

28 Day Game Parks & Gorillas

HIGHLIGHTS

Great Rift Valley
 Lake Nakuru National Park
 Lake Victoria
 Jinja
 Kampala
 Bwindi Impenetrable National Park
 Mountain Gorilla Trek
 Lake Bunyonyi
 Masai Mara National Reserve
 Great Rift Valley
 Meserani Snake Park
 Serengeti National Park
 Ngorongoro Crater Conservation Area
 Zanzibar



Game parks, landscapes and culture. This tour gives a glimpse of East Africa's diversity; From the 'Great Rift Valley' to the terraced hillsides of Uganda and a very special wildlife encounter with the magnificent mountain gorillas in their own habitat, to world-class game reserves in Kenya and Tanzania, to the humid sun-drenched Indian Ocean and Zanzibar Island. An unforgettable experience.

Whilst it is our intention to adhere to the route described below, there is a certain amount of flexibility built into the tour and on occasion it may be necessary or desirable to make alterations to the published itinerary. Please therefore treat the following as a guide only.

The vehicle used for this tour is a fully-equipped safari truck. An additional transfer vehicle may be used for transfers to the start of the trek if we trek from Buhoma.

Duration: 28 Days
Countries visited: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania

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. Very often the first word you hear is the Swahili greeting '*Jambo*' (hello), often followed by '*Hakuna matata*' (no problem!). We recommend you arrive the day before the tour departure in order to relax and overcome any jetlag before your trip. Nairobi has seen rapid growth in recent years but has a comparatively small city centre, a highly interesting city market (great for sharpening your bargaining skills!), as well as craft shops, book shops and plenty of cafes and restaurants to sit and relax in. We depart Nairobi 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) located on the Rift Valley floor. Nakuru's shallow soda lake attracts a huge variety of birdlife – especially flamingos, which may gather in such numbers that from the nearby viewing point they form a strikingly pink 'fringe' around the lake-shore. But Lake Nakuru is not simply a bird sanctuary, it is also home to lion, rhino, leopard, warthog, baboon, antelope, and a variety

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of smaller animals. A delightful introduction to East Africa's wildlife diversity. From Nakuru we continue northwest to Eldoret, and the Uganda frontier.

Day 3 – 6

Jinja – Kampala

We cross into Uganda, Winston Churchill's 'Pearl of Africa'. This is a wonderfully fertile country of green terraced hillsides, lush banana plantations, steep mountains and tangled forests. But we spend our first couple of nights on the grassy banks of the River Nile, near the town of Jinja. 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 bungy jumping! From Jinja, we move on to Uganda's capital Kampala, an attractive hilly city bustling with African street life - roadside traders, markets and busy matatu (mini-bus taxi) stands.

Day 17 – 13

Gorilla Trek – Nairobi

From Kampala, we travel south and west, skirting Lake Victoria and heading into the mountainous region of southwest Uganda. Although a long drive, the scenery is very rewarding as we cross the equator and pass through areas of thick papyrus which give way to mountain valleys and ancient forests. Heading deep into the Kigezi Highlands we stop at picturesque Lake Bunyoni, an ancient flooded valley, before arriving at Bwindi National Park. This region of Africa is home to the world's remaining 700 mountain gorillas, half of which inhabit Bwindi. [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 trekking can be demanding at times with uneven terrain and hilly rainforest but the privilege of spending time with a family of these gentle apes 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.)

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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.

We return to Kenya via Kampala and Eldoret and cross the Rift Valley once again to the lights and bustle of Nairobi, where we take the opportunity to rest and relax for a day.

NB Depending on the availability of gorilla permits the tour itinerary may vary in day to day running order from the above running order which is based on the brochure itinerary. From time to time we may visit neighbouring countries, eg Rwanda, for the gorilla trek (instead of Uganda) and this may entail extra visa fees although we shall endeavour to advise you before departure of any significant change to the tour itinerary.

