

GORILLA TRACKING GUIDELINES

General:

Mountain Gorillas live at high altitude in the Virungas, Volcanoes National Park. Gorilla tracking involves walking long distances through thick vegetation, up steep, wet and muddy terrain which may be difficult for some visitors. We recommend you pace yourself; walk slowly and drink plenty of water. No one should feel deterred from making this trip. At a small fee, Porters are available to help you carry your day pack.

There are 7 habituated gorilla families. Each family can be visited by a maximum of 8 visitors per day. Viewing time is limited and persons are allowed to stay with the gorillas for up to a maximum of 1 hour. Children under 15 years of age are not allowed on gorilla tracking.

Gorilla Families

There are seven gorilla families available for tourists with 8 tourists allowed per group:

Susa—the largest group with 41 gorillas. This family is the hardest to trek as it tends to range high into the mountains but RDB Tourism & Conservation trackers will know well in advance where the group is located. The group is also well-known for having rare twins named Byishimo and Impano.

Sabyinyo—Sabyinyo is an easily accessible group led by the powerful silverback Guhonda. There are fewer members within this family than in the other groups however they are equally impressive.

Amahoro—led by the calm and easy going Ubumwe, Amahoro is made up of 17 members and means “peaceful”. To reach Amahoro one must endure a fairly steep climb however the climb is well worth it once in contact with this tranquil group.

Group 13—when first habituated this group had only 13 members hence its name. Now the group has approximately 25 members, a very positive sign for conservation and the efforts put forward by RDB Tourism & Conservation to protect the gorillas’ habitat.

Kwitonda—this 18-member group is led by Kwitonda which means “humble one” and has two silverbacks and one blackback. Having migrated from DRC, this group tends to range far making it a moderately difficult trek.

Umubano—a family of 11, Umubano were originally Amahoro members but broke off after the dominant silverback was challenged by Charles, now the leader of Umubano. When a young silverback challenges the dominant silverback he must steal some females from the existing group in order to form his own family; thus Umubano was formed.

Hirwa—this group emerged recently and was formed from different existing families, namely from Group 13 and Sabyinyo. Eventually more gorillas joined.

What to Bring/Wear and Take:

Being a rainforest, the climate in the Virunga Volcanoes is interchangeable and one can generally expect rain or sunshine on any day of the year.

Please bring sturdy, waterproof, walking shoes/hiking boots preferably gators and a light raincoat.

We recommend long trousers (thick) and a long-sleeved top to protect against stinging nettles.

A pair of gardening gloves is helpful when you are grabbing for holds in thorny vegetating.

If you feel safer with a walking-stick, pack a folding one although the Park does provide wooden ones.

On the track, carry as little as possible in a waterproof bag: hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, camera, etc.

At 1,700m above sea level, it is generally quite cold, especially in the mornings and evenings. Warm clothing is recommended for these periods.

Health & Safety:

To minimize possible transmission of human diseases, maintain a distance of 7m (22 ft) from the gorillas. If you are sick with a cold, flu or other contagious illness, please do not visit the gorillas.

Spitting in the park is strictly prohibited. Should you need to cough please cover your mouth and turn away from the gorillas. Do not litter. Eating and drinking near the gorillas and smoking anywhere within the park is prohibited.

Photography is permitted, but you may NOT use flash.

When with gorillas, please keep your voice low. Do not make rapid movements that may frighten them. Should a gorilla charge or vocalize at you, do not be alarmed, stand still, look away from the gorilla and follow your guide's directions. The safety of our visitors is our highest priority. There is no need for concern about your personal security.

To enhance your enjoyment:

Certainly carry enough bottled mineral water, at least 1 litre. You may also feel like a snack during the hike so bring a small one. As above porters are available to help you carry your daypack, at a small fee.

NB:

Tracking is a morning only activity, always starting at the National Park HQs in Kinigi at 07:00 am.

Gorilla Tracking Permits are limited in number, max. 80 tickets per day sold on a first come first served basis.

We normally request advance payment at time of booking to purchase/guarantee permits for our guests.

Note: permits are non-refundable/non-transferrable, a penalty applies for 1 allowed date change at >30 days.

The Park office now requires we provide guests' full names and passport numbers when buying gorilla permits.