

**Tour Name** Virunga - Eastern DR Congo Gorilla Trekking  
**Arrival P/U** Kigali International Airport  
**Departure D/O** Kigali International Airport

### Itinerary at a glance

Day	Location	Accommodation	MealPlan
1	Lake Kivu, Rwanda	Lake Kivu Serena Hotel	DBBL
2	Bukima - VNP	Bukima Camp	DBBL
3	Bukima - VNP	Bukima Camp	DBBL
4	Virunga National Park	Mikeno Lodge	DBBL
5	Nyiragongo Volcano	Nyiragongo Cabanas	DBBL
6	South Kivu	Orchids Safari Club, Bukavu	DBBL
7	South Kivu	Orchids Safari Club, Bukavu	DBBL
8	Kigali, Rwanda		

L-Lunch, D-Dinner, BB-Bed and breakfast, LDBB-Lunch, dinner, bed and breakfast. Game drives & activities at the discretion of guide.

### Day by Day Itinerary

#### Day 1 Kigali, Rwanda - Lake Kivu

Kigali airport arrival transfer by private vehicle

Having spent the past 15 years rebuilding, Kigali is now one of the most thriving and progressive capital cities in Africa. Should time permit a stop will be made at the Genocide Memorial Museum in Kigali, where a poignant exhibition testifies to how far Rwanda has come since the dark days of the mid-1990s. If necessary time can also be found at the end of your stay in Rwanda to visit the memorial.

It is then a three to four hour drive through "the land of a thousand hills" past the spectacular Virunga Volcanoes National Park and into the Albertine Rift Valley and the shores of Lake Kivu at the D.R. Congo border town of Gisenyi, recently renamed Rubavu.

#### Lake Kivu Serena Hotel-Standard Room Dayroom

#### Day 2 Lake Kivu - Bukima - VNP

After a leisurely breakfast we transfer to the Rwanda / DR Congo border post for our first experience with Congolese officialdom ! After the tedious process of clearing customs and immigration formalities we continue onwards. Driving through the bustling city of Goma, one of the few safe havens in Eastern Congo we can see the devastation caused by the Nyiragongo Volcano when a wall of molten Lava decimated the town in 1994. We continue 2 hours onwards with an armed escort into the Virunga National Park and the headquarters at Rumangabo. We continue onto the Mikeno Sector of the park to spend the night on the forest edge.

#### Bukima Camp-Tents

#### Day 3 Bukima - VNP

BERINGEI'S MOUNTAIN GORILLA TREK, briefing at Bukima at 7am

#### Bukima Camp-Tents

#### Day 4 Bukima - VNP - Virunga National Park

BERINGEI'S MOUNTAIN GORILLA TREK, briefing at Bukima at 7am

After lunch, we return to the park headquarters at Rumangabo for overnight.

#### Mikeno Lodge-Cottage

#### Day 5 Virunga National Park - Nyiragongo Volcano

An early morning start for a very strenuous five hour hike up Nyiragongo Volcano.

Or for non hikers a day at leisure on Lake Kivu.

#### Nyiragongo Cabanas-Mountain Hut Dayroom

#### Day 6 Nyiragongo Volcano - South Kivu

After a spectacular morning on the crater rim, we start the decent down the volcano and commence our drive to Goma. After lunch on the shores of Lake Kivu at Goma, we enjoy a 2-3 hour speedboat ride down the

length of Lake Kivu to the famous town of Bukavu.

### **Orchids Safari Club, Bukavu-First Class Room Dayroom**

#### **Day 7 South Kivu**

GRAUER'S EASTERN GORILLA TREK, at Kahuzi Biega at 9am  
A full day in and around Bukavu and the Kahuzi Biega National Park.

### **Orchids Safari Club, Bukavu-First Class Room Dayroom**

#### **Day 8 South Kivu - Kigali, Rwanda**

We cross the Rwanda / DR Congo frontier at the famous Ruzizi Bridge,  
Fly Kamembe (Nyungwe) to Kigali.

Kigali airport arrival transfer by private vehicle

### **Accommodation Information**

#### **Lake Kivu Serena Hotel**

Lake Kivu Serena Hotel is located in the Rwandan resort town of Gisenyi, on the shores of Lake Kivu, the sixth largest lake in Africa. The hotel is ideally situated on a sandy beach, with the nearby Virunga Volcanoes providing a spectacular backdrop on one side and a panoramic view of the lake on the other. Accommodation comprises of 66 air-conditioned rooms, including 6 luxury suites, 23 family rooms and one room especially equipped for disabled guests. The restaurant offers a stunning view of the lake as you have breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Lake Kivu Serena Hotel offers business facilities including a boardroom and three conference rooms available for business meetings, cocktails and banquets. The hotel also has a gym, outdoor swimming pool and two tennis courts.

