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THE GORILLA KINGDOMS OF UGANDA AND RWANDA *December 2015*

Long considered an add-on to the classical Big Five safari experiences of Kenya and Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda are fast becoming safari destinations in their own right, offering unforgettable opportunities for up-close gorilla and chimpanzee encounters.

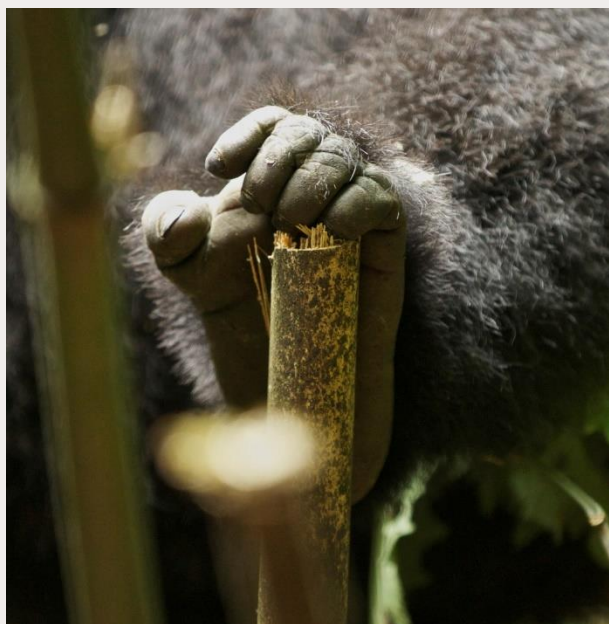
Tucked away in the Great Lakes region of East Africa, Uganda is one of the most vibrant emerging safari destinations in the world. Its mesmerizing views, astonishing biodiversity, opportunities for gorilla trekking and lower temperatures are fast making it one of the top experiences in East Africa. The country's main attraction is undeniably the imposing mountain gorillas, the last of their kind. They make their home in the forests along the south western border of Uganda, mostly in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park or Impenetrable Forest.

Climbing up along the slopes of a mountain range, the park covers a series of narrow, steep valleys. An old and complex ecosystem with a wealth of biodiversity, within its depths lies a rare and striking world. Due to the dense undergrowth and rugged terrain, large portions of it can only be reached on foot, preserving its primordial nature. A variety of species makes its home here, many of them found nowhere or scarcely anywhere else on earth. Forest elephants, giant forest hogs, hundreds of butterfly species and several types of primate roam beneath the thick canopy of trees.

Bwindi is home to half the world's remaining population of critically endangered mountain gorilla. Out of these, several families have become habituated to humans, allowing small groups of people to track them and spend an hour in their company. The gorillas remain wild and the interaction takes place under the careful eyes of highly trained trackers.

The other half of the world's population of mountain gorillas can be found in neighbouring Rwanda. While trekking permits may be cheaper to obtain in Uganda and some people consider the experience there to be more rewarding, the smaller size of Rwanda means that the areas inhabited by gorillas are easier to access. Kigali, the point of entry into the country for most visitors, is situated only a few hours from key gorilla tracking areas. Rwanda's gorillas are also located in a smaller area and the gorilla families are more habituated to humans.

Located in the far northwest corner of Rwanda, the Parc National des Volcans protects the steep rainforested slopes of the Virungas mountain range. Home to the rare mountain gorilla, this mountain range spans from Rwanda to Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The lush slopes of these volcanoes provide a dramatic natural setting for one of the most





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thrilling and memorable wildlife experiences - seeing the mountain gorilla in its natural habitat.

Whether in Rwanda or Uganda, a day of gorilla trekking begins early, departing with the dawn. The guides will meet and brief groups of visitors at the gathering point before setting off. The walk can be challenging, especially during the rainy seasons, which are from March to May and then again in November and December. Depending on where the gorillas were last seen, the trek can take anywhere between 40 minutes to six hours. When the gorillas emerge from the foliage, visitors are able to enjoy their company for up to an hour.

Gorilla tracking tours are available in both [Rwanda](#) and [Uganda](#). For more information, contact your preferred travel provider or log on to www.andBeyond.com.

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