



The Ultimate Gorilla Trekking Guide

OUR EXPERT INSIGHT INTO CREATING YOUR GORILLA EXPERIENCE

THE STEPPES TRAVEL GROUP

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SteppesTravel

Gorilla Trekking

Gorilla trekking is a wonderful experience, providing a close encounter with these gentle giants of the forests, in their natural habitat. Trekking can take place either in Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo or Republic of Congo. Permits are heavily restricted, so early booking is vital.

You need not feel that you are exploiting these animals by paying to see them in their natural habitat. In fact, tourism is an important factor in their survival. The income from permits is used to help set up and finance patrols that are instrumental in protecting the gorillas from poachers.

How close to the gorillas do you get?

Officially, seven metres. It is very important that you adhere to the guidelines laid down by your guide during the pre-trek briefing. The rules are designed for the benefit of both humans and gorillas, particularly to reduce the spread of infection.

Whilst it can be difficult to keep to this distance (the gorillas have never been told of this particular rule), please be aware of your guide's comments and follow these to the letter.

The gorillas are usually spread out in the forest, sometimes out in the open, other times hiding in the shadows, so you may only catch glimpses of them. You may be very lucky and see them all out in the open.

Generally, you will have a full hour with the group, although a few extended permits are now available – ask our experts to explain how this works.



Gorillas are the largest of the primates, with two species, the western gorilla and eastern gorilla. These are then divided into four sub-species; western lowland gorilla, eastern lowland gorilla (also known as Grauer's gorilla), mountain gorilla and Cross River gorilla.

Eastern Gorilla – *Gorilla beringei*



Eastern lowland gorilla (Grauer's gorilla):

- ❖ Population: 2,000-5,000
- ❖ Features: largest and stockiest of all gorillas. Longer faces and broader chests with darker hair
- ❖ Description: Males weigh on average 163kg (359lbs) and have a standing height of 1.69m (5ft 7ins) whilst females are slightly shorter at 1.58m (5ft 3ins) and are half the weight of the males
- ❖ Found: Forests of DRC to the west of Mitumbar Mountains and Lake Tanganyika
- ❖ Threats: poaching, bush meat and logging

Mountain Gorilla

- ❖ Population: less than 900
- ❖ Features: longest and thickest hair for warmth in colder, higher altitudes, generally very shy creatures
- ❖ Description: Males can weigh up to 195kg (430lbs) and can stand at 1.5m (4ft 11ins) whilst females are about half that weight and stand at 1.3m (4ft 3ins)
- ❖ Found: Mountains of Virunga straddling Rwanda and DRC and southern Uganda (Bwindi)
- ❖ Threats: mountain gorillas are currently on the Critically Endangered IUCN Red List.



Western Gorilla – *Gorilla Gorilla*

- ❖ Population: uncertain – less than 95,000
- ❖ Features: smallest of all the gorillas, with bigger skulls and pronounced brow bridges. They have the shortest hair and longest arms
- ❖ Description: Adult males have brown-grey/auburn hair on their foreheads and weigh around 157kg (345lbs) and can stand at 1.55m (5ft 2ins) whilst females are around 1.35m (4ft 6ins) and again around half the weight of a male.
- ❖ Found: forests of northern Republic of Congo, CAR, DRC, Gabon and southern Cameroon



Cross River Gorilla – *gorilla diehli*

- ❖ **Population:** 200-300
- ❖ **Features:** similar to western lowland gorillas in body size. Smaller cranium vault and shorter skulls
- ❖ **Description:** Average adult male height: 1.7m. (5ft 7ins) weighing in at 140-200kg (310-440lbs). Females are about 0.3m (1ft) shorter and half the weight
- ❖ **Found:** a small area between the southern border of Cameroon and Nigeria at the headwaters of the Cross River from where they take their name



Behaviour:

With broad chests and shoulders, large, human-like hands and small eyes set into hairless faces, gorillas display many human-like behaviours and emotions, such as laughter and sadness and even make their own tools to help them survive in the forest. In fact, gorillas share 98.3% of their genetic code with humans, making them our closest cousins after chimpanzees and bonobos.