#### Fact file:

- \* 66 air-conditioned rooms, including 6 luxury suites, 23 family rooms & 1 room equipped for disabled guests
- \* En-suite bathrooms with hot showers, flush toilets
- \* Restaurant with stunning views of the lake
- \* Satellite TV, In-room safe & telephone
- \* Gym, outdoor swimming pool & 2 tennis courts
- \* 24hr front desk, express check out & pre-registration

#### Activities:

- \* Ideal base for Gorilla Tracking (90 minute transit)
- \* Visits to local villages & tea plantation by arrangement
- \* Boat trips, water sports
- \* Visits to the Imbabazi Orphanage



#### **Bukima Camp**

Bukima is one of the sites where we start our gorilla treks. Just outside the perimeter of the park a tented camp has been established catering for up to 16 people at a time. What used to be a base for Gorilla researchers (the original pailote still stands) is now a basic but comfortable tented camp. Tents with 2 beds with warm blankets. Shared shower block with cold water shower. A sparsely furnished dining banda, with surprisingly good food, and a cash bar. It provides all essentials for a comfortable night out in the wilderness, with a magnificent view of the Mikeno volcano draped in tropical forest and the Nyiragongo volcano, of which the glow from the lava lake can be clearly seen at night. Spending the night at Bukima Tented Camp ensures that you can leave for the gorillas at a leisurely time in the morning and will ensure that you will be back at your destination of choice with time to spare after your encounter with the Mountain Gorillas of Virunga.

What visitors should bring for the Gorilla visit:

- Good walking shoes
- Rain gear
- Long trousers & sleeves
- Camera

- Water (2 litres p.p. minimum)
- Snacks (in case of a long hike)



### **Mikeno Lodge**

Mikeno Lodge is Virunga National Park's first lodge opening for tourists in August of 2011. Centred between three main tourist attractions, it is a perfect location to begin treks to see the gorillas, chimpanzees, and Nyiragongo volcano. Nestled among the trees of a virgin forest, the weather is cool, the views spectacular, and the lodging luxurious. Location: Mikeno Lodge is roughly one and half hours north of the city of Goma (border Rwanda) and the same distance west of Bunagana (border Uganda) and can be found tucked into a forested hillside at Virunga National Park headquarters of Rumangabo. To the east is the Mikeno Gorilla Sector, and to the southwest is Nyiragongo Volcano. To the west, the chimpanzee treks begin in the forests of Tongo.

**Dining, Bar, and Lounge:** As you enter the main lodge you will receive a warm welcome before descending steps into a spacious lounge and bar. Adjacent to the lounge, the dining room offers full-course meals included in the price of your stay. Both the bar and dining area open onto a large terrace providing the perfect location for a relaxing drink and sharing of the day's activities.

**Accommodation:** Your private bungalow is made from lava stone with a natural thatch roof and a mahogany deck. The roomy interior includes cosy lounge seating around a stone fireplace, comfortable bedroom area, and a large bathroom equipped with hot-water shower and bath. On cool nights, the fireplace warms the bungalow, while on warm afternoons your private terrace provides a prime position for spotting the Blue and Colobus monkeys or baboons that use the surrounding trees as their playground. Each of the 12 bungalows contains either a double or two single beds, giving the lodge a capacity of 24 guests. When combined with the use of a boardroom at the nearby park headquarters, the lodge is a perfect location for small conferences in a peaceful setting. **Activities:** The close proximity of the lodge to the Senkwekwe Centre means guests have the opportunity to visit the four orphan gorillas living in a spacious natural enclosure with viewing platforms around the periphery. A 30- minute nature walk along a forest trail that encircles the hilltop is available for those who enjoy stretching their legs.

Whether your stay is the starting point for gorilla, volcano, and chimp adventures, or purely for a relaxing time-out in a peaceful location, Mikeno Lodge provides an indulgent experience among the wildlife and beauty of Virunga National Park.



### **Nyiragongo Cabanas**

Nyiragongo, one of the world's most active volcanoes, is a large strato volcano. This type of volcano, also known as a composite cone, is the most picturesque of the volcano types with gentle lower slopes that rise steeply near the summit, and then break to reveal the smoking caldera. The summit stands at 3,468m (11,380ft), with an average diameter of 1.2 km (0.7 miles) across a deep crater formation. In the centre of the crater is the world's largest lava lake. It is so bright that on a clear night, the glow can be seen not only from Goma but also from Rwanda. In the most recent volcanic eruption of 2002, a fissure opened on the south side of the volcano sending a lava flow toward the city of Goma, covering one-third of the city's airport runway, and reaching Lake Kivu.

