

Rwanda

KINGDOM OF THE GORILLAS

- Exclusive access to the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project in Rwanda for a unique insight into conservation
- Led by local guides in an area of spectacular beauty, the Virunga National Park
- An opportunity to track gorillas twice
- Experience a highly personal, small group trip with a maximum of only eight people



Summary

Rwanda is a lush and vibrant country covered in mountains, volcanoes and primeval rainforest, home to over half of the world's population of mountain gorillas, who live in a tiny oasis of ever-decreasing forest located in the Virunga National Park. It is here that you will gain exclusive access to the work of the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project and the researchers who provide an insight into gorilla conservation and the work they do. You will also have the opportunity to come face to face with some of our closest living relatives and the rarest of the great apes whilst also enjoying the chance to meet some of the local communities who live in the region. Joining this tour not only allows you to spend time in the company of these magnificent creatures - a privilege and undoubted pleasure that for many represents one of the most incredible wildlife experiences possible - but also helps support the vital work of MGVP itself working tirelessly to ensure their survival.

Overview



A visit to Rwanda will leave you with unforgettable memories of a very special place – the warmth of the Rwandese people, the spectacular countryside and of course, the iconic mountain gorilla. You will also be touched by the optimism and vitality of the Rwandan people who are working hard to rebuild their communities and livelihoods and who always offer a very warm welcome to all visitors to their country.

This tour not only gives you the opportunity to see the mountain gorillas but also gives you a deeper understanding of their fragile environment and the issues that local people and wildlife face living alongside each other. You will also have the chance to follow in the footsteps of Dian Fossey and spend time visiting the remains of her Karisoke research centre and the final resting place of Fossey herself. Many of the older guides have actually worked alongside Dian Fossey and if you are lucky enough to meet them, they will offer you a fascinating insight into her work.



Each person participating on this tour helps fund a variety of community and conservation initiatives in the country as well as paying a donation to the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project.

Steppes Discovery was one of the first operators to start taking clients back to Rwanda once the door to tourism was re-opened and it remains one of our own personal favourite destinations.

Itinerary



Day 1

On arrival in Kigali, after luggage collection and visa formalities, you will be welcomed by your guide and meet the rest of the group. After the chance to change some money and get your bearings, you will then depart for a three-hour drive along a beautiful road, over ridges and hills of steeply terraced fields, to the world-renowned Parc National des Volcans (PNV) home to the mountain gorilla. PNV forms a contiguous conservation unit with the Virungas National Park and Mgahinga National Park, which respectively protect the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ugandan sectors of the Virungas and is where Dian Fossey undertook her pioneering studies of mountain gorilla behaviour. You will then check in to your hotel for the next 3 nights, the Gorilla Mountain Lodge.



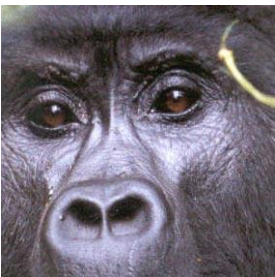
This large lodge is located close to the Parc National des Volcans headquarters, with the concrete and thatch rooms nestling under a grove of large eucalyptus trees. Inside the rooms are clean and comfortable, with modern bathrooms and hot water and a spacious restaurant with a large bar and reception area. It's location right next to the PNV headquarters however, means that you don't have to be up too early and on a clear day the views across to the volcanoes and surrounding hills are spectacular.

This afternoon you will have the chance to enjoy a walk to explore the surrounding areas, including the chance to visit a local school, community projects or the nearby lakes, including the stunning Lake Bulera and Ruhondo. This is a wonderful opportunity, not only to meet the Rwandese people who live nearby, but also to take advantage of the stunning views across the fertile hills of Rwanda. Overnight at Gorilla Mountain Lodge (FB)



Day 2

Today you will track the gorillas! The PNV has more habituated groups than any other park and thus is arguably the best park in which to track and see gorillas. Naturally the gorillas move around, so to track them you will have to do the same - be prepared for a tough, arduous day in the rainforest, following muddy paths and with rain possible at any time. However, the effort is well worth it - the excitement of being on the trail of the gorillas is electric and coming face to face with the great primates is truly an amazing experience. Overnight Gorilla Mountain Lodge. (FB)



Day 3

A second opportunity to track these magnificent creatures (on receipt of a supplement). For those not trekking, there is the chance to trek to the remains of Karisoke, a nature walk of about 6 hours, and a fascinating way to explore the park and get a glimpse of the remains of Dian Fossey's camp. Karisoke is located in a beautiful meadow between the Karisimbi and Visoke volcanoes with the Mikeno volcano in the distance but is a tough, steep trek and you would need to be fit to get the most from the tour.

