



Gorilla Fact Sheet

RWANDA





Gorillas

AN INTRODUCTION

Gorillas (Gorilla) are the largest of the great apes, a family group known as Pongidea which includes chimpanzees (Pan) and orang-utans (Pongo). These species are our closest mammal relatives and are grouped with us into the super family Hominoidea.

It is now almost universally accepted that chimpanzees are our closest living relative; next in line are the gorillas whilst orang-utans are only remotely related to both other species and us. For this very reason the study of both chimpanzees and gorillas has been seen as a way to understand and gain an insight into ourselves and our own evolution.

The mountain gorillas of Central Africa (Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC) are one of the resounding success stories of tourism and conservation working hand in hand. Over ten years ago the mountain gorilla population had decreased to only 620 individuals, whereas now, due to concerted efforts and well-structured eco-tourism models, the mountain gorilla populations have grown to over 1063 individuals.



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There is more meaning in exchanging glances with a gorilla than with any other animal I know.

- David Attenborough

THE GORILLA FAMILY

Traditionally, all gorillas were classified as one species, Gorilla gorilla, with three subspecies. A few years ago, experts decided to separate this classification into two species: eastern and western gorillas and they now recognize four subspecies.

Western Gorillas

The nose of the western gorillas is much broader than in the

eastern populations. They have a sleeker coat and this has grey or brownish tinge in both males and females, with their head hair often having red tones. The crest and nape hair of adult males has a striking chestnut colour. The western adult male's saddle of silvery/white hair often extends to its hips and upper thighs and grades more into their body hair.

Eastern Gorillas

The eastern species is usually deep black (apart from the silvery back of the males) with longer hair. This is particularly so of the mountain gorillas of the Virungas which tend to have shorter arms and very long, silky hair, mainly on the arms. Adult male eastern gorillas have a more developed sagittal crest suggesting a more powerful jaw musculature.

VITAL STATISTICS

Estimated Life Span

No exact data on the maximum age of free-ranging gorillas is available, as animals in the wild have only been observed since 1967. On average they probably reach 40-45 years. The oldest gorilla to have lived in a zoo died at 55 years.

Height

Males: 1.4 - 1.85m (55-73 inches)
Females: up to 1.5, (60 inches)

Weight

Males: 140-200 kgs (300-440 lbs)
Females: 70-100 kgs (150-250 lbs)



HABITS & DAILY ACTIVITY

The Primate Land Lubber - Gorillas are the most terrestrial of all the great apes spending approximately 90% of their time on the ground, although this does depend on the species. Western gorillas are known to be more inclined to climb trees than their eastern counter parts, particularly the mountain gorilla (due to their size, weight and diet). From field studies gorillas have been observed to spend between 5-20% of the day in trees, whereas chimpanzees spend 47-61% of the day above the ground and orang-utans almost 100%. Nevertheless, gorillas do like to climb in order to play or to harvest fruit.

All gorillas are primarily vegetarians, although they will eat some insects (termites) as well mineral soil. Like humans, gorillas have a single non-fermenting stomach which is less efficient at digesting vegetation than the multi-chambered stomachs of colobus monkeys and hoofed ruminants (hence they have a rather bulbous paunch and can be conspicuously gaseous!).

Consequently gorillas are fairly sedentary in comparison to other primates and spend much of their day light hours feeding or at rest.

Mountain gorillas are said to spend approximately 30% of their time feeding, 30% of their time moving and foraging and the remaining 40% of their time resting. Social contacts occur mainly during their rest periods. Therefore the midday rest period is very important for the social life of the group, as this is the time when the animals interact with their companions and when the young gorillas can play without being interrupted.

It's usually the silverback who dictates the daily routine of his family choosing foraging routes, places to feed and in the late afternoon he will typically move again to find a suitable place to spend the night. Each gorilla will make their own nest every night, except for infants who will sleep with their mothers until they are completely weaned between the age of 3-4 years, or when their

mother has a new infant.

Forest Nomads or Homemakers? - As mentioned already gorillas are considered relatively sedentary and live in groups, under the ever watchful eye of an indomitable adult silverback male. Gorilla group sizes normally range between 7 and 16 individuals, most being typically between 8 and 11.