Climbing the volcano is a two-mile-hike which starts 20 km (12 miles) north of Goma near Kibati. The trek takes approximately five hours and involves walking through lush forest and lava fields with a steep incline near the top. Please note that this is a serious hike and visitors need to be fit. The standard trip includes an overnight stay on the rim of the volcano in the Nyiragongo Crater Cabanas, with comfortable beds, so visitors only have to bring a sleeping bag, although a one-day trip may be organized upon request. The overnight stay is highly recommended, as the view of the lava lake at night is stunning. The maximum group size per day is 16. Minimum age for visitors is 12.

#### Nyiragongo Crater Cabanas

On the edge of the Nyiragongo crater within sight of the sweltering lava lake, stand eight simple but firm Cabanas. Coloured black the Cabanas blend in perfectly with the lava rock surroundings. Any trip up the volcano should include a night spent in these Cabanas, that is why they have been included in the price of the volcano permit. They allow visitors to spend their night in sufficient comfort whilst also giving rise to the opportunity to view the lava lake from the top of the crater at any point during the night. Each Cabana is fitted with two beds allowing 16 visitors to reside at the crater at the same time.

What visitors should bring. For the Volcano trek:

- \* Sleeping Bag & Food (lunch, dinner, breakfast) will be provided by Origins Safaris.
- \* Water (3 litres p.p. minimum) and any other drinks required
- \* Change of dry clothes and Rain gear
- \* Good walking shoes
- \* Warm Clothes (sweater, jacket) is very cold up there.
- \* Sun cream, Hat
- \* Torch/head torch
- \* Camera



#### Orchids Safari Club, Bukavu

“ The Friendly Orchids Safari Club Offers the Finest Gorilla Watching in Central Africa from its Base on the Banks of Lake Kivu in the Congo Democratic Republic ( Zaire ) ”

The luxuriant nature of the edge of Lake Kivu permits us to welcome you in an exceptional environment. This hotel, with its elegant and refined decoration, offers a mixture of contemporary and traditional African styles. Each day, our personnel does everything to ensure that your stay in our complex will take place in the most complete relaxation.

All rooms have just been entirely renovated with a care to ensure the most absolute comfort and good taste. We have placed particular emphasis on the quality of the bedding and the charm of the bath. The presence of an office equipped with Internet in your room will allow you to complete your day's work under ideal conditions. These rooms, with an incomparable view of the lake, are equipped with private terrace, television, telephone and safe.

Whether you are fond of traditional or French foods, our chef will satisfy your palate while helping you discover the resources of the lake and the region. In a contemporary style, our “lounge” bar offers a wide selection of special beers, wines and champagnes.



## Flights and Other Information

### Mountain Gorilla Trekking

You arrive at the park headquarters before 0700 am to complete the paperwork. Once processed you are assigned to a group and receive a short introduction from your tracker/guide about the group you will visit and the precautions to take. After approximately half an hour you head off for one of the most exhilarating and moving wildlife experiences you can have: you get so close to these giant primates, observing them observing you - their almost human movements, innate dignity and social interaction make a unique connection within each of us.

The trek to find gorillas can be quite short, but on most days an hour or two of rough hiking each way is necessary. Each visit is by permit and limited to one hour with a professional gorilla tracker in charge who will coach you in the safety rules and body language required to come close to the gorilla troops. The climb begins through the lush terraced farmland of the lower volcanic slopes. As the slopes become steeper and rockier, the vegetation becomes thick and tangled; the guides must use their machetes to help clear a path. Huge trees, clinging vines and undergrowth add to the challenge of swift streams and slippery red mud underfoot. Usually at around 8,000-9,000 foot signs of the huge animals become apparent. Damage to the bamboo trees is an obvious sign as the gorillas relish the young tender shoots and break older stems to suck the sap. The smell of gorilla may waft by in the stray breeze or, if one is really near, it is strong and unmistakable.

This is not a technical climb but it can be a scramble/slide/swing experience as the gorillas make their way through incredibly lush and dense vegetation - where they go you have to follow. As you near you hear sounds: loud crashes or dull reverberating thuds. The sounds and traces around are stimulating beyond all normal levels of endurance! When you are within 200 metres you will meet the gorillas' accompanying trackers, employed by the parks to monitor each group 24/7. Here you leave your bags behind and then you approach these amazing giants, so close and so mesmerising - the hour is over before you have had your fill. The descent is quicker and the exhilaration and adrenaline that pumps after an hour with these magnificent beasts transcends the aches, stings and dirt that you have acquired along the way. Once you get back to Park Headquarters you receive your personal Gorilla Certificate and return to the nearby lodge to swap stories, check out your images and rest.

