Tour Code

RW20

ADVENTURESABROAD

RWANDA & KENYA

Primates, Predators, and Plains

17 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Kigali

Today we arrive in Kigali, Rwanda's vibrant capital and largest city, strategically situated in the heart of the country. Since gaining independence in 1962, Kigali has evolved into the nation's economic, cultural, and transportation hub. This bustling metropolis seamlessly blends traditional Rwandan culture with modern amenities, offering a unique glimpse into the country's rich history and resilience.

Overnight in Kigali.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Kigali - Nyungwe Forest National Park

This morning, we set off from Kigali on a scenic journey southwards, bound for the breathtaking Nyungwe Forest National Park. As we cover the 260 km (160 mi) to our destination, we'll break up the drive with fascinating stopover visits to two of Rwanda's most historic and culturally significant towns: Nyanza and Butare.

In Nyanza, we'll delve into the region's rich history at the Royal Palace Museum, which showcases the traditional seat of the Rwandan monarchy. Next, we'll head to Butare, home to the National Museum of Rwanda, which offers a treasure trove of artifacts, exhibits, and insights into the country's cultural heritage.

We'll take a break for lunch at a popular local restaurant and then continue our journey to the Nyungwe Forest region, arriving in the late afternoon as the sun casts its golden light over the treetops.

Overnight in Lake Kivu (our base for Nyungwe Forest National Park).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Nyungwe: Chimpanzee Trek & Canopy Hike

This morning we'll embark on an unforgettable adventure: trekking through the lush Nyungwe Forest in search of its most charismatic residents – the chimpanzees. Our expert guides will lead us through the forest, sharing insights into the ecology and behaviour of these intelligent primates.

As we trek, we'll need to be prepared for a moderately challenging hike, covering a distance of approximately 4-6 km (2.5-3.7 miles) over uneven terrain. The duration of the trek will depend on the location of the chimps, but we can expect to be walking for around 2-4 hours. The forest's terrain can be steep and slippery in some areas, so sturdy hiking shoes and comfortable clothing are essential.*

After an exhilarating morning with the chimps, we'll head to a different part of the forest for the Adventure Canopy Hike. This thrilling experience will take us high above the forest floor, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape and the chance to spot a variety of bird species and other wildlife.

Following our two exciting excursions, we'll return to our hotel for some well-deserved rest and relaxation.

* We have assigned our East African offerings in Rwanda, Kenya & Tanzania our lowest Difficulty Rating Level 1, strictly with respect to physical activity that occurs OUTSIDE of our one-day chimpanzee and/or gorilla trekking hikes, which can specifically be rated a LEVEL 3 (you can review info on all three levels via the "Tour Styles" on this tour's webpage). Aside from these two excursions, the only physical activity while on safari is limited to walking to/from your room from the main public areas of our hotels/lodges (some of which are spread out). One must also be aware that our programs are ambitious -- some early starts, long/full days of road travel on some some poor/rough roads, and some dust and heat, which can cause fatigue over time.

Overnight in Lake Kivu (our base for Nyungwe Forest National Park).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Nyungwe Forest - Lake Kivu & Boat Excursion - Kigali

This morning after breakfast we'll bid farewell to the enchanting Nyungwe Forest region. Our journey takes us north along the scenic Kivu Belt Road, hugging the shores of Lake Kivu as we make our way to the charming town of Kibuye. The 130-kilometer (80 mi) drive takes approximately 2 hours, offering breathtaking views of the lake and its surroundings.

Upon arrival, we'll embark on a leisurely 2-hour Boat Excursion on the calm waters of Lake Kivu. As we glide across the lake, we'll have the opportunity to hike up Napoleon Island Hill, which offers panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. Keep your eyes peeled for the infamous "swimming cows" – a unique sight that's sure to delight!

After our boat trip, we'll head to a picturesque lake shore hotel for lunch and some time to freshen up, after which we'll depart Kibuye and head east, beginning our journey back to Kigali. The 130-kilometer drive takes approximately 3.5 hours, giving us plenty of time to reflect on the incredible experiences we've had so far.

Upon arrival in Kigali, we'll check into our hotel and enjoy some time at leisure. Dinner is on your own account tonight, giving you the freedom to choose from Kigali's many restaurants and cafes.

