

# RWANDA MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

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With Professional Photographer Randy Hanna  
2-7 January 2014

Rolling mist greets you as you begin your first journey to experience a rare and mystical event. Walking up the mountain hillside, you push aside a tangled rope of vine, pressing onward through the maze of a bamboo forest, when at last you see them. Ten or twelve gorillas sit in a forest clearing, two more are swinging overhead in a tree. They stop foraging for a brief few moments to observe you. A few feet away you spy the big silverback. Twice the size of the young females, he sits on massive haunches, stripping leaves from branches. He's close enough to hold your gaze with his liquid reddish-brown eyes. Something primal, inexplicable, connects the two of you in that moment, when the world exists only within this rarest of encounters.....the mystical mountain gorillas of Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park.



The trip starts with our arrival on the 2 January 2014 into the capital city of Kigali, Rwanda. After a good night's sleep, we will gather for breakfast and orientation, then it's off for a bit of city touring as we visit the genocide museum and a couple of churches in the area.

Following our city tour and lunch at a local restaurant, we will travel to the city of Ruhengeri high in the mountains photographing the people and landscapes of Rwanda. Along the way, we plan to make as many photographic stops as needed as we begin to record our wonderful story about the landscapes, people, and gorillas of the mountain highlands.

Arriving at Mountain Gorilla View Lodge, we will settle in for a bit of R&R and prepare for the next several days of adventures. Before our dinner meal I will do a short presentation on suggested camera settings and shooting techniques to prepare you for your first gorilla encounter. I also will review some successful images and some not so successful ones. Should time allow, I can also demonstrate image processing techniques using Adobe Lightroom, Photoshop and a number of plugins that I use (this can also be addressed on another day during our image review).

The following day we will rise early for breakfast with a departure from the lodge to put us at the park headquarters, by 0700. After a brief introduction and our trekking assignments in hand, we will move to our designated rally point to begin our ascent into the mountains. We will walk through rolling hills and pastures before crossing the rock wall that signifies our entry into the national park.

Once the gorillas are sighted, we will move into our observation area and begin the magical "one hour" of contact with these incredible creatures. At the end of our one hour window, we will journey back to the rally point and return to the lodge for lunch. During our down times I plan to coordinate trips to the local farmers market, clothing markets, and the ex-poachers' village where you can learn about the traditional methods of fire-making, archery, medicine, and witness traditional dances.

We will repeat this scenario for the next three days with the last trek dedicated to observing the endangered golden monkeys. After our contact with the golden monkeys we will drive back to Kigali Serena Hotel for a dayroom to freshen up and change clothes for the flight home. We will be collected from the hotel and transported to the airport for our flights homeward.





## **Detailed Itinerary:**

### **DAY 1: 2 Jan 2014**

- Arrive at Kigali Airport where you will be met by a *Thousand Hills Expeditions'* representative and transferred to Kigali Serena Hotel for overnight
- Dinner on your own

**Overnight Kigali Serena Hotel (B)**

### **DAY 2: 3 Jan 2014**

- Morning - take a city tour of Kigali, which includes the genocide memorial site and craft centers
- Group lunch at a local restaurant
- Afternoon - take a leisurely drive north to Ruhengeri

**Dinner and overnight Mountain Gorilla View Lodge (BLD)**

### **DAY 3: 4 Jan 2014**

- Early breakfast then drive to the park offices
- 0700hrs you will be allocated a gorilla-tracking group followed by a briefing by your trackers then drive to where the trail starts
- Upon sighting the gorillas you will stay with them one hour before returning to the rally point where your driver will be waiting for you
- Lunch at Mountain Gorilla View
- Afternoon tour to the ex-poachers' village where you will learn more about traditional methods of fire-making, archery, medicine and traditional dances among other things

**Dinner and overnight Mountain Gorilla View Lodge (BLD)**

### **DAY 4: 5 Jan 2014**

- Second morning of gorilla tracking where you will have an opportunity to see another gorilla family
- Lunch at Mountain Gorilla View
- Afternoon - take a scenic drive to view the twin lakes of Burera and Ruhondo

**Dinner and overnight Mountain Gorilla View Lodge (BLD)**

### **DAY 5: 6 Jan 2014**

- Third morning of gorilla tracking where you will have an opportunity to see yet another gorilla family.
- Lunch at Mountain Gorilla View
- Afternoon relax at the lodge

