



Tanzanian Gem Safari – A perfect holiday

A journey into East Africa

Combining family vacations while pursuing the holy gemstone grail has probably been the bane of many of the spouse of the avid gemologist. I for once am guilty of such pursuits, however this summer my wife Carol did not complain when I announced that our summer holiday plans included a trip for two to East Africa. With that said, Carol was on a mission to see the great wildlife of the Serengeti and I was on a mission to experience the diverse gemstones of this region.

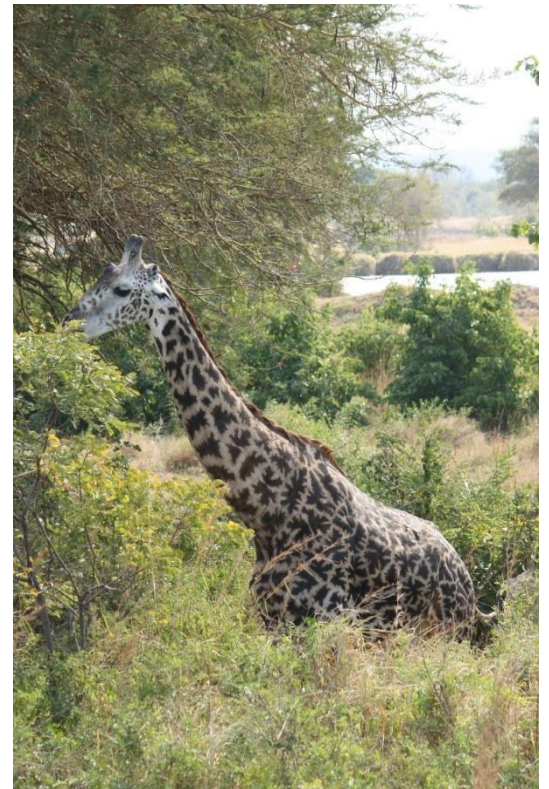
Gemstone Safari and the Lapidary Training Centre, Dar es Salaam

With a little internet research I discovered the Lapidary Training Centre, located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This centre is run by Ms. Noreen Masaki, a certified lapidary instructor who offers hands-on courses in all aspects of gemstone cutting, geared to the hobbyist as well as the more serious-minded student.

In partnership with Mr. Hubert Heldner of Free Form Artists, Montreux, Switzerland and in collaboration with the Southern and Eastern African Mineral Centre, SEAMIC, the centre also offers personalized “Gemstone Safaris” to various mining areas of Tanzania.

This was the perfect opportunity that I was looking for! All I needed now was a plan to combine my gem follies with a wildlife safari for Carol. This was solved with the discovery of Gosheni Tours, an Arusha based safari tour company. The firm came highly recommended in Trip Advisor reviews and I found their pricing very competitive. In addition they were more than willing to customize our safari to fit the plans of our gemstone safari.

With our bags packed we were ready for our trip to Africa. Carol and I agreed to compromise on the itinerary whereby I would take the three day faceting course at the Lapidary centre while Carol visited with the locals and enjoyed some R & R at the nearby beach. The Gemstone Safari was due to depart the day after I finished my course and traverse much of Tanzania over a two week span. I knew that Carol would have had her fill of picking through mine tailings by day two, so I arranged for our Gosheni Safari guide to pick us up on day three in the Morogoro region, a day’s drive west of Dar.



Faceting 101

The art of lapidary was not completely new to me as I had cabbed many a stone as a teenager but learning to facet was like starting all over again. As it turned out that I was the only student in my class, so I had one on one training for the three days course. Ms. Masaki is a very competent teacher and she demonstrated each step of the cutting process in detail and started me hands on with my first stone on day one.

A good selection of Tanzanian rough was presented to choose from for my first project. I chose the citrine crystal in the upper



left hand corner of the photo as it was free of inclusions and of a substantial size. Ms. Masaki showed me how to mark the stone for trimming away unwanted colour zoning. We then chose a basic round facet design for this first project. After preforming the stone on the grinding wheel I learned how to apply it to the dop stick with hot wax. The faceting process then started. The lapidary school employs top of the line digital faceting machines, of Ultra-Tec brand. First the pavilion was cut, and then polished to exacting angles and finish. Then the stone removed and and re-dopped to facet the crown and polish the crown. Through careful tutoring I managed to complete my first faceted stone, a fine 9.50 carat citrine on the first day.

I took the stone out the next morning to marvel at its beauty in the natural sunlight. The critical angles that Ms. Masaki taught me about were working their magic.



The stone sparked like a beauty!

Over the course of the next two days I finished a 0.90 carat rhodolite garnet and 0.70 carat aquamarine. Both stones presented different learning experiences to those that I encountered in cutting the citrine.



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The Gemstone Safari Begins

On our fourth day we were joined by the organizer of the Gem Safari, Mr. Hubert Heldner, and the rest of the gem safari guests for an orientation class, held in conjunction with Ms. Masaki. We spent the morning learning about the geology and gemstone deposits of Tanzania before departing from Dar es Salaam on our bus journey. Chatting with Hubert on our way to our first stop in Morogoro, Carol and I were impressed with his knowledge of the country. I was most interested in his tips on how to interact

with the local people.

The first night we settled down in the lovely country style Arc Hotel nearby the mountain range to which we would travel the next day. The local Tanzanian staff at all the hotels that we visited was extremely friendly and helpful. English was widely spoken and we tried our best to learn some basic Swahili, to the joy of our newly found friends.



A visit to the first mine

On day two we departed from the relatively smooth highway and ventured on a bumpy dusty winding road into the nearby mountain side. Our first stop was nearby the mining region, a very small village of thatch roofed houses, dirt floors and charcoal burning outdoor cooking hearths. There we were met by the local village "Chief" along with a throng of curious children. Hubert had arranged for us to meet with local miners. This afternoon's interaction with the locals was one that I most cherished. We have seen rough yellow danburite crystals, tourmalines and blue quartz.



We bid farewell to the villagers and departed in our bus for the nearby tourmaline mine. I use the term “mine” rather loosely as our destination was more like an abandoned giant gopher field. Active artisanal mining had ceased some time ago so there we were free to dig through the tailings and explore the many large holes in ground. Although ruby had been sourced from this area the only stones we came away with were black tourmaline crystals. The beautiful hike through the weathered marble karsk landscape of this countryside was the highlight of this part of the trip and I regret that my camera’s SD card was corrupted before I could remove the photographs of this area. For those interested in the geology of this area and of Tanzania in general there is an interesting article posted by the G.I.A., entitled “Gem Wealth of Tanzania”, Gems & Gemology, Vol. 28, No.2, pp. 80-102, available online.



We spent our final night with Hubert and the group at the Arc hotel with a nice dinner and chat over our eventful day. The next morning we bid farewell to the group and started out on a new adventure, the wildlife safari of Mikumi National Park.



by Harold Lindsay

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