



## Mount Gahinga Lodge Fact Sheet

Volcanoes Safaris is delighted to present its hiking and culture lodge in the foothills of the Virunga volcanoes.

Nestled high in the foothills of the Virunga volcanoes (2,300m) Mount Gahinga Lodge opened in 1998 and was the very first lodge in the Volcanoes Collection. Mounts Sabinyo, Gahinga and Muhuvura provide an impressive backdrop to this unique lodge, whose 9 bandas (rooms) all named after volcanoes in the Virunga chain are based around traditional pygmy huts – albeit with modern comforts.

Praveen Moman, the Founder of Volcanoes Safaris, said of Mount Gahinga:

‘Gahinga is an unexpected place. It’s a very low-key, hidden mountain lodge. I think the impact of that is huge. It connects guests to the pastoral life of the community, which we think is important.’

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# SUMMARY



Mount Gahinga was the first lodge in the Volcanoes Collection and first opened in 1998. Nestled in an idyllic location between three of the impressive Virunga volcanoes, Sabinyo, Gahinga and Muhuvura, the lodge is built to reflect the local design of traditional pygmy huts whilst also incorporating modern comforts.

We have worked hard throughout the years to preserve our eco-lodge principles. We use solar power instead of mains electricity and for heating water, meaning that the modern comfort of the lodge does not damage the local environment. Each of the newly renovated bandas is named after one of the volcanoes in the Virunga chain, each of which has a traditional and historic significance.

As one guest said, it's 'a rare gem on the roof of the world.'

Volcanoes Safaris prides itself on being actively involved in the communities around our lodges and at Gahinga this is no different. Through the VSPT we have instigated a number of projects aimed at improving the lives of the local population and increasing the community benefits from tourism, specifically we have tried to help the local pygmy population (Batwa) by instigating a number of income-generating projects including a dance group and a garden. We have also begun to train local guides to take our guests through the community, who can provide fascinating and personal insight into Bafumbira culture and customs.



# LOCATION

Mount Gahinga Lodge was the very first lodge in the Volcanoes Collection. The 9-room lodge overlooks the three Virunga Volcanoes on the Ugandan side: Mounts Sabinyo, Gahinga and Muhuvura, which provide an impressive backdrop to this cosy lodge.



## The Lodge: getting there

The lodge is an hour away from Kampala by private or chartered plane, landing at Kisoro. Alternatively, it is about 10-hour drive from Kampala via Mbarara and Kabale or 4 hours drive from Kigali.

### Lodge Location:

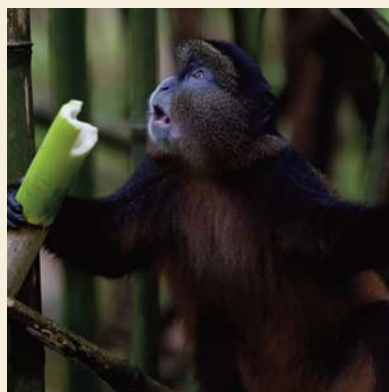
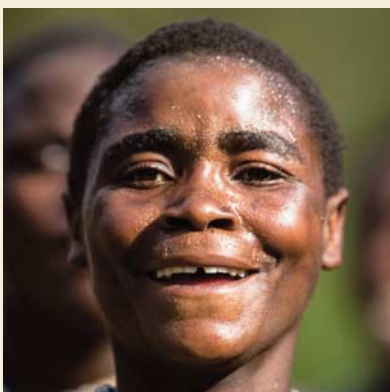
GPS Co-ordinates: S 01° 21.138' E 029° 37.244'

Altitude: 2285m

## Recommended programs:

**4-day safari Hiking and Culture in Mghinga** program offers incredible birding, a number of opportunities to visit and interact with the fading Batwa culture and the opportunity to enjoy a hike up one of three of the Virunga volcanoes.

**6-day safari Gorillas in PNV and Culture and Hiking in Mghinga** offers the chance to track the Mountain Gorillas in Rwanda and to visit the Batwa in Gahinga along with the Golden Monkeys and great hiking trails up the Virunga volcanoes.



