



TRIP REVIEW UGANDA, RWANDA & BURUNDI

By Kaylee Dall (August 2019)

Our first day in Uganda, we had an amazing game drive where we instantly saw animals. Throughout the entire drive, I think we saw 50 giraffes alone. We also saw lions in the trees off in the distance with the pride lurking below, water buffalo splashing in a shallow watering hole, and elephants munching on grass. The whole experience was unbelievable. Our guides were constantly spotting and pointing things out. In the afternoon, we had a boat cruise on the Nile to the fastest falls in the world, Murchison Falls. The hippos littered the river and elephants splashed on the shore. At the end, we got charged by a hippo who thought we got too close, though he quickly realized our boat was too big.



The following day we started at the top of the falls, filled with fury and thunder. It was like watching the clouds fall before it rains. The guides said you have to see the top of the falls or your trip to Murchison Falls would be incomplete - and they were right! After the glorious falls was a visit to the white rhino sanctuary, which was established in 2005 after all the rhinos in Uganda had become extinct from poachers. White rhinos were brought in from around the world to the sanctuary in order to once again inhabit Uganda. We had to track them and found a big mother rhino with her three-month-old baby who stood by checking us out. They were incredible creatures! Their horns were powerful and elegant and it was unbelievable how close we got. We ended our day after a long drive to the next lodge with a hot delicious meal.



On day three, we started at 7:00 am to reach the Kibale National Park entrance to start our trek into the jungle in search of Chimpanzees. It was an early start to the day, but well worth it. We spent two hours walking



around looking for the chimps, but once we found them it was amazing. They sat high in the trees grooming each other, mating, and eating. We had an hour with the chimps, and close to the end, when our necks were getting sore from looking up, and our feet were getting tired, we managed to hang on for a bit longer to see all the chimps climb down and run through the forest after the other groups had left. It was amazing to see them use all four of their limbs to sway and climb. After a one and half hour hike back to the lodge, we were rewarded with a hot shower and hot meal with some time to relax before the drive to our next lodge. Along the way, we stopped at a local restaurant where we tasted banana gin and tried the local dish. The lodge for the night looked like a brand new 5-star lodge from a magazine - overlooking the lake with the mountains behind the lodge. We had dinner outside by candlelight as we looked up at the stars and enjoyed conversations.



Lions were next on the agenda and oh did we check it off! We set off through Queen Elizabeth Park to see the tree-climbing lions. Along the drive, we saw two elephants having breakfast right next to the road. We finally found the spot where the king of the pride was sleeping in the tree. We got, give or take, 10 yards from the lion. One of the cars or cameras woke him up and he looked around then proceeded to climb down and run off. On our drive to the next stop, one of the safari cars ended up with a flat tire, which was no problem for our group. It was nice to sit and read our books on the side of the mountain breathing in the crisp, fresh air. Our guide hopped on the back of a motorcycle to get the spare from another vehicle so they could continue on. It didn't take long to change, so we continued through the mountains to our beautiful view of the hotel at the top.



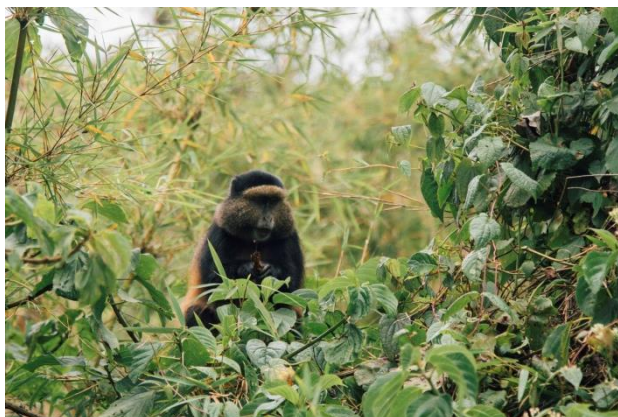
Day five was the big day for gorilla tracking at Bwindi National Park. To say I was nervous would be an understatement, as everything I had heard about the gorilla tracking was hard. We got up early and were at the park early to get a good group. We ended up hiring a few African "helicopters", a type of stretcher or basket made from branches, for anyone who couldn't make it down or up. We had to hike down a mountain to the base and back up again. Hiking down to the gorillas was not an easy trek, but with the helpful hands of my porter, I made it down fine. Once



