

Wildlife Guide

East Africa is teeming with wildlife. From the vast wildebeest herds that stampede across the plains of Serengeti National Park and Masai Mara National Reserve, to chimpanzee bands frolicking in the rainforests of southwestern Uganda, the region is one of the continent's premier safari destinations. In few other places on earth can you find such an impressive collection of large animals and such a diversity of environmental and climatic conditions within a similarly sized geographical area. Best of all, much of this natural wealth is readily accessible to visitors, thanks to enlightened conservation policies and an unparalleled collection of national parks and reserves. The East African safari experience is made all the more alluring as the habitats favoured by early humans – mosaics of riverine forest, savanna and lake shore – remain much as they did a million years ago, when our ancestors shared the plains with many of the animal species that still roam around today.

Wherever you head in the region, and whatever type of safari you choose, it's worth remembering that watching wildlife is about far more than just 'seeing' the animals and ticking them off on checklists. It's much more about experiencing East Africa untamed, getting a glimpse into nature's magnificent synchrony and understanding how the rhythms of the wild can be best protected for future generations. Doing all this takes time – time to loiter for hours at a watering hole, to sit in one spot at dawn while the morning rises around you, or to learn about the animals' habits and migration patterns, and the myriad factors affecting them. It also often takes money as well, although it's possible with some planning to keep things at a reasonable level. The more understanding you can accumulate about the animals and their environment, the more satisfied you'll be that your East African safari has been time and money well spent.



Lions drinking, Ruaha National Park, Tanzania
PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANBERGEN

PRIMATES

Greater bushbabies are named for their plaintive wailing calls (the calls of lesser bushbabies are rarely noticed).

PHOTO BY MITCH BEARDON



BUSHBABY

Greater or thick-tailed bushbaby (*Otolemur crassicaudatus*, pictured); East African lesser bushbaby (*Galago senegalensis*); Zanzibar lesser bushbaby (*Galagoides zanibaricus*)

A primitive primate, bushbabies have heightened night vision and extremely sensitive hearing, making them ideally adapted to their nocturnal way of life. Fruit and tree-sap are the mainstay of their diet, supplemented by insects and, in the case of the greater bushbaby, lizards, nestlings and eggs. Locally very common, they are difficult to see because they are strictly nocturnal.

Size: Greater bushbaby length 80cm, including 45cm tail; weight up to 1.5kg. Lesser bushbaby length 40cm; weight 150g to 200g. **Distribution:** Lightly wooded savanna to thickly forested areas; greater and lesser bushbabies occur throughout the region. **Status:** Common, but strictly nocturnal.

The male vervet monkey has a distinctive bright-blue scrotum, an important signal of status in the troop.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



VERVET MONKEY

Cercopithecus aethiops

Conspicuous inhabitants of the woodland-savanna, vervet monkeys are easily recognised by their grizzled grey hair and black face fringed with white. Troops may number up to 30. Vervet monkeys have a sophisticated vocal repertoire, with, for example, different

calls for different predators. They are diurnal, and forage for fruits, seeds, leaves, flowers, invertebrates and the occasional lizard or nestling. They rapidly learn where easy pickings can be found around lodges and camp sites, but become pests when they are accustomed to being fed.

Size: Length up to 1.3m, including 65cm tail; weight 3kg to 9kg; male larger than female. **Distribution:** All savanna and woodland habitats. **Status:** Very common and easy to see.

The blue monkey's social group may be as large as 30 but generally number between four and 12.

PHOTO BY ANDERS BLOMQUIST



BLUE (SAMANGO) MONKEY

Cercopithecus mitis

Similar to vervet monkeys, but slightly larger and much darker, blue monkeys have a grey to black face, black shoulders, limbs and tail, and a reddish-brown or olive-brown back. They are more arboreal than vervet monkeys, and generally prefer dense forest and

woodland rather than savanna. They feed largely on fruit, bark, gum and leaves. Social groups usually consist of related females and their young, and a single adult male. Their broad diet allows them to occupy relatively small home ranges.

Size: Length 1.4m, including 80cm tail; weight normally up to 15kg, but as much as 23kg; male larger than female. **Distribution:** Throughout most evergreen forests and forest patches. **Status:** Locally common; active by day; often difficult to see in foliage. Easy to see in Uganda's Kibale Forest.

BABOON

Papio cynocephalus

Baboons are unmistakable. The yellow baboon (*P. c. cynocephalus*) and the olive baboon (*P. c. anubis*; pictured) are named for their differing hair colour. Baboons live in troops of between eight and 200; contrary to popular belief, there is no single dominant male. Social interactions are complex, with males accessing only certain females, males forming alliances to dominate other males, and males caring for unrelated juveniles. Baboons forage in woodland-savanna for grasses, tubers, fruits, invertebrates and occasionally small vertebrates.

Size: Shoulder height 75cm; length 1.6m, including 70cm tail; weight up to 45kg; male larger than female, and twice as heavy. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Abundant.



Ever opportunistic, baboons often visit camp sites and may become (dangerous) pests.

PHOTO BY JASON EDWARDS

CHIMPANZEE

Pan troglodytes

The chimpanzee is our closest living relative and behaves like it, engaging in cooperative hunting, tool manufacture and use, and war. They are highly sociable, living in communities numbering up to 120; however, all individuals in a social group rarely congregate and the typical group size is much smaller. Individuals may also spend considerable time alone. Primarily vegetarians consuming fruit, bark, stems and leaves, chimps also eat insects, nestling birds, eggs and larger prey, including monkeys.

Size: Up to 1.7m when standing; weight 25kg to 55kg, male larger than female. **Distribution:** Equatorial forest in western Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and western Uganda; best seen in Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains National Parks. **Status:** Threatened by habitat destruction and hunting (ie illegal chimp trafficking), chimpanzees are endangered and occur in small isolated populations.



Though requiring a rich year-round food supply and preferring productive, moist forests, the chimpanzee is adaptable and is found in a wide range of habitats.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

GORILLA

Gorilla gorilla

Two races occur in the region: eastern lowland gorillas (*G. g. graueri*), numbering 4000 in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda; and mountain gorillas (*G. g. beringei*; pictured), of which there are only 600 to 700 left in the DR Congo/Rwanda/Uganda border region. Gorillas inhabit humid equatorial rainforest up to 4000m. Groups number between two and 20, usually with a single adult male (silverback), though large groups of the eastern race may contain up to four silverbacks. They are vegetarians.

Size: Height up to 1.8m; mass up to 210kg (males), 70kg to 100kg (females). **Distribution:** Equatorial forest in western Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and southwestern Uganda. **Status:** Threatened by poaching, habitat destruction and civil unrest; highly endangered.



Male gorillas make all decisions regarding movements, foraging, and where and when to rest.

PHOTO BY DOUG MCKINLAY

CARNIVORES

Genets are solitary, sleeping by day in burrows, rock crevices or tree hollows.

PHOTO BY DAVE HAMMAN



GENET

Small-spotted genet (*Genetta genetta*, pictured); large-spotted genet (*G. tigrina*)

Relatives of mongooses, genets resemble long, slender domestic cats, with foxlike faces. The two species in the region can be differentiated by the tail tips – white in the small-spotted, black in the large-spotted.

The former has a crest along the spine, which it raises when threatened. All-black individuals of both species may occur, particularly in mountainous regions. They feed on rodents, birds, reptiles, eggs, insects and fruits.

Size: Shoulder height 18cm; length 85cm to 1.1m, including 45cm tail; weight up to 3kg. **Distribution:** Widely distributed throughout the region. **Status:** Very common, but strictly nocturnal; often the most common small carnivore seen at night.

Collectively, mongooses intimidate much larger enemies.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



MONGOOSE

Many of the small animals that dash in front of cars in Africa are mongooses. A few species, such as the dwarf mongoose (*Helogale parvula*; pictured) and the banded mongoose (*Mungos mungo*) are intensely social, keeping contact with twittering calls while foraging. Others, such as the slender mongoose (*Galerella*

sanguinea) – with a black-tipped tail that it holds aloft when running – and the white-tailed mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*), are usually solitary. Family groups are better at spotting danger and raising kittens. Invertebrates are their most important prey.

Size: Ranges from the dwarf mongoose at 40cm in length and up to 400g in weight, to the white-tailed mongoose at 1.2m and up to 5.5kg. **Distribution:** Widely distributed. They prefer open areas. **Status:** Common; sociable species are diurnal, while solitary species are generally nocturnal.

Aardwolves may suffer huge population crashes following spraying for locusts (the spraying also kills termites).

PHOTO BY LUKE HUNTER



AARDWOLF

Proteles cristatus

The smallest of the hyena family, aardwolves subsist almost entirely on harvester termites (which are generally ignored by other termite eaters because they are so noxious), licking more than 200,000 from the ground each night. Unlike other hyaenids, they don't form clans;

instead they forage alone and mates form only loose associations with each other. The male assists the female in raising the cubs, mostly by babysitting at the den while the mother forages. Aardwolves are persecuted in the mistaken belief that they kill stock.

Size: Shoulder height 40cm to 50cm; length 80cm to 1m, including tail of up to 25cm; weight 8kg to 12kg. **Distribution:** Widespread in savanna and woodland habitats from central Tanzania into the arid north of Kenya. **Status:** Uncommon; nocturnal but occasionally seen at dawn and dusk.

STRIPED HYENA

Hyaena hyaena

Hyenas are lean, long-legged animals whose overall appearance is of more robust animals due to their long, shaggy manes and 'capets' along their backs. Striped hyenas subsist largely by scavenging from the kills of other predators and carrying off large parts to cache. They also catch insects and small vertebrates, but are poor hunters of larger prey.

Size: Shoulder height 65cm to 80cm; mass 25kg to 45kg. **Distribution:** Central Tanzania into arid zones of northern Kenya. **Status:** Uncommon; strictly nocturnal.

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SPOTTED HYENA

Crocuta crocuta

Widely reviled as scavengers, spotted hyenas are highly efficient predators with a fascinating social system. Females are larger than, and dominant to, males and have male physical characteristics, including an erectile clitoris that renders the sexes virtually indistinguishable at a distance. Spotted hyenas are massively built and appear distinctly canine, but they are more closely related to cats than dogs. They can run at a speed of 60km/h, and a pack can easily dispatch adult wildebeests and zebras. Their 'ooo-ooop' call is one of the most distinctive East African night sounds.

Size: Shoulder height 85cm; length up to 1.8m, including tail of up to 30cm; weight up to 80kg. **Distribution:** Throughout the region, increasingly restricted to conservation areas. **Status:** Common where there is suitable food and often the most common large predator in protected areas; mainly nocturnal but also seen during the day.



Spotted hyena clans, which can contain dozens of individuals, are led by females.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

CHEETAH

Acinonyx jubatus

The world's fastest land mammal, cheetahs can reach speeds of over 105km/h, but become exhausted after a few hundred metres and therefore usually stalk prey to within 60m before unleashing their tremendous acceleration. Cheetahs prey on antelopes weighing up to 60kg as well as hares and young wildebeests and zebras. Litters may be as large as nine, but in open savanna habitats most cubs are killed by other predators, particularly lions. Young cheetahs disperse from the mother when aged around 18 months. The males form coalitions; females remain solitary for life.

Size: Shoulder height 85cm; length up to 2.2m, including tail up to 70cm; weight up to 65kg. **Distribution:** Largely restricted to protected areas or the regions surrounding them; shuns densely forested areas. **Status:** Uncommon, with individuals moving over large areas; frequently seen in national parks.