Overnight in Kigali.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 5 Kigali - Genocide Museum - Parc National des Volcans

Today we transfer to the Parc National des Volcans (115 km/71 mi, +/- 3 hours).

But first we make a significant stop at the Kigali Genocide Memorial. This poignant memorial, established in 2004, commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. While the genocide was a complex event with multifaceted causes, it remains a dark chapter in Rwandan history. Visiting the Genocide Memorial is a powerful and thought-provoking experience. It offers a sobering look at the tragic events of 1994, highlighting the resilience and strength of the Rwandan people. As we learn about the history and the impact of the genocide, we'll gain a deeper appreciation for the country's journey toward healing and reconciliation.

After a break for lunch in Kigali, we depart for the Parc National des Volcans. "In the heart of Central Africa, so high up that you shiver more than you sweat," wrote the eminent primatologist Dian Fossey, "are great, old volcanoes towering up almost 15,000 feet, and nearly covered with rich, green rainforest - the Virungas." Situated in the far northwest of Rwanda, the Parc des Volcans protects the steep slopes of this magnificent mountain home of the rare mountain gorilla and the rich mosaic of montane ecosystems, which embrace evergreen and bamboo forest, open grassland, swamp and heath.

Overnight at Parc National des Volcans.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Parc National des Volcans: Twin Lakes & Village

We'll start our day with a leisurely walk to the Ellen DeGeneres/Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, a fantastic opportunity to learn more about gorillas and the remarkable work of Dian Fossey. The center offers informative exhibits and educational programs whereby visitors can gain valuable insights into gorilla conservation efforts and the challenges these magnificent creatures face.

We then have a scenic drive to the picturesque Twin Lakes of Burera and Ruhondo. Upon arrival at Virunga Lodge, we'll enjoy a short walk, taking in the stunning views of the surrounding mountains and the tranquil waters.

We'll then head to the bustling Musanze market. As we wander through the vibrant market, we'll immerse ourselves in the local culture,

experiencing the sights, sounds, and smells of this bustling marketplace. We'll have the opportunity to interact with local vendors and learn about their products, from fresh produce to handcrafted souvenirs.

At some point during our stay, we'll be able to trek to walk to the edge of the forest with the hope of seeing endangered Golden Monkeys, a rare treat to watch these unique primates play and perform in the forest (the walking involved depends on where the monkeys are at the time of our visit. More information on this once we arrive in the area).

Overnight near Parc National des Volcans.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Parc National des Volcans: Gorilla Trekking

Parc National des Volcans: Gorilla Trekking*

Early this morning we drive to the park headquarters where we are briefed by the guides of the Parc des Volcans before we start our gorilla trek. This 13,000-hectare national park protects the Rwanda sector of the Virunga Mountains, a range of six extinct and three active volcanoes which straddle the border with Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bamboo forest is interspersed with alpine moorland, grassland and marsh.

Tracking the gorillas through the light mountain forest on the slopes of the Virungas is a magical experience. If you are lucky you will get to the gorillas, spend an hour with them, and be back at the base in time for a late lunch. Some gorilla families however are more elusive, and tracking can take a full day… especially when wet and muddy.

The Mountain Gorillas in the Parc National des Volcans are part of a worldwide population of just 740 individuals. The gorillas we are allowed to track belong to one of five habituated family groups. For up to five years each, these groups have undergone an extremely delicate process that has gradually brought them to tolerate the presence of humans for a brief period every day and allowed a few privileged visitors to interact with them in the wild.

The gorillas are by no means tame, and are completely wild animals. However, experienced guides will accompany us on our tracking, many of who have been involved in the habituation process themselves. 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 1 hour to as much as 8 hours before one returns to base. Once the gorillas are located, our group will be allowed a maximum of one hour with them.

Please remember that the mountain gorillas are a wild animal and are not enclosed in any form and free to move as they please. For this reason actual sightings of the gorilla groups cannot be guaranteed. For more information on gorilla tracking in Rwanda, go to www.ortpn.gov.rw.

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Overnight near Parc National des Volcans.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Parc National des Volcans - Kigali

This morning we'll embark on a cultural immersion experience, visiting a nearby village. We'll witness firsthand the daily lives of the locals, observing their farming techniques, beekeeping practices, and traditional clothing-making processes. We'll also have the chance to explore their homes and gain a deeper understanding of their way of life.