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION



## The Lodge: design

Mount Gahinga was originally opened in 1998 and was the first lodge in the Volcanoes Collection. The location between three of the most impressive volcanoes in the Virunga chain (Mounts Sabinyo, Gahinga and Muhuvura) give the lodge a tranquil and isolated feel. The buildings are all constructed to reflect local traditions and the style imitates that of local pygmy huts, giving the impression of a visit to the bygone era of Hemmingway.

Volcanoes Safaris believes that ecotourism in remote areas needs to respect the culture of local communities. Providing western standards of comfort needs to be balanced with the pressure local people face in obtaining food and clean water. We believe practical action must be taken on the ground to minimise the environmental impact and it is essential to constantly experiment on how best to achieve this in

practice. In designing Mount Gahinga Lodge, therefore, we remain dedicated to our ecological commitments using solar hot water systems and powering the lodge using solar energy.

The lodge was conceived and built by Praveen Moman and a team of African builders led by James Ssemanda.







## The Lodge: the main building

When night falls, the main lounge, with its roaring log fire, provides a cosy retreat from the crisp mountain air and a place to rest weary feet after long days in the mountains. The sunroom provides a tranquil refuge from which to savour the scenery and curl up with a book or enjoy a drink, while the sun terrace is the ideal spot to enjoy breakfast, surrounded by the colourful gardens that provide the perfect habitat for the rare and exotic birds of the Albertine Rift.

Beautifully designed to imitate local building styles and blend with the tended gardens that spread across the lodge grounds, the main lodge is a beautiful place to spend your time.

Ideal for resting with a book or lounging by the fire after a relaxing massage and a long day's hiking, this really is a rejuvenating building, carefully designed to be as local and rustic as possible while retaining that western level of comfort.







## The Lodge: the bandas

The lodge's 9 bandas are newly renovated and named after the mountains in the Virungas and offer a luxury refuge from the cold night air of the mountains. Inspired by the traditional huts of the local Batwa pygmies, they adhere strictly to Volcanoes Safaris' ecolodge principles to minimise the lodge's impact on the environment.

The interiors are stylishly decorated to create an atmosphere of modern comfort alongside the adventure of being on safari.

The cosy bandas are rounded to preserve that traditional, local detail. Each has a private balcony that gives the banda a view of the surrounding landscape and magnificent mountains. The thatched rooves and sensitive colour scheme comes alive at sunset in this lodge 'on the roof of the world.'

Each banda has its own distinctive personality and the inspiration for their design comes from a local African material: Kitenge. Kitenge textiles come in a rainbow of colour and complex patterns and is used to make varied and vibrant traditional clothing by local women.



## Accommodation

The lodge's nine bandas are based around traditional pygmy huts – albeit with modern comforts.

- 9 stone guest bandas with papyrus roofs (4 doubles and 5 twins).
- En-suite bathrooms with flushing toilets, showers, running water and biodegradable hand & body wash, shampoo, conditioner and shower gel.
- Rooms have 240v lighting (with emergency solar lamp & torch provided) plus a small veranda offering views over the volcanoes.
- There are NO power sockets/charging facilities in the rooms.
- Bandas are individually named after each of the Virunga Volcanoes.
- There are NO guide/tour leader rooms.



## Public Areas

The main building and sunroom provide a cosy refuge to enjoy meals, a drink or just relax.

- International cuisine with a Ugandan flair with tropical fruits, cooked breakfasts, hearty lunches, warming soups and generous dinners served.
- Separate tranquil massage room to enjoy a complimentary massage.
- Sun Terrace overlooking the volcanoes with scenic views.
- Mature tropical gardens host an array of colourful flowers and attract a variety of birdlife.
- Wi-Fi and internet access available in the main lodge building.