Day 14 – 19 **Nairobi, Masai Mara National Reserve**

After a day in Nairobi to relax and replenish supplies, we depart the city and re-cross the Rift Valley to the Masai Mara National Reserve. We depart the city early Day One of the tour and make our way across the Great Rift Valley to the Masai Mara National Reserve. We spend two nights camping on the edge of the Reserve with time to explore the park on morning and afternoon game drives. The sweeping plains, distant horizons, low slung acacia trees, occasional coppices of vegetation, and plentiful wildlife form a deeply evocative introduction to this wonderful continent. The 'Mara' is crossed every year between July and October by great herds of wildebeest, zebra and other grazing animals in their migration from the adjoining Serengeti plains to the south (in Tanzania). Predators (such as lion, cheetah, leopard) and scavengers (hyena, vultures) follow the grazing animals and this enormous congregation of wildlife forms a spectacular display of Africa's natural resource. But the Mara is excellent for game viewing at any time of year and regardless of when you can visit we hope to see some, if not all, of Africa's 'Big Five' (elephant, lion, rhino, buffalo and leopard) and an array of other wildlife.

From the Mara, we back across the Rift Valley to Nairobi, where we usually overnight, on our way south into Tanzania.

Day 20 - 24 **Arusha, Serengeti National Park, Olduvai Gorge, Ngorongoro Crater**

After crossing the border at the busy Namanga frontier we come to Arusha. Situated mid-way between Cape Town and Cairo, this is very much Tanzania's 'safari capital' - a bustling city with colourful markets, shops, vehicles and people, all nestling in the shadow of the brooding Mt Meru (4556m). After exploring the curio markets, we head to our camp outside Arusha on the open plains to the west of the city. There is the opportunity to walk (or ride a camel) to one of the local Masai villages. For those who are interested there is a local school and small clinic near the campsite, or you may wish to visit the small but very informative Masai museum and to walk through the – also very informative – Meserani Snake enclosure.

Switching to smaller more 'gamepark friendly' vehicles we drive west across the Rift Valley, passing through Mto Wa Mbo ('mosquito creek') and enter the Ngorongoro Crater Conservation Area. We pass into the park and drive around the Crater rim and down onto the Serengeti plains. Stopping at the Olduvai Gorge, made famous by Drs Louis and Mary Leakey for explorations into early man we descend onto the open plains and wide horizons of the Serengeti. Green after the rains, brown and burnt in the dry this is home to an enormous variety of grazing animals, predators, and birdlife. Flatter and larger than the Masai Mara the Serengeti is simply huge - indeed the name derives from the

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Masai word *Siringitu* – ‘the place where the land moves on forever’. Game viewing here can be superb and camping out in the designated (but unfenced) campsite where lion and hyena roam nearby is an unforgettable experience.

The following day we drive out of the plains for gamedriving and after lunch ascend the outer wall of the Ngorongoro Crater. We spend the night camping on the rim (you may need a jacket; it can be cold at night). At 326 square kilometres in area the Ngorongoro is Africa’s largest intact caldera and is a World Heritage Site. If the view from the rim (2400 metres above sea level) is spectacular, the site from the Crater floor (some 600 metres below) is equally enjoyable. All the major mammals are present except giraffe (which cannot manage the steep slopes leading down onto the Crater floor) and we descend the steep access road for a morning of game driving. Time here is limited however and we drive back up the access road after lunch for a final view over the Ngorongoro before we retrace our steps to Arusha and our camp for the evening.

Day 25 – 28

Dar es Salaam – Zanzibar

We have time in Arusha to replenish our stores before continuing past the shadow of Mt Kilimanjaro (Africa’s highest peak at 5895m) to Dar es Salaam and the Indian Ocean. ‘Dar’ is Tanzania’s main port and is a hub of commerce and industry - a hot, humid and bustling city. We set up camp at our campsite on the beach just outside of the city centre, usually having time to browse curio markets - best known for ebony wood - and prepare for our trip to Zanzibar.

Evocative and exotic, Zanzibar conjures up images of idyllic, sandy, palm fringed beaches, romantic winding cobbled alleys and lush tropical forests. You will find all of these here – and an intriguing history. Zanzibar was the base for the great 19th century explorers such as John Hanning Speke, Richard Burton and David Livingstone and was once a major trading centre for spices. Indeed the spice trade is centuries old: Zanzibaris have traded with the people of the Arabian peninsula for generations, plying the ocean in simple dhow sailboats relying on the annual trade winds for passage. The Arab influence is evident in the architecture and diverse street stall offerings of the capital, Stone Town. Indeed the Arab influence can be seen right along the East African coast - the *Swahili* language itself the result of the mixing of Arab and African languages and cultures over many centuries.

