OVERVIEW: MOUNTAIN AND LOWLAND GORILLAS

You’ll never forget your first gorilla. The way she looked you right in the eye. That’s the moment when you realize we’re not the only sentient beings on this planet.

On this safari, you’ll explore with experienced trackers and rangers, guaranteeing your gorilla sightings will be up-close and intense. We’ll take the time to match your ability to the landscape, so you don’t miss a minute of watching mountain gorillas munch bamboo in the Virungas, or lowland gorillas peak out from the Congo forest foliage. You’ll see things you only dreamed were possible, things rarely captured by a film maker’s lens, and images that will stay in your mind forever.

Of course, the forests have a dramatic pageantry all their own. You’ll traverse both high altitude bamboo forest and dense tropical lowland rainforest, both sensitive and fragile ecosystems. These are some of Africa’s last wild places; wild places that nurture gorillas. It’s your dream. Let’s make it real.

Gorilla and Chimpanzee Safaris with Deeper Africa

Our Mountain and Lowland Gorilla Safari takes you into Rwanda’s Virunga Mountain Range, as well as into the dense primary rainforest in the Republic of Congo. In Rwanda, you’ll view some of the last mountain gorillas on the planet as they roam and forage among the bamboo forests on the slopes of the Virunga Volcanoes. In the Republic of Congo, you’ll trek in the Odzala-Kokoua National Park – home to the planet’s highest lowland gorilla densities at an estimated 100,000 gorillas.
Arrive in Kigali international Airport. Look for your Deeper Africa guide holding a sign with your name on it. He’ll be there waiting to transport you to your destination in Parc National. Set out for Kinigi as you move into Rwanda’s Virunga Mountain Range. You’ll arrive at Jack Hanna’s House, located near Park Nationales des Volcans, in the late afternoon with time to get unpacked and prepared for your next two days of gorilla viewing.

Parc National des Volcans takes its name from a string of free-standing volcanoes that stretch across the Rwanda section of the Virunga Mountains. This area was part of the first national park in Africa, created in 1925. Originally, the park contained only the area bounded by Karisimbi, Biseke, and Mikeno. In 1929, the borders of the park were extended further to include gorilla habitat in the present day DRC. After DRC gained independence in 1960, the park was split in two. Upon gaining independence in 1962, Rwanda undertook oversight of the previously protected lands. The current park boundaries, and this “Land of a Thousand Hills,” include six of the Virunga Volcanoes.

Parc Nationale is where Diane Fossey did her ground breaking gorilla research. She is buried at Karisoke, in the saddle between Biseke and Karisimbi volcanoes. The film “Gorillas in the Mist” was filmed here.
After breakfast, you’ll meet up with your Rwandan Park Rangers from the Office Rwandaise du Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN). You’ll attend an introductory session at the park headquarters to learn about forest and gorilla trekking etiquette. ORTPN guides will be taking you into the rainforest. These guides work daily with the gorillas in Parc National and they speak both English and French. Only a limited number of guests are allowed by the park service to view gorillas each day.

Mountain gorillas are a critically endangered species. The governments of Uganda, Rwanda, and DRC are involved in an innovative program that has veterinarians monitoring the health of the gorillas. These targeted vet interventions have increased both the overall health and birth rate of the gorillas. Population numbers are on the rise.

You’ll return in the afternoon to the Jack Hanna’s House for relaxing afternoon activities. Options include a visit the Iby’Iwachu community programs. This community based tourism initiative showcases Rwandan ways of life, dance, and drumming. Visit traditional healers, a banana brewery, or a local school. These programs have been developed by the community, for the community. You are also welcome to take a driving tour to some of the beautiful mountain lakes.
Breakfast at the Jack Hanna’s House. Meet up with your Rwandan guide and trackers in the morning for your next day of gorilla viewing. Today you will track a different gorilla family, hoping to find them munching bamboo in the forest. Recent DNA research has shown that there are sufficient genetic differences between the Virunga and Bwindi Forest gorillas in Uganda to suggest that the populations breed in isolation, even though mid-altitude forests linked the two mountain ranges until 500 years ago.

The current boundaries of Parc Nationales are only a fragment of the territory that existed for gorilla habitat in the region. Vast tracts of land that once offered habitat to mountain gorillas have been lost to agriculture. Originally, the lower level vegetation areas held montane rainforest, but most of that land was cleared and is now crop land or village land. Between 1969 and 1973, about 2,500 acres (1,050 hectares) of forest was cleared to grow pyrethrum, a natural insecticide made from flower heads.

