**MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK**

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park is Uganda’s smallest park with an area coverage of 33.9 sq. km (13.1 sq. mi) , sitting at high in the clouds at an altitude between 2227 m and 4,127m (7306 ft to 13540 ft). Mgahinga is situated the southwestern part of Uganda on the border of Uganda, Congo and Rwanda in Kisoro district. Mgahinga Gorilla National Park boasts being one of the only 4 place to find the endangered Mountain Gorilla of Africa and carry out Mountain Gorilla tourism others being Bwindi Impenetrable the National Park of Uganda standing out as the best gorilla trekking destination and home to half of them, the other is Volcanoes National Park of Rwanda and lastly Virunga National Park in DRC. The park is also home to a unique specie of Monkeys called the Golden Monkeys also found in Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park. the main tourist attractions in the park are the Mountain Gorillas followed by the Golden Monkeys and Virunga Mountains.

Mgahinga is truly blessed with some of the Virunga Mountain Ranges, these extinct volcanoes all have their slopes in the park though the cut into Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo namely Mount Sabinyo, Mount Muhavura and Mount Gahinga.

The park got its name from one of its attraction that’s Mount Gahinga, “Gahinga” means piles of volcanic stones cleared from farmland at the foot of the volcanoes in native language. Mgahinga Gorilla National Park is dominated by Albertine rift Montane Forest, bamboo forest, Rwenzori- Virunga Montane Moorlands with tree heath and Alpine zone at high altitude which supports the life of Primates and other wildlife species.

Mgahinga is also rich in cultural significance, the park is neighbored by the indigenous Batwa Pygmies who are former hunters and gathers and first settlers in the forest before it was transformed into a National Park. the park is home to over 80 Gorilla Individuals though only one family is open for trekking.

**HISTORY OF MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK**

The now Mgahinga Gorilla National Park was first gazette as a game sanctuary in 1930 and upgraded to National Park level in 1991. The reason why it was gazetted was to protect the mountain Gorillas that inhabited its dense forests and the endangered mountain Gorillas from extinction.

**GORILLA TREKKING IN MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK**

**HOW IS GORILLA TREKKIN IN MGAHINGA COMPARED TO BWINDI IMPENETRALE NATIONAL PARK**

As earlier stated mountain Gorillas are found in only three countries in four destinations in the whole world Uganda with two destinations (Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park), Rwanda (Volcanoes National park and lastly DR Congo (Virunga National Park).

There is always debate of how does Gorilla trekking in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park Compare to that of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

50% of the remaining mountain Gorilla in Uganda are in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park which means Uganda is home to more than 50% of the remain Endangered Mountain Gorillas in the world. Approximately 400 Mountain Gorillas call Bwindi home.

Bwindi National Park is a UNESCO World heritage site making it more popular compared to Mgahinga. Bwindi offers a variety of habituated gorilla families to choose from (12) while Mgahinga has only 1 habituated gorilla family (Nyakagezi family) how ever this family stands out as one of the best gorilla families to trek in Uganda, it is the family with the highest number of Silverbacks in the whole world.

Bwindi has four sector where gorilla trekking takes place (Nkuringo, Ruhsagam Ruhija, Buhoma) meaning it’s possible to do double gorilla trekking unlike Mgahinga with one sector. Double Gorilla Trekking can be done one family per day (different Gorilla Families in different sectors).

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is the only place in the world where Mountain Gorillas and Chimpanzees can be found meaning tourist can sight on mountain Gorillas in Chimpanzee in one place. Mgahinga is advantaged with the Golden Monkeys that can be found in Mgahinga and Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park, making Mgahinga the only place to sight on Golden Monkeys and Gorillas in the same place in Uganda.

**OTHER ACIVITES DO TO IN MGAHINGA ALONG SIDE GORILLA TREKKING**

**Golden Monkeys Trekking and Monkey Trekking**

Mgahinga is also gifted with a healthy population of endangered Golden monkeys, they are among the most beautiful monkeys in the world. Mgahinga is also blessed with other monkey species like Colobus Monkeys. Golden Monkeys are only located in the Virunga mountain ranges in only Mgahinga and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. these species are highly endangered and sought by tourists, they are a sub-specie of the blue monkeys.