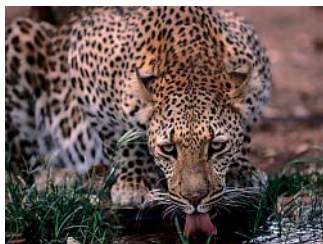


Three out of every four hunts fail for cheetahs.

PHOTO BY ALEX DISSANAYAKE

Leopards are heard more often than seen; their rasping territorial call sounds very much like a saw cutting through wood.

PHOTO BY MITCH REARDON



LEOPARD *Panthera pardus*

Supreme ambush hunters, leopards stalk close to their prey before attacking in an explosive rush. They eat everything from insects to zebras, but antelopes are their primary prey. Leopards are highly agile and climb well, spending more time in trees than other big cats – they hoist their kills into

trees to avoid losing them to lions and hyenas. They are solitary animals, except when a male and female remain in close association for the female's week-long oestrus.

Size: Shoulder height 50cm to 75cm; length 1.6m to 2.1m, including 70cm to 1.1m tail; weight up to 90kg; male larger than female. **Distribution:** Widely spread throughout the region, they also persist in human-altered habitat due to their great adaptability. **Status:** Common but, being mainly nocturnal, they are very difficult to see.

Young male lions are ousted from the pride at the age of two or three, becoming nomadic until around five years old, when they are able to take over their own pride.

PHOTO BY ALEX DISSANAYAKE



LION *Panthera leo*

Lions spend nights hunting, patrolling territories (of 50 to 400 sq km) and playing. They live in prides of up to about 30, comprising four to 12 related females, which remain in the pride for life, and a coalition of unrelated males, which defend females from foreign males. Lions hunt – certainly as a group, perhaps

cooperatively – virtually anything, but wildebeests, zebras and buffaloes are their main targets.

Size: Shoulder height 1.2m; length 2.5m to 3m, including tail up to 1m; weight up to 260kg (male), 180kg (female). **Distribution:** Largely confined to protected areas and present in all savanna and woodland parks in the region. **Status:** Common where they occur; mainly nocturnal but easy to see during the day.

Caracals' long back legs power prodigious leaps – they even take birds in flight.

PHOTO BY DAVID WALL



CARACAL *Felis caracal*

Sometimes called African lynxes due to their long, tufted ears, caracals are robust, powerful cats that prey mostly on small antelopes, birds and rodents but also take prey much larger than themselves. Caracals are largely solitary and, although male-female pairs may associate more than most other

cats, females raise their one to three kittens alone. The sandy body colour is excellent camouflage, but the ears and face are strikingly patterned in black and white and are highly mobile and expressive – features are used for visual signalling.

Size: Shoulder height 40cm to 50cm; length 95cm to 1.2m, including tail up to 30cm; weight 7kg to 18kg; male slightly larger than female. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Fairly common, but largely nocturnal and difficult to see.

AFRICAN WILD CAT *Felis lybica*

The progenitor of the household tabby, African wild cats were originally domesticated by the Egyptians. They differ from domestic cats in having reddish backs to their ears, proportionally longer legs and a generally leaner appearance. African wild cats cross freely with domestic cats close to human habitation where the two meet, and this is probably the greatest threat to the integrity of the wild species. They are solitary, except when females have kittens.

Size: Shoulder height 35cm; length 85cm to 1m; mass up to 6kg. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Common; nocturnal, although sometimes spotted at dawn and dusk.



African wild cats subsist mainly on small rodents, but also prey on birds and insects, and species up to the size of hares.

PHOTO BY ABEI

SERVAL *Felis serval*

The first impression one gains of servals – tall, slender, long-legged cats – is that they look quite like small cheetahs. Their tawny to russet-yellow coat has large black spots, forming long bars and blotches on the neck and shoulders. All-black individuals also occasionally occur particularly in Kenya's mountainous regions. Other distinguishing features of the serval include large upright ears, a long neck and a relatively short tail. Servals are associated with vegetation near water, and are most common in flood-plain savanna, wetlands and woodlands near streams. Birds, small reptiles and occasionally the young of small antelopes are also taken.

Size: Shoulder height 60cm; length up to 1.3m, including tail up to 30cm; weight up to 16kg. **Distribution:** Well-watered habitats throughout the region. **Status:** Relatively common, but mainly nocturnal, sometimes seen in the early morning and late afternoon.



Servals are rodent specialists, feeding on mice, rats and spring-hares.

PHOTO BY MITCH REARDON

BAT-EARED FOX *Otocyon megalotis*

These little foxes eat mainly insects, especially termites, but also wild fruit and small vertebrates. They are monogamous, and are often seen in groups comprising a mated pair and offspring. Natural enemies include large birds of prey, spotted hyenas, caracals and larger cats. They will bravely attempt to rescue a family member caught by a predator by using distraction techniques and harassment, which extends to nipping larger enemies on the ankles.

Size: Shoulder height 35cm; length 75cm to 90cm, including 30cm tail; weight 3kg to 5kg. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Common, especially in national parks; mainly nocturnal but often seen in the late afternoon and early morning.



The huge ears of bat-eared foxes detect the faint sounds of invertebrates below ground, before they unearth them in a burst of frantic digging.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

Jackals scavenge from the kills of larger predators, but are also efficient hunters.

PHOTO BY DENNIS JONES



JACKAL

Golden jackal (*Canis aureus*); black-backed jackal (*C. mesomelas*, pictured); side-striped jackal (*C. adustus*)

Golden jackals are often the most numerous carnivores in open savanna and are very active by day. Black-backed jackals have a mantle of silver-grey hair and black-tipped tails; they are the most common

night scavengers. Side-striped jackals are the least common. They're grey with a light stripe along each side and a white-tipped tail. All have a similar social and feeding behaviour. Pairs are long-lasting and defend small territories.

Size: Shoulder height 38cm to 50cm; length 95cm to 1.2m, including 25cm to 40cm tail (shortest in the golden jackal); weight up to 15kg. **Distribution:** Widespread with a wide habitat tolerance, preferring open plains and woodlands; side-striped jackal most abundant in well-watered wooded areas. **Status:** Abundant in parks and settled areas.

Wild dogs are endurance hunters; the pack chases prey until exhaustion, then cooperates to pull it down.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



WILD DOG

Lycaon pictus

Wild dogs' blotched black, yellow and white coat, and their large, round ears, are unmistakable. They live in packs of up to 40, though usually 12 to 20. They are widely revered for eating their prey alive, but this is probably as fast as 'cleaner' methods used by other carnivores. Mid-sized antelopes are their preferred

prey, but wild dogs can take animals as large as buffaloes. They require enormous areas of habitat and they are among the most endangered carnivores in Africa.

Size: Shoulder height 65cm to 80cm; length 1m to 1.5m, including 35cm tail; weight 20kg to 35kg. **Distribution:** Much reduced, now restricted to the largest protected areas in the region. **Status:** Highly threatened: numbers reduced by persecution, disease and habitat loss.

HONEY BADGER (RATEL)

Mellivora capensis

Pugnacious and astonishingly powerful for their size, honey badgers have a fascinating relationship with honey guide birds. Honey guides lead them to bees' nests, which honey badgers rip open for honey, and in doing so provide honey guides access to their favoured food – beeswax. Honey badgers are omnivorous, feeding on small animals, carrion, berries, roots, eggs, honey, and social insects (ants, termites and bees) and their larvae. Honey badgers are best viewed in parks, where they sometimes scavenge from bins.

Size: Shoulder height 30cm; length 95cm, including 20cm tail; weight up to 15kg. **Distribution:** Widespread in the region, in most habitats. **Status:** Generally occurs in low densities, but populations are sustainable; apparently active by day in parks but nocturnal in areas of human habitation.

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UNGULATES

AFRICAN ELEPHANT

Loxodonta africana

Elephants usually live in groups of 10 to 20 females and their young, congregating in larger herds at common water and food resources. Vocalisations include a deep rumble felt as a low vibration, and a high-pitched trumpeting given in threat or when frightened. Consuming 250kg of vegetation daily, elephants can decimate woodlands, but this may be part of the savanna's natural cycle. They live for up to 100 years.

Size: Shoulder height up to 4m (male), 3.5m (female); weight 5 to 6.5 tonnes (male), 3 to 3.5 tonnes (female). **Distribution:** Widely distributed in the region, though large populations only occur in protected areas. **Status:** Very common in most of the larger national parks.



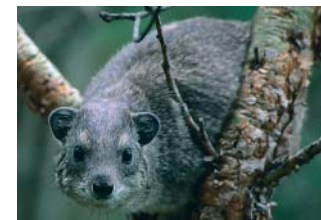
Bull elephants live alone or in bachelor groups, joining herds when females are in season.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

HYRAX

Rock hyrax (*Procavia capensis*, pictured); tree hyrax (*Dendrohyrax arboreus*); yellow-spotted or bush hyrax (*Heterohyrax brucei*)

Although hyraxes resemble large, robust guinea-pigs, they are most closely related to elephants. Three species occur, the most common being the rock hyrax found on mountains or rocky outcrops. They form colonies of up to 60, often with the yellow-spotted hyrax, which is slightly smaller with distinctive white underparts. Kopjes (rock outcrops) in the Serengeti are excellent sites for observing the two species. The tree hyrax prefers forest rather than rocks. **Size:** Length 60cm; mass up to 5.5kg. **Distribution:** Bush and rock species very widely distributed; tree hyraxes restricted to lowland rainforest and best seen in forest reserves, such as Aberdare, Mt Kenya and the Rwenzoris. **Status:** Common; a regular inhabitant of lodges, where they become tame.



If accustomed to humans, hyraxes are often approachable but will dash off if alarmed, uttering shrill screams.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

BLACK (HOOK-LIPPED) RHINOCEROS

Diceros bicornis

In many countries rhinos have been exterminated and the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) is now very rare in East Africa (it remains numerous in southern Africa). The smaller of the two species, black rhinos are more unpredictable and prone to charging when alarmed or uncertain about a possible threat. They use their pointed, prehensile upper lip to feed selectively on branches and foliage. Black rhinos are solitary and aggressively territorial, usually only socialising during the mating season; however, they may form temporary associations.

Size: Shoulder height 1.6m; length 3m to 4m; weight 800kg to 1.4 tonnes; front horn up to 1.3m long. **Distribution:** Restricted to relict populations in a few reserves. **Status:** Highly endangered in the region, but seen in protected areas.



Poaching for horns has made the rhinoceros Africa's most endangered large mammal.

PHOTO BY JASON EDWARDS

Stallions may hold a harem for 15 years but single mares are often lost to younger males.

PHOTO BY JASON EDWARDS



ZEBRA

Common or Burchell's zebra (*Equus burchelli*, pictured); **Grevy's zebra** (*Equus grevyi*)

Two species occur in the region, the most common being Burchell's zebra, famous for its huge migrating herds. Burchell's zebras are marked with broad alternating black-and-white stripes, interspersed with faint 'shadow stripes'. Grevy's zebras are

marked all over with much finer stripes and lack shadow stripes. Both species are grazers, but occasionally browse on leaves and scrub. The social system centres around small groups of related mares over which stallions fight fiercely.

Size: Shoulder height 1.4m (Burchell's zebras), 1.6m (Grevy's). Mass up to 360kg (Burchell's), up to 390kg (Grevy's). **Distribution:** Burchell's zebras occur throughout the region. Grevy's zebras restricted to northern Kenya. **Status:** Burchell's zebras common. Grevy's zebras only common in Kenya's northern frontier district.

