



Gorilla Tracking in Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans Extension

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Wilderness Travel

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PASSPORT

A valid passport is required for your trip. Be sure to check the expiration date. Your passport must be valid for six months after your date of exit from Rwanda. In addition, we recommend your passport have at least two completely blank visa pages for every country you will be visiting. The service of adding pages for visas was discontinued as of January 1, 2016. If needed, you can request a new passport through [US Passport Services Office](#) or use a visa service agency, which can take care of your passport renewal and expedite the process, if needed. We recommend [Passport Visas Express](#). Be sure to allow sufficient time to acquire this before your trip.

Note: send us a digital copy of your passport page as soon as possible if you have not already done so. We need this information for your gorilla permit.

It is very important to carry photocopies of your passport's photo page and any acquired visa pages for your trip (if applicable) in case your passport is lost or as an additional piece of identification, as well as two extra passport photos.

VISAS & ENTRY NOTES

US citizens need a visa for Rwanda. A single-entry Rwanda visa can be obtained upon arrival at most points of entry into Rwanda without prior application. No passport photos are necessary and the visa must be paid for in US dollars. The current fee is \$50 USD for each applicant and the visa is valid for up to 30 days.

If you are a citizen of any country other than the US, check with a local consulate for entry requirements.

MONEY

The unit of currency in Rwanda is the Rwandan Franc, however USD cash is widely accepted. Credit cards can be used at most hotels and lodges. Note: USD bills must be clean, in good condition, and dated 2006 or newer. Old or wrinkled bills are not accepted. You will need to budget spending money for gratuities for your extension guide (see tipping section), for meals not included in the trip itinerary, and for personal miscellaneous items.

TIPPING

Tipping is completely discretionary, but over the years, clients have asked us for tipping guidelines to reward outstanding service. Your guide will meet you upon arrival in Kigali and be with you throughout your time in Rwanda. A range of reference for tipping would be \$20-\$25 per person, per day.

Wilderness Travel has prepaid the tips for local guides who are with you for a short period of time, all trackers and porters, luggage handling, meals at restaurants, and lodge tips.

FOOD

Please reach out to us directly to discuss any dietary restrictions or concerns you may have. We can easily make arrangements for most diets, but please keep in mind that certain cultural differences or logistical limitations can make it difficult or at times impossible to accommodate all requests. With this in mind, please inform us at least eight weeks before your trip if you have a special diet, and any food allergies in particular, so we can do our best to meet your needs.

COMMUNICATIONS

Time Zone

Rwanda is 2 hours ahead of GMT, or 7 hours ahead of US Eastern Standard Time. Daylight Savings Time in the US may affect these times.

Telephone

The international dialing code for Rwanda is 250. Please contact your cell phone company for specific instructions for international use. Smart phones with roaming capabilities on a GPRS or 3G cell network work very extensively in Rwanda. We discourage purchasing a local sim card as the security checks associated before it's activated can be lengthy.

Email & Internet Access

Internet access at our hotels and lodges may be available but is not guaranteed.

ELECTRICITY

Rwanda uses plug types C and J so you'll need plug adapters. Rwanda operates on 230 volts. If you have devices that are not dual voltage, then you will need a voltage converter as well.

LAUNDRY

Laundry service is available for a fee at hotels and most lodges. Please note staff do not wash underwear.

Medical Information

The following recommendations should be used as a guideline only; consult your physician for medical advice. It is vital that you let Wilderness Travel know of any medical problems, allergies, or physical limitations you may have. Please fill out and return the personal medical questionnaire, and feel free to consult us if you have any questions about your ability to undertake this particular trip.

Wilderness Travel is not a medical facility and has no expertise or responsibility regarding what medications or inoculations you and your physician decide are necessary for your safe participation in the trip.

Traveler's health information is available from the Centers for Disease Control ([cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel)). Medical travel products are available from Magellan's Travel Supplies ([magellans.com](https://www.magellans.com)).

INOCULATIONS

Entry requirements are subject to change; check with the Centers for Disease Control for updates. All shots should be entered on your International Health Card (yellow card), which is provided by the facility giving the shots. Keep it with your passport while traveling. This provides an important personal record for you to refer to when making future travel plans. We recommend you discuss the following with your physician:

Yellow Fever: Proof of a Yellow Fever inoculation is only required for Rwanda if you are coming from a country with risk of Yellow Fever transmission. Some parts of Kenya are at risk for yellow fever. If you visit Kenya (even for just one night) prior to visiting Rwanda you will need to provide proof of the yellow fever vaccine. If your travel plans require you to get the shot, have it recorded in your International Health Card and carry the card with your passport as proof. Health officials at borders often (but not always) request proof of the shot. The vaccination is good for life. Visit the CDC Travelers' Health link wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/ for more information.