Remains of the old buildings can be seen here as well as graves of some of the gorillas that have died during the last 30 years, including the famous Digit, who was killed by poachers. Karisoke is also the final resting place of Fossey herself and allows for a thought-provoking journey through this spectacular environment.

Overnight Gorilla Mountain Lodge. (FB)

Day 4



This morning you are driven to the headquarters of the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project in Ruhengeri, about 40 minutes from the lodge. At the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project they dedicate every minute of the day to the Mountain Gorilla. In order to ensure a healthy future for this special animal, they regularly monitor the gorillas, providing life-saving medical care if needed, conduct health studies, and help build local capacity in veterinary medicine and ecosystem health. The team includes eight veterinarians, the gorilla doctors, one laboratory manager, house and office staff, and orphaned gorilla caretakers.

The project began as one veterinarian and has now grown into an entire team of experienced personnel, MGVP veterinarians track ailing gorillas, observe and treat them when needed - inside their native habitat. Without the MGVP, mountain gorillas might not exist today. Still, these animals remain highly endangered due to threats from war, poaching, habitat destruction and human disease.



Whilst at the project you will have the opportunity to tour the centre with one of the doctors who will be on hand to answer any questions you may have, before you are invited to a presentation on their work and how it makes a difference. This is a wonderful opportunity to see gorilla conservation from the inside and gain a privileged insight into the work of the MGVP. In the afternoon you will return to Kigali and spend the night at the Kigali Serena, which allows for a few home comforts before heading home. Time permitting this afternoon, you will also have the chance to visit the powerful Genocide Memorial, a remembrance of the past, but allowing the Rwandese to look to the future. (BB)



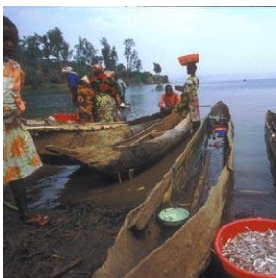
Day 5

This morning is at leisure before you are transferred from the hotel to the airport in time for your flight home.

Optional extensions available:

Chimpanzee Extension

3 day Chimpanzee Trekking in Nyungwe Forest, one of Africa's oldest forests offering an incredible biodiversity and the chance to track Rwanda's other famous primate. This magnificent Nyungwe forest is the largest single tract of montane forest remaining anywhere in East or Central Africa, home not only to the elusive chimps, but also 12 other species of primates, 280 species of birds, 120 species of butterflies and over 200 varieties of orchids. The forest here is full of life and offers the adventurous traveler, the chance to trek the chimps whilst enjoying the natural beauty of the forest, rich in flora and fauna.



Lake Kivu Extension

Enjoy a few days relaxing on the shores of Lake Kivu, the sixth largest lake in Africa and a great place to enjoy a pleasantly relaxed atmosphere, with picturesque and atmospheric, colonial homesteads and a jumble of architectural buildings. Relax at the Serena hotel, ideally situated on a red, sandy beach, surrounded by shady palm-lined avenues and the nearby Virunga Volcanoes providing a spectacular backdrop on one side and a panoramic view of the lake on the other.

Gisenyi is also home to the famous Imbabazi orphanage started in 1994 by Rosamond Carr (originally in Mugongo, but after having moved four times for security reasons, has settled in Gisenyi) to shelter many of the genocide orphans and other displaced children in the region, now numbering over 100. Sadly, whilst Rosamond Carr has passed away, her dedicated team of staff continue her incredible work and a visit to the orphanage is a humbling experience.

Dates

2010

20th to 24th February
05th to 09th June
21st to 25th August
11th to 15th September

2011*

05th to 09th June
21st to 25th August
11th to 15th September

*dates are provisional and subject to change

This itinerary is both a group departure on the above dates or a year round suggested tailor-made itinerary - please contact us to discuss which suits your own requirements best.

Main tour cost

From £1,245 plus gorilla permits at £350 per permit, subject to availability in 2010.

From £1,395 plus gorilla permits at £350 per permit, subject to availability in 2011.

Includes

All accommodation on a full board basis (except in Kigali which is bed and breakfast), transport, gorilla permits (on payment of supplement as above), services of English-speaking guide/driver, local guides and trackers, other expertise on the venture. A contribution per person is given to support local community and conservation projects through the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project in Ruhengeri

Excludes

International economy return flights from London to Kigali, (which we are happy to provide a quote for) which we can help arrange, travel insurance (mandatory), visas, vaccinations, items of a personal nature, gratuities, alcohol, soft drinks, extra meals and any additional permits.

Costs For Tailormade Trips

This trip can be designed on a tailormade basis - please contact us for a bespoke itinerary, which we can design to suit your budget and wanderlust.

Single Supplements

We do not charge single supplements unless you require a guaranteed single room, *subject to rooming availability*. The cost of a single supplement is £395.

