

# GORILLA RULES

## WHAT DOES ECOTOURISM MEAN?

Ecotourism means tourism to natural areas which contributes to:

1. Conserving the natural environment
2. Improving the well being of local people
3. Developing the national economy

## ON THE WAY TO GORILLAS

1. A maximum number of 8 visitors (6 IN Uganda and with smaller groups of gorillas) may visit a group of habituated gorillas in a day. This minimizes behavioural disturbance to the gorillas and the risk of human-borne diseases.
2. Please always keep your voices low. You will then also be able to observe the great bird life and other wildlife in the forest
3. Do not leave rubbish in the park. Whatever you bring in to the forest should be carried back out with you.
4. you will be taken to where the guides observed the gorillas the day before. From there you will follow the gorillas trail to find them. Look out for the gorillas nesting sites along the way!
5. When you approach the gorillas, the guide will inform you when to get your cameras ready.
6. Always wash your hands before you head out to the gorillas.

## WHEN YOU ARE WITH THE GORILLAS

1. Keep a minimum of 7 metres from the gorillas. This is to protect them from catching human diseases.
2. You must stay in a tight group when you are near the gorillas.
3. Keep your voices down at all times. However, it is OK to ask the guide questions.
4. Do not eat or drink while you are near the gorillas. Eating or drinking inevitably will increase the risk of food/drink morsels/droplets falling; which could increase the risk of transmission of diseases.
5. Sometime the gorillas charge. Follow the guide's example – crouch down slowly, do not look the gorillas directly in the eyes and wait for the animals to pass. Do not try

and take pictures and do not attempt to run away. Running away will increase the risk.

6. Flash photography is not permitted! When taking pictures move slowly and carefully.
7. Do not touch the gorillas. They are wild animals. They might look cuddly but...
8. The maximum time you can spend with the gorillas is one hour. However, if the gorillas become agitated or nervous, the guide will finish the visit early.
9. After the visit keep your voice down until you are 200 meters from the gorillas.

#### GENERAL HEALTH RULES

Remember gorillas are very susceptible to human diseases. The following are ways to minimize the risk your visit might pose to them:

1. Respect the limits imposed on the number of visitors allowed with the gorillas each day. This minimizes the risk of disease transmission and stress to the group.
2. If you are feeling ill, or are carrying a contagious disease, volunteer to stay behind. An alternative visit will be arranged for you for you, or you will be refunded your money.
3. If you feel the urge to cough or sneeze when you are near the gorillas, please turn your head away and cover your nose and mouth in order to minimize the spread of bacteria or viruses.
4. Always stay 7 meters away from the gorillas. The further back you are, the more relaxed the group will be.
5. Do not attempt to touch the gorillas.
6. Do not smoke, drink or eat when you are with the gorillas.
7. Do not leave any rubbish (eg: food wrappers) in the park; Foreign items can harbour diseases or other contaminants.
8. If you need to defecate whilst in the forest, please ask the guide to dig you a hole with his panga. Make sure the hole is 30 cms deep and fill it in when you are finished.

#### HOW YOU ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE CONSERVATION OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA

The mountain gorilla ( *Gorilla beringei beringei*), the world's most endangered ape, is found only in small portions of protected afro-montane forests in northwest Rwanda, southwest Uganda and eastern DRC. The mountain gorilla is one of many species unique to these forests. The forest are also home to many wonderful birds primates, large mammals, reptiles, insects and plants and also ensure continued water and medicinal plant resources for the local communities.

The mountain gorillas are divided into two populations and current figures estimate the total population to be about 650 individuals. One population is found in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP), in S.W. Uganda, covering 330 km<sup>2</sup> and the other in the Virunga Volcano Range (VVR). The Virunga volcano range is ecologically homogenous (same flora and fauna), covering three contiguous National Parks in Rwanda and Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, covering an approximate total area of 450 km<sup>2</sup>.

The threats to the remaining mountain gorilla populations and its habitat are many. One of these threats is the possibility of disease transmission from humans to gorillas. In order to address the issue of potential disease transmission to the gorillas and to mitigate behavioural disturbances to this fragile population, the gorilla rules have been developed.

By following these rules and through the purchase of the permit, you too are contributing to the conservation of the mountain gorillas. The protected area authorities use the funds generated from the sale of this permit for the management of the National Parks. A percentage of the funds raised from the Park entrance fees are also donated to local communities living adjacent to the parks to contribute to their development and improve natural resource management in the region.