Gorilla Permits are mandatory and issued by the ORTPN (Rwanda's National Parks Service). Obtaining a gorilla permit does not guarantee of seeing a gorilla but is necessary before you can commence trekking. The permit limits the observation time spent with the gorilla's to one hour (this is timed by the accompanying trackers). Permits are non-refundable except for exceptional medical reasons and a medical certificate has to be provided. Gorilla viewing can be denied at short notice because of national park or border closures, security changes or gorillas going out of range. In such circumstances refunds are at the discretion of the parks authority.

There are no more than 700 Mountain Gorillas remaining in the world today, of which around 400 live in the Virunga Volcanoes. The troop consists usually of a dominant male and up to five or more females and their young. It is basically a stable family with the young only leaving after they reach sexual maturity. Females join another group while young males remain solitary until they have an opportunity of forming their own troop. This primate is of impressive dimensions; some males (such as Guhonda the silverback of Sabinyo Group that you may visit) attain over six feet in height and weigh more than 440 pounds. The head is massive and the huge jaws are equipped with powerful teeth. Far from being an aggressive animal, as the legends claim, the gorilla is gentle and peaceful in its habits.

The Mountain Gorillas make excellent photographic models - their proximity and tendency to 'nest' in the open and almost perform for the camera make them irresistible... you need to force yourself to put the camera down in order to properly watch and absorb the Gorillas themselves. Just remember to turn off the sounds and the flash on all cameras - a cardinal rule of Gorilla tracking is don't upset the Silverback... and flash photography is high on the list of things Silverbacks hate... Guidelines for gorilla viewing:

Total silence, no smoking, no eating

No bags, bottles or sticks permitted within 200 metres of the gorillas

No flash photography, No pointing or staring directly at the gorilla

Move slowly and be calm at all times

Do not touch or approach any closer than seven meters from a gorilla

If the 'Silverback' charges do not run and remain behind the guide at all times

No children of 15 years & under

Only 6 guests with permits are permitted to visit each gorilla family for one hour per day.



### **Eastern Lowland Gorilla Trekking**

The Eastern Gorilla tends to be larger than the Western. Differences between the two species include: longer, blacker hair for the Eastern; the head hair tends not to have red-chestnut tones as is usually the case with adult Western males; Eastern has a more developed sagittal crest along the midline of the skull, indicative of a more powerful jaw musculature; the saddle of silver hair tends to stand out more clearly against the darker hair and to be clearly delineated.

There are few if any absolute physical differences between the two recognized subspecies of Eastern Gorilla. The Mountain Gorilla tends to have very black and longer hair making it densely furred, with a broad face (larger cranium and wider facial skeleton), hairy brow-ridge, massive jaws as well as less rounded and more angular nostrils. Mitochondrial DNA comparisons confirm genetic divergence of the two eastern subspecies, and it is estimated that the two species diverged some 400,000 years ago (Vigilant & Bradley, 2004).

Gorillas are mainly terrestrial. The gorilla's large size and folivorous habits mean that the animals must spend long hours feeding everyday to maintain their body weight. Of all the great apes, the gorilla shows the most stable grouping patterns. The same adult individuals travel together for months and usually years at a time. It is because gorillas eat mainly foliage that they can afford to live in these relatively permanent groups. Foliage, unlike patchy fruit sources generally and especially the ripe fruits that the ape gut requires, is widespread and abundant. In the East, fruit forms a far lower proportion of the gorilla's diet than in West Africa. Correlated to that, in the Eastern gorilla groups tend to be larger and split into temporary subgroups less frequently than in West Africa, where animals range far apart searching for the relatively scarce ripe fruit.

The Gorilla is a forest species. The Eastern Lowland Gorilla has the widest altitudinal range of any of the gorilla subspecies, living in montane, transitional, and lowland tropical forests. One of the best-studied populations occupies the highlands of Kahuzi-Biega. Here habitats vary from dense primary forest intermixed with bamboo stands, to moderately moist woodland, to areas of Cyperus swamp and peat bog, with alpine and subalpine grassland at higher altitudes.

The varied diet of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla includes a wide range of plants, fruits, seeds, leaves, stems and barks as well as ants, termites and other insects. Seasonality in diet and habitat use is greater for Grauer's gorillas in low altitude forests than for mountain gorillas. Grauer's gorilla eats more fruit than Bwindi's mountain gorilla but not as much as western gorillas. When fruit is scarce, Eastern Lowland Gorillas travel less and increase their consumption of herbaceous vegetation. They also occasionally feed on ants, but insects are never more than a minor part of the diet.