Making a Difference



For a number of years, we have supported the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, now known as The Gorilla Doctors. The Gorilla Doctors work under difficult conditions throughout Uganda, Rwanda and DRC, monitoring the gorilla groups on a daily basis and ensuring the health and well-being of the individual family members. Should clients wish to visit the project in the Virungas, a contribution of \$500 will be made to Gorilla Doctors.

Why Choose Steppes Travel?

Such is our reputation, that over the years we have been asked to arrange trips for everyone from the BBC Natural History Unit, to Turner Broadcasting and CNN. Steppes was even approached by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority directly when they were looking to open up a new gorilla group to tourism in 2004 (The Nkuringo Group) – they wanted us to provide the tourists.

We are of course, very lucky to have worked with these organisations over the years, but the highest accolade we can offer is the fact that over 70% of our business is repeat and referral.

We hope that you will call us to at least discuss ideas if nothing else so that we can answer plenty of questions and help start with the planning of your own adventure.

We have put an FAQ section towards the end of this guide to get you started.



Gorilla Trekking in Uganda

Gorilla trekking in Uganda is an excellent option for those looking for a more comprehensive wildlife experience, but who are more flexible on time and budget.

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is the only place you can see gorillas in Uganda. This is an old rainforest (with two blocks designated as Crown Forest Reserves in 1932), so the trekking can be a little tougher than in Rwanda.

Given the diversity of wildlife, the actual forest itself is more dramatic than Rwanda, and although the park is harder to get to by road, requiring an overnight stop from the capital, Entebbe, it is more than worth the effort travelling through some stunning scenery en-route. If you prefer to make better use of your time here, there is a new excellent domestic flight service available.

Like Rwanda, the trekking here is done on steep, muddy paths, but it's not so humid due to the altitude.

In addition to the gorillas in Uganda there are also excellent opportunities for chimpanzee trekking, Big 5 game viewing, boat safaris and some of Africa's best birding. It also has the added benefit of cheaper gorilla permits than Rwanda.

Time allowed with the gorillas is strictly 1 hour, although we can now offer the option to gain access to these wonderful creatures with gorilla researchers and therefore spend several hours in their company.



Pros:

- ❖ The age of the rainforest and the look of the park provides an incredible sense of adventure
- ❖ Combines very well with chimpanzees and other big game
- ❖ Permits are a little cheaper

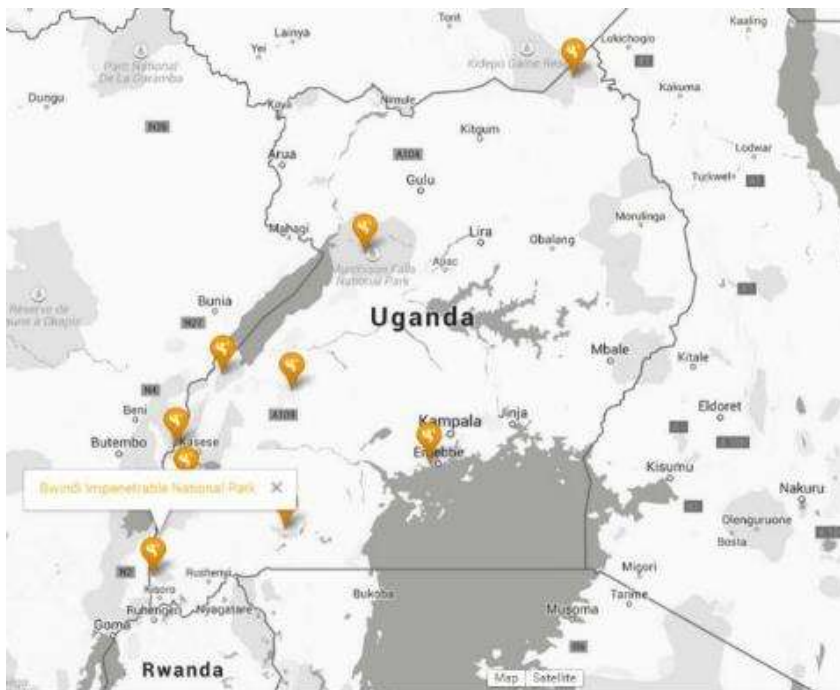
Cons:

- ❖ The park can be steep in places so you have to work for the sightings
- ❖ Can require longer drives given distances involved
- ❖ The thicker vegetation means forest wildlife harder to spot

BWINDI IMPENETRABLE FOREST

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is considered one of the world's most biologically diverse areas and recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has nine habituated families with eight permits available daily for each group. The gorillas here live in thicker tropical forest and tracking is more challenging than Mgahinga National Park in Uganda and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda.

