21 Day Gorillas & Kenyan Game Parks – Nairobi to Nairobi

Day 1: Nairobi to Nanyuki (L / D)

Leaving the hustle and bustle of Nairobi we head north, crossing the equator, before reaching the market town of Nanyuki. Founded in 1907 by English settlers, Nanyuki is home to the main base of Kenya's Air Force. It's popular amongst tourists because of its proximity to impressive Mount Kenya, Kenya's highest peak at 5199 m. It's also home to the Mount Kenya Safari Club, now a hotel, but in the 60's an exclusive club whose members included Winston Churchill, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope.

Day 2: Nanyuki to Samburu National Reserve (B / L / D)

Leaving this old frontier town, we head north-west through the Kikuyu area around Mt Kenya to the Samburu National Reserve. We'll encounter the Masai's distant relatives, the semi-nomadic proud Samburu, tending their cattle along the way. The Samburu National Reserve is a relatively small reserve at just 104 km2. It is a remote, hence unspoilt, reserve and attracts a wide range of animals because of the Ewaso Ng'iro River (brown water) that runs through it.

Day 3: Samburu National Reserve (B / L / D)

The Samburu National Reserve is made up of a mixture of scrub, desert and open Savannah plains interspersed with small rugged hills. It is home to most of the Big 5 (except the rhino, which has been decimated by poachers). What makes this reserve unique is its populations of Grevy's Zebra, Beisa Oryx, Reticulated Giraffe and Somali Ostrich and we'll spend the day searching for these unique animals.

Day 4: Samburu National Reserve to Nakuru (B / L / D)

Leaving the unique Samburu National Reserve, we head west towards the Great Rift Valley and the 4th largest town in Kenya and the capital of the Rift Valley Province, Nakuru. We overnight here before entering Lake Nakuru National Park tomorrow.

Day 5: Lake Nakuru National Park (B / L / D)

Today we head into Lake Nakuru National Park, famous for the thousands of lesser and greater flamingos that flock to this soda lake's edge. The numbers vary depending on the water level, and when it's low, the lake almost turns pink. A truly spectacular sight! The park was established as a sanctuary for black and white rhino, which are often seen. We spend the day searching for these pre-historic looking beasts as well as the elusive leopard, encountering buffalo, giraffe, various antelope and the occasional hippo along the way.

Day 6: Nakuru to Kampala (B / L /D)

Today, we cross the border into Uganda and travel via the lakeside town of Jinja (the Source of the Nile) before reaching Kampala, Uganda's capital, for an overnight stay. Uganda is a small country of striking physical beauty. Its landscapes vary from the fertile green areas around the northern shores of Lake Victoria to the snow-covered Ruwenzori Mountains in the west and the semi-desert parts of the north facing the border of Sudan.

Days 7 & 8: Kampala to Kisoro (B / L /D)

After an early morning departure from Kampala we drive west into the depths of Uganda to our base in Kisoro.

Kisoro is the base from which the optional Gorilla trek takes place. Dependant on where trekking permits are available, we trek in the Magahinga or Bwindi National Parks in Uganda, the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the Ruhengeri National Park in Rwanda. The prices of trekking permits fluctuate and may change without prior notice - currently they are priced between US$375 and US$500 depending on where we trek. There is a local transport & handling fee of US$65 to US$70 per person (this covers the return transfer and the Wildlife Authority's booking fee). For trekking in the DRC or Rwanda, we will also have to purchase an additional visa to enter either country, as well as renewing our Ugandan visa upon re-entry. Please budget accordingly.

Trekking Procedures: The mountain gorilla (Gorilla Gorilla Berengei), of which there are still only about 700 remaining, are one of our closest living relatives. A visit to these gentle giants in their natural environment is a unique and wonderful experience - one you'll never forget. The park rangers monitor the gorillas on a daily basis and have a fairly good idea of where they are. However, they are free roaming animals, and their sighting cannot be guaranteed. As the gorillas share much of our DNA, anyone with even the slightest cold or transferable illness will not be permitted to trek. Trekking is also only open to people over 16 years old.

We depart from our camp in the early morning and after border formalities are transferred to a ranger's station where the trek commences. Your rangers will lead you through the cultivated lands and then into the dense rain forest and on to a gorilla family. Trekking can take anywhere from 45 minutes to 8 hours and it can be quite strenuous, so a reasonable level of fitness is required. To ensure the gorillas do not get too used to the presence of humans and because they share many of our genes (and therefore able to catch our diseases), the maximum time permitted to spend with them is 1 hour. You will have plenty of time to watch their activity and to take photographs. The rangers will be able to provide you with a background to the family you are visiting. Once your hour is up, you trek back out of the rain forest to your meeting point.

