

Gorilla Highlands *Experts*



Map of the Gorilla Highlands



Overview of the Gorilla Highlands Region

Travellers from all over the world come to the Gorilla Highlands region for the epiphany of staring into the eyes of our giant relatives, Grauer's and mountain gorillas. Yet the region offers much more: vibrant cultures bubbling through the surface and a landscape that opens your heart to adventure.

This cross-boundary space is defined by the Virunga volcanoes — some of them still active — and ancient rainforests with precious endangered primate species. From the countless islands of Lake Bunyonyi to the seaside feel of Lake Kivu, water bodies are sprinkled all over the valleys, interrupted by beautifully terraced hills.

The original inhabitants of these lands were Batwa hunter-gatherers who lived in egalitarian communities that roamed

its endless forests. Bantu farmers started arriving from western Africa about 2,000 years ago, followed in the 19th century by Swahili-Arab traders from the shores of the Indian Ocean, and eventually Europeans as well.

The colonisers divided the Gorilla Highlands region into countries, but in actuality it is held together by strong geographical, historical and cultural connections. One can loosely define this area as Uganda west of the mighty Nile, the whole of Rwanda's thousand hills and the riches of eastern DR Congo.

If you ever had interest in the heart of Africa but wondered about its security, infrastructure and other traits, you now have a team of experts to rely on...



Mountain gorillas in Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda; photo by Marcus Westberg



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Lake Bunyonyi, Uganda; photo by Marcus Westberg



On the Congo Nile Trail, Rwanda; photo by Tomaž Malovrh



Grauer's gorilla in Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo; photo by Marcus Westberg

About Gorilla Highlands Experts

Brought together during the Covid-19 epidemic, Gorilla Highlands Experts were 20+ local and global specialists — from park rangers to culinary masters — promoting and developing the Gorilla Highlands region.

More people joined over time, united by deep love for the area, and a belief that wildlife can only thrive if the communities around national parks are doing well.

The flagship Gorilla Highlands Experts initiative is the youth program called Illumineers. Its primary goal is to give the youngsters from the three countries leadership skills and civic education that will help ensure a different future for the region. It annually culminates in the Friendship Camp, a gathering in spectacular nature, with speakers from around the globe.

The pillars of Gorilla Highlands Experts are:

- peace: among nations, within families and in individuals
- nature: respect for the natural environment and the amazing wildlife of the region
- culture: self-respect, respect for others and culturally grounded development
- education: for the world to fully appreciate the region and the youth to reach their full potential
- entrepreneurship: for innovation, self-reliance and home-grown solutions

The education pillar has a strong media component, best represented by the Pocket Treasure booklet, a guide to the region.



2025 Friendship Camp participants from DR Congo, Rwanda and Uganda; photo by Elie Cirhuza



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Trekkers camping at Mama Bena's, Uganda; photo by Wu Jun Yi



On the way from Kabale to Kisoro, Uganda; photo by Georg Schaumberger



Additional activities organised for school groups, Bushara Island, Lake Bunyonyi, Uganda; archive photo

Impactful & Extraordinary Tours



Among Gorilla Highlands Experts there are several with tourism and hospitality backgrounds — the people behind the responsible tourism company founded in Rwanda in 2016. It makes unique itineraries that uncover the very best of the Gorilla Highlands region: in a jeep, on a mountain bike, on foot, or in a dugout canoe.

The company specialises in hiking and cycling trips, a small-scale alternative for travellers who wish to treat the cultures and natural environment with respect, and learn something along the way. Its focus has always been culturally sensitive economic development of remote communities that have few other opportunities.

Started at Uganda’s Lake Bunyonyi as a way to orient international volunteers, the concept of “canoe trekking” has been central. It has become a well-known activity with a simple premise: experiences as far away from touristy areas as humanly possible. This has developed into a system of guided Gorilla Highlands Trails that were connected to Rwanda’s famous Congo Nile Trail in 2019.

