

Rwanda

GORILLA PHOTOGRAPHIC TOUR

- Capture dramatic images of mountain gorilla with professional photographer David Plummer
- Learn about wildlife photography techniques in the field, with practical, hands-on advice
- Access to the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project - a unique insight into conservation
- Open to all levels and abilities, designed for those keen to improve on their basic skills



Summary

Join professional photographer David Plummer in the wilds of Rwanda to develop your photography skills and find out what it takes to capture one of the world's most iconic animals on camera. Not only will you spend each day learning how to get the most from your camera, but you will also enjoy the warmth and hospitality of the Rwandan people, as they show you their beautiful and dramatic country.

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 the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, as this trip also includes a behind-the-scenes tour of their headquarters in Ruhengeri.

Overview



Whilst the gorillas are of course the main focus of this tour, the rest of the country has fantastic photo opportunities and is alive with vibrant colour and breathtaking scenery. From the rich greens of the mountain rainforest, the dramatic blue mists over the Virunga mountains, the yellow bananas being taken to market or the red fabrics of the elegantly dressed women. David shares our commitment to the mantra 'the wildlife comes first' and whether a beginner or an experienced amateur, David will spend time helping to hone your photographic skills so you can return with some truly memorable images. This tour is very much designed to be accessible to all abilities and whilst photography is the main focus, it is also great fun and given the size of the group there will be plenty of one to one tuition.



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A wonderful opportunity for both wildlife and photography enthusiasts alike.

Your Guide



David Plummer

Author, photographer and conservationist, David Plummer, is in his element when watching and photographing wildlife. For most of the year David can be found at his beloved Scrag cove in Sussex, where he hosts a range of wildlife workshops, from badger watching to forest bird photography. He also works as a photographer for Sussex Wildlife Trust and teaches nature photography on their beautiful reserve at Woods Mill. It takes something special to entice David away from Britain's wildlife. However, the lure of photographing the world's most beautiful yet endangered wildlife is always difficult to resist.

David will not only be your guide throughout your tour, but will also offer group and individual photographic tuition throughout. A sample of your pictures will be reviewed on a daily basis and a constructive critique of your shots will enable you to identify and correct any areas in your photography where improvements would be beneficial.

The purpose of a wildlife photographic tour is to provide you with wonderful memories, as well as superb photos that will be a permanent reminder of your amazing close-up experiences with some of the world's most fantastic creatures. All abilities and skill levels are catered for and non-photographers are also most welcome.

Itinerary



Day 1

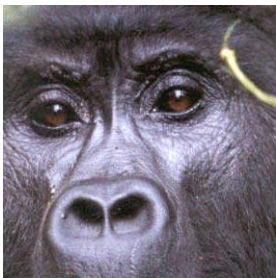
On arrival in Kigali you will be met by our guides and David before being taken to a nearby café for coffee and introductions. David and the guides will then run through the programme with you and explain the days that lie ahead. You will then begin your tour of Kigali, with the chance to explore the 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. 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 will also have the chance to visit nearby markets and immerse yourself in the vibrancy of the capital. You are then taken to the hotel Milles Collines in the afternoon, to unpack and relax. Having been completely refurbished, this international style hotel is by far the best option available whilst staying in Kigali and offers a great place to get your bearings, including all the facilities you would expect from a hotel of this standard, including a pool and various restaurants. The hotel is also the star of the Oscar nominated film, 'Hotel Rwanda'. The remainder of the afternoon is very relaxed but David will run through a presentation covering the outline and general photographic tips to get you started at around 5pm

Overnight Milles Collines (BB)



Day 2

After breakfast this morning you begin your journey north on a three-hour drive along a beautiful road, over ridges and hills of steeply terraced fields, for which Rwanda is most famous, with your final destination being 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 4 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, David will spend time with each of you on a 30 minute one-to-one session with the chance to practice some shots around the lodge. Time permitting; you will also have the chance to enjoy a walk in the surrounding area, including a visit to a local market. This is a wonderful opportunity, not only to meet the colourful Rwandese people who live nearby, but also to take advantage of the stunning views across the fertile hills of Rwanda. This evening there is a presentation on tomorrow's gorilla trek.



Overnight Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)



Day 3

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 during your hour with the group, David will be on hand, to guide you through the challenges of photographing the gorillas and their environment. 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, in the afternoon you will be able to critique the images and edit the photographs taken, with practical tips on how to monitor and improve your own skills. This evening there will be another presentation. Overnight at Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)



Day 4

This morning you are driven to the headquarters of the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project (MGVP) in Ruhengeri, about 20 minutes from the lodge. At the Project centre, they dedicate every minute of the day to the mountain gorilla. In order to ensure a healthy future for this remarkable animal, they regularly monitor the gorillas, providing life-saving medical care, conducting health studies and helping to build local capacity in veterinary medicine and ecosystem health. The team includes eight vets, the gorilla doctors, one laboratory manager, house and office staff and orphaned gorilla caretakers.



