RWANDA: MOUNTAIN GORILLAS IN THE LAND OF A THOUSAND HILLS

ITINERARY:

LEGEND:

B-Breakfast **L**-Lunch **D**-Dinner

- **DAY 1**

Fly to Kigali, Rwanda

You depart today for your overnight flight from the U.S. to Kigali, Rwanda.

- **DAY 2**

Arrive Kigali

Destination: Kigali

Accommodations: Lemigo Hotel or similar

Evening: Upon arrival in Rwanda this evening, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and escort you to your hotel in Kigali, where you will meet your fellow travelers, including those who just completed our *Uganda: The Pearl of Africa Revealed* pre-trip extension.

- **DAY 3**

Explore Kigali • Visit Genocide Memorial • Conversation about life during the Rwandan genocide

Destination: Kigali

Meals included: B L D

Accommodations: Lemigo Hotel or similar

Activity Note: The visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial includes many graphic images and may be disturbing to some travelers.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After a Welcome Briefing and short orientation walk with our Trip Experience Leader, we'll set off for a day of discoveries in the Rwandan capital. Kigali is not only situated in Rwanda's geographical center, but was also at the center of the horrific events of 1994, when more than a million ethnic Tutsis (as well as moderate Hutus and Twa) were systematically murdered by their extremist Hutu neighbors over the course of 100 unspeakably brutal days.

We'll learn more about Rwanda's darkest hour in depth at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, which was conceived both as a tribute to the victims of the Rwandan genocide and to ensure that this history is never repeated. At the memorial, we'll gain firsthand insights into the Rwandan genocide during a conversation with a genocide survivor who will share a personal account of this horrifying period of history.

After our conversation, we'll tour the genocide memorial. Built over a mass burial ground for a quarter million victims, this moving memorial features various exhibit halls that trace the events of the 100-day genocide, reveal the colonial history of Rwanda and factors leading up to the slaughter, and highlight other instances of 20th-century genocides around the world that speak to mankind's capacity for cruelty.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll continue exploring the streets of Kigali and see how the city has emerged as one of the cleanest, safest, and most attractive capitals in all of Africa. The 1994 genocide left Rwanda in shambles: Huge swaths of the educated workforce were killed or fled, looting was rampant, and cash crops withered from neglect. President Paul Kagame, who began serving as vice president in 1994 before being elected president in 2000, is largely credited with Rwanda's remarkable transformation from a genocidal battlefield into a thriving, peaceful nation once more.

We'll also walk around at the large Kigali City Market, where people from across Rwanda come to buy their daily necessities. After our city tour of Kigali, we'll have a few hours to relax at our hotel.

Dinner: Enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: You are free to retire to your room, relax in the hotel's common areas, or gather at the bar for a cocktail to go over the discoveries of the day.

- **DAY 4**

Visit to Nyamata Church Genocide Memorial • *A Day in the Life* of a Rwandan Reconciliation Village • Controversial Topic: Life after the genocide

Destination: Kigali

Meals included: B L

Accommodations: Lemigo Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a visit to Nyamata church, the site of a notorious massacre during the genocide of 1994. Our tour of the church will include an informal conversation with a local community member affected by the brutal massacre that took place here in 1994, providing us with insights into the Catholic Church's role in the bloodshed and how it has shaken the Rwandan people's faith in this religious institution.

When the genocide of 1994 began, around 10,000 civilians sought sanctuary at Nyamata church, placing their faith in its Catholic stewards to protect them from the Hutu extremists. However, when the killers arrived at the gates, the church leaders offered no resistance—bloodthirsty soldiers easily forced their way inside with grenades, leaving the doomed souls within entirely to the scant mercy of the militia's depravity.

Then, we'll learn more about Rwanda's commitment to healing and forgiveness when we head to the Bugesera district to begin our ***A Day in the Life*** experience at a Reconciliation Village, where survivors of the genocide live side-by-side with the very same people who perpetrated it. During a walk around the village, we'll see how the genocide's victims and perpetrators have learned to put the past behind them and live together as neighbors once again. Hutu and Tutsi residents work alongside each other as unified Rwandans to perform the daily tasks that keep the village running. We'll meet locals as they tend to vegetable gardens, raise livestock and poultry, and craft filters to provide potable water.

Lunch: We'll sit down with members of the community for a traditional lunch prepared in the village. Typical dishes might include vegetable rice, chicken or vegetable stew, roast potatoes, lentil soup, fruits, and cassava. As we dine together, we'll have an opportunity to gain a unique perspective of what life is like in an unusual community like this.

Afternoon: We'll join members of the village community to delve deeper into the **Controversial Topic** of the practical difficulties of nationwide reconciliation. While the nation's government has its eyes set on the future, many who survived are unwilling to forgive what happened in the past.