These days treks and cycling trips are key ingredients in the itineraries the tours team makes for its clients. Many opt for a car-centred traditional African safari as their journey’s backbone — and that can be extraordinary too!



An overnight at Mama Bena’s, Uganda; photo by Marcus Westberg



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The rate card with package descriptions, contingency plans and other documentation available on request.

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Winners of Responsible Tourism Awards

At the 2022 World Travel Market in London, Gorilla Highlands Experts won two Responsible Tourism Awards: the global “Contributing to Cultural Heritage” category and gold in the “Rest of the World” competition.

The judges appreciated the company’s partnership with indigenous Batwa “Pygmy” communities, the cooking competition bringing together chefs from Congo, Rwanda and Uganda and the homestays and remote hiking routes developed in Uganda and Rwanda.

The panel wrote about the Batwa: “Gorilla Highlands encourage them to share their traditional beliefs and skills, ensuring that their guests are not going to mock them as backward (just the opposite). Countering the prevalent Disneyfication of Batwa experiences, the activity is focused on the people’s present life instead of costume-based historical performances. The chat between the community and the visitors starts with introductions of everyone and can then take any direction the visitors or the Batwa are interested in.”



Batwa of Rwamahano near Echuya Forest, Uganda, receive the banked 50% of their community fees; photo by Owen Bright



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Tour Client & Partner Testimonials



East African Playgrounds (PlayAction International) is a UK charity that annually sent 150-200 trekkers and volunteers to the Bunyonyi region to take part in a 4-day charity trek. The whole program was developed alongside Gorilla Highlands Experts who helped run the treks from start to finish. We loved working with them. The guides were awesome and great fun, the region is one of the most beautiful in the world and the Gorilla Highlands team have such a great network and knowledge of the area and its wonderful history, culture and nature.

Tom Gill, founding director, UK

As an inclusive tourism professional, I was very impressed with Gorilla Highlands Experts. This regional initiative is all about connecting the tourism industry with communities for rural development. A totally unique and innovative model, not only in Uganda and Rwanda, but worldwide as well. They are definitely the region's experts and quite reliable. You will not be disappointed and will want to come back again!

Juan Garrido, consultant, Spain



Our tour with Gorilla Highlands Experts was the highlight of our 3-week stay in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. Arranging it online was smooth and confidence-inspiring. I organised our whole trip myself, spending many hours on my laptop researching options and tour operators. Gorilla Highlands Experts passed my test so I committed online; then they came through with a fantastic adventure for our family of four. Every person involved in each part was welcoming, interesting, knowledgeable, and fun to be with. The hike from Lake Kayambu to Lake Bunyonyi was spectacular. **Gorgeous scenery, lovely people, and the best guide we had in Africa.** And I'll never forget our night on Tom's Island - sitting by the bonfire listening to a spritely and entertaining old-timer play a traditional stringed instrument and sing. **It was magical.** My only regret is that we didn't allocate more time to our stay in Uganda.

Kirk Lilley, traveller, USA



We have been working with Gorilla Highlands Experts for a decade. The guides are reliable and passionate and have provided unique experiences to countless clients of ours. The team has an extremely diverse and detailed knowledge of the destination, and it is always a pleasure to work out new tours with them.

Sven Gilian, Matoke Tours sales manager, Germany

I was looking for a holiday for me and my two teens that would combine some adventure, holidaying, safari, seeing gorillas, all in two weeks. A tall order I thought. Gorilla Highlands Experts replied quickly and proposed a few scenarios; the best one soon crystalised. **It was an excellent experience all around.**

Tina Grosel Davies, translator, Luxembourg

I had a wonderful press trip organised by Gorilla Highlands Experts. It is nothing like a typical tour operator. They knew exactly what I wanted and took care of everything. They made sure that I got an authentic experience. I highly recommend them!

Jiro Ose, photographer, Japan