Less is known about the social behavior, feeding ecology, life history and demography of Eastern Lowland Gorillas, compared with the extensive data gathered on the Mountain Gorilla. As far as group structure is concerned, gorillas form harems. It was once thought that gorilla groups contained only one adult male, but around one third of groups in East Africa have been found to host two full-grown males. Adult females in any one silverback's harem are mostly unrelated, and the social ties that exist between them are weak.

In contrast to many other primates, it is the bond between each individual female and the silverback, rather than bonds between the females that hold the group together. Upon reaching maturity, most males and females leave the group in which they were born. The females usually join another group or a lone young adult male, whereas the males remain solitary until they can attract females and establish their own groups (Yamagiwa, 2003). Both natal dispersal and secondary dispersal (subsequent transfer to yet another group) occur among female eastern gorillas.



## Reserve and Park Information

### Lake Kivu

The lakes of the Albertine Rift (Albert, George, Edward, Kivu, and Tanganyika) contain large numbers of endemic fish species. Although not strictly thought of as Albertine Rift habitats, these lakes do show a history of interconnection with one another and also with Lake Victoria (Snoeks 2000). Lake Tanganyika is home to over 300 fish species, and about 75% of them are endemic. However, only 10% of Lake Tanganyika's shore has been explored and over 1 200 species (vertebrates and invertebrates) have been recorded, making it the second highest recorded diversity for any lake on Earth (Patterson and Makin 1998). Lakes George and Edward have 56 fish species endemic to these two lakes, while Kivu and Albert have 15 and 6 endemic fishes, respectively. A conservative estimate of freshwater fish diversity indicates that, together with their surrounding drainages, the lakes Kivu, Edward, George, Albert, and Tanganyika harbor over 400 fish species, 274 of which are endemic. Most of the endemic fishes are cichlids, with 226 endemic species and 47 endemic genera. However, a more recent assessment suggests that these numbers are a clear underestimate, and that the number of endemics could be at least 366 species, with around 350 of these being cichlids.

Lake Kivu covers a total surface area of some 2,700 km<sup>2</sup> (1,040 sq mi) and stands at a height of 1,460 metres (4,790 ft) above sea level. Some 1 370 km<sup>2</sup> or 58% of the lake's waters lie within D.R.Congo borders. The lake bed sits upon the Albertine Rift Valley that is slowly being pulled apart, causing volcanic activity in the area, and making it particularly deep: its maximum depth of 480 m (1,575 ft) is ranked eighteenth in the world. The lake is surrounded by majestic mountains.

The world's tenth-largest inland island, Idjwi, lies in Lake Kivu, as does the tiny island of Tshegera, which also lies within the boundaries of Virunga National Park; while settlements on its shore include, Bukavu, Kabare, Kelehe, Sake and Goma in D.R.Congo and Gisenyi (Rubavu), Kibuye, CVyangugu in Rwanda. Native fish include species of Barbus, Clarias Catfish and Haplochromis (Cichlids), as well as Nile Tilapia. *Limnothrissa miodon*, one of two species known as the Tanganyika sardine, was introduced in 1959 and formed the basis of a new pelagic zone fishery.



### Virunga National Park

Virunga National Park is a 7800 square kilometre World Heritage Site that lies on the eastern border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and is just over the border from Rwanda and Uganda. Virunga is Africa's oldest national park and is considered one of the most beautiful and diverse in the World, containing savannahs, lava plains, swamps, erosion valleys, forests, active volcanoes and the ice fields of the Ruwenzori Mountains. The park provides a home to numerous species of wildlife, including 200 of the world's critically endangered mountain gorillas and a small population of eastern lowland gorillas. For years the political situation in Congo prevented tourists from visiting Virunga. Now that the Democratic Republic of Congo is ruled by an elected government and is at peace with her neighbours, the park has been re-opened to tourists and the world is re-discovering one of its most treasured places. With so much diversity in one park, Virunga offers visitors opportunities that can be found in few other places. Our most popular attractions include visiting the mountain gorillas in their natural habitat, climbing a volcano to spend the night next to the world's biggest lava lake and trekking through the spectacular snowcapped Ruwenzori Mountains.

### History of the park

The history of the park is deeply affected by the country of which it is part. For much of its long history, Virunga National Park has struggled to survive through many of Congo's troubled times. Thanks to the

dedication of certain politicians, conservationists, park rangers and wardens, the park not only has survived, but is currently experiencing a resurgence. The park was founded in 1925 by King Albert I of Belgium and originally named Albert National Park, the first national park on the continent of Africa. It was founded primarily to protect the gorillas living in the forests of the Virunga Mountains controlled by the Belgian Congo, but later expanded north to include the Rwindi Plains, Lake Edward and the Ruwenzori Mountains in the far north. In the first 35 years, the boundary of the park took shape, poaching was kept to a minimum and sustainable tourism thrived due to the work of a large body of hand-picked Congolese rangers and dedicated wardens. Land remuneration and the use of park resources such as fishing and hunting by the Congolese citizen population became an on-going problem and attempts were made to solve these issues.