As the hillsides are steeper, it can take up to eight hours after leaving the base to locate the gorillas. However, guests are normally split into groups for easy, medium and hard treks depending on where the gorilla families are residing that day.



Five of the families (Mubare, Habinyanja, Oruzogo, Bitukura and Rushegura) are accessed from Buhoma in the north, staying at Bwindi Lodge

A further four families can be tracked from southern Bwindi, which is accessed from Kisoro, staying at Mount Gahinga Lodge. These families are Nkuringo, Nshongi, Kahunje and Mishaya.

The Mubare Family

- ❖ 11 members including 1 silverback
 - ❖ Habituated between 1991 and 1993 the family were named after the Mubare Hills, where they were first spotted
 - ❖ Mubare is the oldest habituated group in Uganda
 - ❖ Kanyonyi is current group leader. Took over following the death of his father, Ruhondeza, in June 2012
-

The Habinyanja Family

- ❖ 17 members
 - ❖ Meaning 'body of water', this family was habituated in 1997
 - ❖ Makara is the sole dominant leader of the group.
 - ❖ The family has a stubborn prodigal member, Maraya, who left family in August 2011 but often comes to cause chaos in the family then moves back to solitary life.
-



The Oruzogo Family

- ❖ 17 members including 2 silverbacks.
 - ❖ The group was named after the local name of a common plant in the home range of this family
 - ❖ Bakwate has been the dominant silverback since habituation in 2008
 - ❖ Kagaanga – a young silverback is second in command
-

The Bitukara Family

- ❖ 14 members including 4 silverbacks
- ❖ The family was named after the Bitukura River
- ❖ Their habituation started in 2007 and tracking began in 2008
- ❖ The family has four Silverbacks peacefully co-existing. The retired Karamuzi and two others (Rukumu and Mugisha) who are all submissive to Ndahura

The Rushegura Family

- ❖ 15 members with 1 silverback
 - ❖ Kabukojo is current leader following the death of predecessor Mwirima in March 2014
 - ❖ Their name is taken from a tree species that grows in their home area, Ebishegura
 - ❖ They are a calm group and often visit the Bwindi Lodge gardens
 - ❖ Kabukojo has a younger brother – Kalembezi - who helps him co-lead the family
-

The Nkuringo Family

- ❖ 12 members with 2 silverbacks
- ❖ Named after the Nkuringo Hill where the group was first spotted
- ❖ Originally habituated in 2004 after destroying the crops of local farmers. Now farmers benefit from the tourism they provide
- ❖ Rafiki has been the dominant silverback for almost a decade.





The Nshongi Family

- ❖ 7 members
- ❖ Named after the river close to where they were first sighted.
- ❖ It was the largest group to be habituated now fractured to form several new families.

The Kyaguliro Family

- ❖ 20 members
- ❖ Currently under contentious leadership of young Mukiza, whose authority is being contested by an immigrant silverback from Bitukura family.

The Bweza Family

- ❖ 12 members
- ❖ Kakano is the silverback of the group
- ❖ The group was formed after a dispute in the Nshongi family, at which point they split off and became a separate family

The Kahungye Family

- ❖ 18 members including 3 silverbacks
- ❖ The group was named after the Kahungye Hills and are newly habituated
- ❖ The family has three silverbacks but two, Rwigyi (the oldest) and Ruzika (the youngest) are loyal to the dominant one (Rumanzi)
- ❖ Rumanzi has been dominant since habituation

MGAHINGA NATIONAL PARK

Mgahinga National Park has one gorilla group, the Nyakagezi family, which has recently returned from their travels in Rwanda and Congo. Tracking in Mgahinga is usually easier than Bwindi as the Afromontane forest is lighter.

