

Gorilla tracking in Rwanda is a life changer



A visit with endangered silverback mountain gorillas at Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. Photo by Adrienne Jordan [more >](#)

By Adrienne Jordan -- Thursday, October 23, 2014

Many people think of mountain gorillas as being untouchable or something that should provoke a fight or flight response if encountered in the wild. They are anything but.

In [Rwanda](#), people treasure a [visit](#) with the endangered silverback mountain gorillas, which are surprisingly playful and relaxed in the presence of humans.

Praveen Moman, owner of the [Volcanoes Safaris](#) tour [company](#), is celebrating the 10-year anniversary of [Rwanda's](#) Virunga eco-luxury lodge. Mr. Moman blends luxury accommodations, eco-tourism and community service in his [Volcanoes Safaris Co.](#) "You can't just build luxury, you have to connect with the community, however big or small," he says.

Guests to the lodge [sign up for](#) a two-hour hike for a life-changing encounter with a gorilla family in the Volcanoes National Park. A percentage of proceeds from [Volcanoes Safaris](#) tourism dollars is allocated toward community outreach in the surrounding villages, which include beehive initiatives, agricultural support and education.

[Rwanda](#) is called "the land of a thousand hills," a green undulating landscape of crops, gardens and tea plantations. The country is also home to a third of the world's remaining mountain gorillas, which attracts [Rwanda's](#) largest [tourism](#) impact.

Hikes into the Volcanoes National Park starts with a brief orientation, where groups of eight are guided up the volcano with the assistance of a tracker, guide and porter. [Depending on](#) where the group starts their hike, trekkers may encounter fields of pyrenium crops, which are used by East Africans as a natural insecticide. During the hike (which could be muddy), the guide describes the surrounding flora, and how certain species are used as medicines by the indigenous Batwa tribes.

Mountain gorilla families can include between 10 and 30 members, with a fully grown male silverback at the head of the [family](#). Because the gorilla families constantly move around the forest searching for food, the hike could take from one and two hours, depending on their current location in the forest. When the magical moment arrives of finally encountering the family, the primates will be grooming, playing and eating, as if they never noticed the arrival of curious human onlookers. The guides use certain vocalizations around the gorillas that researchers like the late primatologist Dian Fossey have found to convey a message of peace.

Appeased by the lack of threat, the gorillas will come out from their perches and rub past you as they play or look for delicious stalks of bamboo or one of the 142 varieties of plants represented in the silverback's diet, including celery, nettles, thistles, succulent herbs, and wild berries.

Playful baby gorillas roll past [visitors](#) or even touch pants legs if they get close enough. One of the most interesting parts of watching the gorillas in their natural habitat will be witnessing their human-like emotions and mannerisms.

If you are an animal lover or simply enjoy adventure [travel](#), gorilla tracking will prove to be a most memorable experience. Gorilla tracking is recommended for people ages 15 and older. [Volcanoes Safaris](#) is the premier company for gorilla tracking expeditions, with more than 15 years as award-winning eco-tourism.