**Dinner and overnight Mountain Gorilla View Lodge (BLD)**





## **DAY 6: 7 Jan 2014**

- This morning you will be tracking golden monkeys
- 0700hrs - you will be allocated a monkey-tracking group followed by a briefing by your trackers then drive to the rally point
- Upon sighting the Golden Monkeys you will stay with them for one hour before returning to the rally point where your driver will be waiting for you
- Lunch at Mountain Gorilla View Lodge
- Afternoon – Drive to Kigali for dayroom and flights onward

**Dayroom at Kigali Serena Hotel; dinner on your own.**

*Included in this trip:*

- *Accommodations as noted in the above schedule*
- *All meals, as noted in the above schedule*
- *All tips and gratuities for all guides, camp staff, and support staff at all lodges and activities*
- *All porter tips during trekking*
- *Membership in Flying Doctors for Rwanda*
- *All required transfers*
- *All guide services*
- *All permits for Gorilla trekking and park access in Rwanda*
- *Bed and breakfast at Kigali Serena*
- *Exclusive use of 4WD vehicles*
- *Thousand Hills Expedition's Guide throughout tour*
- *Ex-Poachers village tour*





### **Trip Costing:**

This trip costing consists of lodging, guide services, trekking permits, park fees, and conservation permits, as well as all tips and gratuities. NOTE: The trekking permits must be paid at the time of booking and are issued by name and not transferable. Above the cost of the permits, a 30% deposit is required to reserve your space. During our trip, there are only 24 permits currently available per day spread across three lodges, so it is important to get signed up as soon as possible.

### **TOTAL TRIP COST (per person double occupancy):**

**\$7295.00 PPDO \$8395.00 Dedicated Single**

### **Deposit requirements due at registration:**

**\$2350.00 Trekking permits**

**\$1480/00 30% Trip Deposit**

**\$3830.00 TOTAL DEPOSIT**

**The remainder is due 90 days prior to your departure.**



**WHAT DO YOU DO TO ENSURE YOUR SPOT ON THIS TRIP? SEND ME AN EMAIL TELLING ME YOU WANT TO JOIN US AND I WILL SEND YOU THE BOOKING FORMS AND ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS. YOU MAY ALSO BOOK DIRECTLY WITH NICKY OR VANESSA AT *EYES ON AFRICA*, 1-800-457-9575.**

**A final note about lodging and weather:**

**Lodging:** I selected Mountain View Gorilla Lodge (MVGL) as our base of operations for this trip. This will be my second trip staying at MVGL. I chose MVGL because of its proximity to the park headquarters, cleanliness of the rooms, good food, great support staff, and a great value for what we are getting. You will find the rooms to be large but simple with all of the basic necessities needed. The rooms are heated by a fireplace, which is started every night by the staff. They continue to check on the fire several times during the evening before you retire for the night. You can easily opt out of this service if you desire.

**Weather:** Based on my experience, traveling outside of July, August, and September the Volcanoes National Park of Rwanda is always a crap shoot when it comes to rainfall. Africa's weather patterns are becoming increasingly unpredictable – probably due to climate change. The average daytime temperature is around 24°C, except in the higher mountains, which take up a lot of the country, where the range is 10°C to 15°C. Rwanda can be visited at any time of year. The dry season (June to early-October) is easier for tracking mountain gorillas but the endless hills are barren, a contrast to the verdant greens of the wet season. Peak season for gorilla tracking is July and August and travelling outside this time means it is easier to arrange permits, lodging, and ground support, and also to obtain less expensive airfare.

In the case of our trip, I have chosen to run an itinerary which puts us in the National Park before the heavy rainy kicks in. I expect occasional light rain in the afternoons or overcast, with usually clear mornings. As you move further into beginning of March and all of April, the rain increases to a point where it is nearly a downpour all the time.

I have been leading trips to Africa since 2006 and over the past four years, I have seen the effects of global warming right in front of my eyes. I used to be able to predict the weather with a great deal of reasonable certainty. This is no longer the case. These days, I plan the best trips that I can, keeping a balance between what the weather should be and the cost of travel. I have found that running trips during the shoulder season or off peak provides a great cost benefit and the bad weather risk is minimal.

A short video on the gorilla trekking experience can be seen here: <http://vimeo.com/63308349>

