

# ESSENTIAL INFORMATION RWANDA

## PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION

Your passport needs to be valid for **at least six (6) months** after your journey ends, and should have a minimum of one (1) blank visa page for entry and exit stamps.

### **A tourist visa is required for U.S. and Canadian passport holders for entry into Rwanda.**

There are currently two options available as outlined below.

**Electronic Visa (eVisa):** To apply for an eVisa, visit

<https://irembo.gov.rw/rolportal/web/dgie/single-entry-visa>. The current fee for a single-entry visa is USD \$30 (subject to change without notice.) Read and follow all instructions carefully to ensure a smooth arrival in Rwanda.

**Visa on Arrival:** A tourist visa can be obtained on arrival at Kigali International Airport (KGL). The current fee for a single-entry visa is USD \$30 (subject to change without notice.) Accepted forms of payment are cash in U.S. dollars and Visa or Master Card.

Our partner VisaCentral offers easy, efficient U.S. passport and visa processing. Visit them online at [visacentral.com/abercrombiekent](https://visacentral.com/abercrombiekent) or call 844 823 1224 and reference A&K's account number 73001. Service fees apply.

Citizens of other countries should contact the appropriate consular office for entry requirements pertaining to their journey.

## VACCINATIONS

A yellow fever vaccination is only required to enter Rwanda if you are arriving from, or have transited through, a yellow fever-endemic area in South America or Africa—including East African countries such as Kenya and Uganda. The CDC and WHO each provide a current list of all affected countries. If vaccination for yellow fever is necessary, you must carry an International Certificate of Vaccination provided by your physician; you may be denied entry without it. If your physician advises against receiving the vaccination because of your personal medical history, he or she can provide you with the necessary documentation for the country/countries you are visiting. *Note: the requirements and enforcements of yellow fever vaccinations to enter Rwanda are subject to change without notice. As a result it is prudent to be vaccinated and carry your International Certificate of Vaccination with you, even during times when online sources may indicate it is not required.*

## STAY HEALTHY ON THE ROAD

Because of Rwanda's high elevations, you may experience altitude sickness. Please consult your healthcare provider for suggestions on prevention and treatment.

## CASH & CREDIT CARDS

Rwanda has a cash-based economy. Cash transactions can be made in either U.S. dollars or local currency. U.S. dollars should be recently issued bills in smaller denominations. Major credit cards are accepted on a very limited basis, mainly in the largest shops, hotels and lodges. Access to ATM machines is available in larger cities such as Kibale but limited in rural areas.

## OF SPECIAL NOTE: PLASTIC BAGS IN RWANDA

The government of Rwanda has implemented a ban on plastic bags. The ban applies to “carrier and flat bags,” primarily targeting bags from shops and grocery stores, but also extending to Ziploc bags, duty-free bags and bubble wrap. If tourists have those types of bags visible while in

the airport, they are likely to be confiscated. Bags designed for multiple use, such as zippered cosmetic bags, are not included in the ban.

# PACKING LIST & BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS RWANDA

## BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS

One flights within Rwanda, each passenger is limited to a maximum baggage weight of 50 pounds (22.5 kilograms). This includes the weight of purses and camera equipment in addition to regular luggage. Luggage restrictions are adhered to very strictly and passengers should pack their bags accordingly. Soft-sided luggage or duffels are preferable to hard luggage for storage on safari vehicles and also on aircraft used throughout East Africa. Dimensions should not exceed 23 inches (58 centimeters) long x 13 inches (33 centimeters) high x 10 inches (25 centimeters) wide. As a convenience, A&K provides each safari guest with a complimentary, custom-designed A&K Duffel. This bag is specifically crafted to meet airline standards.

Please use the provided A&K luggage tags, even if your bags already have ID tags. This makes it easier for A&K staff to collect and manage your luggage for you.

