



(ABOVE) THE NGORONGORO CRATER IS THE LARGEST UNBROKEN CALDERA IN THE WORLD. THE GEOLOGY DEFINES ITS DIVERSE ECOSYSTEMS AND PROVIDES SHELTER TO A WIDE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE SPECIES.

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the savannah, and of course the lilac-breasted rollers, painted in colours one didn't know existed.

#### GEOLOGY

The true essence and life-support of the Ngorongoro Lengai UNESCO Global Geopark lies beneath the surface, however. Confined to the eastern branch of the East African Rift System, this land bears the scars of 20 Ma of crustal extension. Towering fault scarps stand as testaments to the Earth's power, while the Ngorongoro Volcanic Highlands, a complex of basaltic volcanoes may at one time have rivalled Mount Kilimanjaro in both scale and elevation. It is here that the world-famous Ngorongoro Crater stands, the world's largest, best preserved, inactive, intact and unfilled volcanic caldera. Though the volcanic eruptions that shaped this

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geopark may have subsided, one remarkable volcano still breathes life into the land. *Oldoinyo Lengai*, or 'The Mountain of God' in the language of the Maasai people, to whom it is sacred, is an active stratovolcano with an elevation of 2,962 m. It is the only one in the world to spew carbonatite lava, in stark contrast to the silica-rich lavas of its counterparts. Due to this unusual composition, the lava erupts at low temperatures of approximately 510 °C, so low, in fact, that the molten flow appears black in sunlight, rather than the more common red glow.

Ngorongoro, however, is also home to two of the world's most important paleoanthropological sites, the Olduvai Gorge, where dozens of hominid fossils and numerous stone tools have been found, including *Homo erectus*; and the Laetoli, the site of a 27 m-long trail of footprints dating back 3.6 million