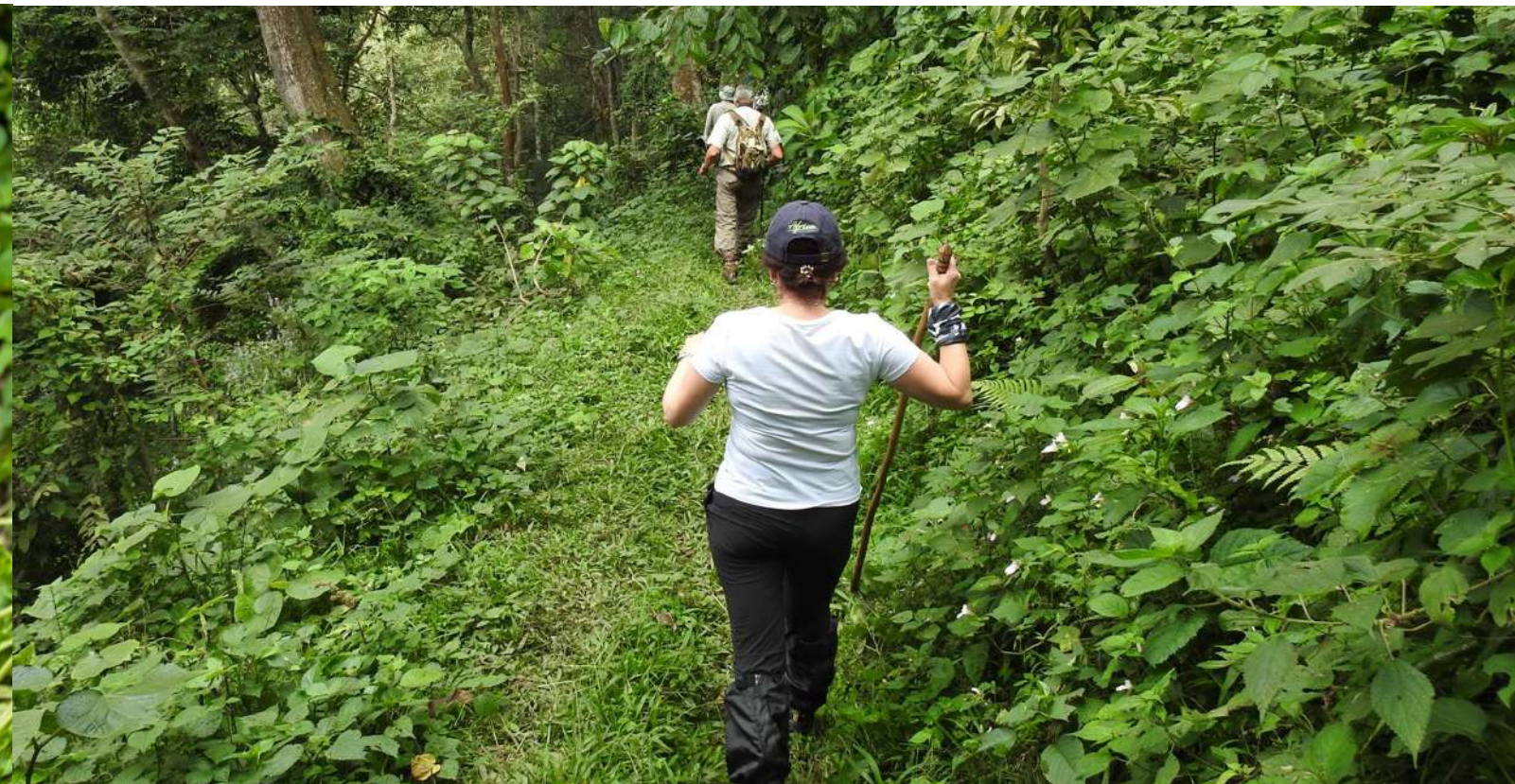
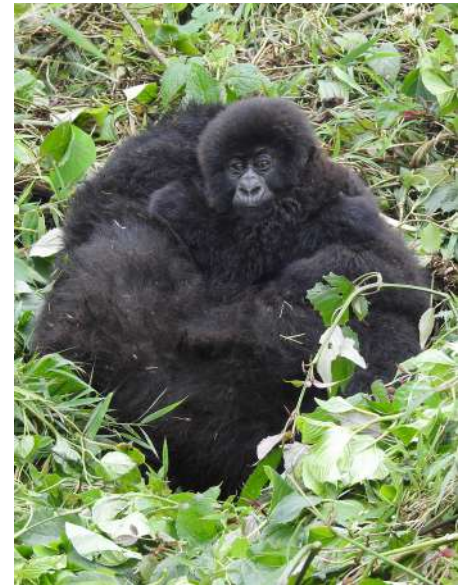


On the whole gorilla groups consist of one dominant adult male (the silverback), several females (3 or 4) and their offspring (four or five). This simple harem-like arrangement describes almost all western gorilla groups, about 90% of eastern lowland gorilla groups and 60% of mountain gorilla groups. The balance is made up of all-male groups and multiple-male groups (usually related). Gorilla groups tend to have cordial but not necessarily strong social bonds, except those between mothers and infants (particularly when compared to chimpanzees).

Gorillas have no mating season. Mating and births occur throughout the year. Female gorillas have a hormone cycle (similar to humans), which is usually 26-32 days long. They will come into season after raising their last youngster which can be between 3-6 years (4 years on average) but won't usually have their first baby until 10 years old. The gestation period is 8.5 months. In general,

gorilla babies are nursed for at least 2 years. At 4-6 months they start to put plant parts into their mouth to bite on them and they can start to walk quadrupedally at this age as well. At 8 months they regularly ingest solid food. At approximately 3 years they start to become independent because their mother gives birth to the next baby. In spite of this, mother and older offspring maintain a strong relationship.

The home ranges of various gorilla groups and of lone silverback males tend to overlap, so encounters are frequent. Lone males often make a special effort to seek out harem groups, as this is their only chance to gain females. The leaders of stable harem groups avoid contact with other adult males in order to avoid losing females. If they detect a competitor, they try to drive him away by displaying with vocalisations and chest-beats or by attacking the intruder which can be quite violent.



Overview

GORILLA TREKKING & PERMITS

1. Only a specific number of gorilla trekking permits are available each day and therefore they must be booked well in advance. (Gorilla trekking permits are now selling well over a year in advance!).
2. Please ensure that you take the appropriate clothing and equipment for trekking the gorillas. Please refer to our packing list below.
3. Gorilla trekking is limited to people aged 15 years or above and all trekkers must be in good health; please note that if you are ill you may be forbidden to trek the gorillas. This is due to illnesses being passed directly from humans to gorillas.
4. Trekking is not easy; however it is possible by most people in good health and reasonable fitness.
5. A percentage of each permit goes back into the local community and park infrastructure.
6. Trekking of gorillas can be denied at short notice due to security in the area or as a result of park authority regulations.
7. You are trekking wild animals and therefore the purchase of a gorilla permit does not guarantee seeing them. Please obey your guide at all times, they know what to do and not to do around these animals and it is for your safety and security that they are there. Please keep a minimum distance of 7 metres at all times from the gorillas.
8. Flash photography is not allowed. Professional filmmakers must purchase the relevant permits however personal video recorders are permitted.
9. You will be designated your guide at the park office. Your guide will explain the rules as to how to behave when around the gorillas.



Gorilla trekking

RULES OF CONDUCT & REGULATIONS

It is important that all gorilla trekking participants familiarise themselves with the following regulations and rules of conduct:

1. You MUST, at all times, follow the instructions of your guide. He is in contact with the gorillas every day and understands them well. Always remain in a quiet, compact group behind the guide, who will attempt to position you in such a way that the dominant male of the group can see you at all times. Please try to keep a minimum distance of 7 metres at all times from the gorillas.
2. If the dominant male gorilla (usually a silverback) approaches very closely, or if he charges, it is very important that you do not move backwards. Remain exactly where you are, look downward, and adopt a submissive, crouched posture.
3. NEVER make any sudden moves or loud noises in the presence of the gorillas.
4. If a young gorilla approaches, NEVER under ANY circumstances make any move to touch it. Your guide, in certain instances, may take steps to discourage a youngster from trying to touch you, as this could create a threatening situation with the dominant male.
5. If a gorilla stares at you, look away or down.
6. Avoid taking an excessive number of photographs, and NEVER use a flash when photographing the gorillas.
7. Only visitors in good health AT THE TIME OF TREKKING will be permitted to track gorillas, as gorillas are susceptible to colds and other respiratory diseases transmitted by humans.
8. All visitors must be physically fit and capable of enduring a walk of several hours in difficult terrain.
9. Each gorilla family may be visited only once each day, during the morning hours.
10. At this time, all gorilla visits are limited to a maximum of eight (8) persons per gorilla family for a maximum length of one (1) hour. Due to the already-limited number of persons allowed to visit the gorillas each day, it is not possible to do gorilla trekking on a private basis.
11. Smoking, eating, and/or drinking are not permitted within 200 meters of a gorilla family. Please avoid smoking at any time if possible.
12. It is prohibited to destroy any vegetation unnecessarily and to make open fires in the national parks and reserves. The flora and fauna of national parks and reserves are strictly protected.
13. All visitors must carry their own litter with them out of the park or reserve, leaving NOTHING behind.
14. Children under the age of fifteen (15) cannot be accepted on gorilla trekking excursions.



Detailed Gorilla

TREKKING INFORMATION

1. Gorilla groups tend to move around a lot and their home ranges often overlap. For this reason, one group cannot be said to be easier to track than another. For up to five years each, these groups have undergone an extremely delicate process that has gradually made them used to the presence of humans, and allowed a few privileged visitors to interact with them briefly in the wild. The gorillas are by no means tame; they are completely wild animals which tolerate human presence for an hour a day at most.
2. Experienced guides will accompany you on your trekking, many of who have been involved in the habituation process themselves. These guides will brief you in detail on your arrival on the various aspects of 'gorilla etiquette', but the information contained in this set of guidelines is to help you arrive for your trek well prepared and ready to enjoy this unique opportunity to the full.
3. Visitors may track for as many days as they like, on purchase of the required number of gorilla permits. The permits are in extremely short supply, and are often booked as much as 18 months in advance. Only persons over the age of 15 are allowed to track the gorillas. Gorilla trekking is a year-round activity, with no season as such. The rainforest is moist, and it rains very often, even in the dry season. Trekking commences every morning from the park headquarters from between 07h30 – 08h30 (your guide will tell you the exact time). There is a daily maximum of 8 visitors to each gorilla group, and each group is accompanied by a guide and by porters who will carry your day-pack for you.
4. The gorillas can cover relatively large distances and they are never constantly in one area. The guides will use their knowledge of the gorillas' habits and information from the previous day to locate the group's whereabouts. Because of this, the time taken to track the gorillas varies enormously, from as little as half an hour to as much as 9 hours before returning to camp. The terrain is extremely difficult, which steep slopes (often steeper than a flight of stairs) covered in dense vegetation that gives the park its name. In addition, the altitude of 1,800 metres and more means participants do need to be physically fit to enjoy the trek.
5. Once the gorillas are located, your group will be allowed a maximum of one hour with them. After this, you will return to the park headquarters and your lodge.

Illness

Don't try to track the gorillas if you know you have an illness that is contagious. You may pass the disease on to the gorillas with disastrous results. If you suspect that you have such an illness, report it to your guide. If you do not disclose

your illness, and the park guides detect it, you will be barred from trekking, and your permit price will not be refunded. Illnesses in this case include colds, coughs, diarrhoea and influenza.



What to expect

AND TREKKING CONDITIONS

- These differ greatly according to the location of the gorillas, so the exact level of difficulty for a specific trek is impossible to define in advance. On an excursion, it is entirely possible that you will find the gorillas quite quickly and be back at your hotel for lunch. It is also entirely possible that you will have to hike three or four hours (or sometimes even longer) each way and will make it back to your hotel just before dark. Because it is impossible to predict the length and difficulty of any single trekking excursion, this program should not be attempted by anyone who is not in reasonable physical condition.
- Trekking is likely to involve scrambling through, over, and under dense undergrowth with nettles, barbed vines, and bamboo thickets. Correct footwear and clothing are essential. It is recommended that you build up the strength and endurance of your leg muscles by walking, stair climbing, bicycling, knee bends, and similar exercises before you leave home.
- Please Note: Travellers with physical disabilities and those who require frequent or ongoing medical attention should advise Your Perfect Africa of their health situation at the time of booking (or at the time such a situation occurs should this be after the reservation is made).
- Each traveller can opt to take his or her own porter for the duration of a trekking excursion.
- Taking a porter is highly recommended and a fee of USD 10 per person is the standard fee.
- Please note that your porter can only carry one (1) bag, and any additional items you want to bring must be carried by you. Because of the potential difficulty of any trek, it is strongly suggested that you take only one (1) bag (to be carried by your porter).
- As you set off from the starting point, the trackers will first lead you to the spot where the gorilla family was seen the previous day and look for clues as to the direction the group may have travelled since it was last observed. Your group's lead tracker will have his "own" gorilla family, which he visits each day and whose home range and travel routes are familiar to him.
- All trackers are experienced in looking for signs of the gorillas, such as footprints, dung, chewed bamboo and celery stalks, and abandoned nests from the previous evening. Gorillas soil their nests and then abandon them to build new ones each night, and trackers are able to tell the age of the nests as well as which group made them. On days of heavy rain, it is more difficult to distinguish signs of the gorillas and the age of nests.
- Gorillas do not live in the most easily accessible terrain, and some of it is virtually impenetrable. They prefer secondary growth vegetation with plenty of food plants near the ground and think nothing of climbing extremely steep slopes to get it. Unfortunately, this means that trekking gorillas can be difficult for humans. If the gorillas you are trekking have wandered deep into the forest, it is entirely possible that the trek to find them will take three or four hours (or sometimes even longer) in each direction. Additionally, you may have to overcome mud, stinging nettles, and some areas of elevated vines where your feet may not touch the ground. The trek can be difficult in both directions (out to the gorillas and back to the starting point).
- Trackers generally do allow time to stop and rest along the trail. However, they tend to hike at a steady, somewhat upbeat pace throughout the excursion, for they must be mindful of the time 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. If you occasionally lag behind the group to take photos or 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.
- You will probably smell the gorillas before you actually see them. When you reach them, the tracker 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.



- 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. At this time of day, the dominant male (usually a silverback) generally lounges on the ground or against a tree while youngsters roll in the vegetation and climb on trees, vines, and each other. Females nurse and play with their infants. Occasionally, a curious youngster may try to approach you or someone in your group. Though it is tempting to touch, this is STRICTLY forbidden. Your trekking group will be instructed to stay together, a minimum of 7 metres away, and crouch down while observing the gorillas so that the dominant male can see you at all times and the family does not feel threatened, surrounded, or overwhelmed. Never stare directly into the eyes of a gorilla, for a fixed stare is as aggressive to them as it is to most humans. Although you may find a gorilla looking directly at you, you should maintain a subservient stance and look at it sideways or from a lower height.
- Sometimes, as a release of tension or as a display to the rest of the group, a male gorilla may charge and beat his chest, tearing up vegetation and hurling his tremendous frame directly at your trekking group. Despite the temptation to run, you must stand your ground, maintain a subordinate, crouching position, and do your best not to flinch – for the gorilla will stop before actually reaching you and calmly return to his previous location, glancing back at you with smug satisfaction. Such displays may turn savage when used between males of different

gorilla families but are simply a bluff when used with human observers on trekking excursions to habituated gorilla groups.

- Your trekking group will spend up to one (1) hour with the gorillas on each trekking excursion. This time limit is carefully observed and protects the gorillas from undue stress. If your group were to stay longer than this, the gorillas would probably end the visit themselves -- by simply leaving. Although they are getting used to being visited regularly and are curious about their human visitors, they are accustomed to one-hour visits; and their intensely shy and private nature will reassert itself in the end.
- In the event a gorilla trekking participant is unable to complete a trekking excursion to the gorillas, he or she will either be allowed to immediately return to the base of the trail with a porter OR the participant will be asked to remain in place with a porter while the group continues its trek of the gorillas, rejoining the rest of the group on its way back to the base of the trail.
- 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).

The gorilla doctors

For those looking for a bit more 'behind the scenes' action than just gorilla trekking, we also organise a visit with the Gorilla Doctors to gain an insight into the daily lives of the gorillas. At a cost of USD\$500 for your party, you have a chance to sit down and interact with the gorilla doctors who are out in the

park most days clearing snares, administering medicine to the gorillas and monitoring their welfare. Covering Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC, the gorilla doctors offer an insightful presentation on the work they undertake and the threats that face them on a daily basis.

Gratuity guidelines

- Tipping is not customary in most places in Rwanda, with the exception of some higher-end restaurants in town where 10% of the final bill is standard. If you are doing a gorilla or chimp trek, tipping is not compulsory but it will be greatly appreciated.
- Bear in mind that some Guides, Porters and Trackers are former poachers who now rely on tourists and travellers to make a living. Your generosity helps them see the value of keeping gorillas and chimps alive.
- It is worth hiring a Porter to help you during the trek: he or she can assist you over tricky parts of the hike, offer support and carry your daypack if you find yourself fatigued on the hike back. Trekking Porters charge a fee of USD 10 per person.
- Tipping is entirely up to the client and his appreciation of good service. It is definitely not compulsory. Please see below a guideline.
- Gorilla / Chimp Guide - USD 10 per guest per trek
- Gorilla / Chimp Tracker - USD 5 per guest per trek
- Trekking Porters charge a fee of USD 10 per person
- Driver / Guide – USD 10 per guest per day
- Waiter at a Lodge / Hotel – USD 5 per guest per night or 10% of your bill
- General staff gratuity pool – USD 10 per guest per night
- Porters – USD 0.50 per bag (half a Dollar)
- If you have a Specialist Guide who accompanies you all the way, this could increase to USD 20 per guest per day.
- Waiters – for drinks waiters, normally we recommend 10% of consumption.

Remember this is only a guideline and it entirely depends on the service and the client's wishes.

For more information please call us on +27 (0)10 476 0330 or visit our website yourperfectafrica.com

