



## Virunga Lodge Fact Sheet

Volcanoes Safaris is delighted to present its popular Virunga Lodge in Rwanda – home of the mountain gorilla.

Set on a stunning hilltop in a spectacular location, the magnificent Virunga Lodge offers a panoramic view of the Virunga volcanoes and shimmering twin lakes Ruhondo and Bulera. Opened by Volcanoes Safaris in 2004, Virunga Lodge includes two spacious deluxe bandas and has frequently been described as having ‘the best view in the world’. This charming lodge is the ideal place to base yourself when visiting Rwanda’s mountain gorillas.

Praveen Moman, the Founder of Volcanoes Safaris, said of Virunga Lodge:

‘Virunga is unique because of its location. It’s a magical place. This is where Africa meets. We’ve tried to imbibe the history of the place, how a Rwandan would build, into the Lodge. We believe very much that you must give back to the community, give back to conservation.’

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# SUMMARY



Volcanoes Safaris was the first international upmarket safari company to start taking clients to see gorillas in Rwanda in 2000 as the country settled down after a decade of conflict.

Virunga Lodge was opened by Volcanoes Safaris in 2004 and in 2009, the UN's 'Year of the Gorilla', received an extensive refurbishment. The construction of the lodge was part of a public-private partnership eco-tourism project supported by the British government. Volcanoes Safaris co-ordinated the Business Linkages Challenge Fund project (BLCF), which undertook a series of initiatives to kick-start gorilla tourism in post-conflict Rwanda.

'Volcanoes Safaris has taken a sector-wide approach to the vision of improving the infrastructure of tourism

in Rwanda: rather than focus solely on their part of the business, they have worked to the belief that improving the entire sector will have benefits for all involved – and ultimately for the local community as well.' BLCF Managers.

Virunga Lodge prides itself on being actively involved in a variety of community projects that educate local people and promote gorilla conservation. Projects are themed around preserving traditional culture, community development and education. Volcanoes Safaris also supports organisations that actively conserve the gorillas, such as the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project.

# LOCATION

Virunga Lodge is a magnificent eco-luxury lodge set on a breathtaking hilltop near Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park, home to the endangered mountain gorillas. The 10-room lodge overlooks the Virunga Volcanoes and Lakes Ruhondo and Bulera, offering what has been described as 'the best view in the world'.



## The Lodge: getting there

The lodge is a scenic 3-hour drive from Kigali. Alternatively, it is about 20 minutes in a stunning helicopter transfer from Kigali direct to the lodge.

### Lodge Location:

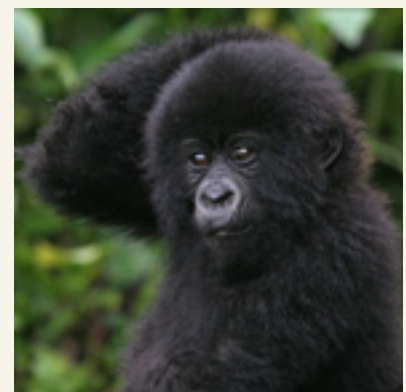
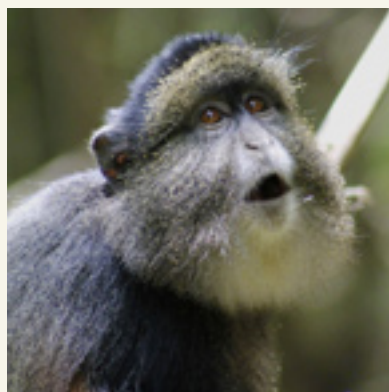
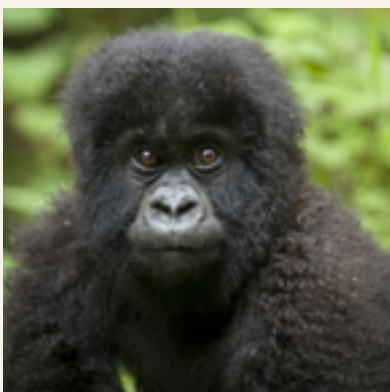
GPS Co-ordinates: S 01° 26.828' E 029° 44.498'

Altitude: 2200–2300m

## Recommended programs:

4-day safari Gorillas in PNV program that offers gorilla and golden monkey tracking as well as a chance to visit Dian Fossey's grave and the Karisoke Research Centre or climb Mount Visoke.