When the Belgians granted Congo independence in 1960 the new state deteriorated rapidly, and so did the park. It was only in 1969 when President Mobutu began to take a personal interest in conservation, that the park was revived. In the process it was renamed Virunga National Park, and the first Congolese Wildlife Authority was established (today known as ICCN). Virunga fared well for the better part of the 1970s. Foreign investment helped to improve the park's infrastructure and training facilities, and the park became a popular destination for tourists, receiving on average 6500 visitors a year. In 1979 UNESCO designated the park as a World Heritage Site. In the mid-1980s the Mobutu regime began to lose its hold on power and the country began a long slide into chaos. The park suffered terribly. Poaching depleted Virunga's large mammal populations, infrastructure was destroyed, and many rangers were killed. The Congolese Wildlife Authority slowly lost control of Virunga and UNESCO changed the World Heritage Site status to "endangered." Over the twenty-five years that followed, the park staff endured an almost uninterrupted series of trials that included a refugee crisis from the Rwandan Genocide that contributed to the severe destruction of park forests, and armed militia penetration throughout the park.

The Kivu War, the most recent of Congo's conflicts, centred exactly on the park, with rebel forces occupying the park headquarters and evicting the park's staff. By the end of 2008 it seemed as if Virunga National Park was finished. The political situation in the DRC has changed exponentially since then. The park is back in the hands of the ICCN and enjoying the greatest resurgence of tourism and development in its history. International donors are investing in the development of the park's infrastructure at unprecedented levels. Virunga's management is efficient and transparent, and morale among the rangers is at an all-time high. Tourism has increased from zero in 2008, to approximately 2000 in 2010 with numbers continuing to grow steadily. New tourist activities are being developed in the park, including the habituation of chimpanzees in the Tongo forest and a high-end lodge conveniently located near the centre of the three main tourist attractions in the southern sector, north of Goma.

#### Mountain Gorillas

Virunga National Park is home to approximately 200 of the world's remaining 790 Mountain Gorillas. The park's gorillas live in the Mikeno Sector, an area of forest situated on the flanks of a range of mostly dormant volcanoes. Virunga National Park has 6 habituated gorilla families which can be visited by a maximum of 30 visitors per day. Visitors will have the opportunity to observe the gorillas for up to an hour. Gorillas may surround you while playing and eating in the trees, or the family may be at rest in an open grassy area. As you walk through the family you must keep a distance of at least seven meters. If a gorilla family consists of more than ten individuals, we allow a group of six tourists to visit. The treks leave from one of three patrol posts (Bukima/Jomba/Bikenge), with several rangers and trackers to accompany you. Bukima post, the most popular with tourists and the closest to Goma, has a basic tented camp or overnight stays. Treks can take from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours to reach a gorilla family, often moving through dense forest and across steep hills, so a reasonable level of fitness is required. Weather conditions can range from sunny and warm to cold and rainy, so visitors should come prepared for both. Minimum age for visitors is 15.

#### Visa

Clients can get their tourism visa for the DRC at the DRC embassy in their home country. Alternatively it is possible to get the Visas at the DRC embassies in Nairobi/Kampala/Kigali, but this can prove costly and time consuming. Virunga National Park is working on a Tourism Visa which will be available for purchase via our website, once this has been arranged it will be communicated widely. The visas can also be bought at the border posts with DRC (Bunagana/Kisoro) & (Gisenyi/Goma), prices vary per location. Transport can either be arranged with Congolese partners or via our Tourism Office. For safety reasons we ask our tour operators and visitors to contact the tourism office to arrange a ranger escort (free of charge). See also the section about safety.

#### Money

The DRC has its own currency the Congolese Franc, however for normal day to day expenditures US\$ are easily accepted and valid as a Congolese citizen currency. The exchange rate is approximately 1US\$ = 900CF.



### **Nyiragongo Volcano**

Nyiragongo, one of the world's most active volcanoes, is a large strato volcano. This type of volcano, also known as a composite cone, is the most picturesque of the volcano types with gentle lower slopes that rise steeply near the summit, and then break to reveal the smoking caldera. The summit stands at 3,468m (11,380ft), with an average diameter of 1.2 km (0.7 miles) across a deep crater formation. In the centre of the crater is the world's largest lava lake. It is so bright that on a clear night, the glow can be seen not only from Goma but also from Rwanda. In the most recent volcanic eruption of 2002, a fissure opened on the south side of the volcano sending a lava flow toward the city of Goma, covering one-third of the city's airport runway, and reaching Lake Kivu.

