

Rwanda

KINGDOM OF THE GORILLAS

- Meet gorilla researchers from the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project for a unique insight into conservation
- An opportunity to track gorillas twice in the lush rainforests of Virunga National Park
- Experience a highly personal, small group trip with a maximum of only eight people
- Explore the regions colourful market, spectacular landscapes and lively Kigali



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, living in a tiny oasis of ever-decreasing forest in the Virunga National Park. It is here that you will gain 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 in today's Rwanda. You will also have the chance to follow in the footsteps of Dian Fossey and trek the gorillas, with many of the older guides having worked alongside Dian Fossey herself. If you are lucky enough to meet them, they will offer you a fascinating insight into her work.

By joining this tour you are directly contributing to the ongoing survival of the mountain gorilla as well donating funds 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 you will be met along with the rest of the group and you will then have the chance to explore the city and visit the powerful genocide memorial. Opened in April 2004, on the 10th Anniversary of the genocide, the Centre provides an opportunity to offer a place in which the bereaved could bury their families and friends with over 250,000 victims of the genocide now buried at the site. The Centre exists as a permanent memorial to those who fell victim to the genocide and also as a place for Rwandans to pay their respects. Whilst this an incredibly emotional experience, many Rwandans encourage people to spend time here as a way to remember the past, but also encouraging people to look to the future. Whilst this is a very emotional experience, we encourage our clients to visit this at the start of the tour to place the people in a historical context and to understand just how far the Rwandese people have come.

You then head north on 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. The park 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 Mountain Gorilla View, located close to the park headquarters. Each of the individually designed rooms are clean and comfortable, with western style private bathrooms and hot showers. There is also a spacious restaurant, a large bar and reception and offers a great base from which to track the gorillas. It's location near the park 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, time permitting, you will have the chance to enjoy a walk in the surrounding area, including the chance to visit a local school, community projects or the nearby lakes - 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 Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)



Day 2

Today is your first Gorilla trek. After an early start, you will head to the PNV park HQ to check in and receive your briefing from the guides, over a cup of tea or coffee. You will then be driven to the start of the trek (which can be anything from 20 minutes to an hour depending on which group you are visiting) and after arranging porters - certainly worth considering - you head out into the park to track the gorillas through the lush forested slopes of the Virungas, a magical experience.

Each gorilla group is different with some gorilla families proving far more elusive and tracking can take a full day, especially when it is wet and muddy, so come prepared! After you begin your trek, your guide will stop to point out the flora and fauna en-route, as well as allowing you the chance to stop for photographs and water breaks. Once the gorillas have been located, you will leave your day packs with your porter, carrying only that which you need for the 1 hour you are allowed with the gorillas. Depending on the gorilla group you visit, you could expect to see the imposing dominant silverback or a new born infant clinging to his mother's fur.

However, the thrill of seeing these beautiful creatures in the wild is electric and after



spending the hour with the group, you will retrace your steps back to the lodge, where you can take a well deserved shower. Depending on when you return to the lodge, you can either relax with the remainder of day at leisure, or spend some time exploring the nearby villages. (Please note the gorilla permit is not included in the cost and is shown separately below) Overnight at Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)

Day 3

A second opportunity to track these magnificent creatures (on payment 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. (Please note the gorilla permit is not included in the cost and is shown separately below) Overnight at Mountain Gorilla View. (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 to meet the researchers who 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 and without them, mountain gorillas might not exist today. However, 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 this trip supports. In the afternoon you will return to Kigali and spend the night at the Kigali Serena, which allows you to indulge in a few home comforts and enjoy the facilities you would expect from a hotel of this standard. Overnight Kigali Serena (BB)

Day 5

This morning you will have time to enjoy a later breakfast before heading out into Kigali itself. Here, you can capture the vibrancy of the capital and visit a number of markets before heading to the airport in time for your flight home.



****Please note that gorilla permits in Rwanda are due to increase from U\$500 to U\$750 as of the 01st June 2012. Please note we have pre-bought a number of permits at the old rate of U\$500 to ensure a saving for our clients for this particular trip. All permits paid for before the 01st June will be charged at the existing rate of U\$500. Please contact us for details****

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Chimpanzee Extension

4 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.



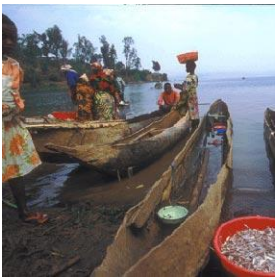
Costs from £1,095 per person based on a twin share room including 2 chimpanzee permits, accommodation, meals, guides and transfers.

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 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.



Costs from £995 (4 days) per person in a twin share room including accommodation, guides and transfers.



Date

2012
10th to 14th June
22nd to 26th July
26th to 30th August
09th to 13th September

2013
28th June to 02nd July
12th to 16th July
23rd to 27th August
06th to 10th September

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 £1,425.00 plus gorilla permits at £350 per permit, subject to availability (2012)

From £1,495.00 plus gorilla permits at £500 per permit, subject to availability (2013)

Includes

All accommodation on a full board basis except in Kigali which is bed and breakfast, transport, gorilla permits (the costs of which are shown separately), services of English-speaking guide, 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 meal.

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

If you are happy to share accommodation with a fellow traveller of the same sex then you will not be charged a single supplement for your holiday. This is of course dependent on there being another same sex traveller on the trip who is also wanting to share. If we cannot find a partner with whom you can share then unfortunately we will be left with no choice but to pass on the single supplement, imposed by the properties we are using. We will endeavour to keep this supplement to a minimum. Naturally should you wish to have a single room then this is possible by simply opting to pay the single supplement as per the itinerary. The cost of a single supplement is £395.

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 15 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.

PLEASE NOTE - GORILLA PERMITS AND COSTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT SHORT NOTICE AND CAN INCREASE UNEXPECTEDLY FOR REASONS BEYOND OUR CONTROL AT ANY STAGE OF THE BOOKING. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN WE ARE OBLIGED TO PASS THIS COST ON BUT WE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO ENSURE THE TRIP RUNS SMOOTHLY.

Weather And Best Time To Travel

Rwanda can be visited at any time of year with best times from Jan - Feb and June - 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. 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. You will enjoy a walk through the forest at a pace that is comfortable for everyone, although you may be walking 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 View is a comfortable and clean hotel, with all rooms en suite with hot and cold running water and flushing toilets. 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, Rwanda is a very safe country to visit and you will be given a very warm welcome!

Our commitment



An unavoidable consequence of travel is the emission of carbon dioxide into the high atmosphere and while Steppes Discovery takes measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its holidays, regrettably it is not yet possible to make them carbon neutral. If you are able to, we suggest you consider offsetting the carbon emission of your long haul flight by using Rainforest Concern's Forest Credits scheme. Details can be found at www.forestcredits.org.uk

Rainforests have a central role to play in the slowing of climate change and yet we are removing forests from the planet at a faster rate than they can grow back. Rainforest Concern supports projects that look to preserve the forests that we have rather than replanting new ones, working to safeguard biodiversity and local communities and in so doing mitigate climate change.



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.