Please note: According to the CDC, people 60 years or older may be at increased risk for serious adverse events following vaccination, compared with younger persons. This is particularly true if they are receiving their first yellow fever vaccination. If you are over 60, please discuss this with your physician. If you are advised to decline the vaccine for medical contraindications, please have your physician or travel clinic fill out and sign the "Medical Contraindications to Vaccination" section of the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP) form. Please visit [cdc.gov/yellowfever](https://www.cdc.gov/yellowfever) for more information.

Polio: People who have received the primary series of at least three doses of polio vaccine are considered fully immunized. People who are unsure of their status should receive the vaccine (three doses spaced at intervals).

Hepatitis: The vaccines HAVRIX and VAQTA (two injections, six to 18 months apart) give long-term protection against Hepatitis A and are worthwhile if you travel regularly to developing countries.

Tetanus Booster: A booster is strongly recommended (effective for 10 years).

Typhoid: The CDC recommends the injection or the oral vaccine, Vivotif Berna. You may not be able to take the oral vaccine simultaneously with mefloquine (for malaria prevention).

MALARIA PREVENTION

All travelers to Rwanda are urged to take antimalarial medications. Malaria is a serious but preventable disease spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Please discuss antimalarial medication with your doctor, who will explain various antimalarials and their side effects and recommend a regimen for you. In addition to medication, a further precaution against malaria is to wear long sleeves and long pants at dusk. Thin clothing should be sprayed with insect repellent, especially around the elbows and ankles. Use repellent containing DEET.

If, after returning from your trip, you have a persistent fever, fever with chills, muscle aches, and headache, report to your doctor the possibility of exposure to malaria. For further malaria information, consult your doctor or the CDC Malaria Hotline (cdc.gov/malaria/travelers) or by phone at 888-232-3228.

COVID-19

The Public Health Emergency for COVID-19 declared by the World Health Organization and the US Department of Health and Human Services expired in 2023. As of March 2024, we no longer require guests who exhibit cold or flu symptoms to test for COVID-19. Guests who test positive for COVID-19 will be required to follow local health protocols, wear a mask in group vehicles and during indoor activities for the remainder of the trip, and may be asked to dine separately. Any travel companion sharing a room with them will also be required to wear a mask at all times in the shared group vehicles for the remainder of the trip.

We encourage all travelers to actively monitor their own well-being and to use common-sense preventative measures such as regular handwashing (or use of hand sanitizer) and/or wearing a face mask. If you are feeling sick, we encourage you to self-isolate and/or wear a mask to protect your fellow travelers. Guests may be required to wear a mask if the Trip Leader believes the situation warrants it.

Leading up to the trip, we encourage you to do everything possible to stay healthy, including avoiding close contact with anyone displaying cold or flu symptoms and washing your hands often. As always, by traveling with Wilderness Travel, guests agree to be accountable for their own well-being. If you are worried about a fellow traveler's cold or flu-like symptoms, you may opt to wear a mask or distance yourself as needed. It's important to remember that there are inherent risks associated with travel and group settings.

These protocols will be reviewed and adjusted as guidance evolves.

STAYING HEALTHY

Drinking Water

Consider all tap water unsafe. Do not drink it or brush your teeth with it; use bottled water, available everywhere. Don't use ice in your drinks unless you are sure it was made with treated water. When in doubt, ask your Trip Leader for guidelines. Additionally, be aware of the possibility of dehydration, especially when gorilla tracking. You may want to bring re-hydration salts or Gatorade-type powdered drink mixes for long trekking days. Be sure to bring plenty of bottled water.

Bot Fly Bites

Bot flies bites are a rare occurrence for travelers in the tropics and rarely cause serious health problems but we want you to be aware of the possibility. If you have a mosquito bite that seems extremely itchy, is swollen or raised, looks like a spider bite or a boil, or has a small hole in the center, ask your local guide or Trip Leader how to treat it. If you have already returned home, see your doctor and be sure to tell him or her that you have been in a tropical area. Try to find a doctor who knows about tropical medicine, as few US doctors are knowledgeable about bot fly bites. In general, judicious use of mosquito repellent with DEET is the best way to avoid bites.

Helpful Information

RECOMMENDED READING



Elevate your travel experience by delving into this curated collection of books tailored to your upcoming adventure. They will not only entertain but also provide invaluable insights into the history, culture, cuisine, wildlife, mountain trails, or even folklore of the places you're about to explore. Discover the perfect companions for your journey ahead by [following the link](#) or scanning the QR code.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Camera Recommendations

With the many advances in digital technology, a simple compact digital camera or even your smartphone is capable of taking pictures suitable for the needs of most people. For higher quality images and the ability to use long lenses for closer wildlife pictures, a DSLR camera is well worthwhile, though heavier. Most digital cameras and phones have good video options, but you may want to consider a GoPro for a lightweight, waterproof option. Always practice ahead of time with new equipment and bring your manual with you. You may want to consider renting camera equipment for your trip from places such as [lensrentals.com](#). This is an especially good idea for renting large zoom lenses that you may need for just one trip. Adding their extra insurance fee to cover expensive equipment is recommended.

Camera Accessories

We recommend bringing at least two large capacity memory cards or a small digital storage unit (or tablet) to back up your photos, freeing space on your memory cards. Don't forget to bring a battery charger and a backup battery so one is always charged and ready to use. For trips where you may be away from power sources for multiple days, consider looking into a solar-powered battery charger or buying additional backup batteries, and check that you have the appropriate adapter for the electrical outlets in your destination.

Sharing Your Images

We would love for you to share photos from your trip, and with your permission, may even use your photos in our marketing materials or on our photo blog. We request that you send us a small sample of your best images. Please email your photos to wtphtoblog@gmail.com or tag us [@WildernessTravel](#) on social media.

Photography Etiquette

When taking pictures of local people, be aware of cultural considerations. Approaching people with a warm smile and using polite gestures or simple phrases to ask permission to photograph them usually works well. It is always recommended to engage people in conversation before asking to photograph them, but if people do not wish to have their photo taken, please honor their requests. We urge travelers to avoid giving money in exchange for photo opportunities, which makes it harder for future travelers to have a meaningful personal interaction with local people. Please always heed your Trip Leader's guidelines for what is appropriate.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tracking gorillas in their natural habitat is a thrilling adventure, and it's important to be well prepared. On the day of the tracking excursion, you will be assigned your own porter. You may hire an extra porter if you wish. Depending on where the gorilla family is located, your guide will work with the group's lead tracker to search for clues such as footprints, dung, chewed bamboo and celery stalks, and abandoned nests from the previous evening. If the gorillas you are tracking have wandered deep into the forest, it is possible that the trek to find them will take three or four hours (or sometimes even longer) in each direction. This may include trekking over difficult terrain including steep muddy slopes, stinging nettles, and some areas of elevated vines.

where your feet may not touch the ground. If you are having difficulty negotiating a steep or slippery portion of the trail, your porter will stay with you to assist, but the group will most likely continue forward. In the event you are unable to complete a tracking excursion to the gorillas, you may return to the base of the trail with your porter or be asked to remain in place with your porter while the group continues on, and rejoin the rest of the group on its way back to the base of the trail.

Your guide will allow a short time to rest for a snack, but please note that your guide will often hike at a steady pace to ensure that you will be able to reach the gorillas, spend a full hour with them, and make it back down the trail before dark. Upon locating a gorilla family, you will most likely smell them before you actually see them. When you reach the forward trackers, you will gather your cameras and leave your packs behind with the trackers. Your guide will move forward, making soft smacking and groaning sounds with his mouth to assure the group that friends are approaching. Although gorillas make very few vocalizations, this sound of reassurance is one that family members often use with each other.

Your group will be instructed to stay together and crouch down while observing the gorillas so the dominant male can see you at all times and the family does not feel threatened. If your trek to find the gorillas has not been unusually long, you are likely to visit them during their long midday rest and play period.

Please keep in mind that gorillas are shy, wild animals. At the start of the trekking day, there is no way of telling exactly where the habituated gorilla families are (even though trackers are very skilled at looking for signs of gorillas and their paths of travel). Because gorillas are wandering animals that favor areas of dense vegetation, clear viewing at close range cannot be guaranteed.

In order to ensure that you enjoy your visit with the gorillas to the fullest extent, it is a good idea to engage in an exercise program for at least several weeks or even months before your departure. The treks, which usually last between two and eight hours, including one hour spent with the gorillas, may cover more than four miles in distance and may occur in any kind of weather; rain may occur at a moment's notice. Please also note that the gorilla treks occur at altitudes of up to 9,000 feet above sea level and can be very physically strenuous. It can be very humid and the terrain is often steep, rough and, at times, slippery and muddy. The goal is to be able to walk up hill for several hours, so make sure your exercise regiment includes walking up inclines. In addition, strong hiking boots with good tread and ankle support are essential.