## Activities from Mount Gahinga Lodge

A stay at Volcanoes Mount Gahinga Lodge offers a diverse variety of activities for clients over several days:

### Wildlife Activities

- Gorilla Tracking in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park or Southern Bwindi (must be booked in advance – NB gorillas sometimes can not be tracked in Mgahinga NP)
- Golden Monkey Tracking
- Birding from the lodge or in the park

### Unique Community and Cultural Activities

- Watch a Batwa Pygmy Dance Performance
- Enjoy the Local Village Walk
- Learn about Batwa Pygmy Culture and take the Batwa Trail
- Batwa Vocational Centre
- Batwa Heritage Site and Experience

### Hiking

- Walk the Sabinyo Gorge, Congo Border Trail or the Buffalo Wall Walk
- Climb Mount Sabinyo Volcano
- Hike Mount Gahinga Volcano
- Hike to Mount Muhavura Volcano's Crater Lake
- Enjoy a Scenic Walk to one of several nearby Calderas or through the local farmland
- Stroll the Lodge grounds and along the local stream
- Visit one of the many lava caves

### Relax at the Lodge

- Complimentary massage
- Selection of board games & library





## Journey and Stay

A stay at Volcanoes Mount Gahinga Lodge takes you on a journey to the heart of Africa:

### The Lodge: getting there

- A scenic 4-hour drive from Rwanda's capital city: Kigali.
- 2 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Virunga Lodge.
- 6 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Bwindi Lodge.
- 8 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Kyambura Gorge Lodge.
- 12 hour drive from Uganda's capital city: Kampala.



### Seasons & Climate

Uganda enjoys a warm climate all year round, however rainfall patterns and altitude play a role in day-to-day temperature; at night it can be chilly.

- Average daytime temperatures range from 15°C/59°F to 25°C/77°F
- Average night time temperatures range from 5°C/41°F to 15°C/59°F (duvets, blankets and hot water bottles are provided)
- Drier months – generally December to February and May to August
- Wetter months – generally March and April and September to November

### Contacts

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# USEFUL INFORMATION



## Complimentary Drinks

- The lodge offers a fully stocked bar with a selection of complimentary soft drinks, beers, wines and liquor. Bottled water or treated, filtered drinking water is also provided.

## Electricity

- Charging of electronic gadgets can be done in the main public area (110 to 240 volts).

## Payment

- Extras must be paid for in cash – we accept UG Shillings, US Dollars, GB Pounds or Euros.
- Gratuities are at the discretion of guests and greatly appreciated; they are best given in post 2006 US Dollar cash. For lodge staff we suggest \$5-15 per day per guest. For Volcanoes Safaris' guides we

suggest \$10 or more per day, for park guides \$10-20 and for trackers and porters \$20 per guest. Make sure you bring enough cash with you.

## Child Policy

- Children are welcome, though we do not have childcare facilities at the lodge.
- Children under 15 years of age are not allowed to visit the gorillas or visit the golden monkeys; families travelling with children aged 15 years and below will need to arrange alternative activities.

## Internet

- Limited Wi-Fi in the communal area only (the strength and connection can be very erratic).

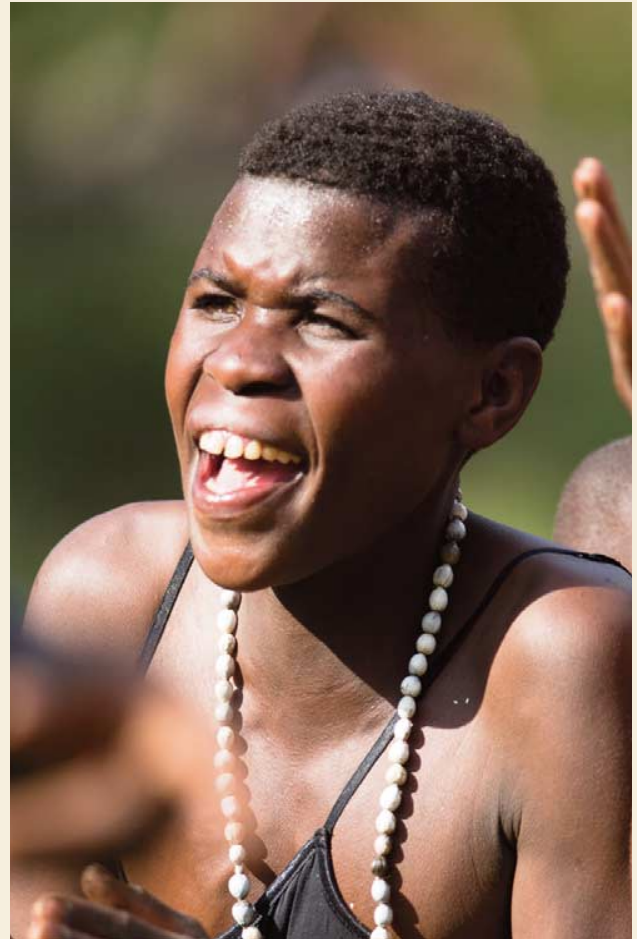
## Cell Phone Reception

- The lodge has cell phone network coverage (however this is not always reliable).