The Nyakagezi Family

- ❖ 10 members, including 5 silverbacks – the highest number in a single group
- ❖ The group is very nomadic, crossing the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and DRC
- ❖ Mark is the dominant silverback. He took over from Bigingo, who is still alive but the oldest family member



Bwindi Lodge

This attractive, low key lodge was one of the first to be built in the area and sits in a fantastic location, with uninterrupted views of Bwindi Forest. The addition of a few coloured panes of glass in the walls allows plenty of sunlight in to the large rooms, which all lead out to a small veranda at the front to soak up the fantastic views, best enjoyed with a cup of steaming coffee first thing in the morning.



Buhoma Lodge

The warmth and welcome of this lodge is what sets it apart and the spirit of the original Buhoma Homestead built on the site, shines through. Each of the wood and stone cottages are set across the hillside in the forest surrounding Bwindi, using simple African fabrics to add comfort and character, whilst the private decking offers sweeping views of the forests.



Clouds Mountain Gorilla Lodge

Aptly named, this lodge sits in a commanding position, high up on the Nteko Ridge in the quieter Nkuringo region of Bwindi. Eight cottages with enormous beds and a separate sitting room are warmed by an open fire, carefully lit each night by a private butler. The food rivals the best of many lodges in Africa - zebu steaks and fresh salad from the lodge's own garden are a specialty.



Gorilla Forest Camp

Gorilla Forest Camp is a permanent luxury tented camp nestled in the mist-swathed rainforests on a mountainside in the heart of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The exclusive location makes Gorilla Forest Camp the sole property within the park boundaries and so is considered by many to be the ideal base for gorilla tracking, primate viewing and birding excursions in the park.

Gorilla Trekking in Rwanda

In Rwanda, gorilla trekking takes place in the Volcanoes National Park, where Dian Fossey famously carried out her research. There are only about 700 mountain gorillas left in the wild, half of these can be found in central Africa's Virunga Mountains.



Rwanda is still, without a doubt, the best place in the world to go mountain gorilla trekking and release your inner Attenborough. Walking in the Virunga Mountains, in the shadow of giant, prehistoric plants as the mists clear to reveal a family of gorillas is incomparable. The stylish lodges here are bursting with Rwandese charm and the riot of colour around every corner from kanga clothing, banana plantations and the fertile hills soon exhaust your camera batteries.

For those with more time, Akagera Park, bordering Tanzania in the east, offers big game viewing with the wildlife to yourself, or head south to look for elusive chimps (as well as Rwanda's best birding and chameleons) in the dark and exotic Nyungwe Forest.

If you want to relax then head to Lake Kivu, where the only trekking to be done is back to your room from the beach, when you realise you've forgotten your holiday read.

Volcanoes National Park (VNP) in Rwanda has 10 habituated gorilla families with 8 permits available daily for each group. These include Susa, Karisimbi, Sabyinyo, Amahoro, Umubano, Kwitonda, Hirwa, Agashya, Bwenge and Ugyenda.



Most groups are half-day walks but Susa can take around 7 hours.

Tracking in VNP is usually easier than tracking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda as the forest is lighter.



The Susa Group

28 members including 3 silverbacks

- ❖ **Susa was the largest gorilla group before it split into two and named after the Susa River**
- ❖ **It was the group originally studied by Dian Fossey and is popular because of a pair of twins, Byishimo and Impano**

The Karisimbi Group

15 members including 3 silverbacks

- ❖ **This is the family that split from the original Susa family**
- ❖ **They tend to stay in the lower slopes of Karisimbi Volcano**

The Sabyinyo Group

12 members including 2 silverbacks

- ❖ The group was named after the rugged Sabyinyo Volcano.
- ❖ Sabyinyo means 'old man's teeth' and the group is known to stay between the mountains Sabyinyo and Gahinga, enjoying the gentle slopes and easy terrain

The Amahoro Group

17 members including 1 silverback

- ❖ Amahoro means 'peaceful' and the group is usually extraordinarily gentle and peaceful, which is why they were given the name
- ❖ It is a tougher climb to reach this family

The Umubano Group

11 members including 1 silverback.