6-day safari Gorillas in PNV and Culture in Mgahinga program that offers gorilla and golden monkey tracking as well as a chance to participate in the culture and traditions of the local Batwa pygmies.





# BACKGROUND INFORMATION



## The Lodge: design

Volcanoes Safaris started to build Virunga Lodge in 2002, the first phase of which opened in 2004. No other international tourism company was prepared to take such risks at this time and this early investment on the ground by Volcanoes is a hallmark of our pioneering work in and around the mountain gorilla parks.

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 Virunga Lodge, therefore, we remain dedicated to our ecological commitments using solar hot water systems, harvesting rainwater with collection facilities on the roof of the main building and powering the lodge using solar energy.

Virunga Lodge, conceived and built by Praveen Moman and a team of African builders led by James Ssemenda, reflects local architecture. Using volcanic rock, local terracotta tiles and pastel colours, the lodge blends sympathetically into the hillside. With the help of Prabhat Poddar, an expert on Vasthu, it incorporates ancient

Indian concepts of harmonizing the energy of buildings with the earth while Ross Langdon, from sustainable architectural practice Regional Associates, helped to create locally inspired buildings.





## The Lodge: the main building

The main building, sitting 'on top of the world', provides a cosy refuge to enjoy meals, a drink around the fire or a chance to relax with a book. While the terraces overlooking the volcanoes and the lakes are ideal places to take in the stunning scenery during meal times or with a sunset. The lodge's mature, terraced gardens and the magical sunken paradise garden are host to an array of beautiful wild flowers, which attract a wide variety of birdlife.

The views from the terraces are spectacular, one side of the lodge facing the twin lakes Ruhondo and Bulera and enjoying the sight of the sun rising from the hills beyond them in the morning. The other side of the lodge looks out over the

Vrunga volcanoes starting with the tall Muhavura volcano, the rest of the chain falling in line behind them in idyllic open landscapes.







## The Lodge: the bandas

The lodge's eight tiled bandas are each named after African lakes in the region and offer elegance and great comfort. Their 'organic, bush-chic' design reflects the local building style.

Each banda is refurbished regularly, the 2010 innovations including the addition running water and luxurious, en-suite bathrooms with full facilities, including low-flush toilets and hot and cold running showers. Each banda has its own private terrace with spectacular views of the volcanoes or lakes.

Virunga also features two honeymoon bandas, larger and more private suits that also include an open and comfortable living room area for private dining. These more private and insular bandas are ideal for a honeymooning couple wanting to spend that much more time together.

The interiors feature brightly-coloured Kitnege furnishings, the fabric commonly used for traditional clothing, providing a wide variety of exciting colours and complex patterns, adding to the local feel of this eco-luxury lodge experience.

The lodge includes two deluxe bandas with spacious living spaces in addition to the bedroom and including a fireplace. The private terrace is ideal for sundowners and the larger rooms ideal for honeymooners or families.



## Accommodation

The lodge's eight bandas offer elegance and great comfort with their 'organic, bush-chic' design.

- 10 stone guest bandas with tile roofs (4 doubles, 4 twins, 2 deluxe) reflect the local building style.
- Recently refurbished en-suite bathrooms with flushing toilet, double vanity, shower with hot & cold running water (solar heated) and bio-degradable hand & body wash.
- Rooms have mosquito nets, 240v lighting (with emergency solar lamp & torch provided), plus a private veranda offering spectacular views over the volcanoes or lakes.
- There are NO air conditioners, power sockets/charging facilities or fireplaces in the rooms.
- Bandas are individually named after African lakes of the region.
- 4 guide/tour leader rooms (with shared shower room & toilet).



## Public Areas

The main building sits 'on top of the world' – a cosy refuge to enjoy meals, a drink or just relax.