## Laundry

- A complimentary laundry and boot cleaning service is available (in the rainy season it may take up to 48 hours for the return of clothes).





## The Batwa of Mgahinga

### Discover the fading culture of the Batwa pygmies and the timeless majesty of the Virunga volcanoes

Referred to as the first people of Africa, the Batwa (formally known as Pygmies) were the first inhabitants of the forests and hills of East Africa. The Batwa lived, relatively undisturbed, in the forested areas of the region until around 2000 years ago, when the expanding Bantu peoples from the West of the continent arrived and began to clear the forests for use in agriculture.

Batwa are indigenous people who lived in the forest as their home. The Batwa lived in harmony with the forest and its creatures like mountain Gorillas for millennia. The Batwa survived by hunting small game, honey, gathering plants and fruits, they

lived in caves, huts constructed of leaves and branches.

Finally in 1991 with the gazetting of the national parks in Uganda the Batwa were forced out of their last remaining ancestral forest. Unfortunately, the Batwa had never officially owned the forests, not surprising given their ancient culture has no concept of ownership, and as a result were evicted from their ancestral home, receiving no compensation for their losses.

As a result, the community suffers from terrible poverty and Batwa often struggle to adapt to the more modern society in which they are forced to live.

Many of them lost their lives during early years of exile, and those existing were severely threatened and their cultural heritage under graded. Some do squat on people's land do not have sustainable revenue, and education. They are exposed to forced labour, and some earn a living through begging.

The Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust is striving to empower this minority group, revive these traditions so that their history and culture are better understood by both the local communities



## Visit the Batwa pygmies and experience their diminishing culture first-hand

Batwa culture is one of the most ancient and endangered in the entire world, for thousands of years they have survived in the forest and have a vast store of cultural knowledge relating to this. Historically, Batwa people would have had an in depth knowledge of forest plants, especially for medicinal purposes, they could track bees to find their hives and collect honey and had a whole range of techniques used to survive.

Traditionally this knowledge would have been passed on orally through dancing and storytelling, but now much of this knowledge is no longer relevant to their lives and sadly, despite the Batwa retaining their love of stories and dance, is being lost in modern communities.

In Uganda Batwa constitute around 0.03% of the total population, with the highest number (just under 1000) living in the Kisoro region. Their small numbers and lack of education and wealth, mean they have little political clout, and as a result have become very much marginalised in society. It is for this reason the Volcanoes Safaris Partnership trust is involved in helping the community around Mount

Gahinga Lodge (around 25 families) in the hope that we can improve the lives not only of those local to us, but also, through increasing awareness, the position of the Batwa in Ugandan society as a whole.