Female warthogs have a pair of distinctive facial warts under the eyes; males have a second set of warts further down the snout.

PHOTO BY ANDREW MACCOLL



WARTHOG

Phacochoerus aethiopicus

Warthogs are abundant in all savanna and woodland habitats in East Africa. They grow two sets of tusks: their upper tusks grow as long as 60cm, and their lower tusks are usually less than 15cm long. Sociality varies, but groups usually consist of one to three sows and their young. Males form bach-

elor groups or are solitary, only associating with females during oestrus. Warthogs feed mainly on grass, but also on fruit and bark. In hard times they grub for roots and bulbs. They den in abandoned burrows or excavate their own burrows.

Size: Shoulder height 70cm; weight up to more than 100kg, but averages 50kg to 60kg; male larger than female. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Common, diurnal and easy to see.

Adult bull hippos aggressively defend territories against each other and most males bear the scars of conflicts.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



HIPPOPOTAMUS

Hippopotamus amphibius

Hippos are found close to fresh water, spending most of the day submerged and emerging at night to graze on land. They can consume about 40kg of vegetation each evening. They live in large herds, tolerating close contact in the water but foraging alone when on land. The scars found on bulls resulting

from conflicts are often a convenient indicator of the sex of hippos. Cows with calves are aggressive towards other individuals. Hippos are extremely dangerous when on land and kill many people each year, usually when someone inadvertently blocks the animal's retreat to the water.

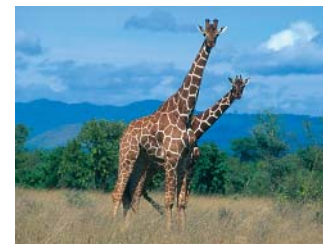
Size: Shoulder height 1.5m; weight 1 to 2 tonnes. **Distribution:** Occur widely, usually found near large areas of fresh water. **Status:** Common in major water courses and easy to see.

GIRAFFE

Giraffa camelopardalis

There are several distinctly patterned subspecies of giraffe, including reticulated giraffes and Masai giraffes, which are more common. The 'horns' (knobs of skin-covered bone) of males have bald tips; females' are covered in hair. Giraffes form loose, ever-changing groups of up to 50; females are rarely seen alone, while males are more solitary. Browsers, giraffes exploit foliage out of reach of most herbivores – males usually feed from a higher level than females. Juveniles are prone to predation and lions even take adults; giraffes are most vulnerable when drinking.

Size: Height 4m to 5.5m (male), 3.5m to 4.5m (female); weight 900kg to 1.4 tonnes (male), 700kg to 1 tonne (female). **Distribution:** Reticulated giraffe occurs in northern Kenya; Masai giraffe is widespread southwest of Nairobi extending into Tanzania; Rothschild's giraffe is restricted to Uganda and western Kenya near Lake Baringo. **Status:** Relatively common and easy to see.



A giraffe's neck has seven cervical vertebrae – the same as all mammals.

PHOTO BY MATT FLETCHER

KLIPSPRINGER

Oreotragus oreotragus

Small, sturdy antelopes, klipspringers are easily recognised by their curious tip-toe stance – their hooves are adapted for balance and grip on rocky surfaces, enabling them to bound up impossibly rough and steep rockfaces. Klipspringers normally inhabit rocky outcrops; they also sometimes venture into adjacent grasslands, but always retreat to the rocks when alarmed. Klipspringers form long-lasting pair bonds and the pair occupies a territory, nearly always remaining within a couple of metres of each other.

Size: Shoulder height 55cm; weight 9kg to 15kg; horns up to 15cm; female larger than male.

Distribution: Rocky outcrops and mountainous areas throughout the region. **Status:** Common, but wary; often seen standing on high vantage points.



When disturbed, a pair of klipspringers often gives a duet of trumpetlike alarm calls.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

KIRK'S DIK-DIK

Madoqua kirkii

Dik-diks are identified by their miniature size, the pointed flexible snout and a tuft of hair on the forehead; only the males have horns. Dik-diks are monogamous and pairs are territorial. If one is seen, its mate is usually nearby, as well as that year's young. Both members of the pair, and their young, use dung piles to mark their territory, placing their deposits as part of an elaborate ceremony. Dik-diks feed by browsing on foliage and, being well adapted to their dry environments, don't drink.

Size: Shoulder height 35cm to 45cm; weight 4kg to 7kg; horns up to 12cm. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Common, but wary and easy to miss; active day and night.



A dik-dik's territory is marked by up to a dozen large piles of dung placed around the boundary.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

If a predator approaches, steenboks lie flat with neck outstretched, zigzagging away only at the last moment.

PHOTO BY MITCH REARDON



STEENBOK

Raphicerus campestris

Steenboks are pretty and slender antelopes; their back and hind-quarters range from light reddish-brown to dark brown with pale underpart markings. The nose bears a black, wedge-shaped stripe. Males have small, straight and widely separated horns. Although usually seen alone, it's likely that steenboks share

a small territory with a mate, but only occasionally does the pair come together. Steenboks are active in the morning and afternoon and by night; they may become more nocturnal where frequently disturbed.

Size: Shoulder height 50cm; weight up to 16kg; horns up to 19cm; female a little larger than male. **Distribution:** Restricted to central and northern Kenya into Tanzania. **Status:** Relatively common, but easily overlooked.

Often dismissed by tourists because they are so abundant, impalas are unique antelopes with no close relatives.

PHOTO BY DENNIS JONES



IMPALA

Aepyceros melampus

Male impalas have long, lyre-shaped horns averaging 75cm in length. They are gregarious animals, forming resident herds of up to 100 or so. Males defend female herds during the oestrus, but outside the breeding season they congregate in bachelor groups. Impalas are known for their speed and ability to leap – they

can spring as far as 10m in one bound, or 3m into the air. They are the common prey of lions, leopards, cheetahs, wild dogs and spotted hyenas.

Size: Shoulder height 85cm; weight 40kg to 80kg; horns up to 90cm; male larger than female. **Distribution:** Savanna regions from central Kenya extending south into Tanzania. **Status:** Very common and easy to see.

Gazelles are often the main prey of predators – so they are very fleet of foot and wary of attack.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



GAZELLE

Gerenuk (Litocranius walleri); Grant's gazelle (Gazella granti); Thomson's gazelle (G. thomsonii, pictured)

Often the most common medium-sized antelope where they occur, gazelles form the main prey item of many predators in East Africa. Three species are common in the region. Thomson's gazelle is the

smallest. It is often found in with the impala-sized Grant's gazelle, which lacks the 'Thommy's' black side stripe. The gerenuk has uniquely long limbs and neck, allowing it to reach otherwise inaccessible parts of trees. All three species are sociable, but the gerenuk forms small herds rarely numbering more than 12.

Size: Shoulder height 90cm (Grant's), 70cm (Thomson's), 1.05m (gerenuk). Mass 65kg (Grant's), 29kg (Thomson's), 45kg (gerenuk). **Distribution:** Grant's/Thomson's common in savanna and woodland; gerenuks from northwestern Tanzania through central Kenya. **Status:** Grant's/Thomson's common; gerenuk less so.

BLUE WILDEBEEST

Connochaetes taurinus

Blue wildebeests often form herds in association with zebras and other herbivores. Wildebeests are grazers, and move constantly in search of good pasture and water, preferring to drink daily – this gives rise to the famous mass migration in the Serengeti–Masai Mara ecosystem. Elsewhere, especially where food

and water are more permanent, groups of up to 30 are more usual, with larger congregations being less frequent. In both situations, males are territorial and attempt to herd groups of females into their territory.

Size: Shoulder height 1.4m; weight 200kg to 300kg (males), 140kg to 230kg (females); horns up to 85cm; male larger than female. **Distribution:** Widely distributed. **Status:** Very common; 1.5 million occur in the Serengeti–Masai Mara ecosystem.



Blue wildebeests are gregarious, and in some areas form herds of up to tens of thousands.

PHOTO BY ANDREW VAN SMEERDIJK

HARTEBEEST

Alcelaphus buselaphus

Hartebeests are red to tan in colour, medium-sized, and easily recognised by their long, narrow face and short horns. In both sexes, the distinctively angular and heavily ridged horns form a heart shape, hence their name, which comes from Afrikaans. Dominant males defend territories, which herds of females

and their young pass through; other males move in bachelor groups. Herds typically number up to about a dozen (male herds are generally smaller), but aggregations of hundreds and (in the past) thousands also occur.

Size: Shoulder height 1.2m; weight 130kg to 170kg (males), 115kg to 150kg (females); horns up to 85cm. **Distribution:** Wide ranging; Coke's hartebeest, also known as 'Kongoni', is common in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania; Jackson's hartebeest is confined to areas near Lake Victoria. **Status:** Common.



Hartebeests prefer grassy plains but are also found in sparsely forested savannas and hills.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN

TOPI

Damaliscus lunatus

Topis are reddish brown, with glossy violet patches on the legs and face. Their social system is highly variable. In grassy woodlands, males hold territories with harems of up to 10 females. On floodplains with dense populations, nomadic herds of thousands may form, males establishing temporary territories whenever the herd halts. Elsewhere, males gather on breeding-season display grounds; females visit these 'leks' to select their mates. Both sexes often stand on high vantage points (commonly termite mounds) to view their surroundings and as territorial advertisement.

Size: Shoulder height 1.2m; weight 110kg to 150kg (male), 75kg to 130kg (female); horns up to 45cm. **Distribution:** Widespread throughout medium-length grasslands, abundant in the Serengeti ecosystem. **Status:** Common.



Topis' horns, carried by both sexes, curve gently up, out and back.

PHOTO BY TONY WHEELER

The sable is a fierce fighter and there are occasional records of males killing lions when attacked.

PHOTO BY ARIADNE VAN ZANDBERGEN



SABLE ANTELOPE

Hippotragus niger

Sables are often considered the most magnificent of Africa's antelopes. Their colouring is dark-brown to black, with white bellies and face markings; the males' coats are a rich glossy black when adult. Both sexes have long sweeping horns, but those of the male are longer and more curved. Sables feed mainly on

grass, but foliage accounts for around 10% of their diet. Females and the young live in herds, while males are territorial or form bachelor groups. Other predators include leopards, hyenas and wild dogs.

Size: Shoulder height 1.35m; mass up to 270kg. **Distribution:** In East Africa, restricted to southeastern Kenya and Tanzania. **Status:** Uncommon; in Kenya, they occur only in Shimba Hills National Reserve. They are more widely distributed in Tanzania.

To conserve water, oryxes let their body temperature rise to levels that would kill most mammals.

PHOTO BY MATT FLETCHER



ORYX

Oryx gazella

Adapted for arid zones, oryxes can tolerate areas uninhabitable for most antelopes. Two races occur in the region: beisa oryxes (*O. g. beisa*) of northern Kenya; and the slightly smaller fringe-eared oryxes (*O. g. calottis*) of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. Oryxes are solid and powerful animals with long, straight

horns, which are present in both sexes. Oryxes are principally grazers but also browse on thorny shrubs unpalatable to many species. They can survive for long periods without water. Herds vary from five to 40 individuals.

Size: Shoulder height 1.5m; mass up to 300kg. **Distribution:** Northern Kenya (beisa oryxes); southern Kenya and northern Tanzania (fringe-eared oryxes). **Status:** Relatively common where they occur, and easy to see. They are, however, often shy, and flee from humans at great distances.

Strong jumpers, kudus flee with frequent leaping, clearing obstacles more than 2m high.

PHOTO BY MITCH REARDON



KUDU

Greater kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*, pictured); lesser kudu (*T. imberbis*)

Greater kudus are Africa's second-tallest antelope; males carry massive spiralling horns (the largest of any antelope). They are light grey in colour, with six to 12 white stripes down the sides. Lesser kudus have 11 to 15 stripes; males are blue-grey

and females are a bright rust colour. In both species, one to three females and their young form groups, and are joined by males during the breeding season. Kudus are browsers, finding their diet in woodland-savanna with fairly dense bush cover.

Size: Greater kudu shoulder height 1.2m to 1.5m; weight 190kg to 320kg. Lesser kudu shoulder height 95cm to 1.1m; weight 90kg to 110kg. Males larger than females. **Distribution:** Greater kudus can be found throughout the region, except in the driest areas; lesser kudus prefer the arid regions of Tanzania and northern Kenya. **Status:** Greater kudu scattered; lesser kudu common.

ELAND

Taurotragus oryx

Africa's largest antelope, elands are massive. The horns of both sexes average 65cm, spiralling at the base then sweeping straight back. The male has a distinctive hairy tuft on the head, and stouter horns. Herds consist of adults, or adults and young, or sometimes just young – group membership and composition change often. The most common large groups consist of 10 to 60 females and young. Males are less gregarious, coming together more sporadically and in smaller numbers, but one or more often join female-and-young herds.

Size: Shoulder height 1.5m to 1.8m (male), 1.25m to 1.5m (female); weight 450kg to 950kg (male), 300kg to 500kg (female); horns up to 100cm long. **Distribution:** Patchy distribution in arid zones; best seen in Nairobi and Tsavo National Parks. **Status:** Low density, but relatively common and easy to see.



Aggregations up to 1000 elands form where new grass is growing.

PHOTO BY MITCH REARDON

WATERBUCK

Kobus ellipsiprymnus

Waterbucks have a shaggy brown coat and white rump, face and throat markings; only males have horns. Females have overlapping ranges, coming and going to form loose associations of normally up to a dozen animals. Young, non-territorial males behave similarly. Mature males hold territories, onto

which females wander (nonterritorial males are also often allowed access). These essentially independent movements sometimes produce herds of 50 to 70. They always stay near water and are good swimmers, readily entering water to escape predators.

Size: Shoulder height 1.3m; weight 200kg to 300kg (males), 150kg to 200kg (females); horns up to 1m. **Distribution:** Wet areas throughout the region. **Status:** Common and easily seen.



The waterbuck's oily hair has a strong, musky odour, potent enough for humans to smell.

PHOTO BY ANDERS BLOMQUIST

AFRICAN BUFFALO

Syncerus caffer

Both sexes of African buffaloes have distinctive curving horns that broaden at the base to meet over the forehead in a massive 'boss' – the female's are usually smaller. Local populations of buffaloes inhabit large home ranges and at times herds of thousands form, but the population's social organisation

is fluid: groups of related females and their young coalesce and separate into larger or smaller herds. Although generally docile, buffaloes can be dangerous – especially lone bulls, and females protecting their young.

Size: Shoulder height 1.6m; weight 400kg to 900kg; horns up to 1.25m long; female somewhat smaller than male. **Distribution:** Widespread, but large populations only occur in parks. **Status:** Common and may be approachable where protected.



Male buffaloes associate with the females during breeding, and at other times they form male herds or are solitary.

PHOTO BY DAVID WALL

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AARDVARK

Orycteropus afer

Vaguely piglike (its Afrikaans name translates as 'earth-pig') with a long tubular snout, powerful kangaroo-like tail and large rabbitlike ears, the aardvark is unique and has no close relatives. Protected by thick wrinkled pink-grey skin, aardvarks forage at night by sniffing for termite and ant nests, which they rip

open with their astonishingly powerful front legs and large spadelike nails. Normally nocturnal, they occasionally spend cold winter mornings basking in the sun before retiring underground.

Size: Shoulder height 60cm; length 1.4m to 1.8m, including a 55cm tail; weight 40kg to 80kg.

Distribution: Widely distributed throughout nearly the entire region. **Status:** Uncommon; nocturnal and rarely seen.

RODENTS

If attacked, a porcupine drives its rump into the predator – the quills are easily detached from their owner, but can remain embedded in the victim, causing serious injury or death.

PHOTO BY DAVE HAMMAN



PORCUPINE

Hystrix africaeaustralis

The Cape porcupine is the largest rodent native to Southern Africa. Its spread of long black-and-white banded quills from the shoulders to the tail makes it unmistakable. For shelter, it either occupies caves or excavates its own burrows. The porcupine's diet consists mainly of bark, tubers, seeds, and a variety

of plant and ground-level foliage. The young are born during the hot summer months, in litters of between one and four.

Size: Length 70cm to 1m, including a 15cm tail; weight 10kg to 25kg. **Distribution:** Throughout the region. **Status:** Nocturnal but occasionally active on cooler days; difficult to see.

SPRINGHARE

Pedetes capensis

In spite of its name and large ears, the springhare is not a hare but a very unusual rodent with no close relatives. With its powerful, out-sized hind feet and small forelegs, it most resembles a small kangaroo and shares a similar energy-efficient hopping motion. The springhare digs extensive bur-

rows, from which it emerges at night to feed on grass and grass roots. Reflections of spotlights in its large, bright eyes often give it away on night safaris.

Size: Length 80cm, including a 40cm tail; weight 3kg to 4kg. **Distribution:** Widespread in Kenya southwards into mid-Tanzania; favours grassland habitats with sandy soils. **Status:** Common, but strictly nocturnal.

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Safaris

The hoof beats of thousands of wildebeests echoing across the Serengeti Plains; vast, open vistas broken only by the occasional stand of acacia thorn trees; a pink haze of flamingos wading in the shallows – these are likely to be among the most indelible images that you will take back from an East African safari. The chance to observe wildlife in its natural surroundings is one of the region's top attractions, and the safari industry here is highly developed.

Because the industry has become so competitive, especially in Tanzania and Kenya, it's worth putting extra time into planning. This is especially so at the budget level, where there's often only a fine line between operators running no-frills but reliable safaris and those that are either dishonest, or who have cut things so close that problems are bound to arise. At the higher end of the price spectrum, ambience, safari style and the operator's overall focus are important considerations.

This chapter provides an overview of factors to consider when planning a safari; many apply in equal measure to organised treks. See p89 for a few things to keep in mind if you're arranging things on your own.

PLANNING A SAFARI

Booking

If you're on a shoestring budget, or don't want to be pinned down with specific dates, the best thing to do is to wait until you get to East Africa, shop around at various operators to see what's on offer and then arrange things on the spot. This gives you the advantages of being able to hunt for lower walk-in rates, maintain flexibility, and meet up with other travellers to form a group and thereby lower costs. Being on-site also gives you a better feel for what you'll be getting. One of the disadvantages is that during the high season you may need to wait around several days before an opening arises or vehicles become free. During the low season, it can take a while to find a large enough group; four is the minimum for many budget companies. Another disadvantage is having to deal with safari touts. Although they're not all bad, many are quite aggressive, and the whole experience can be rather intimidating. If you wait until arriving in East Africa to book, keep your schedule flexible, allow some extra days to arrange things, and don't rush into any deals.

The other option is to book your safari or trek directly through the operator before arriving in the region. These days most midrange and top-end safaris are prebooked, as are some budget safaris. The main drawback of prebooking is that it decreases flexibility, especially if you're doing your safari as part of longer travels in the region. It also can be more expensive, although if you shop around and can take advantage of last-minute offers, it's possible to find some good deals, and many operators now offer prebooked trips at around the same price as walk-ins. Among the advantages of prebooking are that you won't need to spend time on the ground shopping around for an operator (which takes at least a day), it minimises the amount of cash or travellers cheques that you'll need to carry and you'll have someone to sort out the logistics for you. If you're travelling on your own and hoping to find other travellers to join, you can still consider prebooking, as some companies will permit you to adjust your booking on arrival, though you should confirm this in advance.

For an armchair preview of East Africa's major parks, check out www.tanzaniaparks.com (Tanzania), www.kws.org (Kenya) and www.uwa.or.ug/parks.html (Uganda).

In addition to prebooking with locally based companies such as most of those listed in this chapter, you can prebook through tour operators in Europe, the USA, Australia and elsewhere; a small sampling is listed on p635. This, however, will be considerably more expensive as most will subcontract to local operators. It's almost always cheaper to deal directly with the operating company; if all or part of your itinerary is subcontracted, the commissions will be reflected in the prices you pay.

If you're going to prebook, the general rule is to do so as far in advance as possible, especially if you'll be travelling in popular areas during the July/August and December/January high seasons.

Costs

There are essentially two types of organised safaris: those where you camp, and those where you stay in lodges or luxury tented camps. (For explanations of tented and fly camps, see p618.) Camping safaris are the least expensive option. Most cater to shoestrapping travellers, the young (or young at heart) and those who are prepared to put up with a little discomfort and who don't mind helping to pitch the tents and set up camp. But, if you plan things right, they offer the chance for an authentic adventure in the African bush, often with nothing between you and the animals at night except a sheet of canvas and the embers of a dying fire.

Safaris based in lodges or luxury tented camps cost more than camping safaris, with the price usually directly proportional to the quality of the accommodation and staff, and the amount of individualised attention you'll get. Some upscale lodges and tented camps quote 'all-inclusive' prices, which in addition to accommodation, full board and occasionally park fees as well, normally include two 'activities' (usually wildlife drives, or sometimes one wildlife drive and one walk per day, each lasting about two to three hours). A few quote accommodation-only prices, which means you'll need to pay extra to go out from the lodge and actually look for wildlife.

When comparing prices, check to see what's included. Relevant items here are park entrance fees, camping fees and accommodation costs, transport and fuel, number of meals per day, tent rental, and wildlife drives or walks. Drinks are almost always excluded, except at the highest price level. Budget safari prices also normally exclude sleeping-bag rental, which costs anywhere from US\$5 per day to US\$15 per trip.

If you're booking a group safari, find out how many people will be sharing the vehicle with you (the larger your group, the cheaper the per person cost), and how many people per tent or room. The norm is two, and most operators charge a supplement for single occupancy ranging from 20% to 50% of the shared-occupancy rate. Prices quoted in this chapter are based on the cost per person for shared occupancy.

You'll also need to factor in tips, which are commonly given to drivers, guides and porters assuming service has been good. You can use 10% of the overall cost of your safari as a rough guide. Depending on where you are, for camping safaris this averages from about US\$8 to US\$10 per day per group for the driver-guide/cook, more for upscale safaris, large groups or an especially good job. Another way to calculate things is to give an additional day's wage for every five days worked, with a similar proportion for a shorter trip, and a higher than average tip for exceptional service. Wages in East Africa are low, and if someone has made a special effort to make your trip memorable, you should be generous.

Kenya is the cheapest place in the region for safaris. In Uganda, most companies rely heavily on pricier lodge and hotel accommodation, and even where camping is involved it's usually the luxury tented variety.

East Africa boasts an impressive collection of Unesco biosphere reserves, modelling the successful fusion of conservation, development and research initiatives. See www.unesco.org/mab/bri1stAfr.htm for a full listing.

BUDGET

The goal of keeping costs to a minimum on budget safaris is achieved by camping or staying in basic guesthouses, working with comparatively large group sizes to minimise per-head transport costs, and keeping to a no-frills setup with basic meals and minimal staff. In some areas the camp sites may be outside park boundaries to save on park entry fees and comparatively high fees for park camping grounds – though this means you'll lose time in prime morning and evening wildlife-viewing hours shuttling to and from the park. Also, for most safaris at the budget level as well as for many in the midrange, there are kilometre limits placed on how far the vehicle drives each day, though operators seldom publicise this.

The bare minimum for a budget camping safari in Kenya is about US\$65 to US\$80 per person per day. In Tanzania, expect to pay from US\$85 to US\$100. Genuine budget camping safaris are few and far between in Uganda. Throughout the region, it's often possible to find discounts during the low season.

MIDRANGE

Most midrange safaris use lodges, where you'll have a comfortable room and eat in a restaurant. In general, you can expect reliability and reasonably good value in this category. A disadvantage is that the safaris may have a package-tour atmosphere, although this can be minimised by carefully selecting a safari company and accommodation, and giving attention to who and how many other people you travel with. In both Kenya and Tanzania, expect to pay from a minimum of about US\$130 to US\$140 per person per day for a midrange lodge safari, although most will start at about US\$160 or higher. Particularly in Tanzania, good deals are available at some of the lodges during the low season, so it's always worth asking about these. In Uganda, plan on anywhere from US\$150 to US\$250 per day.

TOP END

Top-end safaris use private lodges or luxury tented camps, and sometimes private fly camps. For the price you will pay – from US\$200 up to

Check out www.eawildlife.org for an excellent introduction to conservation efforts in East Africa.

TANZANIA VS KENYA

If you're heading to East Africa to see wildlife, and are trying to decide whether to go on safari in Kenya or in Tanzania, the best answer is to do both and compare things for yourself. Assuming this isn't possible, it depends what you're after. Budget camping safaris are almost always cheaper in Kenya than in Tanzania, although for midrange safaris you can often find good deals in Tanzania. Kenya also tends to be somewhat less expensive generally, as a travel destination.

Apart from that, each country has its fans. Many connoisseurs say that the scenery and abundance of wildlife is better in Tanzania, while old Kenya hands would argue these points vehemently. Another difference is that in Tanzania, you're required to stick to designated roadways in most areas, which isn't the case in Kenya, much to the detriment of local ecosystems. If you're not a fan of large urban areas, another consideration may be that for an organised safari in Kenya, you'll likely need to at least spend a day in Nairobi (enough to send some people running for Tanzania). In Kenya, however, the road network and infrastructure are better, and getting acclimatised is somewhat easier, making it perhaps a 'softer' introduction if it's your first time in Africa.

The list of comparisons could go on, but in the end, it's all beautiful. The animals don't know which country they're in, and having a reliable, competent operator, a good guide and enjoyable travelling companions are just as important to your overall experience as the destination. And, if you can't decide between the two, there's always Uganda, where you'll have striking surroundings and many areas to yourself.

US\$500 or more per person per day – expect a full range of amenities. Even in remote settings you can enjoy hot bush-style showers, comfortable beds and fine dining. Also expect a high level of personalised attention, expert guides, an often intimate atmosphere (many places at this level have fewer than 20 beds), and emphasis on achieving an ‘authentic’ bush experience.

When to Go

Throughout East Africa, getting around is easier in the dry season from late June to October, and in many parks this is when animals are easier to find around water holes and rivers. Foliage is also less dense, making it easier to spot wildlife. However, as the dry season corresponds in part with the high-travel season, lodges and camps get crowded and accommodation prices are often at a premium.

Apart from these general considerations, the ideal time to make a safari very much depends on which parks and reserves you want to visit and what you want to see and do. If it’s birding you’re interested in, for example, the wet season is the best time in many areas. However, some lowland parks may be completely inaccessible during the rains. Wildlife concentrations also vary markedly, depending on the season. Tanzania’s Tarangire National Park is best visited during the dry season when animal concentrations there are highest. In Serengeti National Park, there are comparatively fewer animals during the dry season, although overall numbers continue to be high and you’ll probably see wildlife there at any time of year. The dry season is also best for the park’s famous lions and other predators.

If you’re timing your safari around specific events, such as the wildebeest migration in Serengeti National Park and Masai Mara National Reserve, remember that there are no guarantees, as seasons vary from year to year and are difficult to accurately predict in advance. More details on the individual parks are given in the country chapters.

What to Bring

Useful items include binoculars; field guides; a good quality sleeping bag, especially if you’ll be doing any trekking; mosquito repellent; rain gear and waterproofing for wet-season travel, especially for camping safaris or treks; sunglasses; camera and film; extra contact-lens solution and your prescription glasses as the dust can be irritating; and a good book for the downtime in the middle of the day between wildlife drives or walks. Top-end lodges and tented camps usually have mosquito nets, but it can’t hurt to bring one along, and you’ll need one for budget guesthouses. For walking safaris bring lightweight, long-sleeved/-legged clothing in subdued colours, a head covering and sturdy, comfortable shoes. For budget safaris, it’s a good idea to bring extra food and snacks and a roll of toilet paper. In and near most parks, there’s little available except hotel meals and perhaps a few basics, so if you’re on a tight budget stock up on mineral water and supplies in the nearest major town.

TYPES OF SAFARI

Organised Vehicle Safaris

The options here range from two days up to several weeks, with five to seven days ideal. At least one full day will normally be taken up with travel, and after seven, you may well feel like a rest. If you pack too much distance or too many parks into a short period, chances are that you’ll feel as if you’ve spent your whole time in transit, shuttling from place to place, rather than enjoying the destination.

SAFARI STYLE

While price can be a major determining factor in safari planning, there are other considerations that are just as important:

- **Ambience** – will you be staying in or near the park? (If you stay well outside the park, you’ll miss the good early morning and evening wildlife-viewing hours.) Are the surroundings atmospheric? Will you be in a large lodge or an intimate private camp?
- **Equipment** – mediocre vehicles and equipment can significantly detract from the overall experience (and on mountain treks, inadequate equipment can mean the difference between reaching the summit or not, or worse).
- **Access and Activities** – if you don’t relish the idea of hours in a 4WD on bumpy roads, consider parks and lodges where you can fly in. Parks and reserves where walking and boat safaris are possible are the best bet for getting out of the vehicle and into the bush.
- **Guides** – a good driver or guide (often the same person) can make or break your safari. Staff at reputable companies are usually knowledgeable and competent. With borderline operators trying to cut corners, chances are that staff are unfairly paid, and will likely not be particularly knowledgeable or motivated.
- **Setting the agenda** – some drivers feel that they have to whisk you from one good ‘sighting’ to the next. If your preference is to stay in one strategic place for a while to simply experience the environment and see what comes by, don’t hesitate to discuss this with your driver. Going off in wild pursuit of the ‘Big Five’ means you’ll miss the more subtle aspects of the surrounding nature.
- **Extracurriculars** – in some areas, it’s common for drivers to stop at souvenir shops en route. While this gives the driver an often much-needed break from the wheel, most shops pay drivers commissions to bring clients, which means you may find yourself spending a lot more time souvenir shopping than you’d bargained for. If you’re not interested in this, discuss it with your driver at the outset of your safari, ideally while you’re still at the safari company’s offices.
- **Less is more** – if you’ll be teaming up with others to make a group, find out how many people will be in your vehicle, and try to meet your travelling companions before setting off.
- **Special interests** – if bird-watching or other special interests are important, arrange a private safari with a specialised operator.

Minivans are the most common option throughout Kenya and northern Tanzania, but if you have a choice, go for a good Land Rover-style 4WD instead. Apart from aesthetics, minivans accommodate too many people for a good experience, the rooftop opening is usually only large enough for a few passengers to use at once, and at least some passengers will get stuck in middle seats with poor views.

Whatever type of vehicle you’re in, you should try to avoid crowding. Sitting uncomfortably scrunched together for several hours over bumpy roads, or squeezed into a middle seat, detracts significantly from the safari ambience. Most prices you will be quoted are based on groups of three to four passengers, which is about the maximum for comfort for most vehicles. Some companies put five or six passengers in a standard 4WD, but the minimal savings don’t compensate for the extra discomfort.

Other Safaris

If you’re the type that gets antsy sitting cooped up in a vehicle for several days on end, there is an increasing number of options for walking,

The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals by Jonathan Kingdon makes a wonderful safari companion, with a wealth of information on East African wildlife. *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* by Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe is similar for birding.

Tsetse flies can be unwelcome safari companions in some areas. To minimise the nuisance, wear thick, long-sleeved shirts and trousers in khaki or other drab shades, and avoid bright, contrasting and very dark clothing.

cycling and other more energetic pursuits, sometimes on their own, and sometimes in combination with a vehicle safari.

In addition to the safaris listed here, see p26 for more ideas on ways to get out and moving.

WALKING, HIKING & CYCLING SAFARIS

At many national parks you can arrange relatively short walks of two to three hours in the early morning or late afternoon. The focus is on watching animals rather than covering distance, and walks like these are often included in organised vehicle-safari packages, especially at the top end of the scale.

For keen walkers, and those who want to minimise their time in safari minibuses, there are an increasing number of more vigorous options, usually involving point-to-point walks or longer circuits. Kenya in particular has a wide array of organised safaris combining walking, hiking and cycling, with side trips by vehicle into the parks to see wildlife. Popular areas include Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon, the Cherangani Hills and around the Rift Valley lakes. In Tanzania, activity-oriented safaris are getting into full swing, so expect lots of new developments within the next few years. For now the best areas include the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and Mt Kilimanjaro and Arusha National Parks, all with highly rewarding hiking. Longer walks can also be arranged in areas bordering the Serengeti, in Ruaha National Park and in Selous Game Reserve. Uganda also offers some excellent opportunities – everything from tracking gorillas and chimpanzees to birding walks in Bwindi Impenetrable and Kibali Forest National Parks, to climbing Mt Elgon or trekking in the Rwenzori Mountains.

BOAT & CANOE SAFARIS

Like walking safaris, boat safaris are an excellent way to experience the East African wilderness, and offer a welcome break from dusty, bumpy roads. They're also the only way to fully explore riverine environments, and they'll give you new perspectives on the terrestrial scene as you approach hippos or crocodiles at close range, float by a sandbank covered with birds, or observe animals on shore from a river vantage point.

Good places for boat safaris include along the Rufiji River in Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve; and in Uganda, Queen Elizabeth National Park, or the launch trip up the Victoria Nile to the base of Murchison Falls. In Tanzania's Arusha National Park, you can take canoe safaris on the Momela Lakes (p188). Also see p549.

CAMEL SAFARIS

Camel safaris offer the chance to get off the beaten track and into areas where vehicle safaris don't or can't go. Most take place in Kenya's Samburu and Turkana tribal areas between Isiolo and Lake Turkana. Camel safaris can also be arranged at Mkuru, Tanzania (see p187). Although you may well see wildlife along the way, the main attractions are the journey itself, and the chance to immerse yourself in nomadic life and to mingle with the indigenous people. You have the choice of riding the camels or walking alongside them. Most travelling is done in the cooler parts of the day, and a camp site is established around noon. In Kenya, camel safaris are quite straightforward, with operators doing the organising and most providing camping equipment and ablution facilities. In Tanzania, however, you will need to be self-sufficient and sort out most of the logistics yourself.

BALLOON SAFARIS

Drifting over the Serengeti Plains or along a riverbed in a hot-air balloon is a superb way to experience East African nature if you have the funds. While everything depends on wind and weather conditions, and wildlife can't be guaranteed, the captains try to stay between 500m and 1000m above ground, which means that if animals are there you'll be able to see them. The main places for balloon safaris are Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve and Tanzania's Serengeti National Park. For more information, see p435 and p194.

HORSEBACK-RIDING SAFARIS

Horseback-riding safaris are gaining in popularity, particularly in Tanzania; most require previous riding experience. See p250.

DO-IT-YOURSELF SAFARIS

If you're lucky enough to have your own vehicle, or have a group to split rental costs, it's relatively easy to organise your own safari, though less commonly done than in southern Africa. Doing things yourself offers the great advantages of flexibility and being able to choose who you travel with. Just remember to bring enough extra petrol (as it's not available in most parks), and some mechanical knowledge and spares; many park areas are quite remote, and if you break down, you'll be on your own. The main additional cost – apart from accommodation, park fees, petrol and other standard items – is likely to be the vehicle fees charged by many parks. For most areas, you'll need a 4WD. Apart from costs, the main disadvantages of organising your own safari are breakdown and security concerns, finding your way (if you're unfamiliar with the area), and the fact that whoever is driving is going to be too busy concentrating on the road to notice much of the wildlife.

As for organising a safari via public transport: while it's possible to reach many parks with public transport, you'll then need to arrange a vehicle to get around once you get to the park gates. With the exception of Ngorongoro Crater and Katavi National Park, both in Tanzania, and a handful of other areas, there's no vehicle hire at most parks or reserves, and hiring a car specifically for safari usually works out at least as expensively as going through a tour operator, unless you are in a group. Hitching a lift isn't usually a realistic option either, especially in Uganda, where there's very little traffic into the national parks, and in Tanzania, where it's not permitted in most parks.

For hiking or other safaris where you don't need a vehicle to get around once you're at the park, doing things yourself via public transport is much easier, with the main considerations being time, sorting things out with park fees, guides and other logistics, and finding some travelling companions. Allow up to a full day at the access town or trail head to organise food, equipment and guides.

CHOOSING AN OPERATOR

Competition among safari companies is fierce these days, and corners are often cut, especially at the budget level. Some companies enter wildlife parks through side entrances to avoid park fees, while others use glorified *matatu* (Kenyan minibus) or *daladala* (pick-up truck or minibus) drivers as guides, offer substandard food and poorly maintained vehicles, or underpay and otherwise poorly treat their staff. There are also many high-quality companies who have excellent track records. Companies recommended in this chapter enjoyed a good reputation at the time of research, as do many

For beautiful photos, especially of the Masai Mara, look for *Mara-Serengeti: A Photographer's Paradise* by Jonathan and Angela Scott.

Serengeti: Natural Order on the African Plain and In the Lion's Den – both by Mitsuaki Iwago – are superb photographic documentaries of the majestic rhythms of nature on the East African plains.

In addition to the 'Big Five' (elephants, lions, leopards, buffaloes and rhinos), there's also a 'Little Five' (elephant shrews, ant lions, leopard tortoises, buffalo weavers and rhino beetles).

others that couldn't be listed due to space considerations. However, we can't emphasise enough the need to check on the current situation with all of the listed companies and any others you may hear about. Following are some things to keep in mind when looking for an operator:

- Do some legwork (the Internet is a good start) before coming to East Africa. Get personal recommendations, and once in the region, talk with as many people as you can who have recently returned from a safari or trek with the company you're considering.
- Be sceptical of price quotes that sound too good to be true, and don't rush into any deals, no matter how good they sound.
- Don't fall for it if a tout tries to convince you that a safari or trek is leaving 'tomorrow' and that you can be the final person in the group. Take the time to shop around at reliable outfits to get a feel for what's on offer, and if others have supposedly registered, ask to speak with them.
- In Tanzania and Kenya, check with Tanzanian Association of Tour Operators (TATO) or Kenyan Association of Tour Operators (KATO), and in Uganda with the Uganda Tourist Board, to find out whether the operator you're considering is licensed. (See below for contact details.)
- Don't give money to anyone who doesn't work out of an office, and don't arrange any safari deals at the bus stand or with touts who follow you to your hotel room. Also be wary of sham operators trading under the same names as companies listed in this or other guidebooks. Don't let business cards fool you; they're easy to print up and are no proof of legitimacy.
- Go with a company that has its own vehicles and equipment. If you have any doubts, don't pay a deposit until you've seen the vehicle that you'll be using. (Also be aware that it's not unknown for an operator to show you one vehicle, but then on the actual safari day, arrive in an inferior one.)
- Especially at the budget level, there's a lot of client swapping between companies that have full vehicles and those that don't. You could easily find yourself on safari with a company that isn't the one you booked with, especially if you're booking from abroad. Reputable companies will inform you if they're going to do this. Although getting swapped

KATO & TATO

Kenya and Tanzania have tour-operator associations that serve as local regulatory bodies, and with whom reputable safari companies will be registered members. While they're not always the most powerful of entities, going on safari with one of their members will give you at least some recourse to appeal in case of conflict or problems. They're also good sources of information on whether a company is reputable or not, and it's well worth checking in with them before finalising your plans. Their contacts are as follows:

Kenyan Association of Tour Operators (KATO); ☎ 020-713348; www.katokenya.org

Tanzanian Association of Tour Operators (TATO); ☎ 027-250 4188; www.tatotz.org

In Tanzania, TATO publishes a list of registered operators on its website. Other good sources of information on tour operators:

Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association (☎ 020-609355; www.safariguides.org)

Tanzania Tourist Board Tourist Information Centre (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-250 3843; www.tanzania-web.com; Boma Rd, Arusha)

Uganda Tourist Board (Map p472; ☎ 041-342196; www.visituganda.com; 13/15 Kimathi Ave, Kampala)

into another company's safari isn't necessarily a bad thing, be sure that the safari you booked and paid for is what you get, and try to meet the people you'll be travelling with before setting off.

- Unless you speak the local language, be sure your driver can speak English.
- Go through the itinerary in detail and confirm what is expected/ planned for each stage of the trip. Be sure that the number of wildlife drives per day and all other specifics appear in the written contract, as well as the starting and ending dates and approximate times. Normally, major problems such as complete vehicle breakdown are compensated for by adding additional time onto your safari. If this isn't possible (for example, if you have an onward flight), reliable operators may compensate you for a portion of the time lost. However don't expect a refund for 'minor' problems such as punctured tyres or lesser breakdowns. Also note that park fees are nonrefundable.

TANZANIA

ITINERARIES

Northern Circuit

Arusha National Park is the best bet for a day trip, while Tarangire and Lake Manyara National Parks are each easily accessed as overnight trips from Arusha, although all these parks deserve more time to do them justice. For a half-week itinerary, try any of the northern parks alone (although for the Serengeti, it's worth flying at least one way, since it's a full day's drive from Arusha), or Ngorongoro Crater together with either Lake Manyara or Tarangire. With a week, you'll have just enough time for the classic combination of Lake Manyara, Tarangire, Ngorongoro and the Serengeti, but it's better to focus on just two or three of these. Many operators offer a standard three-day tour of Lake Manyara, Tarangire and Ngorongoro (or a four- to five-day version including the Serengeti). However, distances to Ngorongoro and the Serengeti are long, and the trip is likely to leave you feeling that you've spent too much time rushing from park to park and not enough time settling in and experiencing the actual environments. If you're serious about a safari in the north, especially if you want to visit Serengeti National Park, allow a minimum of five days from Arusha.

In addition to these more conventional itineraries, there are countless other possibilities combining wildlife viewing with visits to other areas. For example, a vehicle safari in the Ngorongoro Crater followed by a climb of Oldoinyo Lengai, trekking elsewhere in Ngorongoro Conservation Area, or visiting Lake Eyasi.

Southern Circuit

Mikumi National Park and Saadani Game Reserve are both good destinations if you have only one or (better) two nights. With three to four days, try Selous Game Reserve, or Ruaha National Park if you fly. With a bit longer, you could combine the Selous and Ruaha, Ruaha and Katavi (in the west) or – for a safari and hiking – Mikumi and Udzungwa Mountains National Parks.

Western Parks

Trips to Katavi, Mahale Mountains or Gombe Stream National Parks will require a bit more planning, and unless you have lots of time, will involve

The Serengeti is Tanzania's largest park (14,763 sq km), and home to the greatest concentration of large mammals in the world. About half of the park is pristine wilderness, without even a road.

some flights. For Katavi, a minimum of three days would be ideal, given the effort it takes to reach the park. For Gombe Stream, budget at least two days, and for Mahale, a bit longer to revel in the remoteness.

OPERATORS

Africa Travel Resource (www.intotanzania.com) A Web-based safari broker that matches your safari ideas with an operator, and helps you plan and book customised itineraries. All budgets.

Akaro Tours Tanzania (Map p172; ☎ 027-275 2986; www.akarotours.com; Ground fl, NSFF House, Old Moshi Rd, Moshi) No-frills Kilimanjaro treks, day hikes on Kilimanjaro's lower slopes and a range of cultural tours. Budget.

Coastal Travels (Map p118; ☎ 022-211 7959/60; safari@coastal.cc; Upanga Rd, Dar es Salaam) A long-established outfit with its own fleet of planes and safari camps and lodges in Ruaha National Park, the Selous Game Reserve and on Mafia Island. They often have good-value 'last-minute' flight-accommodation deals. Midrange.

East African Safari & Touring Company (Map pp180-1; ☎ 0744-741354; www.eastafrican.safari.info; Goliondoi Rd, Arusha) Customised itineraries for individuals and small groups, with focus on the ecosystems around Tarangire National Park, where they operate a camp. Midrange to top end.

Foxes African Safaris (☎ 0744-237422; www.tanzaniasafaris.info) A family-run company with lodges and camps in Mikumi, Ruaha and Katavi National Parks, on the coast near Bagamoyo and in the Southern Highlands. Offers combination itineraries to these destinations using plane, road and their own private luxury train. Midrange to top end.

George Mavroudis Safaris (☎ 027-254 8840; gmsafaris@gmsafaris.com) Exclusive, customised mobile safaris in off-beat areas of the northern circuit, done in vintage style. Also offers combination Tanzania-Rwanda itineraries. Top end.

Green Footprint Adventures (☎ 027-250 2664; www.greenfootprint.co.tz) One of the best contacts if you're interested in anything action-oriented in the northern circuit (though they also cater to those with more sedentary tastes as well). All safaris are individually tailored and highly personalised. Activities generally range from a few hours to a half day, and include canoe safaris in Arusha National Park, mountain biking and walking around Lake Manyara, short hikes in the Crater Highlands and bush guide courses. Upper midrange to top end.

Hippotours & Safaris (Map p118; ☎ 022-212 8662/3; www.hippotours.com; Nyumba ya Sanaa, Ohio St, Dar es Salaam) Southern-circuit itineraries, especially in Selous Game Reserve and on Mafia Island. Midrange to top end.

Hoopoe Safaris (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-250 7011; www.hoopoe.com; India St, Arusha) One of the best companies in the industry, with top-quality luxury camping and lodge safaris, plus a range of treks. Hoopoe has its own tented camps in the border areas of Lake Manyara and Serengeti National Parks and elsewhere in the northern circuit, where they have formed partnerships with the surrounding communities. They also arrange trekking and safari itineraries combining Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda. Upper midrange and top end.

IntoAfrica (www.intoafrica.co.uk) A small company offering fair-traded cultural safaris and treks in northern Tanzania and Kenya, and earning consistently high marks from readers. It supports local communities in the areas where it works, and is a fine choice if your interest is more in gaining insight into local life and culture than in experiencing the luxury-lodge atmosphere. Itineraries include treks on Mts Kilimanjaro and Meru, plus a seven-day wildlife-cultural safari in Maasai and Chagga areas. Midrange.

Kahembe's Trekking & Cultural Safaris (☎ 027-253 1088, 027-253 1377; www.authentic.culture.org; Babati) A small outfit offering Mt Hanang treks and a range of no-frills cultural safaris around Babati; a good choice for experiencing Tanzania from a local perspective. Budget.

Key's Hotel (☎ 275 2250; www.keys-hotels.com; Uru Rd, Moshi) A long-established place offering reliable Kilimanjaro packages. Midrange.

Moshi Expeditions & Mountaineering (Map p172; ☎ 027-275 4234; www.memtours.com; Kaunda St, Moshi) Kilimanjaro treks and northern-circuit safaris at competitive prices. Budget to midrange.

Nature Beauties (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-254 8224; nature.beauties@habari.co.tz; Old Moshi Rd, Arusha) Kilimanjaro treks and northern-circuit safaris. Budget.

Bernhard Grzimek's 1959 film *The Serengeti Shall Not Die* was one of the most influential wildlife films ever made, drawing world attention not just to the Serengeti but to conservation throughout the continent.

Nature Discovery (☎ 027-254 4063; info@naturediscovery.com) Environmentally responsible northern-circuit safaris, and treks on Kilimanjaro, Meru and in the Crater Highlands. Midrange.

Roy Safaris (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-250 2115, 027-250 8010; www.roysafaris.com; Serengeti Rd, Arusha) A highly regarded family-run company offering budget and semiluxury camping safaris in the northern circuit, plus luxury-lodge safaris and treks on Mt Kilimanjaro, Mt Meru and in the Crater Highlands. Their vehicle fleet is the cream of the crop, and safaris and treks are consistently good value for money. All budgets.

Safari Makers (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-254 4446; www.safarimakers.com; India St, Arusha) Reliable no-frills northern-circuit camping and lodge safaris and treks at very reasonable prices, some of which also incorporate Cultural Tourism Program tours. Budget.

Shah Tours (Map p172; ☎ 027-275 2370, 027-275 2998; www.kilimanjaro-shah.com; Mawenzi Rd, Moshi) Quality Kilimanjaro and Meru treks at reasonable prices. Midrange.

Sunny Safaris (Map pp180-1; ☎ 027-250 8184, 027-250 7145; www.sunnysafaris.com; Colonel Middleton Rd, Arusha) A wide selection of no-frills camping and lodge safaris at reasonable prices, as well as Kilimanjaro and Meru treks, and day walks in the area around Arusha. Budget.

Tropical Trails (☎ 027-250 0358, 027-254 8299; www.tropicaltrails.com; Masai Camp, Old Moshi Rd, Arusha) A long-standing company offering high-quality treks and walking safaris on Kilimanjaro, Meru, in the Crater Highlands and in the Monduli Mountains. Koshier treks, photographic camping safaris and other special-interest tours can be arranged, and a portion of the company's profits goes towards supporting education projects in Maasai schools. Upper midrange.

Zara Tanzania Adventures (Map p172; ☎ 027-275 0011; www.zaratravel.com; Rindi Lane, Moshi) An efficient outfit that does a brisk business with Kilimanjaro treks, plus some northern-circuit safaris. Budget to midrange.

Most hotels in Marangu also organise Kilimanjaro treks at price levels roughly corresponding with their accommodation rates. For listings, see p175. Marangu Hotel, in addition to fully catered treks, also offers a no-frills 'hard way' option: for US\$170 plus park fees for a five-day Marangu climb, the hotel will take care of hut reservations and provide a guide with porter; you must provide all food and equipment.

KENYA

ITINERARIES

Whether you take a camping safari or a lodge safari, there's a plethora of options available ranging from two days to 15 days and, in some cases, up to six weeks.

Most shorter itineraries of half a week or less concentrate on Masai Mara National Reserve and Lake Nakuru National Park, while short Amboseli and Tsavo National Parks safaris are also common. You'll need a little more time to head north to the popular Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves, while a week will give you time to tag on visits to Lakes Nakuru, Bogoria and Baringo to either a Masai Mara, Amboseli or northern parks itinerary. With a week and a half you could take in two or more of the Rift Valley lakes plus Masai Mara, Amboseli and Tsavo, or Samburu and Buffalo Springs, Meru, Lake Nakuru and Masai Mara.

Most of the safari companies cover the standard routes described in the previous paragraph, but some also specialise in different routes designed to take you off the beaten track. Meru, Mt Elgon, Saiswa Swamp and the Aberdare National Parks are all possible. Also popular are itineraries combining wildlife safaris with visits to Lake Turkana; for example, visiting either or both of Samburu and Buffalo Springs and either Meru National Park or Shaba National Reserve and then heading up to Marsabit National Park before crossing the Chalbi Desert to Lake Turkana.

An essential safari companion is Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife East Africa*, which is full of tips on spotting wildlife, maps of East Africa's parks and background information on animal behaviour and ecology.

In the high season many companies have daily or every second day departures to the most popular national parks – Amboseli, Masai Mara and Tsavo. They generally leave only once or twice per week for the less frequented parks such as Samburu and Buffalo Springs, Shaba and Meru. In addition, most companies will leave for any of the most popular national parks at any time so long as you have a minimum number of people wanting to go – usually four. If you are on your own you may have to wait around for a while to be put together with a larger group, which means it makes sense to book ahead or get a group together yourself rather than just turning up and expecting to leave the next morning.

OPERATORS

Basecamp Explorer (☎ 020-577490; www.basecampexplorer.com; Ole Odume Rd, Hurlingham, Nairobi) An excellent Scandinavian-owned ecotourism operator offering a nine-day camping itinerary to Samburu, Lake Nakuru and the Masai Mara, with walking at Mt Kenya, Lake Bogoria and Lake Baringo. The firm also runs plenty of conservation-based safaris, including trips to Lamu, Tanzania, Mt Kenya and Kilimanjaro. Top end.

Best Camping Tours (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-229667; www.bestcampingkenya.com; I&M Towers, Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi) This company offers camping safaris on all the main routes including Amboseli or Masai Mara (three to four days) and Amboseli and Tsavo West (four days). Budget.

Bike Treks (☎ 020-446371; www.biketreks.co.ke; Kabete Gardens, Westlands, Nairobi) This company offers walking and cycling as well as combined walking/cycling safaris. Its shortest safari is a three-day Masai Mara trip, and there are also six-day walking or cycling trips to the Maasai land west and south of Narok. Midrange.

Bushbuck Adventures (☎ 020-7121505; www.bushbuckadventures.com; Peponi Rd, Westlands, Nairobi) Bushbuck is a small company specialising in personalised safaris. It's relatively expensive, but some company profits are put into conservation projects. The company is also strong on walking safaris. Midrange.

Eastern & Southern Safaris (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-242828; www.essafari.co.ke; Finance House, Loita St, Nairobi) A classy and reliable outfit. Safaris in Tanzania and Uganda are also available, and departures are guaranteed with just two people for some itineraries. Midrange to top end.

Gametrackers (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-338927; www.gametrackersafaris.com; Nginyo Towers, cnr Koinange & Moktar Daddah Sts, Nairobi) Long established and usually reliable, this company offers a full range of camping and lodge safaris around Kenya. There are also short excursions, walking, Mt Kenya treks and numerous long-haul trips to Tanzania, Uganda and further afield. Budget and midrange.

IntoAfrica (www.intoafrica.co.uk) This environmentally and culturally sensitive company gets more praise from readers than just about any other, placing an emphasis on fair trade. Trips on offer include a variety of routes up Mt Kenya as well as cultural treks with Maasai people. Midrange.

Ketty Tours (ketty@africaonline.co.ke) Diani Beach (☎ 040-203582; Diani shopping centre, Diani Beach); Mombasa (Map p314; ☎ 041-2315178; Ketty Plaza, Moi Ave, Mombasa) This company specialises in short tours of the coastal region and into Tsavo East or West. However, it also offers camping safaris to all the usual parks from two to 10 days. Budget and midrange.

Let's Go Travel (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-340331; www.letsgosafari.com; Caxton House, Standard St, Nairobi) This excellent travel agent runs its own safaris and excursions and also sells on an amazing range of trips from other companies, covering Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and even the Seychelles. Prices are on the high side for camping, but it's also a good port of call for unusual lodge safaris and car hire. Midrange.

Ontdek Kenya (☎ 061-2030326; www.ontdekkenya.com; PO Box 2352, Nyeri) This small operator has been recommended by several readers and offers walking trips catered to women, vegetarians and bird-watchers. Destinations include the Rift Valley lakes and Mt Kenya. Budget.

Origins Safaris (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-312137; www.originsafaris.info; Fedha Towers, Standard St, Nairobi) Origins offer tailored bird-watching trips and a superb range of exclusive cultural safaris around the country, including such rare sights as Samburu circumcision ceremonies and tribal initiation rites in southern Ethiopia. Top end.

About 8000 elephants roam Tsavo's expanses – one-third of Kenya's overall total, but a huge drop from the 40,000-plus elephants at home here before poaching took its toll.

Safari Seekers (www.safari-seekerskenya.net) Mombasa (Map p314; ☎ 041-220122; Diamond Trust Arcade, Moi Ave, Mombasa); Nairobi (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-652317; Jubilee Insurance Exchange Bldg, Kaunda St, Nairobi) Has its own permanent camp sites in Amboseli, Samburu and Masai Mara, and runs camping and lodge safaris both in Kenya and Tanzania, plus trips into Uganda. Budget and midrange.

Saferide Safaris (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-253129; www.saferidesafaris.com; Avenue House, Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi) A relatively new operator consistently recommended by readers for its camping excursions. Budget.

Sana Highlands Trekking Expeditions (Map pp282-3; ☎ 020-227820; www.sanatrekkingkenya.com; Contrast House, Moi Ave, Nairobi) Another of the big budget players and a regular stop on the tout circuit. However, they have had a reasonable reputation in the past for walking safaris as well as the usual camping and lodge itineraries. Budget.

Somak Travel (www.somak-nairobi.com) Mombasa (Map p328; ☎ 041-487349; Somak House, Nyerere Ave, PO Box 90738); Nairobi (☎ 020-535508; Somak House, Mombasa Rd, Nairobi) Runs the usual range of lodge safaris and other options such as luxury camel treks. Top end.

Southern Cross Safaris (www.southerncrosssafaris.com) Malindi (Map p337; ☎ 042-30547; Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd); Mombasa (Map p312; ☎ 041-475074; Kanstan Centre, Nyali Bridge, Malindi Rd, Mombasa); Nairobi (☎ 020-884712; Symbion House, Karen Rd, Nairobi) A long-standing operator and travel agent with an excellent reputation around the country. Top end.

UGANDA

ITINERARIES

Uganda is a compact country in comparison with some of its neighbours, and most safari itineraries are relatively short, averaging from one to three weeks. Some include a detour to neighbouring Rwanda. Shorter trips to view the mountain gorillas or Murchison Falls are also popular with travellers combining Uganda with visits to Kenya or Tanzania.