Packing List

ESSENTIALS

- Air tickets (or E-tickets)
- Passport
- One other picture ID, such as driver's license
- Expense money
- Reusable water bottle

LUGGAGE

Please limit your luggage to one soft-sided bag and one daypack. You must bring a daypack for gorilla tracking, as you will use it to carry your lunch and extra clothing in addition to your other items such as camera gear, binoculars, water bottle, and personal items needed during the day.

Please note that Rwanda has outlawed the use of plastic bags and is reducing the use of single-use plastics. **Please do not bring grocery style plastic bags, as they will be confiscated on arrival. Ziploc bags for personal use or to protect camera equipment are OK.**

CLOTHING

The climate in Parc des Volcans is typically damp, with daytime temperatures averaging 50°F.

During trek, most people wear waterproof hiking boots, waterproof pants and jacket, t-shirt, and gaiters. It is preferable that your daytime clothing be in neutral colors such as khaki, bush green, and darker colors to blend in with the surroundings. White and bright colors tend to scare away the animals.

This list is meant as a guideline only; we encourage you to pack as lightly as possible.

- Breathable rain jacket (such as Gore-Tex) with hood; ponchos not recommended
- Fleece jacket for cool evenings
- Light cotton or quick-drying synthetic pants
- Lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and t-shirts. Quickdrying fabrics are best.
- Sleepwear (or lightweight long underwear)
- Shade hat with wide brim, preferably with chin strap
- Hiking boots with ankle support and good traction. You will need these for gorilla tracking.
- Thick socks
- Leather or heavy canvas (gardening-style) gloves for moving through the vegetation and especially avoiding any contact with stinging nettles.
- Gaiters—either ankle- or calf-length. These protect your pant legs from moisture in the brushy undergrowth.
- Comfortable walking or running shoes for vehicle travel and touring
- Teva-type sandals or flip flops for wearing around the lodge
- Hiking socks. For gorilla tracking, please bring at least two pairs of socks that are long enough to tuck your pants inside (they keep the ants out!).
- Swimsuit
- City/hotel attire

EQUIPMENT

- Strong flashlight or headlamp, with spare batteries
- A small, lightweight, frameless, waterproof back/day pack
- Reusable water bottle
- A waterproof, squash-able hat
- Binoculars
- Camera, spare batteries, spare flash cards
- Field guides
- Good quality sunglasses with case
- Personal toiletries

PERSONAL FIRST AID

Trip members should bring a small kit for personal use. Your own experience will influence your choices.

- Sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher. We recommend mineral-based sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide because they do not contain harsh chemicals that are harmful to the environment. Brands such as Honest Company, Badger, and Alba Botanica are found in most sporting goods stores and drugstores.
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Aspirin, ibuprofen, or Tylenol, Tylenol PM for sleeping
- Insect repellent. Repellents with DEET are recommended. DEET content of about 30-35% is ideal (higher DEET content is not recommended). Wipe DEET off your hands before touching plastic surfaces (such as binoculars) because it can damage plastic.
- Blister kit. Look for the long-lasting gel-type bandages that you can apply directly on blisters, such as Band-Aid Advanced Healing Bandages or Curad Gel Multi-Day Bandages. “Liquid band-aids,” such as New-Skin, are useful because they dry rapidly to form a tough protective cover over a blister.
- Dramamine (for motion sickness) for long drives
- Anti-bacterial gel for hand washing
- Post-insect bite cream (antihistamine)
- Antihistamine such as Benadryl and cold remedy such as Sudafed
- Imodium for diarrhea. If you wish to bring an antibiotic for diarrhea prophylaxis, please consult your physician.
- Prescription medications properly labeled
- Spare contact lenses or spare prescription glasses

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Extra sweater or fleece if you really feel the cold
- Plug adapter kit for appliance use at hotels/device charging. Rwanda has 220-240 volt current; plugs usually have two or three round pins.
- Reading/writing material
- Bandana to protect neck from sun
- There is plenty of food on the trip, but for variety and snacks, feel free to bring a small supply of your own favorite snacks, such as raisins, hard candies,
- M&Ms, dried fruits, chocolate bars, granola bars, trail mix, power bars, etc.

GEAR STORE

To help you prepare for your next WT adventure, we've put together a great collection of top brands including Patagonia, Outdoor Research, Eagle Creek, and more at our WT Gear Store (wildernesstravel.newheadings.com).

Revised: May 13, 2024