Zanzibar’s other history is not so romantic. The island was also a staging post for slaves brought from the African interior being held before being shipped to slave owners in the middle east. You can still see the places where these men and women were held – and even a short visit is enough to convey the appalling conditions they had to endure.

Our time on the island is not structured and your time is at leisure. Perhaps the best way to see Stone Town is on foot: explore the bazaars, shops, mosques, palaces, courtyards and alleyways of the old town. Spices are grown in plantations nearby and you can take day-tours to visit some and have your senses dazzled by the tastes and scents experienced. If it’s white sand, sparkling ocean and hot sun you prefer – head for the northern beaches and enjoy the Indian Ocean at its best. Try snorkelling and diving, indulge in some sumptuous seafood, or simply relax beneath a coconut palm with a cocktail and a good book.

After three nights we cross back by ferry to the African mainland and Dar es Salaam, where our tour ends.

NB As we leave the truck on the mainland, food and accommodation on Zanzibar is **not included** in the tour price or Local payment, and your time is free to enjoy the island’s activities. Your tour leader will be happy to assist booking

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accommodation in Stone Town and/ or at the beach – if you wish - please budget approx \$30-35 per night. [You are of course free to arrange your own accommodations in advance.]

NB² Meals and accommodation in Nairobi on nights 14 & 15 is **not included** in the tour price or Local Payment. Please allow between US\$20-30 per night for meals and accommodation there for these two nights.

Tour Information

Travelling overland is great fun, but it can also be challenging! This is a *participation* tour and your help will be needed in setting up the camp each night and assisting (usually on a rota basis) with the various day to day campsite duties, such as shopping, cooking and keeping the truck and camp tidy. But don't worry it's not all hard work and it's a great way to meet the local people and get to know your fellow travellers. Your contribution benefits the success of the tour - most people find the greater their involvement, the greater their enjoyment of the whole trip.

Africa is an adventure destination and travelling here is not always predictable so be prepared to "expect the unexpected" in difficulties or delays which might come our way! However, you'll soon find that the diversity of the African landscape, the wildlife and the communities we pass on our way, make the sometimes rough travel and long driving days worthwhile.

Come with a sense of adventure and a flexible attitude and you will be sure to enjoy your overland tour across this amazing continent.

TOUR STYLE

Overland Tour.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Fully equipped safari vehicle, camping and cooking equipment including sleeping mattress, all road tolls and vehicle taxes, transport, services of driver and tour leader, meals as indicated.

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Local Payment excursions, visas, travel insurance, flights, departure taxes, airport transfers, sleeping bag, optional activities, drinks, tips, meals not mentioned in itinerary, items of a personal nature. Accommodation and meals in Nairobi (2 nts: days 14 & 15) and on Zanzibar (3 nts: days 25 - 28).

ACCOMMODATION

We use 2-person dome tents with fly sheets, built in ground sheets, zip-up insect screens and thick foam sleeping mattresses. We mainly use designated campsites, which often have permanent wash and shower facilities, electricity points and sometimes even a small shop and bar/restaurant.



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African
Overland
Tours

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TRANSPORT

24-seater, self contained, custom-built safari truck with onboard tables, plug sockets, freezer, library, i-pod jack, safety features and 70-litre individual lockers.

MEALS

Meals included are – Breakfast (B) x22, Lunch (L) x23, Dinner (D) x21

These meals are prepared in camp by the group and help preparing the meals is invited. Most dietary requirements can be catered for on the road. Please ensure you inform your Tour Leader of any special requirements when you book or at your earliest convenience.

GAME PARK VISITS

In order to maximise the quality of game driving and to comply with local authority rulings, some of our National Park visits and game viewing may be carried out using services provided by local African ground handlers. As well as enhancing our experience it also allows us to contribute at a 'grassroots' level to local economies from which local people benefit. Where used these local services are paid from the Local Payment.

GORILLA PERMITS

The Uganda Wildlife Authority imposes strict regulations regarding the gorilla trekking permits. One of these is that permits must be booked and paid in advance. In order for us to do this we must collect your permit money, in addition to your normal deposit, at the time of booking. Like your deposit, the permit money is not refundable if you cancel your tour. The permits currently (Oct 2010) cost US\$510 per person. Please ask your agent for the equivalent amount in your own currency.

On rare occasions, subject to permit availability, we may purchase trekking permits to view the gorillas in neighbouring Rwanda.



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