



Travellers visit habituated gorillas, meaning they have grown accustomed to being around people. STUART BUTLER

ray of luxury lodges includes Wilderness Safari's newest offering, Bisate Lodge (wilderness-safaris.com; rates from US\$1,299 a person, based on double occupancy), which fuses traditional architecture with a modern designer hotel (and they've tacked on a wine bar for good measure).

UGANDA

Uganda has two distinct gorilla populations. The largest number reside in the steep and steamy hillsides of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. The gorillas here are every bit as unperturbed by humans as those in Rwanda. Do take note though, the "impenetrable" in the name isn't just there for reasons of poetry. Unlike in any of the other habitats, the forest here is a mess of grappling undergrowth, which, like a pea-soup fog, can reduce visibility to just a few metres. Combine that with slippery and vertically inclined terrain and even experienced hikers will find the trek to most of the groups here exhausting. In return for your efforts, though, you'll get an experience that feels somehow less staged than that of Rwanda, with a greater sense of being in the wild.

Uganda's other prime spot is the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. Abutting Rwanda, the landscapes and vegetation here are similar to Volcanoes National Park. However, only one habituated group calls it home, and ever so occasionally they go on a short holiday to Rwanda or DRC; check before booking. On the upside, the low number of gorillas make it less popular with tour-



ists, and it's not at all uncommon to have the Mgahinga group all to yourself.

WHAT ELSE?

Uganda is an unusually diverse country with plenty to keep you busy. Queen Elizabeth National Park, with its corn-coloured grasslands, tree-climbing lions and trumpeting elephants is just up the road and the habituated chimpanzees of the Kibale Forest National Park are a few hours away.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodation around the Ugandan gorilla parks is primarily aimed at midrange travellers who demand comfort but are happy to forgo the bells and whistles of top-end lodges. Examples are the easy-going Nkuringo Bwindi Gorilla Lodge (mountain-gorillalodge.com; rooms from US\$195 a person, based on double occupancy), and Volcanoes Safaris colonial-style Mount Gahinga Lodge (volcanoessafaris.com/mount-gahinga-lodge-uganda; rooms from US\$240 a person, based on double occupancy), which has open fire places in the rooms and a garden filled with rainbow painted sunbirds.



A trek through Uganda's aptly named Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park rewards visitors with a more wild encounter.

PHOTOS BY STUART BUTLER

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The mere mention of the Congo brings images of unexplored rainforests and temperamental volcanoes. In the Virunga National Park, the reality doesn't disappoint. This is Africa's oldest national park, one of its most bio-diverse and beautiful but also one of its most threatened. The security situation here is fluid: The government of Canada advises against all travel to eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the province of North Kivu, in which the park can be found. Virunga itself recently reopened in February after being closed for eight months because of violence against rangers and visitors.

For those willing to make the trek, this is probably the most exciting place to see mountain gorillas. The reward is few other tourists and apes that are perfectly at ease with people. Not to mention the knowledge that you're giving money to a park that so desperately needs all the love it can get.

WHAT ELSE?

When your morning meditation with the gorillas is over, you don't even have to leave Virunga to track chimpanzees, climb mountains and scramble to the summit of a giant volcano to stare in awe into the boiling mass of the world's largest permanent lava lake.

WHERE TO STAY?

The Democratic Republic of the Congo offers excellent value accommodation, and the Mikeno Lodge might be one of the best deals in Africa (mikenolodge.com; pricing varies with packages).

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The writer's travels were subsidized by the national parks board of each country and Natural World Safaris. They did not review or approve the article.

The safari, reimagined

Lodges are dreaming up new ways to go beyond the Big Five, **Barbara Ramsay Orr** writes

While many travellers put seeing the Big Five at the top of their wish lists, there are other reasons to head out on a safari beyond catching glimpses of lions and leopard in the wild (as magnificent as that is). New iterations of the adventure classic are drawing visitors in to the complex and multi-layered landscape of the veldt, and adding new ways of understanding and appreciating the wonder that is Africa.



THE SLOW SAFARI

While the safari ritual is standard at most lodges – a 5 a.m. wake-up for the morning excursion (don't worry, there's fresh coffee to start and a stop for breakfast out in the bush) and 4 p.m. departure – the Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in the southwest part of South Africa's Kruger National Park puts a renewed emphasis on in-depth study of animal behaviour. Outings here, one of the best known game destinations in Africa, allow for more time to observe the animals in the wild, with excursions led by guides who are knowledgeable not just about the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and Cape buffalo), but about the Little Five (elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, leopard tortoise, antlion and rhino beetle, less noticed but still enigmatic dwellers in the bushveld) and the local vegetation.

Dawn safaris reveal elephants, rhinos, hippos, lions, leopards, giraffes – the whole *Lion King* roster – and the twilight journey lets you see the animals in a different light. There are also guided walking safaris with an armed guard, just in case, that concentrate on the smaller animals and flora. One grace note I particularly appreciated at Sabi Sabi's Earth Lodge – a high-design luxury escape – were art supplies in the bedside-table drawer for guests desiring to do paint or sketch.

A four day fly-in Safari package at Earth Lodge begins at \$8,168 a person. One night, with full board begins at \$1,868 a person. sabisandsgamereserves.com



BOTANICAL SAFARI

Grootbos Private Nature Reserve, in the Gansbaai region of South Africa's Western Cape, is surrounded by the world's most diverse botanical area, the Cape Floral Kingdom. The five-star resort sits amongst the rolling hills of fynbos, the rich South African bush vegetation with more than 9,000 species of plants.

So while a flower safari may sound pretty tame, it is anything but. A tour, done either on horseback or in a jeep, of the rolling hills covered in flowering bushes reveals the intricate interconnectedness of plants, birds and insects.

My guide, Clayton, knew the botanical names of every bush and flower. "This is the *protea leucadendron coniferum*, but you don't need to know the Latin name," he said, pointing at a shrub with yellow leaves. "It is far more interesting to know that there are both male and female forms of plants in the fynbos and that some of them produce a silky parachute that spreads the seeds in the wind. Some of the seeds are spread by mice or rodents and some of these plants flourish only after enduring a fire."

Some of the plants documented at Grootbos are found only in this private reserve, and it is that special and rare diversity that the resort is dedicated to saving. Rates from \$1,055 a night, including full board and activities. grootbos.com



MARINE SAFARI

If you've seen the animals, why not do the fishes? Both Grootbos and the elegant White Pearl Resort in Mozambique offer marine safaris, with the chance to see the aquatic big five – dolphins, whales, sharks, seals and penguins. (The devastating cyclone that has ravaged Mozambique has thankfully not damaged White Pearl, which is located on the Indian Ocean in the far southern tip of the country.) You can try out shark cage diving in the Gansbaai too, if that's on your risk-list.

White Pearl, built into an ocean-facing hillside and cradled in a crescent bay lined by white sandy beach, offers the two-part Bush to Beach Safari. Not far from the resort is a nature reserve, and guests can enjoy an animal safari in the early morning and either a marine safari or a beach experience in the afternoon.

If you want to keep focus on the water, you are in the right place here. Each villa has its own butler, who will schedule your picnic lunch on the beach, arrange a marine discovery walk, a beach horseback ride or a snorkelling excursion. He'll also bring you breakfast to enjoy by the plunge pool while you watch the dolphins just offshore. Rates begin at \$730 a night and include full board and most activities. whitepearlresorts.com

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The author travelled as a guest of GoWay Tours. It did not review or approve this article.

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