**Nature Walks**

Nature walks are done in the forest but using different forest trails, they are usually done on the slopes of Volcanoes , swamps (Rugezi Swamp), Forest and along the shores of Lake Mutanda.

Nature walks offer visitors several opportunities to spot birds, primates, small mammals, tree species, Your accompanied by an armed park ranger.

**Batwa Trail /Cultural encounter**

Batwa Trail takes you to the Batwa people who originally inhabited the forest before it was gazetted for Gorilla Conservation, they were evicted from the forest and resettled outside. Batwa were hunters and gathers in the forest nesting the Garama caves for thousands years.

They were focused to forego their way of life and adjust to life outside the forest. During the visitor you get a chance to engage with them and know how they are cooping up with life out side the forest. Engage in a number of cultural activities life dancing , storytelling, folk songs and enjoy the traditional way of life.

**Note** that this activity is led by a local Batwa guide who knows the locals best.

**Cave Exploration**

This activity takes you to the base of the Garama and Muhavura caves. These deep caves are historically a treasure to the Batwa people, they used these caves as assembling and meeting points while fighting their Bantu neighbors. The caves are now occupied by bats.

Hiking in these caves requires one to have strong torches. Garama caves are so deep that they are believed to reach Rwanda.

**Mountain Climbing**

Mountain climbing is one of the major tourist attractions in the park, one can climb one of the extinct volcanoes in the park like Mount Muhavura ( 4127 meters), Mount Sabinyo (3634 meters) and Mount Gahinga(3474 meters). Climbing one of the mountains takes only a day of hiking. One is required to have a trekking permit and they can also be at the park offices on short notice. For more details about hiking these mountains check out Mountain Hiking in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park.

**Bird Watching**

Mgahinga boasts being one of the best birding destinations in Uganda. Bird lovers stand a chance to sight on over 100 bird species. A local park guide will take you through trails to sight on different bird species like Blue-headed sunbird, Cape Robin-chat, Double-collared Apalis, Dusky Turtle Dove, Grey Capped warbler, Montane Oriole, Masked Apalis, Olive Thrush, Chestnut-throated Apalis, Doherty’s Bush-shrike, Dusky Crimson wing, Kivu Ground Thrush, Lagden’s bush Shrike, Mackinnon’s Fiscal, Pin-tailed whydah, Red-throated Alethe, Rwenzori Batis, Regal Sunbird to mention but a few.

**ACCOMMODATION DURING GORILLA TREKKIN IN MGAHINGA**

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park has a number of accommodation options ranging from Budget, Mid-range and Luxury. Some of the options include Mount Gahinga Safari Lodge, Chameleon Hill Lodge, Amajamere Lwacu Camp, Traveler’s Nest Hotel, Nkuringo Safaris Lodge, Clouds Mountain Gorilla Lodge, Mountain Gahinga Rest Camp, Mount Gahinga Lodge to mention but a few.

**HOW TO GET TO MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK**

**The park can be accessed both by road and Air**

**By Road;**

**From Kampala;**

The park is approximately km from Kampala/Entebbe via the Masaka-Mbarara high way and Kabale -Kisoro high way.

**From Rwanda;**

Drive from Rwanda via the Cyanika border for about 3-4 hours drive.

**By Air;**

Chartered flights are available from Entebbe International Airport to Kisoro Airstrip and then a short drive from the airstrip to the park headquarters or Accommodation.

**BEST TIME TO VIST THE PARK**

The park is open to tourists all year round. The best time to visit is the dry season between the months of June to August, January to February. During the dry season it’s easy to navigate the park being that the roads are murram, its less likely to rain, Hiking and trekking is very easy during this season. The rai season comes with muddy trails, slippery which makes hiking and trekking a bit challenging.