

14 Day Gorilla Encounter

Tour overview

Game parks, landscapes and culture. This safari gives a glimpse of East Africa's enormously diverse scenery; From Kenya's lake-studded 'Great Rift Valley' to the terraced hillsides of Uganda and a very special wildlife encounter with the magnificent mountain gorillas in their natural habitat.

Highlights

Kampala, Uganda

Lake Bunyonyi, Uganda

Mountain gorillas

Lake Nakuru, Kenya

Great Rift Valley

Lake Victoria

Meals

13 Breakfasts, 14 Lunches, 13 Dinners

Accommodation

Camping in 2-person dome tents

Day 1- 2

Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret

Kenya is East Africa's most popular destination and has a long tradition of tourism and of welcoming visitors. Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, has seen rapid growth in recent years but still has a comparatively small city centre and interesting city market, numerous craft shops, book shops and plenty of cafes and restaurants. We recommend you arrive the day before the tour departure in order to relax and overcome any jetlag.

We depart Nairobi early on Day One and descend into the 'Great Rift Valley', an enormous cleft in the Earth's surface stretching from the Red Sea to Madagascar but with particularly marked escarpments here in Kenya.

Our first stop is Lake Nakuru National Park, a relatively small park (by African standards) on the Rift Valley floor. The shallow soda lake attracts a huge variety of birdlife – especially flamingos, which may gather in such numbers that (when viewed from above) they form a strikingly pink 'fringe' around the lake-shore. However Lake Nakuru is not simply a bird sanctuary, it is also home to buffalo, lion, rhino, leopard, warthog, baboon, antelope, and a variety of smaller animals. A delightful introduction to East Africa's wildlife diversity. From Nakuru we continue northwest to Eldoret, and the Uganda frontier.



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Day 3 - 5

Kampala, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Lake Bunyonyi

We cross into Uganda, Winston Churchill's 'Pearl of Africa' and to the capital, Kampala. This is an attractive hilly city, bustling with roadside traders, markets and busy matatu (mini-bus taxi) stands.

From Kampala, we travel west to Queen Elizabeth National Park. Uganda is a wonderfully fertile country of green terraced hillsides, lush banana plantations, steep mountains and tangled forests.

We enter the QENP, with a view (further to the west) of the mountains that separate Uganda from central Africa. We game-drive in the morning in search of the Uganda Kob (a type of antelope) as well as elephant, lion, buffalo, hyena and hippo. Nearby the park we visit the Kyambura Gorge for the trek to see the chimpanzees. Unlike the larger gorilla, chimps live mostly in the trees and so our viewing is necessarily at some distance. However the experience of seeing man's closest relative in the wild is a memorable one.

Continuing deep into the Kigezi Highlands we come to the picturesque Lake Bunyoni, an ancient flooded valley, where we usually base ourselves for the gorilla trekking.

Day 6 - 9

Gorilla Trek, Kampala

This region of Africa is home to the world's remaining 700 mountain gorillas, many of which inhabit the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. [Occasionally we may travel into neighbouring Rwanda to trek for the gorillas.]

On the day of our trek we gather in the early morning to meet our local guide and tracker. Walking in small groups we trek into the thick rainforest. The trek can be demanding at times with uneven terrain and hilly rainforest but the privilege of spending time with a family of these gentle primates makes the effort well worthwhile. To many people, even those who stay in Africa longer than this two week tour, the day's trek and time with the gorillas remains their most exciting wildlife encounter in Africa.

The usual procedure, once we have located the gorilla 'family', is to squat or sit down and simply observe them for around an hour – the time set by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (the national body charged with controlling and maintaining the gorillas in Uganda). Gorillas are sociable creatures, living in groups between 12 and 20 individuals, usually led by an 'alpha male' (the 'silverback' - so called because of the silver hair on his back which grows once the male gorilla attains maturity). Most people find that the gorillas are remarkably human-like at close quarters – particularly in the social interaction between family members and in 'play' activity in which the young engage. Photography is permitted (although not with a flash and there are restrictions for those who wish to use a video camera.)

Your permit allows you one trek and gorilla viewing (time limited to one hour). However because the authorities maintain strict limits on the number of visitors allowed to view the gorillas each day we may spend several days in the area while all passengers in our group complete the trek and viewing.

Day 10 - 14

Kampala, Jinja, Nairobi

When all members of the group have completed the gorilla trek we pack up and make our way back to Kampala. Pausing for the night we continue on to Jinja and our camp on the grassy banks of the River Nile. It was in 1862 that the British explorer John Hanning Speke recognised Lake Victoria as the 'source of the Nile' settling a long running dispute about Africa's (and the world's) longest river. From this modest monument the Nile begins its 4132 mile course through Uganda, Sudan and eventually Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.

Our camp overlooks a dramatic set of rapids known as Bujagali Falls. It is here that we usually have the option to try rafting - an exciting day out for those enjoying the thrill of 'white water'. There is also the opportunity to make some difference to local children at a local school project: 'Softpower' is a locally run voluntary programme aimed at building and improving schools in the Jinja area to which your contribution of a few hours of painting or plastering is always most welcome. Other activities at Jinja include quad biking, village walks and even bungee jumping! From Jinja, we move on to Uganda's capital Kampala.



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Finally we make our way back into Kenya, passing through Eldoret and the Rift Valley once again to the lights and bustle of Nairobi, where our tour ends.

Includes

- Fully equipped safari vehicle
- Camping and cooking equipment
- All road tolls and vehicle taxes
- All ground transportation
- Sleeping mattress
- Services of two crew
- Meals as indicated

Excludes

- Local Payment excursions
- Visas
- Flights
- Travel insurance
- Departure taxes
- Airport transfers
- Sleeping bag
- Optional activities
- Drinks, tips and items of a personal nature