The project began with just one vet and has now grown into an entire team of experienced personnel, with MGVP vets tracking ailing gorillas, observing and treating them when needed - inside their native habitat. Without the MGVP, mountain gorillas might not exist today. 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 hear 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. After lunch at a local restaurant, you will head out this afternoon to capture images of the people and landscapes of the region, venturing off-the-beaten-track to the more remote villages found in the region. On returning to the lodge, there will again, be time to critique images and run through the days images. After dinner there will be another evening presentation.



Overnight at Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)

Day 5

A second opportunity to track these magnificent creatures (on payment of a supplement and subject to availability).

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) This afternoon is free to explore the region and also critique the images.

Overnight at Mountain Gorilla View. (FB)

Day 6

Your final morning is very relaxed as you can take in a few last shots, before retracing your steps to Kigali Airport, where you say goodbye to your guides and catch your flight home.

Optional Extension:

Chimpanzee Extension

Three-day Chimpanzee Trekking in Nyungwe Forest, one of Africa's oldest forests that offers an incredible biodiversity and the chance to track Rwanda's other famous primate. This magnificent 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 to 12 other species of primates, 280 varieties of birds, 120 kinds of butterflies and over 200 types 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 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. Nearby Gisenyi is also home to the famous Imbabazi orphanage started in 1994 by Rosamond Carr. The orphanage was originally in Mugongo. However, after having moved four times for security reasons, it has now settled in Gisenyi. It shelters many of the genocide orphans and other displaced children in the region, now numbering more than 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

Date

2013

02nd to 07th February 2012
Other dates to be confirmed shortly

Main tour cost

From **£2,795.00** per person **INCLUDING ONE gorilla permit**. Additional permits available at **£500 per permit**, subject to availability. Excludes international flights.

Includes

Expertise of David Plummer throughout the trip. All accommodation on a full board basis (except in Kigali which is bed and breakfast), transport, ONE gorilla permit (additional permit costs shown separately 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, (for which we are happy to provide a quote), travel insurance (mandatory), visas, vaccinations, items of a personal nature, gratuities, alcohol, soft drinks, extra meals. Permits, costed separately above.

Single supplements

We do not charge single supplements unless you require a guaranteed single room, *subject to availability*. The cost of a single supplement is **£495**.

International Flights

We are happy to provide a quote for flights to Kigali from the UK, to arrive in time for 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 years old.

Photography Notes

To get the most out of your photographic tour with Steppes Discovery, our photographic leader, David Plummer recommends that you have either a digital SLR or film SLR type camera.

Digital hybrid or bridge cameras (ie Panasonic Lumix, Nikon Coolpix or similar), although now popular, are primarily designed to be used in an automatic mode and as such you may lose out on some of the photographic tuition as well as control of your images in the field.

Because of the size and your proximity to gorillas, a long lens (400 or 500mm) is not necessary. A zoom lens such as an 18-200mm or 2 lenses 18-55mm plus 70-300mm is probably perfectly adequate. In essence, the better quality your lens, the better quality your images. David Plummer primarily uses a Nikon 70-200mm lens to photograph the gorillas and occasionally switches to a wider angle lens. Critique of images by David Plummer will be carried out viewing images either on your camera or on your own storage device. Images will not be collectively downloaded. If you have a spare or additional camera body it is recommended that you bring it, even if it is just an old or obsolete one; safaris can be taxing on camera equipment and malfunctions can and do occur.

We do send through a much more comprehensive guidelines for photography on confirmation.

Important information

Weather in Rwanda

We have chosen to run this trip during the short dry season. This time of year is perhaps best from a photographic point of view as the rains in the preceding months ensure that the countryside is at its most fertile, the colours vibrant and the sky blue. Please bear in mind however, that this is a rainforest, so you can expect showers at any time – we can't control the weather!

Coming from USA

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

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 must be provided in the event of cancellation. Gorilla viewing can be denied at short notice because of national park, 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.

Vaccinations and visas

All visitors must be in possession of a valid passport with at least six months left before expiry. Visas are required for entry for British citizens to enter Rwanda (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. With this in mind, we recommend you undertake some form of regular exercise in preparation for gorilla tracking, which is sometimes challenging. Previous groups have been known to track up to six hours in the forest on steep slopes and through dense vegetation, although there are some natural trails to follow. Please bear this in mind to ensure you get the most from the tour and prepare accordingly. Please note that, given the altitude and the fact that it is a mountain, not tropical rainforest, trekking here is NOT humid.

Accommodation and food

We use the best accommodation available. However, 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. The hotel is clean and comfortable and is in the best location for tracking. Whilst service can be a little slow, the staff are very welcoming and the food served is fresh. Those with special dietary requirements should not expect a huge variety. However, with prior notice, they can easily be catered for.

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 that our tours operate in areas which are safe.

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. In order to offset these emissions we give £10 per client to Rainforest Concern. 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.

The Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project dedicates every minute of the day to the mountain gorilla. In order to ensure a healthy future for this remarkable animal, they regularly monitor the gorillas, providing life-saving medical care if needed, conducting health studies and helping to build local capacity in veterinary medicine and ecosystem health. However, they cannot 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 the people and the remarkable spirit of the 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 or e-mail chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk for more details.



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.

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