure all your belongings all the time.
9. Don't flash your cash.
10. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS is the constant rule.

## Expert Advice

Before you travel internationally, it is always a good practice to check out the CDC and State department websites. They provide information about health and safety related information while in each country. The specific sites for Tanzania are as follows:

Information	Link
General health information for Tanzanian travelers from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)	<a href="http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/tanzania.aspx">http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/tanzania.aspx</a>
CDC health information for travelers climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro	<a href="http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-3/kilimanjaro-tanzania.aspx">http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-3/kilimanjaro-tanzania.aspx</a>
CDC health information for travelers going on safari	<a href="http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-3/safaris-east-and-southern-africa.aspx">http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-3/safaris-east-and-southern-africa.aspx</a>
Safety information from the US State Department	<a href="http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1038.html">http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1038.html</a>

Many of the links in this document are from the CDC.

## Travel Tips

### Avoid Injuries

**Walking:** It's always a good to avoid injuries. But developing nations usually have less ability to deal with them, especially traumatic injuries. Perhaps one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself in Tanzania is to look both ways before stepping off the curb. Traffic is on the opposite side of the street and tourists are frequently hit as they step off a curb.

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**Riding:** Wear your seat belt. Motorcycles are risky because the roads are poor and other drivers will ignore your presence, expecting you to get out of the way. In Tanzania, size matters. This applies to bicycles, too, so wear a helmet and be prepared to stay on the shoulder. Avoid night travel and use experienced local drivers. Don't get behind the wheel. If you are in an accident, do not exit the vehicle. Immediately

proceed to the nearest police station. Local people may take justice into their own hands, even if you believe you are not at fault.

**Getting Crazy:** Injuries that you might survive in the developed world, you might not in Tanzania. Don't take unnecessary risks. Save bungee jumping, cliff diving and other 'out there' activities to safer locales.

## Prevent Insect Bites

Many diseases, like [malaria](#) and dengue fever, are spread through insect bites, mostly mosquitoes. Prevent bites by:

- Using bug spray with at least 30% DEET – no alternatives proven against malarial carrying mosquitoes.
- Wearing long-sleeves shirts, pants, and a hat outdoors. Wear light colors on safari.

- Staying inside during the peak biting period for malaria (dusk and dawn).
- Using bed nets (best if treated with insect repellent) if not sleeping in an air-conditioned or well-screened room.

## Prevent Animal Bites and Scratches

Cats and dogs in Tanzania are not like family pets in the USA. Most are at least partially wild and they won't react in the ways you might expect. Also, they are rarely vaccinated for rabies and so rabies is more common, much like it was in the USA 50 or more years ago.

- Be up-to-date on your tetanus shot. Talk to your doctor if you're not sure. Tetanus is completely preventable but not curable.
- Do not touch or feed any animals, including dogs and cats. Even animals that look like healthy pets can have rabies or other diseases. They are treated differently in Tanzania and may bite or scratch.
- Keep children away from animals.
- If you are bitten or scratched, wash the wound well with soap and water and go to a doctor right away.
- After your trip, be sure to tell your doctor if you were bitten or scratched during travel.
- Tanzania has millions of wild animals. It is part of the wonder of the country. They are often on the side of the road as you travel. Never leave your vehicle and never feed them, even to get a better picture.

Consider: In less than a second Crocodiles can lunge several yards or more out of the water from a dead stop. There are snakes that can slither at 25 miles per hour and will chase you down and kill you. Africa has over 200 varieties of poisonous snakes. Over half of the lions in Africa are in Tanzania and more than 100 people per year are killed by them, mostly local children. But the most dangerous may be the water or Cape buffalo, which may appear to be a docile cow but is completely unpredictable and could charge at any moment. Wild animals do not restrict themselves to the national parks. So don't go on hikes unless you have been told it is safe or you are accompanied by an experienced guide. Don't wander around your safari cabana, either. Often a Masai guide will walk you to your cabana when you are in a national park. Use them.

CDC INFO: See the [Rabies chapter](#) of the [Yellow Book](#) or [CDC's Rabies homepage](#). For more about risks related to animals, see [Animal-Associated Hazards](#).

## Be Careful about Food and Water

Diseases from food and water are the leading cause of illness among travelers. Follow these tips for safe eating and drinking:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or commercially made drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.
- Do not eat food from street vendors.