You needn't feel like you're exploiting these animals. The ever-growing number of tourists trekking them each day play a vital role in their survival. For years they have been ruthlessly hunted for their hands and heads, which have been sold as ashtrays and lampshades! In addition, large numbers have been killed whilst trying to stop poachers stealing the babies for sale to zoos, where they have never lived long. 100% of the gorilla permit cost is used to by the parks authorities to finance patrols that are instrumental in protecting the gorillas from poachers and their lethal snares and on promoting these wonderful animals.

Day 9: Kisoro to Lake Bunyoni (B / L /D)

A short drive through arguably some of the most picturesque scenery in Africa brings us to Lake Bunyoni. Lake Bunyoni is the deepest Crater Lake in Africa and is home to a large number of bird and fish species as well as otters.

Days 10 & 11: Lake Bunyoni (B / L /D)

The next two days are spent at leisure to enjoy the beauty of Lake Bunyoni. There are the options to swim, canoe, hike, visit the local villages or just sit back, relax and enjoy the tranquil surrounds. Well deserved rest days!

Day 12: Lake Bunyoni to Kampala (B / L /D)

After enjoying the peaceful surrounds of Lake Bunyoni we drive to Kampala for the next two nights stay, and perhaps the chance to sample the nightlife. Today we will cross the equator for the second time and there will be ample opportunity for photos at the Equator crossing.

Day 13: Kampala (B / L /D)

Today is spent at leisure in Uganda's capital and can be spent exploring the local markets and museums, or taking a trip to the nearby Ngamba chimpanzee sanctuary. The political instability that haunted Uganda over a period of years has had the positive effect of leaving the country free of the overcommercialism so common in other parts of Africa. The current administration under President Museveni has devoted considerable effort and funds to regain Uganda's former glory as one of Africa's most prosperous and, from a tourist's point of view, one of the most appealing and interesting countries to visit.

Days 14 & 15: Kampala to Jinja (B / L /D)

After a short drive to the Lakeside town of Jinja, you have the option over the next day and a half to raft the Nile, visit the local community project or take part in a quad bike trip along the riverbank. Our overnight camp is right on the edge of the Nile River where there is an abundance of resident bird life & some truly amazing photo opportunities from right outside your tent!

Day 16: Jinja to Nakuru (B / L /D)

Today will be a full day driving back to Kenya with an overnight at a campsite in Nakuru.

Day 17: Nakuru to Lake Naivasha (B / L /D)

This morning we have the option to take a game drive in the Lake Nakuru National Park or head into Nakuru town. In the afternoon, we drive to Lake Naivasha where we make camp in peaceful surroundings beside the lake.

Day 18: Lake Naivasha (B / L /D)

Moving south-east, we head to Lake Naivasha, home to a multitude of bird life, the most magnificent being the African Fish Eagle with his regal cry. At 1880 m, this is the highest of the Rift Valley lakes. Time permitting; we spend the afternoon enjoying optional excursions like Elsamere (former home to Joy & George Adamson of Born Free fame), a boat ride to the Crescent Island Game Sanctuary or a bike ride around Hell's Gate National Park.

Day 19: Lake Naivasha to Masai Mara (B / L /D)

We depart from Lake Naivasha and enter Masai land where these habitual pastoralists are often seen tending their cattle from the side of the road. We pass through the town of Narok, before arriving at our campsite, Acacia Camp. Acacia Camp looks on to the Meguarra hills and the stream that meanders by on the bottom end forms a natural border to the Masai Mara National Reserve.

Day 20: Masai Mara Game Reserve (B / L /D)

We spend the day driving through nature as it was intended to be - huge plains, rolling hills and an abundance of game matched nowhere else on earth. We keep an eye open for the Big 5 - elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion & leopard. If travelling between July and October, we may get to witness the impressive herds of over 1 million wildebeest, zebra and Thomson's gazelle in their Annual Migration. Sitting around the camp fire, watching the sun set is the perfect way to finish a day's game viewing in this 'Garden of Eden'.

Day 21: Masai Mara to Nairobi (B)

After breakfast, we leave the Masai Mara and return to Nairobi, arriving in the late afternoon. On arrival we exchange addresses and part ways, having just experienced an overland tour of a lifetime!

Optional excursions

Lake Naivasha, Crescent Island Sanctuary - US$ 25
Lake Naivasha, Elsamere High Tea - US$ 10
Jinja, Softpower Community Project - US$ 25
Jinja, White Water Rafting on the Nile - US$ 95
Kampala, Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary - US$ 50
Uganda, Rwanda or DRC, Gorilla Trek - US$375 to US$500
Masai Mara, Masai Village Cultural Visit - US$ 5

(All prices are approximate and are subject to change)