Climbing the volcano is a two-mile-hike which starts 20 km (12 miles) north of Goma near Kibati. The trek takes approximately five hours and involves walking through lush forest and lava fields with a steep incline near the top. Please note that this is a serious hike and visitors need to be fit. The standard trip includes an overnight stay on the rim of the volcano in the Nyiragongo Crater Cabanas, with comfortable beds, so visitors only have to bring a sleeping bag. The overnight stay is essential, as the view of the lava lake at night is stunning. The maximum group size per day is 16. Minimum age for visitors is 12.



### **Kigali, Rwanda**

Kigali has been the capital of Rwanda since 1965. An attractive city, it spreads over a number of hills and although it saw some difficult times through the genocide in 1994 and as power changed hands subsequently, it now has a pleasant, buoyant air. The main shopping and commercial area is centred around the Hotel Mille Collines, with the government district on the neighbouring Kacyiru hill. The markets, the handicrafts, the Muslim quarter and a new genocide memorial under construction in Gisozi are some of the main places of interest. Kigali city is inhabited by one million people and is divided into three districts—Gasabo, Kicukiro and Nyarugenge. The Kigali City Tour begins as a historic journey through the city with a guided tour from the first modern building from which the capital city was first founded, to the rapidly growing neighborhoods that are changing the face of the city. Kigali is one of the friendliest, cleanest and safest of Africa's cities attracting numerous visitors and investors to the capital. Kigali City was founded in 1907 as a small colonial outpost by Dr. Richard Kandt, the first German colonial resident of Rwanda. Along the tour, we will pass by Kigali's older commercial "quartiers", business and residential areas, visit historic sites commemorating the 1994 Tutsi Genocide, take a guided tour within the Gisozi Genocide Memorial, and learn about the city's diverse neighborhoods and local attractions.

The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre was opened on the 10th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, in April 2004. The Centre is built on a site where 250,000 people are buried. The Centre is a permanent memorial to those who fell victim to the genocide and serves as a place where people can grieve those that they have lost. One of the principle reasons for the Centre's existence is to provide an educational facility. Rwandans believe that it is extremely important for the younger generations of Rwandans who will not have lived through the genocide but whose lives will still be affected by it, to be able to have access to a place where they can learn about the reasons and affects of the genocide. The Centre includes three permanent exhibitions, the largest of which documents the genocide in 1994. There is also a children's memorial, and an exhibition on the history of genocidal violence around the world. The Education Centre, Memorial Gardens and National Documentation Centre of the Genocide all contribute to a meaningful tribute to those who perished, and form a powerful educational tool for the next generation.

Social History: In 1962, under Prime Minister Gregoire Kayibanda, Rwanda gained independence. Ten years

later Major General Juvenal Habyarimana came to power. His death in a plane crash in April 1994 unleashed the genocide in which about one million Rwandans are thought to have been killed and nearly twice as many fled into exile. Political and social stability returned to Rwanda in 1999 with the new Government of National Unity.

The geography of Central Africa has been created by The Albertine Rift, a series of high mountain chains that separates the Guineo-Congolian rainforest of Central Africa from the forest-savanna mosaic habitats of East Africa, is an area of exceptional faunal endemism. This is where the first chimpanzees and gorillas were studied in the wild, at Gombe Stream and Virunga Volcanoes, respectively, and is probably the best place in the world to see these charismatic flagship species. While the region is not as rich in plant species as others elsewhere on the continent, the Albertine Rift is the most species-rich region for vertebrates in Africa. The region is the watershed of the great river Nile.

The Albertine Rift contains the well-known "Mountains of the Moon" or Rwenzori Massif in Uganda, made famous by nineteenth-century explorers such as Burton and Speke; the Virunga Volcanoes (Virungas), renowned for their mountain gorillas; Lake Tanganyika, at 1 470 m deep, the world's second deepest lake; and active volcanoes in the Virunga National Park. Volcanic activity has been pivotal in the formation of the Albertine Rift, created as it was through a process of upliftment and volcanism associated with the origins of Africa's mighty Rift Valley and famous valley lakes. Large cracks down the eastern side of Africa, formed by the rotation of the African continental mass, were filled to form lakes, including Lake Tanganyika. This was accompanied by an upwelling of volcanic material, most spectacularly visible in the volcanoes within the Parc de Volcans and the Virunga National Park. Most of the mountain blocks in the Albertine Rift reach altitudes of between 2 000 and 3 500 m, but a number of peaks exceed 4 500 m, with the highest peak being Mt. Margherita (5 110 m) in the Rwenzoris, Africa's third highest peak.