Extras

Here are some suggestions of ways to enhance your trip even before you arrive; upgrade your flight from economy to premium economy or business class, upgrade your hotel room, prebook valet or airport parking, airport hotels and airport lounges. If you wish to take advantage of the reduced tour operator rates we are able to offer, please don't hesitate to contact us for further information

International Flights

We are happy to quote you with flights to Kigali from the UK to arrive in time to coincide with the tour departure.

Age Restrictions

Please note that due to the nature of this tour and the rules for gorilla viewing, the minimum age for this tour is 16 yrs old.

Important information

Coming From The USA

Experience tells us that the best way to get to Rwanda is via London and Nairobi and therefore we would encourage you to join the tour in London.

Extra Permits

Please contact us should you wish to take advantage of a second permit, subject to availability and payment of an additional charge.

Notes On Permits

Early bookings are more likely to get full gorilla permit allocation. Permits are non-refundable except for medical reasons and a medical certificate has to be provided in the event of cancellation. Gorilla viewing can be denied at short notice because of national park or border closures or gorillas moving out of range. In such circumstances refunds are at the discretion of the authorities. Obtaining a gorilla permit is therefore not a guarantee of seeing a gorilla. Seeing a gorilla in the wild should be seen as a privilege not a right.

Weather And Best Time To Travel

Rwanda can be visited at any time of year with best times from June to October with least rain. The wettest months are March to May and generally to be avoided although it can rain at any time especially over the Virungas although this clears the air of haze and mist, with brighter sunshine for photography. The climate in the PNV region is unpredictable although you can generally expect both sun as well as rainfall during the day. The area in which you are staying in is above 2,400metres (7,800 feet) above sea level, which means it can be very cold, particularly in the evening and early morning so you should dress accordingly.

Please note that the trekking here is NOT humid, given the altitude and the fact that it is a mountain, not tropical, rainforest.

Vaccinations And Visa's

All visitors must be in possession of a valid passport with at least six months left before expiry. Visas are required for entry into Rwanda for British citizens (not required for American citizens) and are obtained free of charge on arrival. A Yellow fever vaccination is essential and we recommend inoculations for Typhoid, Tetanus and Hepatitis A. If you are a regular traveller abroad we would recommend that you are up to date on all childhood inoculations and vaccinations including polio. Malaria is present in Rwanda and expert advice is therefore essential. Please consult a medical practitioner or call MASTA on 09068 224100 (premium rate call) at least one month before you travel.

Health And Fitness

A good level of fitness will allow you to fully appreciate this safari and with this in mind we recommend you undertake some form of regular exercise in preparation for the sometimes challenging gorilla tracking. Past groups have been known to track up to 6 hours in the forest on rare occasions on steep slopes and through dense vegetation, though there are some natural trails to follow. Please bear this in mind to ensure you get the most from the tour and prepare accordingly.

Accommodation And Food

We use the best accommodation available but the tourism infrastructure in the country is still developing. The Mountain Gorilla Nest is a comfortable and clean hotel situated close to the PNV park headquarters. All rooms are en suite with hot and cold running water and flushing toilets and is in the best location for tracking and is clean and comfortable. The service is a little slow and patience is sometimes needed, however the staff are very welcoming and the food served is fresh. Whilst those with special dietary requirements should not expect a huge variety, they can easily be catered for if given prior notice.

Security

Given the nature of the tour and the fact that you will be tracking wild animals, please bear in mind that this tour can change at short notice. However, we monitor the situation regularly and ensure our tours operate in areas which are safe.

Our commitment



Since 2007 we have become pioneers in the field of nature travel.

We have raised significant funds in support of the world's leading wildlife and conservation agencies, researchers and experts, and increased awareness of travel and conservation through newsletters, lectures and consistent media coverage. Furthermore we have voluntarily spearheaded collective action campaigns such as Travel Operators for Tigers in South Asia.



The Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project dedicates every minute of the day to the Mountain Gorilla. In order to ensure a healthy future for this special animal, they regularly monitor the gorillas, providing life-saving medical care if needed, conduct health studies and help build local capacity in veterinary medicine and ecosystem health. However, they can't do it alone and this tour includes a donation per person to ensure that they are able to continue their vital work in the region.

Our travel partners, accommodation, service providers and ground agents are all carefully chosen to ensure their commitment to the environment, most being quality, family owned businesses – reflecting the unique character of the places, the abiding hospitality of its people and the remarkable spirit of its wilderness.

Now come along and see for yourself. With us it won't cost the earth!

Want to discuss this trip?



Please call Chris on ++ 44 (0) 1285 643333 for e-mail chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk more details or to make a booking.

Having travelled extensively through some of the world's rich primate habitats, including Borneo, Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Central African Republic and the DRC, Chris has developed a passion and understanding for these wild and captivating areas.

Having come face to face with gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans on numerous occasions he will be more than happy to share his enthusiasm for the great apes.