- ❖ Umubano means 'live together' as the group originally formed when it split from the Amahoro group
- ❖ They still share much of the same territory and there is a peaceful relationship between them

The Kwitonda Group

18 members including 2 silverbacks

- ❖ Kwitonda means 'humble one', a name given to the group after the name of their dominant silverback
- ❖ They generally stay on the lower slopes of Mount Muhavura but are one of the more difficult tracking experiences

The Hirwa Group

12 members including 1 silverback

- ❖ Hirwa means 'lucky one'
- ❖ Hirwa is a new group formed when splinters from Sabyinyo group and Group 13 merged
- ❖ They have twins and are usually on Mount Sabyinyo

The Agasha Group

25 members including 2 silverbacks

- ❖ Agasha means 'the news'
- ❖ The Agasha group was previously known as Group 13 but renamed when Agasha challenged the dominant silverback by leading the group away from him and assimilating other individuals from groups or solitary wandering

The Bwenge Group

10 members including 1 silverback

- ❖ Bwenge means 'brightness'
- ❖ The family shares much of their territory with the Ugyenda group on Mount Visoke.

The Ugyenda Group

11 members including 1 silverback.

- ❖ Ugyenda means 'departure'
- ❖ The group usually stays around the Mount Visoke region
- ❖ Tracking is not too difficult





Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge

With only 5 cottages, 2 suites and 1 family cottage, Sabyinyo Silverback lodge is certainly luxurious and exclusive. The enormous guest rooms have a large lounge area, where you can sink into oversized chairs and feel the warm from roaring fire, stylish en-suite bathrooms, a separate dressing room and a sheltered veranda to take in the stunning views.



The lodge, like the rooms are constructed of local stone, finished with an ochre coloured plaster, with terracotta tiled roofs giving the lodge an almost Mediterranean villa feel.



Virunga Lodge

Sitting atop one of Rwanda's many "thousand hills", Virunga Lodge has one of the most breath-taking views of any lodge in Africa with cloud topped volcanoes to one side and shadowy blue lakes on the other. Each of the contemporary, stone bandas are softened by fresh flowers and draped in traditional kanga fabrics with hot water bottles and hurricane lamps adding to the warmth. If the trekking takes it out of you, the heart-warming food leaves you sated, or the complimentary massages bliss you out, there is always somewhere to relax and take in one of the most dramatic views in Africa.



Mountain Gorilla View Lodge

It is one of the closest lodges to the park headquarters, with 30 simple, stone cottages spread out across the slopes of Mount Sabyinyo in spacious gardens full of flowers. The en-suite rooms are simple, clean and comfortable and surprisingly large, with a lounge area centered on a small fireplace to help keep the chill at bay, given the altitude. It's location near the park however, means that you don't have to get up too early when trekking and on a clear day the views across to the volcanoes and surrounding hills are spectacular. A solid, straightforward, mid-range option.



When is the best time to go to visit these countries?

All are near the equator, so the climate does not change a huge amount.

The short lighter rains are from October to November, whilst the rainy season tends to be from March to April. That said, you are spending time in mountain rainforests, so you can expect rain at any time.

Unlike wildlife viewing elsewhere in Africa, the rains do not affect the movement of the gorillas and you can trek at any time of the year.

Travel can be tougher during the longer rains and trekking much muddier.

For those keen on photography however, just after the rains (January/February or May/June) is a beautiful time to travel as the air is clear, the skies are blue and the countryside is at its most fertile.

How fit do I have to be for gorilla trekking?

This is the question we get asked the most and whilst fitness is a very subjective thing, anyone can enjoy gorilla trekking, providing they prepare for it. By its very nature, gorilla trekking will be challenging as you will be walking through



mountain rainforests, with thick vegetation, on steep muddy paths. Therefore, the fitter you are, the more you will enjoy it.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that as this is a mountain rainforest, it's not too humid and in fact will be quite cool and damp, although you will warm up during the trek.

The porters are also brilliant and you will be given the opportunity to hire them when you arrive at the park HQ on the morning of your actual trek. They will be there to help steady you as you walk and can help with camera bags. They are great company and well worth the small payment.

What should I take when I go gorilla trekking?

Strong legs, a small rucksack in which you can put your camera, a jacket and comfortable, sturdy boots or shoes.

Given that it will start off cold early in the morning, you need lots of light layers that you can take off and put on easily. As you trek, you will warm up, shedding layers as you go, but when you reach the gorillas and stop for the hour, it can turn cold very quickly, particularly if you are in shadow or shade.