## Other Safety Tips

**Bare feet:** To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot, especially on beaches where animals may have defecated. You can get parasites from the soil and so do not use open sandals, flip flops, etc. except around the house/hotel or in areas without animals.

**Swimming:** [Schistosomiasis](#), a parasitic infection, can be contracted in fresh water in this region. Do not swim in fresh water, including rivers, lakes, waterfalls and streams (except in well-chlorinated swimming pools). Salt water is free from this parasite but open sewage may be present so avoid swimming in the ocean near cities.

**Sex:** Most of the HIV-AIDS infections in the world are in Africa. Some local populations have very high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, from 20-80%. Be wary and do not have casual unprotected sex, share needles, get tatoos, etc.

**Drugs:** Drug use is severely punished. Prison is very dangerous.

- Make sure food is fully cooked. Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Avoid fish unless you know it is fresh or properly handled. Many vendors sell fish that has been in the sun for hours or day.
- It's best to only eat fruits that you can peel.

Diseases from food and water often cause vomiting and diarrhea. Make sure to bring diarrhea medicine with you so that you can treat mild cases yourself. Ask your doctor about obtaining a prescription for Cipro.

**Stealing and Breaking the Law:** Locals may enforce their own justice and prison isn't safe.

### Coming home:

- If you are not feeling well, you should see your doctor and explain that you have traveled.
- See your doctor if you were bitten or scratched by an animal while traveling.
- Keep taking your antimalarial drug as directed (1-4 weeks depending on type).
- Malaria is always a serious disease and may be a deadly illness. If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness either while traveling in a malaria-risk area or after you return home (for up to 1 year), you should seek immediate medical attention (especially for fevers over 101 degrees) and tell the doctor your travel history. 1 in 13 people on earth have malaria at any given time and some studies suggest that half of the people that ever lived may have died of malaria. It is a disease that plagues the developing world.

## Avoid Crime

An ordinary digital camera is worth more than the annual income of 60% of the people (living on less than \$1 per day with even less cash). See your belongings through different eyes. You wouldn't flash \$40,000 dollars anywhere in the world, so you shouldn't do it in Tanzania. That's what a camera or smartphone looks like to an ordinary person. \$50 is often two month's income. 85% are unemployed.

To locals, if you are white you are probably rich. The plane ride cost five year's income for most. You are rich! Only about 1 in 400 people are white and to thieves are obvious targets. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS is the constant rule.

As in most of the world, crime can be a random event. But a few precautions can go a long way:

- Always keep your valuables with you so don't bring a lot to Tanzania.
- Don't wander in a city unless you have been told it is a safe area, especially at night. Markets and active areas during the day are usually safe but beware of pick pockets as in most cities in the world.
- Hold tightly to your bags at all times and do not set them down. People may try to distract you to take things.
- Don't flash your cash! When shopping, have small amounts separated from your day's supply. You can fold up packets of TSh 50,000 (\$38) and remove from your pockets one at a time. Use a money belt for large amounts. ATMs are widely available so avoid carrying a lot.
- In cities, never hang your camera out the window to take a picture. Be careful if the window is open. People may reach in.
- Don't take a picture of anyone without permission. It can cause an incident. Some have personal or spiritual ideas about pictures and others will want to be paid.
- Lock car doors as soon as you get in. If you leave a bag in the car, even with a driver, lock the door. Never leave valuables with anyone, unless you know they are completely trustworthy. You are unfairly tempting them and they live in the midst of perpetual need.
- Careful how your luggage is tied to the top of a car or under a tarp. It may be quickly cut away and stolen at a signal light or even at a speed bump. If someone attempts to steal your luggage (or even a side mirror), don't get out of the car. Drive away.
- If you take a bus, watch the loading and unloading of luggage at stops. If you put your valuables in the luggage rack over your head, hold them when the bus is stopped. People may try to distract you while others take your belongings and run away.
- In villages in Tanzania, you are usually very safe, as the villagers will generally be protecting you and watching out for you. Even so, it is better to explore as a group or with a local friend rather than going it alone. Local residences can be closely spaced and have private areas. Don't enter uninvited.

This careful description doesn't mean that danger is lurking everywhere. It means be cautious. Understand that actions that may be ordinary at home, like opening your wallet, you shouldn't do in Tanzania or anywhere in the developing world for that matter.

***Tanzania is a popular tourist destination. Have a fun trip!***