What was left of the park was a battlefield during the Rwandan Civil War. There was rampant poaching on park land, and the Research Centre was abandoned. It was not until 1999 that the park was deemed safe and gorilla tourism began again. Of course, all of these human actions forced the gorillas to retreat back up hill, with home ranges that now only include the mountain slopes.
Breakfast at Jack Hanna’s House. Leave the mountains early today for your drive down into Kigali and Kigali International Airport. We’ll have a packed lunch ready for your trip. Arrange your flight to Brazzaville, Republic of Congo for the afternoon.

You’ll be overnighting in downtown Brazzaville, Congo’s capital and business hub. Odzala camp staff will be meeting you at the airport and accompanying you to the hotel.

**INCLUDED**
- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Alcohol and Beverages
- Swimming Pool
- Wifi
Morning flight from Brazzaville to Olombo. Staff from Odzala Discovery will be waiting for you at this remote bush strip. They’ll transport you in a Toyota Cruiser bus to the small town of Etoumbi. Today you’ll pass striking landscapes and numerous small towns and villages, some of which have colorful markets. In the town of Makoua, you’ll cross the Equator.

Western lowland gorillas cannot really be observed close to places where humans live, so you’ll need to be deep into the forests of the Odzala-Kokoua National Park for your gorilla observations. The Etoumbi ferry does not operate after dark, so you’ll be staying overnight in Etoumbi at a hotel owned by Odzala Discovery. It is a clean, comfortable place to overnight, and it is the perfect place to start assimilating into rain forest life. One of your gorilla guides will join you this evening for dinner. Enjoy a Ngok beer with him.

**INCLUDED**
- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Sundowners
- Dinner
- Alcohol and Beverages
- Laundry
Ngaga Camp is located deep in the dense, north-west primary Congo rainforest. Odzala-Kokoua is one of Africa’s oldest national parks. It is an integral part of both the Congo Basin and the TRIDOM Transfrontier Park overlapping Gabon, Congo, and Cameroon. This is a part of the planet that is exotic and unspoiled. It is home to the highest known lowland gorilla densities, with an estimated 125,000 western lowland gorillas living in its forests. Odzala-Kokoua also protects forest elephants, forest buffalo, and the largest and most elusive forest antelope -- the bongo.

This morning you will pursue gorillas with a guide and skilled local tracker. These professionals have expertise in following the signs on the forest floor that can lead you to a habituated gorilla family living in the forest. Western lowland gorillas are the main species of wildlife tracked on foot out of Ngaga Camp. There are at least seven families with a total of about 105 individual gorillas living in this area. Two of these families have been habituated by researchers. You are allowed one hour of viewing time with the gorillas each day. There are no more than four guests allowed to visit the gorilla families at a time. Good news is, you’re here for three days.

Other primates such as crowned and moustached monkeys can be encountered, while central chimpanzees are often heard, but only occasionally seen. You will however frequently see chimpanzee’s night nests up in the trees while out trekking.

INCLUDED

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Sundowners
- Dinner
- Alcohol and Beverages
- Laundry
Ngaga Camp is set on raised decks that look into and above the primary rainforest. The camp was designed to touch lightly on the earth and to sustainably blend into the remote forest environment. It is made from materials that are born from, and will return to, the earth. The camp is constructed to allow you the same perspective as the gorillas and other primates. You are elevated above the ground, yet hovering below the cool rainforest canopy. Both the structural and interior elements of the camp were created by local Congolese craftsmen. This is not a hotel in the bush, but rather a light, very authentic experience in the wild. Green building principles were used in constructing Ngaga Camp.

This vast region of the Congo Basin contains the world’s second-largest tropical rainforest, surpassed only by the Amazon. It is especially species rich. This region is far less impacted by commercial logging than other tropical rainforests of the world, but there is no doubt that the same pressures that affect conservation in the Amazon or are relevant here, in Congo.

Spend the morning gorilla trekking. After a mid-day siesta, opt for a forest walk searching for birds and mammals. Forest duikers are plentiful, and there are some spectacular forest birds such as large Black-casqued Wattled Hornbills and Great Blue Turacos. Clouds of spectacular butterflies are frequently seen. Nocturnal primates are well represented, as well as other unique creatures.