Later today we travel back to Kigali arriving later in the afternoon.

Overnight in Kigali.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Kigali, Rwanda - Fly to Nairobi, Kenya

Today we fly to to Nairobi, Kenya.

Part of Maasai land when the British arrived, Kenya's modern capital grew with the development of the railway. Derived from a Maasai word meaning "Cold Water," Nairobi is a pleasant mix of colonial British with modern and traditional African influences.

* NOTE: This flight is included if you purchase your international air through Adventures Abroad. Land Only passengers can purchase this for an extra charge (pricing is subject to change without notice, but it has historically been in the range of USD$350 per person).

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Nairobi - Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Today we travel from Nairobi, through the "White Highlands," so called because of the large number of Europeans who settled here, northwards to the lower slopes of Mt Kenya, rising to 5199 m (16,728 feet), Africa's second highest peak. Our (+/- 4 hour) drive will take us into the Central Highlands, the heartland of the Kikuyu people. This is a very fertile region, well-watered, intensively cultivated, and thickly forested. The land was coveted by the Europeans who began arriving in ever-increasing numbers once the railway through the area was completed. The settlers established coffee and tea plantations on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya and cultivated wheat on the western slopes.

Our destination is Sweetwaters, a luxury tented camp clustered around a water hole and set in the pristine calm of the private Ol Pejeta Conservancy, a non-profit organization supporting endangered species, tourism and community outreach. Ol Pejeta is East Africa's largest Black Rhino sanctuary, the only place in Kenya to see chimpanzees, and holds some of the highest predator densities in Kenya.

This afternoon we'll enjoy our first game drive within the conservancy.

Overnight at Sweetwaters.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Ol Pejeta Conservancy is a sprawling landscape, a mosaic of diverse habitats stretching across over 350 square kilometers. Imagine rolling grass plains, interspersed with wooded grasslands, acacia woodlands, and patches of dense evergreen thickets – all contributing to a rich and varied ecosystem. This diversity of habitats supports an astounding variety of animals, including, of course, the iconic "Big Five" – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo.

Today, we'll immerse ourselves in this wildlife haven with both morning and afternoon game drives, maximizing our chances of encountering its incredible inhabitants. But that's not all! We'll also have the unique opportunity to visit the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary, a truly special place. This sanctuary is the only one of its kind in Kenya, providing a refuge for the highly endangered and remarkably intelligent chimpanzee species. These chimpanzees, often orphaned or rescued from abusive situations in West and Central Africa, find a safe and nurturing home here. The sanctuary's dedicated staff carefully nurses them back to health, allowing them to live out their days in the security of a vast, natural enclosure. It's a chance to witness these fascinating primates up close and learn about the important conservation work being done to protect them.

Overnight at Sweetwaters Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Ol Pejeta - Great Rift Valley - Lake Nakuru National Park

This morning we travel to Lake Nakuru, a shallow soda lake in the Rift Valley (+/- 5 hours). The Rift Valley was created millions of years ago under the strain of enormous volcanic eruptions which resulted in a giant split in the earth's surface from Syria to Mozambique. Lava flowed into the valley, forming escarpments on either side of the gigantic trough which can be up to 80 km (50 miles) wide, big enough to be visible from space. At the lake, depending on the water levels, we may have the opportunity to see flamingos,* in addition to the over 340 species of birds that have been recorded in the Rift Valley!

Lake Nakuru is very shallow and can fluctuate up to five metres (12 feet) each day. When the water is low, you can see a white band of crystallized soda along the shoreline. This is also one of the best places in Kenya to view the rare White Rhino as we explore the park on our afternoon game drive.

* This, and other Rift Valley lakes, have been known in the past for huge numbers of flamingos; however, this can be very "hit and miss" owing to seasonal variations in rainfall and water level, and the increasing frequency of drought. The best we can do is hope for the best!

Overnight in Lake Nakuru National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Lake Nakuru - Maasai Mara National Reserve

We rise early this morning and bid farewell to Lake Nakuru National Park, continuing our journey through the dramatic landscapes of the Great Rift Valley. Our route takes us past the serene beauty of Lake Naivasha and the imposing presence of nearby Mount Longonot. This relatively young volcano serves as a stark reminder of the Rift Valley's turbulent geological history. Our drive time today is approximately six hours (plus time for a lunch break en route), which includes a stretch on a less-than-perfect road.