## PACKING LIST

Choose comfortable and casual clothing in natural, "breathable" fabrics and versatile styles that can be layered as temperatures may vary considerably in the course of the day. For game viewing, wear neutral colors (though not camouflage, which is illegal in most national parks and reserves). Black, navy or other dark colors tend to attract insects. Smart casual attire is appropriate for evenings. Formal clothing is not necessary.

When primate tracking, wear long pants and shirts made of sturdy fabric is recommended to protect against scratches from stinging nettles and thorny vegetation. Also bring a good pair of comfortable, waterproof walking/hiking boots with textured soles, and ideally a good pair of protective leather or garden gloves should also be worn. Gaiters are also highly recommended. Avoid wearing perfume or cologne. Those with longer hair may wish to wear it in a ponytail or tuck it under a hat to avoid being tangled with thorny vegetation or flying insects.

### Clothing

- Casual slacks
- Walking shorts
- Polo shirts, casual short-sleeve shirts or blouses
- Long sleeve shirts or blouses
- Comfortable walking shoes with traction
- If you are travelling during Africa's winter months of mid-May through early September, bring warm clothing —heavy sweater, hat, gloves, lined jacket —to protect against chilly early morning and evening temperatures
- A pair of rubber beach sandals to use as slippers.
- Lightweight raincoat.
- Brimmed hat for sun protection
- Swimwear/cover-up
- Personal garments
- Sports bra for women for bumpy roads
- Sleepwear
- Socks

### Other Recommended Items

- Sunglasses / Sun block
- Insect repellent with high % of DEET to protect against mosquitos, bees, wasps and tsetse flies\*

Prescriptions and medications (in their original bottles and/or packaging)

Extra eyeglasses/contact lenses

Charging cables for electronics

Simple first-aid kit (including antihistamines or cortisone cream to treat insect stings)

Smartphone

Global travel adapter

#### Optional Items

Small LED flashlight

Lightweight binoculars

Low-suds detergent for washing small items of personal laundry

Foldable walking stick

Small daypack or fanny pack

\*Note: many properties provide insect repellent in rooms/tents. However you may wish to bring your own preferred brand.

Laundry Service is available at most hotels, lodges and camps. Because some laundries in Africa do not accept any underclothing, be prepared to wash your own smalls. Laundry techniques may not be suitable for delicate and/or synthetic fabrics. Check costs and return times before using these services.

## TIPPING GUIDELINES RWANDA

While decisions regarding tipping rest entirely with you, we suggest the following gratuities (noted in U.S. dollars) depending on the type of journey.

	<b>All Small Group Journeys and Pre/Post Tour Group Extensions</b>	<b>Tailor Made and Signature Journeys</b>
Resident Tour Director or Group Extension Guide	\$15 per person, per day	Not applicable
Gorilla Tracking Staff (Head Guide, Security Rangers, Trackers)	Included	\$30 per person, per day – Gratuities are accepted at a central tip box and shared among the staff.
Personal Porter during gorilla tracking (if hired)	\$25 per person, per day	\$25 per person, per day
Safari Driver-Guides (non-gorilla tracking)	Included	\$15 per person, per day
Local Safari or City Guides	Not applicable	\$20 per person, per day (full day)
Airport Transfer Drivers	Included	\$5 per person, per transfer
Hotel Porters	Included	\$2 per bag
Bush Lodges and Permanent Tented Camps	Included	\$10 per person, per day – Gratuities are accepted at each property and shared among the staff.
Housekeepers	Included	\$2 per person, per night
Included Meals	Included	Included
Restaurants or Room Service on Own	10-15% unless already added	10-15% unless already added

For extra nights or Tailor Made services added to a Small Group Journey, please follow the Tailor Made Journeys guidelines for these days only.

## OF SPECIAL NOTE: GORILLA TRACKING IN RWANDA

The following information will help you get the most from a once-in-a-lifetime wildlife adventure.

There are three sub-species of gorilla in the world. The western lowland gorilla and the eastern lowland gorilla are, respectively, native to West Africa and East-Central Africa. The third sub-species – the mountain gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) – is one of the most endangered species in the world and found only in isolated habitats in Uganda and Rwanda.