## Country Information

### DR Congo

**Eastern Congo is considered unsafe, the region is infested with multiple disgruntled rebel groups, including the relics of Interhamwe, the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Almost every government in the world has a travel warning on the area advising their nationals against travel there. In the past there have been serious incidences of robbery and kidnapping. In an effort to mitigate against these insecurity threats, we will travel with a security team from ICCN, the Congolese national park's rangers responsible for security in the Virunga National Park. Their presence does not guarantee our safety, and therefore the decision to travel to this region must be yours and yours alone.**

Although Virunga National Park is located in a region that is often troubled by unrest. In the last three years, the southern sector of Virunga National Park (gorillas and volcano) has been considered safe for visitors with over a 100 tourists visiting these sites every month. The Ruwenzori Mountains are also open for tourists and can be reached from Beni in the North of the park. The management of Virunga National Park is dedicated to ensure the safety and security of all its visitors. It does, however, emphasize the importance that all visitors be aware of current security issues at the time of their visit. Virunga National Park cannot take responsibility for any accidents or incidents. If any signs indicate a security issue, the Management of Virunga National Park can decide to (temporarily) close one of its destinations and all bookings to those destinations will be refunded.

Before organizing a trip to Virunga National Park we advise our visitors to inform themselves on the security situation, they can check [www.gorilla.cd](http://www.gorilla.cd) for the latest independent news feeds on this region, as well as detailed information on the parks activities outside tourism. We advise that our visitors check with their governments foreign affairs agencies on their travel advice to the region and to check whether their insurance covers travel in this region, if not we advise visitors to ensure that they acquire additional insurance to cover travel to Virunga National Park.

Of all the countries of Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo is the closest to "Tarzan's Africa". You can very easily imagine him swinging on a vine right in front of you as you travel through this country, visited more

by adventurers than tourists. No one goes there to rest and sit in a chair for a couple of weeks. Congo is an experience and asks for active people who - with all respect for nature and local culture - like to learn, observe and have no objection against social contact.

**Geography:** Located in central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo covers more than 2.3 million square km. It consists of a vast central plateau, which rises to the volcanoes and mountains in the east. Numerous rivers traverse the country, of which the Congo River is the largest. More than half of the country is covered by dense rainforests. The climate is hot and humid in the central region, cooler and drier in the southern highlands and cooler and wetter in the eastern mountain areas. It has been said that the Democratic Republic of Congo is the country around which all other African countries revolve. Two thirds the size of Europe with only 450 km of paved road - an area of vast jungles and dark corners, scattered outposts and tribal strong-holds, equatorial rainforests and active volcanoes - truly one of the most untamed countries on the surface of the earth. The D.R. Congo is the third largest country on the continent after Sudan and Algeria. The equator runs through the northern third of the country. It is surrounded by nine other countries: to the north lies the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and Sudan; to the east Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania; to the south, Zambia and Angola. The border measures some 10,000 km. The D.R. Congo has a western gateway to the Atlantic along a 40 km coastal strip.

**Wildlife:** The rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo contain great biodiversity, including many rare and endemic species, such as both species of chimpanzee: the common chimpanzee and the bonobo (also known as the Pygmy Chimpanzee), mountain gorillas, okapi and white rhino. Five of the country's national parks are listed as World Heritage Sites: the Garumba, Kahuzi-Biega, Salonga and Virunga National Parks, and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. The civil war and resultant poor economic conditions have endangered much of this biodiversity. All five sites are listed by UNESCO as World Heritage In Danger.

**Climate:** The climate is tropically hot and humid in the lower western and central regions, which frequent heavy rains from November through May south of the equator and from April to November in the north, whilst along the equator itself there is only one season. The higher regions of the east, though, have fairly temperate weather. Average annual temperatures are 25°C (77°F) in the low central basin and 17° to 20°C (63° to 68°F) at altitudes of 5,000 ft. Average annual rainfall in Kinshasa is 56 inches while in Lubumbashi it is 45 inches.

**Languages:** French is the official language in the D.R. Congo. Of the 200-odd local languages and dialects, the major one is Lingala, spoken primarily in Kinshasa and along the rivers. You'll hear more Kikongo west of Kinshasa, Tshiluba in the south and central area, Swahili in the east and north-east.

**Health:** The country is a high-risk malaria area, and tropical diseases such as yellow fever, cholera, bilharzias and meningitis occur in rural areas. Medical facilities are limited and visitors are advised to carry their own full medical kits. All visitors entering the DRC require a valid passport and a visa, as well as a yellow fever vaccination certificate. Special travel permits are needed for entry into the central mining regions; and other permits may be required, depending on the level of unrest in the area.