Early-to-mid afternoon, we'll arrive at our lodge nestled within the world-renowned Maasai Mara National Reserve. After check-in and a well-deserved breather, we'll embark on another thrilling game drive, venturing out into the reserve in search of its incredible inhabitants. The possibilities are endless, and every game drive offers a unique and unforgettable experience.

The Maasai Mara is essentially a seamless extension of the vast Serengeti ecosystem, and it boasts an astonishing concentration of wildlife. This reserve is home to the largest population of lions in all of Kenya, a testament to its rich biodiversity. Large herds of plains game roam freely across the Mara's grasslands, creating a spectacle of nature at its finest. The Maasai Mara is also arguably the best place in Kenya to spot cheetahs, those sleek and graceful hunters.

Time-permitting, we may have the opportunity to visit a local Maasai village. This cultural immersion would provide a fascinating glimpse into the Maasai people's traditional way of life, allowing us to meet its residents and learn about their customs and beliefs. If time constraints prevent us from visiting the village today, we'll make every effort to arrange this experience on our return journey to Nairobi.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Maasai Mara National Reserve

The Maasai Mara National Reserve, a seemingly endless expanse of rolling grasslands, sits at the northern edge of the vast Serengeti Plain. Widely regarded as Kenya's premier park, the Mara plays a crucial role in one of nature's greatest spectacles: the annual wildebeest migration. These massive herds journey north from Tanzania around the end of June, gracing the Mara with their presence before returning south around the end of September. This incredible movement of animals is a sight to behold.

"The Mara," as it's affectionately known, is a haven for wildlife, supporting all of the famed "Big Five" – lion, elephant, leopard, rhinoceros, and

buffalo. Beyond these iconic creatures, the reserve teems with an astonishing abundance of herding animals, including zebras, gazelles, and antelopes, as well as a rich diversity of other wildlife. As you traverse the reserve, you'll likely encounter the stately Maasai men and youth, easily recognizable by their distinctive attire, tending to their cattle and goats along the roadside. Their presence adds a unique cultural dimension to the Mara's natural beauty.

Today we've dedicated a full day to exploring this remarkable reserve, with both morning and afternoon game drives planned. This will give us ample opportunity to witness the incredible wildlife that calls the Maasai Mara home, from the majestic predators to the vast herds of herbivores, and everything in between. Every game drive in the Mara is a unique adventure, filled with the potential for unforgettable encounters.

In the Mara you will also have an optional opportunity to ascend over the northern Serengeti at daybreak in a hot air balloon (optional expense). From over 300m (984 feet) above, you will be able to view the vast land and the myriad animals that inhabit the Maasai Mara. Today or tomorrow are the best days to participate in this activity - details sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Maasai Mara National Reserve

We enjoy another full day with game viewing in Maasai Mara. Depending on the season and current game locations and viewing conditions, we may divide our day into morning and afternoon drives, or take our lunches with us in order to venture further into the reserve if conditions warrant.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Maasai Mara - Nairobi

After breakfast, we'll embark on our journey back to Nairobi. The drive itself is expected to take approximately six hours, factoring in comfort stops along the way.

A highlight of our return journey will be a visit to the Karen Blixen Museum, conveniently located just outside of Nairobi. This isn't just a quick photo opportunity; we'll delve into the fascinating story of Baroness Karen Blixen-Finecke. Imagine stepping back in time to the 1920s and 30s – this Danish Baroness made Kenya her home in 1918 and lived here until 1931. It was during this period that she drew inspiration for her most famous work, "Out of Africa," published in 1937 under her pen name, Isaac Dineson.

The museum itself is Blixen's beautifully restored former home. It offers a unique glimpse into her life in colonial Kenya, showcasing the style and furnishings of the era. As we tour the house, we'll learn about her struggles and triumphs, her relationships, and the profound connection she felt to the African landscape. It's a chance to connect with the author behind the iconic book and gain a deeper understanding of the historical context that shaped her writing.

We'll make a lunch stop in the vicinity before continuing to our Nairobi hotel.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Depart

Departure from Nairobi.

SAFIRI SALAAMA!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast