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*Guest information*

EXPLORE THE WILDERNESS

# Explore the Wilderness

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## HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

Lying in the centre of the Albertine Rift in the western section of Africa's Rift Valley, Rwanda supports amazing diversity and endemism, from scenery and habitats to fauna and flora – conserved by several National Parks – including Volcanoes, Akagera, and Nyungwe National Parks. Aside from over a thousand plant species, 670 bird species and myriad reptiles and amphibians, Rwanda boasts some 151 mammal species, amongst which are 15 primates.

The heavy population pressure on natural resources in this densely-populated yet beautiful country means that ecotourism plays a critical role in the conservation of the remaining islands of central African rainforest biodiversity.



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## VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK

Volcanoes National Park is part of the Virunga Massif that straddles three countries – Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda – and home to six towering, extinct volcanoes that penetrate the clouds (Karisimbi, Bisoke, Muhabura, Gahinga, Sabyinyo and Mikeno). Its lower slopes are covered in bamboo forest, with a rich, otherworldly woodland of hagenia and hypericum trees, festooned with lichens and old man's beard on the midslopes. Above this is the alpine zone with its bizarre lobelia and senecio plants and seasonal snow on the top of Mount Karisimbi. Together with Uganda's Mgahinga National Park (3 800 hectares/9 390 acres), and the Democratic Republic of Congo's Virunga National Park (Mikeno Sector, 25 000 hectares/61 000 acres), Volcanoes National Park (16 000 hectares/40 000 acres) makes up a 44 800-hectare (110 000-acre) conservation area that is a World Heritage Site and home to some 480 mountain gorillas.

The park was gazetted in 1925 in order to help protect these rare apes and is Africa's oldest National Park. Dian Fossey made what was then known as the Parc National des Volcans her base in the 1970s and 1980s and her research changed the way this great ape species was viewed and protected. Volcanoes National Park is thus considered the best place in East Africa to track gorillas, thanks to its easy access to twelve habituated gorilla groups.

Aside from this great ape, other mammals that call the park home include golden monkey, black-fronted duiker, buffalo, elephant, tree hyrax and bushbuck. Some 178 bird species are found here too, including at least 13 endemic to the Virunga area such as the Rwenzori turaco, Rwenzori batis, Archer's robin-chat, red-faced woodland-warbler and Rwenzori apalis.

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