

GUIDELINES FOR GORILLA TREKKING IN UGANDA AND RWANDA



By the time you read this, if a mountain gorilla tracking safari in Uganda or Rwanda is not on your bucket list, then maybe you are planning your next gorilla trek. Perhaps it's just your interest in great apes that triggered the Google search; could it still be that you are looking up some information for a friend or relative planning a trip to Africa?

Going on a Uganda or Rwanda gorilla safari is one of many lifetime decisions that every visitor will live to remember and be thankful to have made. It tickles the deepest of senses, it presents a feeling of royalty and sometimes evokes tears of joy. Entering their territory is always a heartwarming moment, and you will quickly tell by the similarity in behavior, why we share about 98% DNA resemblance with the "gorilla beringei beringei species" (the famed and special mountain gorilla species).

Mountain gorillas can only be found in three countries in the entire world and in both Uganda and Rwanda there are more than 90% chances of seeing the gorillas during a gorilla trekking safari. There have been only very few cases in the past where a group of tourists have missed seeing them after the jungle hike; but either way, a partial refund procedure exists for the failed hike, should this unfortunate incident occur.

The gorilla tracking activity in Uganda and Rwanda takes place in a jungle setting in the national parks of [Bwindi Impenetrable National Park](#) and [Mgahinga Gorilla National Park in Uganda](#); and [Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda](#). This bucketlist activity involves climbing, sometimes sliding and "sweat-wiping" while following a path created by a team of rangers who monitor the mountain gorillas on a daily basis.

When the group of trackers arrive at the family being sought, they get a full hour (60 minutes) to watch the family and to take as many photos before they are then required to retreat to the starting point, usually referred to as the trailhead or briefing point where then the awarding of gorilla tracking certificates takes place

Both countries have a fine set of rules and guidelines for gorilla tracking set by the organization mandated to protect the wildlife or promote tourism in that particular country, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and Rwanda Development Board (RDB); and while one of the reasons is to ensure that the activity of gorilla tracking is carried out in a well-coordinated manner for the protection of the mountain gorillas and other species in the national park, it is more importantly for your safety. The following rules and guidelines govern gorilla tracking activity in Rwanda and Uganda.

On a daily basis, before the actual hike commences, tourists meet at the briefing point to go through a short briefing procedure in which some of the gorilla tracking rules and guidelines below will be reiterated.

Before gorilla tracking starts:

1. A maximum of 8 tourists or visitors can be allowed to track a particular mountain gorilla family or

group on a daily basis. This is in line with guidelines from promoters of ecotourism and protectors of these iconic species – the gorillas. This limitation reduces on the behavioral disturbance that humans would cause to the mountain gorillas and minimizes the chances of transferring diseases from humans to the gorillas.

2. Ensure to have your hands washed before you head out for the gorilla tracking hike, whether in Rwanda or Uganda. This is also aimed at encouraging the highest level of cleanliness like how the contemporary statement goes, “we are as clean as our own hands”.

During the hike:

3. You are requested to keep your voices at a very low volume as you head to track the mountain gorillas and to even be quieter when you finally meet them. This is so that you do not disrupt their peace, but also to allow you the opportunity to enjoy other wildlife species along the trail especially the birds, golden monkeys and butterflies.
4. Follow your tour guide through the gorilla tracking trails and stick to the group for both your safety, but also so that you can listen to him explain the attractions seen along the way to the mountain gorillas.
5. DO NOT LITTER! Like in any national park or protected area, you are advised to keep any form of rubbish or garbage on you. If you have a backpack, please put all garbage into it and you can always empty it at a designated point when you return to the briefing point. This a fragile ecotourism site which needs to be kept free of any form of litter.
6. Should you want to use the toilet, please speak to your guide to advise you accordingly on how to do it ecologically.
7. As you approach point where the rangers observed the mountain gorillas the day before, you will get the final briefing before your next few steps to where the family is. You are often requested to leave your walking sticks and baggage at this point.

When finally with the mountain gorilla family

8. You are advised to keep a distance of about 7 meters from where the mountain gorilla family is. Though habituated, mountain gorillas are still wild animals and if they feel threatened, the silverback (alpha male mountain gorilla) will usually lead the family away or even charge at you in a form of retaliation. This distance is also maintained to reduce on the chance of transmission of diseases by humans to the gorillas or from the gorillas to humans.
9. Eating or smoking while in the presence of mountain gorillas is prohibited.
10. Before you reach the family, you are requested to switch off your camera’s flash. Flash photography is also prohibited while with the gorillas.
11. You will be allowed a total of 60 minutes with the mountain gorillas to watch them foraging, playing and going about their usual business of the day, after which you will be required to leave the family.

Every visit leads to one of the habituated gorilla groups or families which have been made accustomed to visits by humans. Gorilla tracking is not done in a wild mountain gorilla family because the safety of tourists on gorilla safaris in Uganda and Rwanda is at the very heart of our tourism planning.

It is a fantastic experience standing at merely a 7-meter distance from where these fascinating beasts are seated munching on the bamboo and the green vegetation around. It is highly rewarding to watch the babies' innocence and the juveniles' relentless playfulness. Oh the feeling of staring into the eyes of the silverback sends tingling senses down one's spine! But you need not to fear; if undisturbed, they are the gentlest apes on the planet.

A gorilla tracking trip to Rwanda or Uganda is worth every penny and every step of the hike and by visiting them you are not only lucky to see a few of the last few surviving individuals but also are able to make a financial contribution to their survival, as well as the livelihoods of the local communities living around the gorilla national parks.

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