



A mountain gorilla chows down in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park.

Wild Life

Gorillas in the Midst

Thanks to the work of many—not least of all the late Dian Fossey and the Gorilla Organization, the NGO she inspired—the rare mountain gorilla is thriving in the bamboo forests of Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park. For some time now tourists have been able to come to the park, a twisting two-hour drive from the capital city of Kigali, but a lack of comfortable accommodations nearby discouraged visitors. In the last year, however, new properties have opened, and today access to the great apes is much more convenient—not to mention blissfully exclusive, limited to a handful of people each day.

HOW IT WORKS You pay \$500 to the Rwanda Office of Tourism and Parks (ORTPN) for one of only 56 daily permits; this document grants access to about an hour with the gorillas. Although it's best to book a month or two in advance, same-day permits are sometimes available. Arrive at the ORTPN office in Kinigi, near the town of Musanze, at 7 a.m. for a briefing by English-speaking park rangers. They'll then divide the visitors into groups of eight, depending on hiking ability, and take you off into the forest.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE Gorilla families of anywhere from seven to 37 members, including mothers, babies, and 500-pound silverbacks.

WHERE TO STAY In the foothills of the Virunga Mountains and close to the ranger station is the new Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge (\$370-\$650; governorscamp.com). Run by Kenyan luxury safari and lodge operator Governors' Camp, it makes a great base for gorilla trekking.

WHEN TO GO Any time of year is good for gorillas. June to September is the long dry season; December to February the short. The rest of the year is wetter, but the rains make for verdant landscapes. And even in July and August, the hottest months, temperatures are still only 75 to 80 degrees.

WHO TO GO WITH You can get permits from the Rwanda Tourism Board (rwandatourism.com), but the easiest way to explore the park is through one of these outfitters, which can also arrange longer Rwanda trips: Primate Safaris (primatesafaris-rwanda.com), Thousand Hills Expeditions (thousandhills.rw), and Volcanoes Safaris (volcanoessafaris.com). —CARI GRAY