Light layers and fleeces are good, walking trousers are good, but anything that you are comfortable in, that dries quickly is best.

Be prepared for your clothes to get very mucky, possibly quite wet and probably ripped or torn as you may be scrabbling in some pretty heavy duty undergrowth. Strangely, you might want to consider taking gardening gloves as you will be pulling at thorny vegetation and nettles as you climb so this protects you against cuts and scratches.

Of course take a fully charged camera and spare memory cards. For those with different lenses, a good zoom of around 300-400 mm should be fine but you will need a steady hand or tripod if you are serious. The ground is very uneven and you may be balancing on a slope to see the gorillas.



How long are the gorilla treks?

The gorilla treks vary enormously. Some groups are very close and can be reached in around an hour, whilst others are on the far side of the parks and can take all day. That said, as the gorillas obviously move around, they are in a different place each day, so it is impossible to predict how long it will take you to reach them. They can also move as you trek towards them, even when you are there, so you need to be prepared. If you are doing more than one trek, the rangers will try and ensure you see a mixture of groups to get a range of experiences.



On the morning of your trek, which usually means a 6am start, you will be allocated a group (you can opt for an easy, medium or hard trek) and your ranger will then go through the dos and don'ts of gorilla trekking. It is important you adhere to their guidance and do not get too close to the gorillas (they are very susceptible to catching human colds).

Then it's time to head out to the park. Some groups can be accessed directly with a short

walk to the start of the trail, but others might require a drive to the start of the trail further away.

Our guides will always be there to take you to the gorilla treks and will then meet you at the end to drive you back to your lodge.

If you arrive back to your lodge early, your guide will offer you some additional activities should you wish – although you may just want to collapse in your room!

What advice would you give for photography?

The photographic opportunities are incredible and these countries are almost designed to drain your camera batteries and eat up memory cards. The gorillas are of course the main focus for much of the trip so you should be prepared for a dark environment, with the gorillas themselves a dark subject matter, often in shadow, although this can vary and they are sometimes out in the open. This means you will need a high ISO or a tripod or small monopod which can be quite useful if serious about photography. Also, whilst the rainforests are not humid (they are cooler mountain rainforests), there will still be a great deal of moisture around so it is a good idea to take some small silica gel packets to put into your camera bag and a small, dry cloth as lenses can mist up quickly, usually at the most inopportune moment. It is essential to have a good zoom lens, with a minimum of 300mm.

Aside from the gorillas, the scenery is as exciting – and possibly easier to photograph, with dramatic skylines and volcanoes, along with endless rolling hills and lakes. A wide angle lens may be worth considering to capture this.

Finally, the markets and the people are bursting with colour and offer some amazing picture opportunities for these with even the most rudimentary understanding of photography. As always when photographing people, it is best to strike up a conversation first before even asking if they mind having their picture

taken, which is not only common courtesy, but puts them at ease, making for much more natural images. That said, please don't be offended if they say no. As with much of Africa, do not photograph military or government personnel or buildings.



What is travel like?

Uganda: Very exciting, very adventurous and always interesting. You can get around by driving (Steppes always use 4x4 vehicles) or you can take internal flights for convenience. Either way, there is something new to see at every turn. Roads vary enormously from good tarred roads (around cities) to rough dirt tracks in and around national parks, villages and more remote areas – if you suffer from travel sickness or a bad back, we suggest you fly. If driving, be prepared for some long travel times; 4-6 hours in some cases. However, the scenery is stunning and you will travel through lush green tea plantations, beautiful valleys and past lots of lakes. Your driver/guide will be happy to stop for rest breaks and photo opportunities.

If you wish to fly, there are very safe internal flights, using small 12 seater planes or private aviation companies or helicopters.

Rwanda: Surprisingly easy. There is a very good network of tarmac roads to all of the major parks. The road from Kigali to the Virunga Mountains is particularly good although this is used by a lot of traffic and is also built around many of the winding hills leading up to the park, so whilst it can be slow moving, the views are spectacular. The roads elsewhere are also very good and given that Rwanda itself is a very small country, most destinations can be reached in a day.