- International cuisine with a Rwandan flair with tropical fruits, cooked breakfasts, hearty lunches, warming soups and generous dinners served.
- Tranquil massage room to enjoy a complimentary massage.
- The simple curio shop offers Volcanoes Safaris merchandise and clothing.
- Terraces overlook the volcanoes & the lakes with scenic panoramic views.
- Mature, terraced gardens host an array of wild flowers and attract a wide variety of birdlife.
- Wi-Fi and internet access available in the main lodge building.





## Activities from Virunga Lodge

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

### Wildlife Activities

- Gorilla Tracking (must be booked in advance)
- Golden Monkey Tracking
- Birding from the lodge or in the park

### Unique Community and Cultural Activities

- Watch the Intore Dancer Performance
- Visit Mwiko Primary School (not during weekends and school holidays)
- Enjoy the Local Village Walk
- Visit Iby'lwacu Cultural Village near the park
- Visit Lake Kivu & Gisenyi Town
- Visit Roz Carr's old flower farm 'Mugongo' and orphanage 'Imbabazi'

### Hiking

- Hike to Dian Fossey's Grave
- Climb Karisimbi Volcano (must be booked in advance)
- Hike to Visoke Volcano's Crater Lake
- Walk to Lake Bulera from the Lodge
- Stroll the Lodge's Crater View Trail

### Relax at the Lodge

- Complimentary massage
- Selection of board games & library





## Journey and Stay

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

### The Lodge: getting there

- A scenic 3 hour drive from Rwanda's capital city: Kigali.
- Alternatively, it is about a 20 minute stunning helicopter transfer from Kigali direct to the Lodge.
- 2 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Mount Gahinga Lodge.
- 6 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Bwindi Lodge.
- 7 hour drive from Volcanoes Safaris Kyambura Gorge Lodge.
- 10 hour drive from Uganda's capital city: Kampala.



### Seasons & Climate

Rwanda enjoys a warm climate all year round, however rainfall patterns and altitude play a role in day-to-day temperatures; 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 January, July and August to mid-September
- Wetter months – generally February to June and mid-September to mid-December

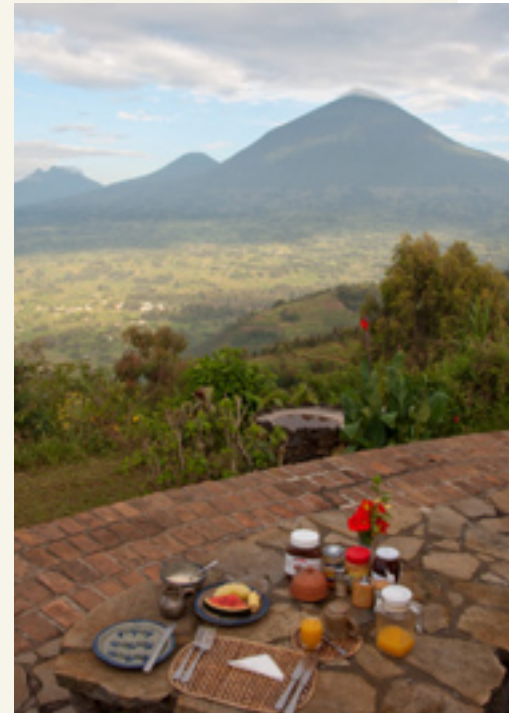
### Contacts

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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 and those under 15 cannot 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 wildlife and Virunga volcanoes**

### **Discover the wildlife, gorillas, volcanoes and lakes of the Virunga chain**

The lodge is a scenic drive from the headquarters of the Volcanoes National Park, Parc National des Volcans (PNV), which protects the Rwandan sector of the Virunga Mountains and makes up one part of the Virunga Conservation Area, which spans the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Rwanda.

PNV evolved from the oldest National Park in Africa, which, prior to 1960, was known as Albert National Park. Today PNV covers an area of about 160 km<sup>2</sup>, ranging from 2,400m to 4,507m and contains five volcanoes: Karisimbi, Visoke, Sabinyo, Gahinga & Muhavura (two of which can be climbed). The park was established in order to protect the mountain gorilla and was brought to the attention of a global audience by Dian Fossey, through her

research on the gorillas there and through her autobiography *Gorillas in the Mist*.