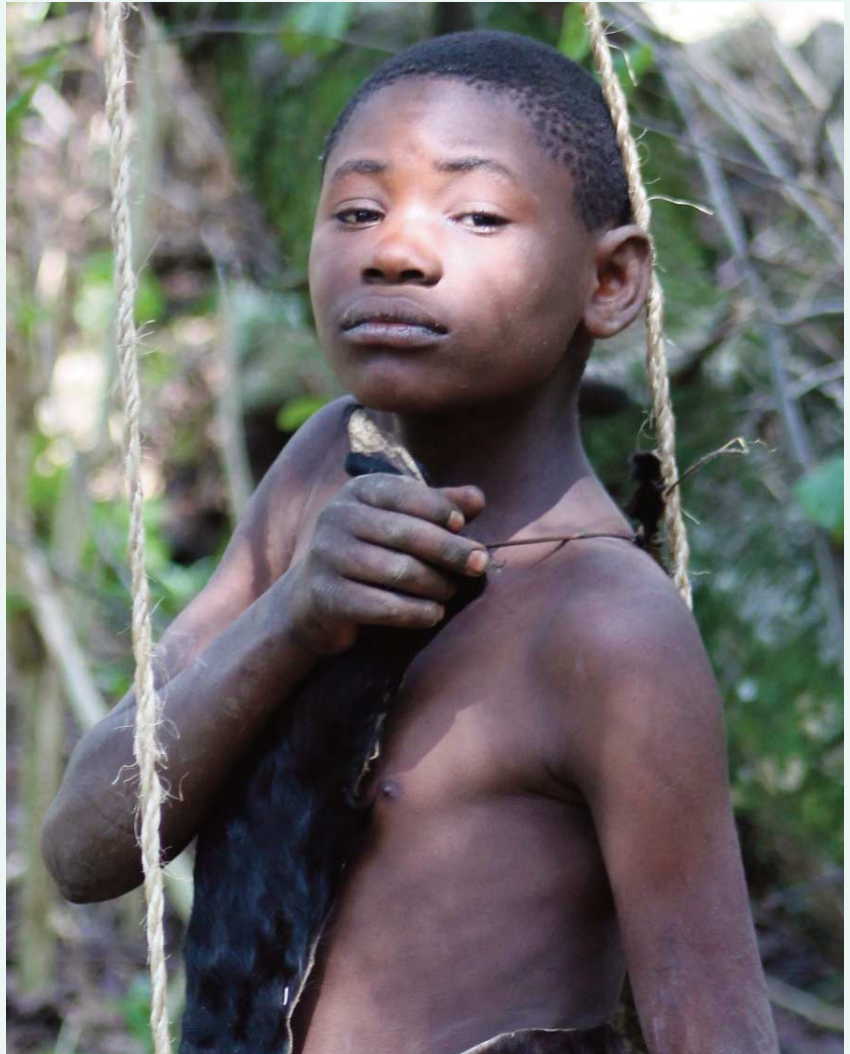
## **The Mount Gahinga Ecotourism Partnership**

### **The work of the Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust**

In 2009 the Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT), was established by Volcanoes Safaris Ltd. VSPT is a non-profit organization that undertakes community and conservation activities in areas that neighbour all four Volcanoes Safaris lodges and great ape habitats. The VSPT aims to create long-term, self-sustaining projects that will enrich the livelihoods of local communities, promote the conservation of the great apes, restore natural habitats and work with communities and institutions to reduce human-wildlife conflicts in the areas neighbouring our lodges. The

objectives of VSPT are achieved through regular donations from Volcanoes Safaris who contribute a voluntary donation of \$100 from every full cost safari purchased.

Prior to 2009, Volcanoes Safaris undertook a number of community projects as part of its activities. The most wide ranging one was DFID's BLCF Project in Rwanda which was a public-private partnership involving nine partners based in Rwanda and which engaged in a series of initiatives to kick-start gorilla tourism in the country from 2003 to 2006.



The Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT) has set up a number of activities around Mount Gahinga to help tourism make a positive impact on the local people and their ways of life:

- **Training local guides for a community walk.** In consultation with the community we devised and established a walk through their villages led by members of their society with the aim to help them increase the revenue they are gathering from tourism.
- **The Batwa Dance Group** was an initiative to support the local traditions by funding a dance group. Dance is how they traditionally share knowledge so both preserves their culture and increases revenue for the group.
- **A Batwa Garden** was cultivated to address the Batwa's traditional problem of not owning land. Being hunters and gatherers, not farmers, it was designed to help them learn new skills and generate income.
- **The Batwa Vocational Centre** has been set up by the VSPT and was initially a sewing project, teaching the women of the local Batwa community to mend and create clothes and bags. Now it teaches them a variety of skills including how to make craft items that are sold in the lodge's gift shop.
- **The Batwa Heritage Experience** is located on the lodge grounds and provides a centre for the Batwa to share their ancient traditions with guests. Their forest traditions are in danger of being lost now that they are no longer practiced so this site creates a focus for the continuation of these traditions, which the VSPT and VS believes are important to the history of the people of Africa.