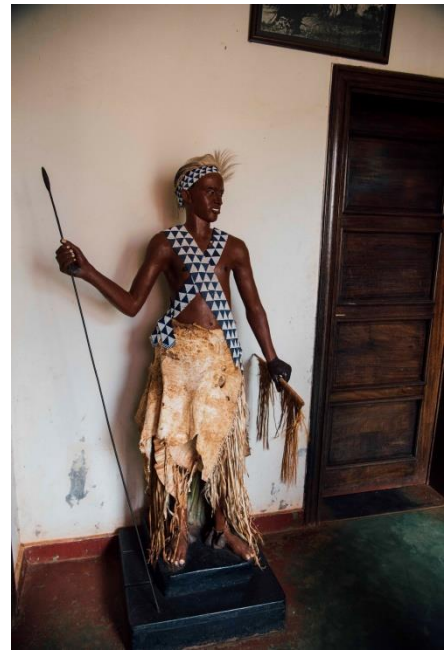
we got to the bottom we found the silver back and followed him deeper into the jungle. We also saw a few of his pack along the way. He ended up charging us twice for getting to close. It still is unbelievable that I was right in front of a gorilla and in his territory! On the hike back up, about 80% of our group used the African helicopters, which cost us \$300 each. We helped the village by using them, so the money was well spent. We were lucky as our trek only took three hours whereas some people spent six hours hiking. The afternoon was spent relaxing and resting.

Crossing the border into Rwanda on day six was a lot easier and simpler than I thought. There was no one there when we crossed and it went smoothly. After crossing, we stopped in town for a lunch and a walk through the local market. The people at the market were not happy with tourists taking pictures, nor were they as friendly as all the Ugandan people we met. After our brief walk through the market, we continued to a craft market where we bought a bunch of amazing things including their world-famous coffee. We had a short break at the lodge before experiencing the cultural village museum. Iby'iwacu Villagers greeted us at the gate with yelling and waving of the spears and then cheering. We saw how the traditional villages worked in Rwanda before they got rid of all poaching. At the end of the tour they did a traditional music and dance performance for us and even got me up there to join in.

The following day was an early wake up for the golden monkeys at Volcanoes National Park. This was the easiest hike out of all of the trekking. First, we walked through farm land and up part of a mountain to find hundreds of golden monkeys. They were everywhere! Towards the end of our visit, they were even getting comfortable and started getting closer and closer. We spent an hour just observing and enjoying their presence. We then hiked down before the rain hit and watched as the storm rolled over the mountains. After getting back to the lodge, we had a nice hot shower and the hotel staff cleaned our boots before heading off to the next lodge. We had a long drive that day to get to the prettiest place I've ever seen - a lodge situated on a peninsula on this huge lake surrounded by mountains. It reminded me of Neverland, and I'm not sure, but I think I saw Tinkerbell right after sunrise!



Waking to the sunrise over the mountains on the lake was so magical and as if I was in a dream. We had a nice breakfast before starting our drive to Burundi, with a few stops along the way. First stop was the Rwanda Genocide Museum - a heartbreaking experience. The government at the time lured many innocent people to be slaughtered at what was presented as a school. They had some of the original buildings housing some of the actual skeletons from the genocide. I couldn't even wrap my head around how devastating this was and it only happened 25 years ago. How is this something I didn't learn in school or even fully understand? We had some time to reflect on our own at the museum before continuing on for a lunch at a local restaurant. Following lunch, we crossed the border into Burundi, which went very smoothly for our group. It was almost like night and day seeing Rwanda and Burundi on opposite sides. Rwanda was so well put together and Burundi looked rundown and filled to the brim with people. Right after crossing, our car got swarmed by people trying to exchange money for us. Burundi was nothing like I've seen before. It is the fourth poorest country in the world and filled with people, but had lights everywhere.



The following day we experienced all of Burundi in all different settings. We started with a small museum that had the history of the local tribes and villages. The true source of the Nile followed the museum, which had great scenery but was not as spectacular as you would think. It's really the basin underground that is the source and flows all the way through Egypt. Afterwards, we continued to the beautiful hotel that had a golf course and a five-star restaurant. We had a nice relaxing evening before an amazing meal that the hotel. It was nice to relax before our flights the next day.



The most amazing part of the whole trip was the staff everywhere we went and the amazing guides. They were constantly making sure everyone was happy and had everything they needed. They rearranged things to make them flow better and were there to make our comfort their first priority.

