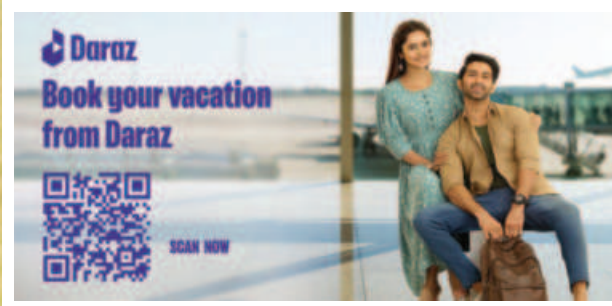




A trip to MAASAI MARA- SERENGETI



Sarmin Shahariath and Rejaul Bahar, married since 2005, are avid travellers. Born and raised in Bangladesh, Bahar moved to the USA in 1999 and now lives in Connecticut.



Sarmin joined him in 2005. So far they have travelled 85 countries across seven continents.

REZAUL BAHAR

Some encounters and experiences are humbling and mind-altering. They serve as a reminder of our insignificance on the scale of the vast entities, the universe. Shattering our deluded belief of superiority, these experiences tell us that we humans are merely a minuscule part of Mother Earth.

This story is about our 9-day trip to East Africa, during which we roamed across the greater Serengeti-Mara ecosystem.

On the 30th of May, we arrived at Nairobi, Kenya. After spending the night at a local hotel, we took a flight from Wilson Airport to Maasai Mara Kitchwa Tembo airstrip the next morning. Nelson, our safari guide and driver, picked us up from the airport and took us to Sanctuary Olonana, a well-equipped safari lodge by the Mara River in the heart of the 1,510 square km Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Honks and grunts from hippos were our alarm clock early in the morning! The lodge was just a few feet from the Mara River, home to those enormous animals.

The courageous Maasai people, the region's aboriginal inhabitants, are the origin of the name Maasai Mara. "Mara" means spotted in the Maasai language which refers to the many small bushes and trees dotting the broad, green terrain.

GAME DRIVE IN MAASAI MARA
A "game" drive around Maasai Mara could be planned for early morning, half a day, or, a full day. We chose to go out for half a day twice and a full day once in our 4-day stay. Wildlife is referred to as "game." Open four-wheel-drive cars are used for safari. The maximum security in this scenario is

a little time, we lost track of it as it glided across the tall prairie.

So, we moved on to explore other parts of The Mara – what locals call this place.

After half an hour, Nelson, listening to the radio, again rushed back to the scene where the cheetah was spotted earlier. This time the magnificent wild cat was out, a few feet away from us. Nelson told us from his experience that the beast was out for a hunt.

The cheetah was moving slowly. We and a few other cars were observing it from a distance. In her direction, we noticed a few gazelles were grazing miles away.

It was in no hurry. Closing in on its prey, it stood up on a termite hill, perhaps to take a better look.

Suddenly, the cheetah made its move. In a flash, she lunged at her prey. But

The cheetah was exhausted, huffing. The scene was intriguing, yet sad. But such is the cycle of life!

She finally had her meal.

KICHAKANI SERENGETI CAMP, TANZANIA

After four amazing days, we moved from Maasai Mara to Northern Serengeti, Tanzania. Serengeti and Mara form one vast open landscape. To get there, though, we required two flights. From the airstrip, our guide there, Emanuel, took us to Kichakani Serengeti Camp.

Out on the open grassland, it was a striking sight. The nights were kind of daunting though. Bellowing elephants and laughing hyenas beside our tent made sleep difficult.

Game drive in Serengeti was completely different. The word "Serengeti" means



within a few seconds, she stopped.

She had miscalculated!

The fastest land animal on Earth didn't mind at all. She turned around and started walking back slowly to where she came from. Nature of life.

It was almost afternoon and we were famished. We asked Nelson to give up on following the cheetah. But Nelson was adamant – he knew the cheetah would make another move.

However, we couldn't spot her prey! Then Nelson, using a binocular, spotted a few more gazelles, almost a mile away from the cheetah. His experienced eyes even identified the prey the wild cat, according to him, had selected – a young gazelle.

This time, we couldn't follow the cheetah. Laws in Mara Reserve prohibit following an animal while on an active hunt. But if any beast makes the kill, cars

endless plains. Serengeti (north, central, south) is almost 20 times larger than Maasai Mara.

This is the place where the Great Migration starts. About 2 million wildebeests and 200,000 zebras and countless other animals move across the Serengeti South to Central, then North to Maasai Mara during the dry season crossing the most dangerous Mara River for fresh grass. Many animals fall prey to crocodiles in this process.

The migration arrives in the Maasai Mara around the beginning of July and around October. We were a little early for the spectacle. When we visited, the herds were still in the Central Serengeti moving north.

In Serengeti, we witnessed lions mating, enjoyed lunch in the open savanna, and cruised through head-high grasslands filled with wildlife.

NGORONGORO CRATER CAMP, TANZANIA

Ngorongoro (pronounced "Goron-goro") was the last leg of our trip. From Kichakani Serengeti Camp, we relocated to this beautiful acreage. An aircraft took us from Lamai to Manyara airstrip.

After arriving, we spent our afternoon in the Lake Manyara National park.

At the very end of the day, we drove to the crater, Ngorongoro. We checked in to Sanctuary Ngorongoro Crater Camp located up on the crater rim.

The 260 sq km volcanic crater with a unique ecosystem is about 2 million years old and home to many species. Nowhere in Africa will you witness such species saturation!

HOW TO GO THERE?

One of the reputable luxury safari providers, Sanctuary Retreats, organized our trip. It was designed just for the two of us. They managed our accommodation, food, and commutation between countries and parks.

EXPENDITURES: The all-inclusive 9-day package cost us \$16 thousand except for tips.



can get close.

Nelson was right. Soon, the mighty cat was in top-flight chasing her prey, the young gazelle. It seemed unreal how fast the cheetah was moving.

She was lucky this time. So was I - my camera was rolling.

Soon after the successful kill, Nelson's car raced through the bumpy savanna towards the scene. Just 10-15 feet away, the predator and prey were lying on the ground. The gazelle, still alive, renounced.

The word Serengeti means endless plains. One has to come here to see the true meaning of it. Serengeti (north, central, south) is almost 20 times larger than Maasai Mara.



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