### King Kong Versus Dian Fossey

When pioneering British explorers of the 19th century first brought word of their existence to the Western world, gorillas quickly developed a reputation as unpredictable, aggressive marauders. Fed by popular culture (think “King Kong”), this sensational characterization was contradicted by science when Dian Fossey began her famous studies of mountain gorillas in the Virungas.

Ms. Fossey’s groundbreaking observations, which began in 1963 and continued until her death in 1985, proved that gorillas were surprisingly gentle vegetarians with an elaborate social structure. Her efforts also brought world attention to the gorillas’ plight, as poaching and loss of habitat continued to severely reduce its already-dwindled numbers.

### Gorillas and Tourism

Today, tourism is fundamental to the preservation of gorilla habitat and, ultimately, to the survival of the gorilla itself. There are no mountain gorillas in captivity; they do not long survive or breed outside their highland forests.

Tourism finances habitat preservation, anti-poaching and community conservation efforts, habituation of gorilla families, and safeguards to limit the number of visitors and prevent exploitation of the species. As local people continue to be employed as trackers and guides, their lives and the lives of the gorillas have become increasingly interconnected, offering added hope for long-term survival.

### What to Expect on a Gorilla Tracking Excursion

The day begins early. Set your alarm clock for an early-morning call, as you will want to be washed, dressed and breakfasted in time to leave camp at 7:45 am. Wear neutral colors and bring your rain gear. Long sleeves and long trousers tucked into your socks are a must: protection against ants, stinging nettles and whipping foliage.

After arriving at the Park Headquarters, you will join your guide(s) and tracker(s) and begin tracking. Your lead tracker looks for clues—footprints, gnawed bamboo, dung—which indicate the location of a gorilla group.

*Note: It is highly recommended that guests hire a personal porter (arranged and paid for locally) to assist you during the trek.*

### Definitely Not a Walk in the Park

Mountain gorillas prefer densely overgrown landscapes with plenty of food plants near the ground, and they think nothing of climbing extremely steep slopes to reach the vegetation they like. As a result, tracking gorillas can be very difficult for humans.

You may walk for three or four hours to find them, followed by an equally long and potentially difficult return trip. En route, you may find yourself challenged by mud, slippery slopes, stinging nettles and paths leading across deep beds of thick vines.

Correct footwear and clothing are essential, as is general good health and excellent physical condition. A pre-departure program of walking, stair-climbing, bicycling, knee bends or similar exercise will help build strength and stamina for your trek. Ask your doctor for his/her recommendations.

Trackers usually allow for brief rest breaks en route, but they must be mindful of the time required to get out to the gorillas, spend a full hour with them, and return back down the trail before dark. As a result, their usual pace is brisk and steady. If you fall behind the group or are having difficulty negotiating some portion of the trail, a staff member will stay with you to assist, but the rest of the group will probably continue forward.

#### Sniff, Sniff—Gorillas!

You will probably smell the gorillas before you see them. As you move closer, your tracker will make soft smacking and groaning sounds to assure the group that friends are approaching. If your morning trek has not been unusually long, you are likely to visit gorillas during their midday rest and play period.

The dominant male (usually a silverback) lounges on the ground or against a tree while youngsters roll in the vegetation and climb on trees, vines and each other. Females nurse and play with their infants. Occasionally, a curious adolescent may approach you or someone in your party, but remember that touching gorillas is strictly forbidden.

#### Stay Low and Quiet

Your group will be instructed to crouch down and stay together while observing gorillas. The dominant male wants to be able to see you at all times, to ensure that his family is not being threatened or surrounded. Don't stare directly into the eyes of a gorilla—along with humans; they share the sense that a fixed stare is an aggressive gesture. Stay low, maintain a subservient posture and watch them sideways or from below.