The official government policy toward the country's ethnic tensions is straightforward and clear: "*Ndi Umunyarwanda* (We are all Rwandan)." In an effort to let go of the ethnic divisions that led to the genocide, as well as the civil wars and violent clashes that preceded it, the country has formally banned the practice of separating the country's people along ethnic lines. However, while the residents of the Reconciliation Village are all firmly committed to burying their old hatreds and living harmoniously alongside their former enemies, many others in Rwanda are not so ready to forget about these divisions; there are many who still believe that justice cannot be served until those who perpetrated the genocide are tracked down and locked away. We'll spend some time in conversation with up to three residents of the Reconciliation Village (depending on their availability) to get their firsthand perspectives of how and why they decided to move on from their dark pasts, and how they perceive the prospects of a future peace in Rwanda at large.

Dinner: On your own in Kigali.

Evening: You are free to explore on your own, use the hotel's amenities, or relax in your room for our last night in Kigali.

- **DAY 5**

Journey to Akagera National Park • Visit Women's Opportunity Center • Night game-viewing drive

Destination: Akagera

Meals included: B L D

Accommodations: Akagera Game Lodge or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart Kigali for our overland journey to Akagera National Park, situated along Rwanda's northeastern border with Tanzania. We'll stop along the way in the small town of Kayonza to visit the Women's Opportunity Center. Designed as a mini-village with a series of pavilions built to blend into the landscape, the modern center is home to about 300 Rwandan women—most of whom are genocide survivors—and is also a gathering place for other rural farmers who come here to put their lives back together through education, agriculture, and food cooperatives. During our visit, we'll not only hear firsthand testimonies from the women at the center, but we'll also have the chance to participate in some of the training activities available to the farmers.

After our visit, we'll continue our journey to Akagera, arriving in time for lunch.

Lunch: At the lodge.

Afternoon: Later this afternoon, we'll set off on the first game-viewing drive of our Rwandan adventure. One of Africa's oldest national parks, Akagera is a 348-square-mile scenic game reserve of savannah, woodlands, and wetlands featuring a dozen lakes linked by channels and papyrus swamps teeming with crocodiles and hippos. The park will thrill both nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts alike, as we'll discover on an evening game-viewing drive.

Dinner: At the lodge.

Evening: You are free to explore on your own, take advantage of the game lodge's facilities, or relax in your room.

- **DAY 6**

Full-day game-viewing drive with picnic lunch
Destination: Akagera
Meals included: B L D
Accommodations: Akagera Game Lodge or similar
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: We'll set off on a game-viewing drive in the northern section of the park, keeping our eyes open for giraffe and zebra in open woodland, or small herds of elephant and buffalo that emerge from the dense woodland to drink at the park's many lakes.
Lunch: In the park.
Afternoon: We'll resume our game-viewing drive through Akagera.
Dinner: At the lodge.
Evening: You are free to gather with your travel companions for a drink at the lodge's lounge area, or relax in your room.

- **DAY 7**

Morning game-viewing drive • Behind-the-scenes tour of park headquarters • Lake Ihema boat cruise
Destination: Akagera
Meals included: B L D
Accommodations: Akagera Game Lodge or similar
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: We'll depart our lodge for a morning game-viewing drive to a different region of the park, keeping in mind to look skyward, too. With some 500 species within the confines of the park (the highest number of varied species per unit in the world), Akagera is a birding enthusiast's paradise. Then, our small group will enjoy a special "behind the scenes" presentation about Akagera's recent program of reintroducing animal populations. After the civil war of the 1990s, much of the park's wildlife disappeared—including all of its lions and rhinos. During this time, many protected areas of the park were also given over as farmland to accommodate returning refugees. The Akagera of today is almost unrecognizable from just 20 years ago, when it was on the verge of being lost forever.
Lunch: At the lodge.
Afternoon: After a couple of hours free to relax, we'll take a boat cruise on Lake Ihema. As we cruise along a shoreline tangled with trees, keep an eye out for basking crocodiles and giant hippos bobbing nearby. The lake is also a haven for birdwatchers: Red-breasted papyrus gonoleks lurk among the reeds, irises probe the mud, and statue-like shoebills wait patiently for prey.
Dinner: At the lodge.
Evening: You are free to enjoy a nightcap with fellow travelers or retire to your room to pack up and prepare for tomorrow's journey to Ruhengeri.

- **DAY 8**

Overland transfer to Ruhengeri • Conversation about Gorilla conservation with Volcanoes National Park Warden
Destination: Ruhengeri
Meals included: B L D
Accommodations: Mountain Gorilla View Lodge or similar
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: We'll leave Akagera on our way to Ruhengeri (also known as Musanze), gateway to Volcanoes National Park (*Parc National des Volcans*) and home of the golden monkeys and mountain gorillas. We'll make stops along the way to take in the scenery and observe rural life in Rwanda, including a visit to a local market in the town of Kayonza.
Lunch: At a local restaurant in Kigali.
Afternoon: After lunch, we'll continue our drive to Ruhengeri. We may make other brief stops along the way, including a short break to admire the breathtaking views of the Virungas, five massive volcanoes looming in the distance.
Later this afternoon, the Park Warden of Volcanoes National Park will meet us at the lodge for a conversation about gorilla conservation and behavior within the ecosystem of the park. We'll learn about the efforts that take place behind the scenes to maintain the livelihood of these endangered primates while creating an environment that is beneficial to both the gorilla population and visitors.
Dinner: At the lodge.
Evening: You are free to explore the lodge's facilities, which may include a relaxing bar, or take in the scenic views of the nearby volcanic mountain peaks in the evening light.

