

MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park is the smallest gorilla national park in the country (about 33.7 km) is very important, as it is one of the only two parks in Uganda that offer habitat for the endangered Mountain gorilla. (Gorilla safaris in Uganda Destination)

It is situated in Kisoro in south western Uganda about 540 km from Kampala (Uganda's capital city) .

An 8 hours drive via Kabale. For those without private transport, there are daily bus transport services, which set off at 0700 hours. Once in Kisoro town, you hike (if you are flexible) or take a special hire vehicle to the park gate. It is also possible to fly to Kisoro. Flights can be arranged with Eagle Air, which has flights on Mondays and Fridays from Entebbe to Kisoro.

Mgahinga National Park was gazetted in 1991 and is a part of the great Virunga Conservation Area, which is 434 km. It adjoins Rwanda's Volcano and the Democratic Republic of Congo's Virunga National Parks. Mgahinga Gorilla National Park experiences two wet rainy seasons; February - May and September- December of each year. The maximum amount of rainfall in a year is 250mm (October) and Minimum is 10mm (July).

THE PEOPLE

Kisoro District is heavily populated with the Bafumbira who lead a simple life-style mainly as cultivators. These are the major ethnic group. The Batwa (Pygmies) who once lived in caves and fed on wildlife is the minority group.

The park has Afro-montane vegetation and a cool climate. The abundant type of Vegetation is the bamboo (60 %), which is a delicacy to the Mountain gorilla; other types of flora include the Lobelia etc.

Animals found in the park include the Mountain gorilla, buffalo, elephants, bushbucks, the threatened golden monkeys and many others.

GORILLA TRACKING

This is the most exhilarating and notable adventure, which might take one through a thick jungle. Tourist group (The Nyakagezi Group) consists of 9 members; 2 silverbacks, 3 adult females, 2 juveniles and infants.

Tracking can take three to eight hours.

BIRD WATCHING

Examples of bird species include Rwenzori turaco, Fiscal shrike, crowned hornbill, Black kite, Augur Buzzards, Crowned Crane. Birding along the edge of the park is now available on request, the guides are happy to take you out from 5-6 p.m. If you book by 10am that morning. A stroll along the Buffalo wall towards Congo takes you through a wetland area where Ibis, Whydah, Speckled Mouse bird, and Fire Finch are found, Stone chat, Grey-Capped Warbler, Waxbills and Yellow-Vented Bulbul are always seen around the campground. Ask your guide where the best spots are. Feel free to take your time and go at your own pace .Do not forget your Binoculars!

VOLCANO CLIMBING

Mgahinga National Park offers three extinct volcanoes for physically fit hikers although they do not require special Mountaineering gears.

MT. MGAHINGA [3474M]

Mount Mgahinga is quite bigger than the average 'Mgahinga' but sitting next to Mount Muhavura does make it look small. On your way to the Park, look out for small piles of stones in the garden fields. The local people call such a pile a 'Mgahinga'. A hike, who takes you about, six hours round trip, goes through a good example of a pure Bamboo forest. Mgahinga once had a Crater Lake on top but time has changed it into a Lush swamp. Distance to the swamp is 8 km.

MT SABINYO [3669M]

Like an old man, time has eroded Mt. Sabyinyo's crown. This volcano offers 3 challenging peaks to climb. A climb up the mountain takes one up a ridge along the eastern side of the climb to peak one. If you are to continue, the climb to peak eleven involves walking a ridge with breath-taking drops into gorges of Rwanda and Uganda. Finally, the hike up to the peak 111 is steep with several ladders and mush scrambling. You are guaranteed to get your hands dirty en-route to peak 11! Once on top, you will be in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda at the same time. The journey takes about eight hours round trip to cover the 14 km stretch.

MT MUHAVURA [4127 M]

Seen from all over Kisoro, this volcano acts as a guide. The typical cone-shaped Mountain provides some of the best views in the country. Much of the climb passes a rocky surface covered by grasses and small shrubs. Once at the top, hikers are rewarded with the view of the other Virunga volcanoes, Lake Edward in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Bwindi and the peaks of Rwenzori Mountain. The hike takes approximately 8 hours

round trip covering 12 km. You are advised to camp at the Muhavura base camp the night before the site has no facilities so you need a tent, water, food and sleeping gear.

CAVE EXPLORATION

The distance to the cave entrance from the park Headquarters is 3 km long and it takes about 4 hours.

This is one of the caves where once the crafty Batwa (who were warriors) lived and fought their neighbours. Your guide will show you how the Batwa lived and fought out of the cave. The cave is 342m in length and 14m deep, and is now inhabited only by bats.

VIEWING PLATFORM

This is about 800 metres from the Park gate. Once on top, you will have good view of the park and the surrounding areas. A Guide is not necessary and the activity is free. Display panels at the hill point will give some information about what you can see.

ACCOMMODATION

Kisoro offers a wide range of accommodation facilities ranging from the basic Campsites to the luxurious full board hotels, these include; Traveller's Rest Camp, Sky Blue, Mt. Mgahinga Rest Camp, Virunga Hotel, Mgahinga Safari Lodge, Rugigana Camp Site, Mubano Hotel among others.

At the park gate, there is a community Camp ground with ample space for ' Do it you Self-Camping, and Mount Mgahinga Rest Camp.

The choice is yours!

GORILLA TRACKING REGULATIONS

For Conservation reasons, visits to the gorillas are tightly controlled. The following rules apply and must be strictly adhered to:

1. No one with a communicable disease (eg. Flu, diarrhoea) is allowed to enter the park.
1. Stay together in a tight group while with the gorillas, don't surround them.
2. Don't get closer than 5 metres (15 feet) to the gorillas.
3. Don't use camera flashes while photographing.
4. Don't eat or smoke when with the gorillas or within distance of 200 metres from the gorillas.
5. Bury all human faeces a minimum of one foot deep and ensure that the hole is properly covered.
6. Don't leave litter. All litter must be carried out of the park and disposed of properly.
7. No person under 15 years is allowed to track gorillas.
8. Don't make loud noise or move suddenly.
9. You are allowed a maximum of 1 hour with gorillas.
10. Don't spit on vegetation or soil while in the park. Use your hankie or other garment