

# a gentle ENCOUNTER

**Katie Fewkes explores Rwanda and finds there is more than meets the eye for visitors seeking adventure.**

I entered a small clearing in the forest and was caught in the middle of a game of tag – except this wasn't between children in a playground, but between two young male gorillas. Their giant bodies brushed past my feet before I had time to step back, and I was at once frightened and fascinated. The pair weren't bothered by our group's arrival and continued playing before joining the rest of their family to rest and eat in the dappled sunlight. My first glimpse of the famous gorillas in the mist, high on the slopes of Rwanda's Virunga Volcanoes is something I will never forget.

## FACT FILE

A ten-day trip to Rwanda, including return flights, costs from £2,550 per person. This is based on two people sharing and includes one day of gorilla trekking (including gorilla permit), a night at Lake Kivu and a visit to the Nyungwe Forest National Park. Please call Katie on 01993 838 513 for further details.



Three years later, I was lucky enough to return to Rwanda. After tramping through dense bamboo, fighting through muddy tunnels and brushing painfully past the largest stinging nettles I've ever seen, we finally found our group.

Only too aware of the fact you only have an hour with them, you try to soak in every second – watching every movement, listening to their strange 'cough-grunts' which the trackers emulate to reassure the gorillas, and smelling the scent of their nests.

The gorillas' behaviour is entrancing. I delighted in watching a young silverback lying on his stomach, resting his chin on his hand, drumming his fingers, much as a human would. I saw a baby gorilla leap onto its mother's stomach and play the drums on her chest. To watch a gorilla carefully select their chosen leaf, fold in the edges and tuck it gingerly into its mouth is to realise how delicate they can be.

Whilst many people go to Rwanda for the gorillas, few realise the wealth of other adventures to be had in this remarkable country. Lake Kivu, just over an hour's drive away from the Volcanoes National Park, is a perfect, peaceful place to relax your weary limbs and wash your muddy boots.

If your gorilla experience has whetted your appetite for primates, head for

the Nyungwe Forest National Park in the south of Rwanda where you can track chimpanzees in the wild. Following their shrieks, you will hear them long before you see them. Nyungwe is also home to eight types of monkey, and more than 250 species of birds, making this a fascinating park to spend a few days exploring on foot.

Akagera National Park in the east is home to elephant, giraffe, eland, zebra, lion and much more – and only a few hours drive from Kigali. Or if you're looking for big game, you can easily fly from Kigali to Tanzania or Kenya for a safari.

Driving through this land of a thousand hills, it's remarkable how quickly its citizens are rebuilding their country after the horrors of the genocide. Today, you'll be stunned at how clean it is (they have a monthly cleaning day where everybody, including the President, sweeps the streets), at the sense of national pride and community spirit, and at the beauty of the patchwork quilt of fields which blanket the hills. This is not a land of luxury lodges or the Big Five safari, but if you have a sense of adventure, and don't mind getting a bit muddy for it, Rwanda will surprise and delight you in every way.

**Katie Fewkes**  
Rwanda Specialist



Muddy but exhilarated



A painful lunch of stinging nettles



Sabyinyo Volcano, Volcanoes National Park



Gorilla's Nest Lodge, edge of Volcanoes National Park