There is a good selection of flight options around the country, from scheduled flights, to private helicopter transfers to some of the lodges and parks. Choices are dependent on budget and time. The one good thing about travelling around Rwanda is that once you leave the larger towns and cities, you will pass through the most beautiful countryside and traditional villages – plenty of photo stops and welcoming villages. Again, we only ever use good quality 4x4 vehicles for road transfers or regulated internal flights with registered airlines or private aviation companies for those who wish to fly.



What else is there to do apart from gorilla trekking in Uganda?

There are so many other activities you can do in Uganda besides gorilla trekking that you can easily fill 2 weeks.

Many of the parks are home to lots of traditional big game and savannah wildlife where you can enjoy game drives and guided walks. These include Queen Elizabeth National Park (famous for tree climbing lions), Murchison Falls (excellent not just for the falls, but one of the best places in the country to see the shoebill stork and lots of other big game), Semliki (excellent for big game, boat safaris and black & white colobus monkeys) and Kidepo Valley National Park. Kidepo is one of the wildest parks in Africa, best reached by a short domestic flight and in addition to the dramatic setting and wealth of wildlife, it is the only park in Uganda where you can find aardwolves, caracals and cheetahs.



Uganda is also one of the most accessible places in Africa to see chimpanzees which you can do in three regions (Kyambura Gorge – OK, Kibale Forest – good, Budongo Forest – very good). A similar experience to gorilla viewing in terms of early starts and forest trekking.

As 25% of Uganda is covered by water, there are some great boat safaris to do, in particular the Kazinga Channel in Queen

Elizabeth National Park, some of Africa's best fishing (big tiger fish and Nile perch) in Murchison, shoebill safaris on the lakes around Semliki, and Jinja offers some dramatic white water rafting.

There is some excellent climbing to be done in the Rwenzori Mountains or some easy day hikes in the foothills.

The birding in Uganda is also considered some of the best in the world, with over 1,000 species in a country smaller than Great Britain due to the huge variety of habitat. Uganda really is one of Africa's most photogenic countries.

What else is there to do apart from gorilla trekking in Rwanda?

A lot! Those with more time should head off and explore what is a beautiful country. In the east, you have Akagera National Park, a stunning combination of lakes and savannah grasslands, where you find big game and superb birding, as you would expect from a park that borders Tanzania. Game drives and walks along with boat safaris and some fishing can be done here. Head south, past vibrant green tea plantations and you can enjoy some chimpanzee trekking in Nyungwe Forest. This park has a huge diversity of wildlife, so in addition to the chimpanzees, you



can see up to 13 other primate species (25% of Africa's total), including L'Hoest's monkey, golden and silver monkeys, mangabeys, incredible birdlife and strangely, lots of chameleons. Most people like to find somewhere to relax after the trekking, so the best place to head is the area around Lake Kivu and Gisenyi. Here, there are a handful of good hotels where you can sit and relax on sandy beaches on the shores of the lake itself to unwind for a

few days. The drive to Gisenyi and Lake Kivu is spectacular, winding its way past volcanoes, tea plantations and rice paddies.

Finally, you should try and spend a few days in Kigali and whilst a visit to the moving Genocide Memorial is worth considering, there is a vibrancy and energy in many of the cities markets and a thriving arts and music scene, with regular galleries and live music.

Our Experts



Chris Johnston

Inevitably I am bewildered and amazed in equal measures whenever I travel. I find the best travel experiences are those you never see coming. From being mistaken for a priest in Madagascar (drinks and blasphemy), being surrounded by thousands of fireflies in the Congo (like walking through phosphorous) to being invited to a traditional village feast in Cameroon (take gifts, your dancing shoes and a strong constitution), I travel to find as many of these unexpected moments as I can.

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Bridget Cohen

Aged five and with my Curious George toy safely tucked under my arm I set off with my family to travel around Europe in an orange VW mini bus. Looking back on the adventures we had along the way, I now know that this was where my love for travel and exploring this great planet of ours was born. Growing up in South Africa, Africa as a whole has naturally become one of my favourite destinations to explore and unravel. From sitting and watching Gelada baboons in the heights of the Simien Mountains in Ethiopia to whale watching in Hermanus, South Africa and everything in-between Africa is a spectacular continent that just keeps surprising me.

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