DAY 9

Mountain gorilla trek • Home-Hosted Dinner
Destination: Ruhengeri
Meals included: B L D
Accommodations: Mountain Gorilla View Lodge or similar
Activity Note: Today's mountain gorilla trek typically involves two to four hours of walking through thick brush over steep, rugged terrain at elevations ranging from 7,000 to 9,000 feet—and can include exposure to stinging nettles and fire ants. As overexposure to humans is harmful to mountain gorillas, contact is limited to one hour—and there is the possibility that they may become agitated and retreat back into the bush in less than our allotted time. Any travelers showing signs of obvious illness may be refused entrance by park authorities.
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: We'll take a short drive to the Kinigi Trekking Station in Volcanoes National Park, situated in Rwanda's border region with Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Visitors are required to register before entering the park; we'll complete our paperwork prior to departing the hotel so that we can avoid the long lines at the entrance and begin our trek as early as possible.
Skilled trackers will have gone on ahead to locate one of the ten habituated populations of mountain gorilla families we can visit. There are at least five more families residing high on the slopes of Virunga, but they can only be visited by researchers. After splitting up into two smaller groups of eight (or fewer) travelers, each group will then set off. Our first glimpse of a gorilla may be a baby up a tree, or a female quietly munching on leaves—or perhaps a massive silverback pounding his chest. Every encounter with these gentle, endangered primates is different, but if we are fortunate, ours will be a memorable experience and we will have enjoyed what many consider the most sought-after adventure in the world.
Lunch: At the lodge.
Afternoon: We'll have some time to relax at our lodge this afternoon. Later, we'll regroup to depart for some nearby homes for dinner.
Dinner: Enjoy a **Home-Hosted Dinner** this evening, a special opportunity to enjoy traditional Rwandan hospitality and experience what daily life is like here
Evening: After returning to our lodge, you are free to relax from the day's activities at the bar, or retire early to rest up for tomorrow's golden monkey trek.

DAY 10

Golden monkey trek • Grand Circle Foundation visit: Local Primary School
Destination: Ruhengeri
Meals included: B L D
Accommodations: Mountain Gorilla View Lodge or similar
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: We'll depart to the Kinigi Trekking Station to embark on another memorable primate trek—this time to observe Rwanda's population of golden monkeys. Also rare and endangered, these playful, curious primates make their home in the bamboo forests at the base of the volcanoes and live in two habituated groups (or troops) of 30 to 100 individuals. They are very active, and once we spot them, we'll be able to follow their antics as they swing from tree to tree or jump from one bamboo branch to another using their extra-long tails for balance.
Lunch: At the lodge.
Afternoon: After some time to relax at the lodge, we'll visit one of two local schools in the area (when in session)—either the Nyabitsinde or the Rushubi Primary School (described below). Both schools are supported by **Grand Circle Foundation**—part of the World Classroom initiative.
Grand Circle Foundation

Rushubi Primary School
Total donated: **$8230**
Partner since: **2019**
Our visit to this school allows us a glimpse at what education is like in this region of Rwanda, right on the doorstep of Virunga National Park. We'll meet the Head Teacher, who will enlighten us about education in Rwanda, and the daily operations of Rushubi Primary School. The government-operated school, staffed with 19 teachers, provides a free education to more than 800 students—aged between 6 and 14—from the surrounding region.
Then, we'll head to one of the classrooms to meet some of the children for ourselves. Their teacher will introduce their young students, and we'll join them in the singing of a song, adding our own voices to their chorus. We'll spend some time with the class, helping them with their lessons, practicing English, and learning about their favorite subjects in school.
Next, we'll stop by the school library with a few of the other teachers, then gather with the children on the playground for

recess, joining them for a quick game of soccer, handball, or other schoolyard games. As we tour the school and meet its teachers and students, we'll get a closer look at how Rwanda's next generation is being educated, and how your travel dollars help make a difference in their lives.

Dinner: Enjoy a Farewell Dinner at our lodge.
Evening: Your last night in Ruhengeri is free to explore on your own or retire early to rest up for tomorrow's flight home.

- **DAY 11**

Ellen Degeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund • Overland to Kigali • Return to U.S.
Meals included: B L
Accommodations: Lemigo Hotel
Breakfast: At the lodge.
Morning: Visit the Ellen Degeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. At this multi-acre, state-of-the-art research facility, we'll enjoy an interactive exhibit about the story of Dian Fossey and learn about the ongoing research and conservation efforts that resulted from the nearly two decades she spent living with and studying the mountain gorillas.
Then, we'll drive back to Kigali, where we'll have the use of a day room before our evening flights.
Lunch: At a local restaurant in Kigali.
Afternoon: Enjoy the afternoon to relax at the hotel or do some last-minute shopping. Travelers taking the post-trip extension to *Tanzania: The Ngorongoro Crater & Serengeti Private Tented Safari* will depart for the airport early this afternoon. Other travelers will depart to the airport later in the afternoon for their return flights home.