The Virunga eco-system is composed of four major vegetation zones: bamboo, Hagenia-Hypericum forest, Sub-Alpine and Afro-Alpine. Secondary thicket, meadows, marshes, swamps and small lakes also occur but their total area is relatively small. Although most famous for the gorillas and the endangered golden monkeys, the park is also home to black-fronted duiker, buffalo and bushbuck – elephants are also reported to be in the park, though these are now very rare. The park also boasts approx. 200 bird species, with 13 species endemic to the Albertine Rift.



## Track the endangered Mountain Gorillas of the misty Virunga mountains

Volcanoes Safaris are the No.1 Gorilla Safari Company, having been at the forefront of mountain gorilla tourism since 1997 and the only safari company to have signed the UN Kinshasa Declaration on Great Apes. A journey with Volcanoes Safaris takes our guests on an unforgettable voyage into the misty forests of Africa and gives them a privileged insight into the fascinating world of the great apes.

Gorilla tracking is a captivating and unforgettable experience. Nothing can prepare you for the impact of encountering a fully grown silverback gorilla, up to three times the size of an average man, yet remarkably peaceable, playful and tolerant of human visitors. It is a privilege to spend an hour sitting with and watching these wild relatives. Only eight visitors are allowed per gorilla group each day. Typically, tracking takes 3 to 7 hours and requires some agility and fitness. Mountain gorillas live at high altitude, but no one should feel deterred from missing this once in a lifetime experience.

There are two populations of mountain gorilla: one in the Virunga Massif and the other in Bwindi, Uganda. Mountain gorillas are a critically endangered subspecies of the Eastern gorilla, with only about 786 left in the world. After chimpanzees, gorillas are our closest relatives and share about 97.7%

of our DNA. First described in 1902, George Schaller later pioneered studies of mountain gorillas in the 1950s and 60s. In 1967 they were followed up by Dian Fossey, who worked in Rwanda until her death in 1985. Today there are estimated to be approximately 480 mountain gorillas in the Virunga Conservation Area (from the 2010 census). PNV has 10 habituated gorilla families used for tracking – almost double

what it was 5 years ago. Of these, currently eight groups, or families, of habituated gorillas can be tracked by tourists in Rwanda. These are: Susa, Sabyinyo, Amahoro, Kwitonda, Group 13 (Agashya), Umubano, Hirwa and Karisimbi. Sometimes these are joined by a migrant group from Uganda.







## **The Virunga 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 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 Intore Dancers

Since 2004 we have worked with the neighbouring community to maintain Rwandan cultural heritage around Virunga Lodge by establishing an Intore Dance Troupe made up of more than 40 local children, teenagers and young adults. The group's regular performances of traditional Rwandan music and dance are hugely popular with our guests and the VSPT supports the group through employing two trainers, providing salaries for the dancers, practice facilities and uniforms. In supporting the troupe, the VSPT helps preserve and maintain this piece of Rwanda's cultural heritage.

#### Mwiko Primary School

The school is situated near Virunga Lodge and has over 800 children and only 12 dedicated and hard-working teachers. Over the last 4 years the VSPT has built the school a new classroom, a water tank, repaired the roof, built latrines, helped with grounds maintenance and bought uniforms and materials for the school. The VSPT continues to help fund structural improvements to the school buildings. Many of the children who are part of the lodge's Intore Dance Troupe, who attended Mwiko at primary level, currently receive sponsorship through secondary school, thanks to the generous donations from former VS guests and other organisations associated with VS.

We also support organizations such as the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, who carry out vital work on gorilla conservation by inviting them to give talks to guests at our lodges and channelling donations through them. The VSPT also works closely with the local wildlife authority in Rwanda (RDB) to ensure that our guests and guides follow guidelines while visiting protected areas and that money generated by our guests' visits goes back into the conservation of the National Parks.