INCLUDED

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Sundowners
- Dinner
- Alcohol and Beverages
- Laundry
Morning gorilla tracking. A major feature of this area of the forest is the occurrence of “bais” or salines. These are swampy, grassy clearings in the otherwise dense jungle that forest wildlife visit on a regular basis in order to drink, feed on sedges and grasses, and obtain minerals and salts. The fauna is spectacular: ancient trees well over 164 feet (fifty meters) tall emerge from the canopy, delicate orchids cling to their branches, and the forest floor is littered with an incredible array of pods, fruits, flowers, and fungi.

After a hot day’s gorilla tracking, you can hike down to Ngaga Stream and relax on a wooden deck at the edge of the stream. Alternatively, you can visit the nearby Ombo village to learn more about sustainable forest lifestyles and how people make the most of all that nature provides in such a remote location. The forests of the Congo have long been sources of food and shelter for hunter-gatherer societies, who have been hunting duikers, bush pigs, monkeys, and other mammals for generations. Animal products play important roles in cultural and religious ceremonies.

By now you’ll have observed the differences between mountain gorillas and western lowland gorillas. Obviously, their habitat is different, with the lowland gorillas living in tropical lowland forest areas. Lowlands are also slightly smaller than their mountain cousins and they lack the very thick fur of mountain gorillas because of the warmer climate.
This morning is memorable as it will be your last morning with the gorillas. Choose your favorite gorilla family and return for a visit; reminiscing while also creating new adventures.

Conservation efforts are essential for the survival of lowland species. Hunting is the main threat to western lowland gorillas. They are still killed for bush meat as well as for use in traditional medicine and charms. Additionally, vast areas of the rainforest habitat of the gorillas have been destroyed because timber is a major export from the region. The increase in logging opened up once remote forest areas, both destroying habitat and allowing easier access to kill gorillas for bush meat.

There are not very accurate estimates of the number of lowland gorillas left in the wild, as they are elusive and inhabit some of Africa’s densest and most remote rainforests. The total population is thought to be about 100,000. Western lowland gorillas are classed as Critically Endangered. The forests you are trekking in here in Congo are considered the place that harbors one of the last major populations of lowland gorillas.

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Early breakfast with a very early morning departure from camp. You’ll need the full day for your journey out of this remote place and back to civilization. First, take the drive back to Etoumbi, retracing the road you came in on. In Etoumbi, you’ll transfer to the Toyota Cruiser bus for the last leg of the road journey back to Olombo. You’ll have time for lunch while on the road.

We’ll have you to the Olombo strip on time for your flight to Brazzaville.

Depart Olombo strip @ 14:15
Arrive Brazzaville @ 15:10

Once you have arrived in Brazzaville, you may either connect tonight onto an Air France international flight, or return to the Radisson Blu for overnight and an alternate international departure tomorrow.
Depart the Radisson Blu for Brazzaville’s international airport and your international flight home.

**International Flight #1**
- Departs: Brazzaville, Congo
- Arrives: TBD

**INCLUDED**
- Breakfast

**国际飞行 #2**
- Departs: TBD
- Arrives: TBD
INCLUDED IN YOUR SAFARI

• Full board accommodations in all lodges and tented camps
• All meals
• All park and entrance fees
• Experienced and professional safari naturalist guides
• All in-country transportation
• Laundry available at some lodges and camps
• Bottled water available at all times
• Extensive pre-departure briefing and materials including health information, reading list, and map

EXCLUDED IN YOUR SAFARI

• Gratuities
• Alcohol and some beverages in some camps and lodges

We plan your wildlife adventures in areas where wildlife habitats are known to exist for the season and time you are traveling. Still, animals in the areas you are viewing are not in a zoo. They run freely, and we cannot always anticipate their movements.

Also, Deeper Africa uses best efforts to provide the lodging set out in this itinerary, but occasionally there are circumstances that occur in Africa that require lodging substitutions. We reserve the right to make comparable lodging substitutions whenever necessary.

2016 CUSTOM DEPARTURE DATES & PRICING

Schedule as you wish May - March.

• 4 or more persons: $11,799 USD per person
• 2 persons: $11,299 USD per person
• Single Supplement: $1,089 USD per person

Upgrade: Alternative Pricing for Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge in Rwanda:
• 4 or more persons: $12,999 USD per person
• 2 persons: $12,499 USD per person
• Single Supplement: $1,775 USD per person

Call us for high and low season rates.

All pricing is in US dollars. Arrivals are into Kigali International Airport, Rwanda. Departures out of Brazzaville, Congo. Prices do not include international airfare or connecting flights between Kigali and Brazzaville. All itineraries and prices are subject to change. Gorilla permit prices fluctuate; pricing subject to Rwanda and Republic of Congo park fees.