Sometimes, as a release of tension or a display for the rest of the group, a male gorilla will charge a tracking group, beating his chest, tearing vegetation and hurling his bulky frame in your direction. It's a bluff. Hard as it is not to run, maintain your crouching position and try not to flinch. The gorilla will stop before reaching you and calmly return to his previous position, probably with a smug glance over his shoulder. While such displays may turn savage between males of different gorilla families, they are simply a performance—albeit a breathtaking one—when used with human observers of habituated gorilla groups.

Tracking groups spend up to one hour with the gorillas on each excursion. This time limit is carefully observed; it protects the animals from undue stress. If your group stayed longer, the gorillas would probably end the visit themselves, by simply leaving. Habituated to human company as they may be, their naturally shy, private nature would reassert itself in the end.

Please note: The flora and fauna of Rwanda's national parks and reserves is strictly protected. Open fires are banned. Vegetation should not be damaged or destroyed unnecessarily. You are asked to leave nothing behind after your stay with the gorillas; carry all litter back to base with you.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Q. Can I photograph the gorillas?*

A. Yes, photography is allowed. But photos must be taken within the physical limitations of a gorilla visit: from a low, crouched position with slow, minimal movement. Don't take an excessive number of photos and never use a flash. Taking videos of the gorillas is permitted, but only without illumination lights.

*Q. Can I touch a gorilla?*

A. Absolutely not. Gorillas are curious creatures, and younger animals especially may approach or attempt to touch human visitors. Don't reciprocate! Your guide may take steps to discourage this curious behavior, as it could create a threatening situation with the dominant male. You yourself should never attempt to approach or touch a mountain gorilla.

*Q. Is it possible to predict how long or how hard my group's forest trek will be?*

A. Tracking conditions vary according to the gorillas' location on any given day, so the level of difficulty for any specific trek is impossible to define in advance. It's entirely possible that you will find the gorillas quickly and be back in time for lunch. It's also possible that you may trek three or four hours—or longer— each way, and end your excursion just as the sun goes down.

*Q. What happens if I find that the trek into the forest is too hard for me?*

A. If you just can't manage one more slippery slope or muddy hillside, advise your guide. Depending on the point at which you stop, you'll immediately return to the base of the trail with a member of the tracking staff, or be asked to remain in place (with a staff member) until met by the group on its return leg.

*Q. Is it possible to arrange a private viewing—just me, the guides and the gorillas?*

A. No, all gorilla tracking takes place in small groups of from four to six people per gorilla family. There are several different gorilla families. To guard the gorillas against stress, visits are limited to one hour per family per day—regardless of the number of people in the visiting group. With the available time already so limited, private visits cannot be arranged.

*Q. I've heard that if I have the sniffles on the day of my gorilla excursion, I won't be able to go. Is this true?*

A. Yes. Diseases such as colds, respiratory infections or diarrhea can be passed to gorillas by human visitors. If you have a cold or similar communicable ailment at the time of your tracking excursion, tell your guide. You won't be able to visit the gorillas, but the cost of your gorilla-tracking permit will be refunded. If you set off on the trek anyway and the guide notices that you're sick, you'll be escorted back to the base immediately. Your tracking permit fee will not be refunded.

*Q. Does A&K guarantee that I'll be able to spend "quality time" with the gorillas?*

A. No one can make this guarantee. Although trackers are very skilled at finding signs of gorillas and their movements, even the most experienced do not meet with 100% success. You should also be aware that consistent, clear viewing at close range is not always possible, given the dense vegetation in which gorillas prefer to roam.

Please note: Abercrombie & Kent does not control the administration or play any part in the operation of Rwanda's national parks and reserves, including the areas where gorilla tracking occurs. These areas are the total responsibility of local authorities. If our local staff observe situations which merit improvement, they will request that changes be made, but the authorities in charge are under no obligation to do so.

While Abercrombie & Kent has an excellent relationship with local authorities who are eager to help us look after our guests, gorilla-tracking excursions are operated by these authorities, not by Abercrombie & Kent.

Abercrombie & Kent believes that, if you travel with a sense of adventure, the rewards of gorilla tracking will far outweigh the demands of the trip.