The shortest safaris, taking a week or less, focus on the southwest, usually combining a gorilla visit in Uganda or Rwanda with Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo National Parks or Kibale Forest National Park. With 10 to 12 days, you'll be able to cover most of Uganda's highlights, following a loop from Kampala south via Lake Mburo to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park or Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda, before heading north through Queen Elizabeth National Park and Kibale Forest National Park on to Murchison Falls National Park. With two or more weeks, you'll also be able to include other parks in the west such as Semliki National Park or Semliki Valley Game Reserve and even consider a flying visit to remote Kidepo Valley in the northeast. This time frame will also allow more time to relax en route, and for other activities such as guided bird-watching or white-water rafting.

OPERATORS

Afri Tours & Travel (Map p472; ☎ 041-233596; www.afritourstravel.com; Daisy's Arcade, 13 Buganda Rd, Kampala) One of the better all-round safari companies in Uganda, offering safaris at prices for every pocket. It operates the Sambiya River Lodge in Murchison and promotes some excellent-value short safaris to what is arguably Uganda's best national park, as well as offering full safari itineraries throughout the country. All budgets.

African Pearl Safaris (Map p472; ☎ 041-233566; www.africanpearlsafaris.com; Impala House, 13 Kimathi Ave, Kampala) Offers a wide range of shorter safaris around Uganda with a focus on Bwindi Impenetrable National Park where it operates the Buhoma Homestead. Midrange.

Great Lakes Safaris (☎ 041-267153; www.safari-uganda.com; Suzie House, Gaba Rd, Kampala) One of the newer safari companies in Uganda, the team has been generating rave reviews for friendly service and flexibility. They cover all the major national parks in Uganda. All budgets.

Uganda's Murchison Falls National Park is one of the few places in the world for spotting the rare shoebill stork, though sightings are far from guaranteed.

Mantana African Safaris (☎ 041-321552; www.kimbla-mantana.com; 17 Nambi Rd, Entebbe) Known throughout East Africa for its luxury lodges and tented camps, Mantana offers a limited range of safaris around Uganda. Most of its trips combine stays at one or several of their camps at Lake Mburo, Bwindi and Kibale Forest, plus visits to Queen Elizabeth and the crater lakes. Midrange to top end.

Uganda Safari Company (Map p471; ☎ 041-251182; www.safariuganda.com; Emin Pasha Hotel, Aki Bua Rd, Kampala) Formerly Semliki Safaris, this is a specialist operator offering all-inclusive safaris throughout Uganda for around US\$300 per day, including Semliki Valley Game Reserve, Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls and the mountain gorillas. As well as offering tailored trips for bird-watchers, fishers and other special-interest groups, it runs the luxurious Semliki Lodge in western Uganda and Apoka Lodge at beautiful Kidepo Valley. Top end.

Volcanoes Safaris Kampala (Map p471; ☎ 041-346464; www.volcanoessafaris.com; 27 Lumumba Ave, Kampala); UK office (☎ 0870-870 8480; salesuk@volcanoessafaris.com) An extensive choice covering the highlights of Uganda, with a particular focus on the mountain gorillas here and in Rwanda. The organisation also operates upmarket camps at Mgahinga, Bwindi and Sipi Falls. It's also possible to make enquiries or bookings through its UK office. Midrange to top end.

RWANDA

ITINERARIES

The few organised safaris that include Rwanda are generally short – most less than a week – yet expensive due to the lack of competition. All concentrate on trips to Parc National des Volcans.

OPERATORS

In addition to the following companies, it's worth checking with the national tourism office in Kigali (see p575) for an updated listing of operators working in Rwanda.

Primate Safaris (Map p574; ☎ 503428; www.primatesafaris-rwanda.com; Ave de la Paix, Kigali) Offers a range of short safaris to Ngungwe Forest National Park and Parc National des Volcans; in addition, the owners have years of experience in the Kenyan safari business.

Thousand Hills (Map p574; ☎ 505151; www.thousandhills.rw; Hotel des Milles Collines, Kigali) New operator with a very experienced team who have worked all over the world. Gorilla visits, national park visits and an emphasis on local culture. Their motto is 'paradise needs to be shared'.

Volcanoes Safaris (Map p574; ☎ 576530; salesrw@volcanoessafaris.com; Hotel des Milles Collines, Kigali) The Rwandan branch office for Volcanoes Safaris of Uganda; see p95 for more information.

Jane Goodall's classic, *In the Shadow of Man*, is essential and fascinating reading for anyone planning to go chimpanzee tracking in East Africa.

Mountain Gorillas

Coming face to face with mountain gorillas is the ultimate wildlife experience in Africa. No bars, no windows – you are a humble guest in their domain. Tracking through dense vegetation, nothing quite prepares you for the moment when you come upon a gorilla family in the wild; the first glimpse of black as a juvenile jumps off a nearby branch, a toddler clinging to the back of its mother, and the shiver of fear as a giant silver-back slowly crosses your path. This is one of life's great experiences and is not to be missed when travelling through East Africa.

There are thought to be fewer than 700 mountain gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*) left in the world today, all found in a small area of East Africa straddling the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo). This makes them a critically endangered species.

Relations between humans and gorillas have not always been fraternal. For centuries gorillas were considered fearsome and aggressive – with portrayals like King Kong hardly helping their image – and it was only last century that we finally learned that they are gentle and vegetarian. In reality chimpanzees are far more aggressive than the relatively docile gorillas.

The first European to encounter the mountain gorillas was Oscar von Beringe, in 1902. He shot two on the slopes of Mt Sabinyo and the 'new' subspecies was named after him. Hunting the gorillas was a popular pastime until one hunter, Carl Akeley, decided that something must be done to preserve the population of these magnificent creatures. In 1925 he persuaded the Belgian government to create Africa's first protected area, Albert National Park, which is now Parc National des Virungas in DR Congo. Sadly, over the years agriculture and administrative division reduced the size of this protected area, and poaching further reduced the number of gorillas.

The first scientific study of the mountain gorillas in the Virunga volcanoes area was undertaken by George Schaller in 1959. His work was continued by Dian Fossey from 1967 and her story has been made the subject of a film, *Gorillas in the Mist*. Fossey's confrontational, uncompromising stance on poaching most likely led to her murder in 1985.

GORILLA TOURISM

By the late 1960s gorilla tracking had already become quite popular in DR Congo, and from 1978 gorilla tourism was also being promoted in Rwanda, with tremendous results for the local economy. During the 1980s gorilla tourism was an important source of income for Rwanda, and the animals became a symbol of national pride. Uganda was slow to realise the potential of promoting its primates, but, due to political instability in neighbouring Rwanda and DR Congo, by the late 1990s it was Uganda which had established itself as the most popular country for encountering gorillas.

Gorilla tourism today stands at a crossroads. All three countries where the remaining gorillas live have a history of instability that makes it hard for international conservation organisations to operate with any certainty. The International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund (DFGF) have tried to promote sustainable agricultural and tourism practices, and to encourage the active participation of local communities in conservation, and this has played a large part in ensuring the gorillas' survival during turbulent times. However, many of the local communities around these protected areas remain bitter, as they're aware

Gorilla: Struggle for Survival in the Virungas (1996) is coauthored by George Schaller, the primatologist who pioneered the study of mountain gorillas in the Virungas. This is a biography of these gentle creatures and the efforts undertaken to protect them in a hostile environment.

In 1978 Bill Weber and Amy Vedder began studying mountain gorillas with Dian Fossey in Rwanda. *In the Kingdom of Gorillas: Fragile Species in a Dangerous Land* tells how they established the Mountain Gorilla Project and encouraged the ecotourism which may save these majestic creatures from extinction.

of the vast sums of money flowing in from visitors, and very little of it reaches them.

The Ugandan authorities pioneered a program to give 10% of gorilla revenue to the local communities around Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks. However, after the initial fanfare, the amount was quietly trimmed back to 10% of park entrance fees, not 10% of gorilla-tracking fees – which is the difference between US\$2 and US\$36 per visitor or more than US\$1000 per day! Unless the local communities have more of an incentive to protect these beautiful creatures, the future of the gorillas will never be secure.

Currently Bwindi, in Uganda, and Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans are the two most popular places to track the mountain gorillas. Mgahinga in Uganda used to be popular with independent travellers, as permits were available at short notice; however, the solitary family once resident there has been on an extended vacation on the Rwanda side of the border, and may not return. The good news for visitors to the region is that Parc National des Virungas in DR Congo is once again open for gorilla tracking and there are 36 permits a day available at Djomba and Bukima. This is currently the easiest place to pick up a permit at short notice.

The most important development for the future of gorilla tourism could be a long-term plan, currently under discussion, to create a tri-national protected area under a single administration, which would market the gorillas internationally. However, with relations between the governments of Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo frosty to say the least, this will remain a conservationist's dream rather than a geographic reality for several years to come.

THE GORILLAS

Gorillas are the largest of the great apes and share an astonishing 97% of their biological make-up with human beings. Gorillas used to inhabit a swathe of land that cut right across central Africa, but the ice age diminished the forests and divided them into three groups: the western lowland gorilla, the eastern lowland gorilla and the mountain gorilla. Mountain gorillas are now found only in two small populations of about 330 or so each in the forests of Bwindi, and on the slopes of the Virunga volcanoes, encompassing Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans and DR Congo's Parc National de Virungas. There is no doubt that mountain gorillas are a very rare species – there is just one for every 10 million people on earth.

Mountain gorillas are distinguished from their lowland relatives by longer hair, a broader chest and a wider jaw. The most obvious thing that sets apart the gorillas in Bwindi from those of the Virunga volcanoes is that they are less shaggy, most likely due to the lower altitude of Bwindi compared with the volcanoes. More recently, DNA tests have suggested that the Bwindi gorilla is a distinct subspecies from the mountain gorilla, although that's of more concern to scientists than the average tourist.

Daily Life

Gorillas spend 30% of their day feeding, 30% moving and foraging, and the remainder resting. They spend most of their time on the ground, moving around on all fours, but stand up to reach for food. Gorillas are vegetarians and their diet consists mainly of bamboo shoots, giant thistles and wild celery, all of which contain water and allow the gorillas to survive without drinking for long periods of time. Insects are a popular source of protein.

The group's dominant silverback, also known as the alpha male, dictates movements for the day, and at night each gorilla makes its own nest.

Nests are only used once and the age of a nest is usually determinable by the dung left there. Gorillas will usually only travel about 1km a day, unless they have encountered another group in which case they may move further.

Families

Gorillas generally live in family groups of varying sizes, usually including one or two older silverback males, younger black-back males, females and infants. Most groups contain between 10 and 15 gorillas but in Rwanda and DR Congo there are groups of 30 or more.

There are strong bonds between family individuals and status is usually linked to age. Silverbacks are at the top of the hierarchy, then females with infants or ties to the silverbacks, then black-backs and other females.

Most gorillas leave the group when they reach maturity, which helps prevent interbreeding among such a small population.

Conflict

Gorillas are relatively placid primates and serious confrontations are rare, although violence can flare if there is a challenge for supremacy between silverbacks. Conflicts are mostly kept to shows of strength and vocal disputes.

Conflict between groups is also uncommon, as gorillas are not territorial. However, ranges can often overlap and if two groups meet, there is usually a lot of display and bravado on the part of silverbacks, including mock charges. Often the whole group joins in and it is at this point that young adult females may choose to switch allegiance.

If gorillas do fight, injuries can be very serious as these animals have long canine teeth. If a dominant male is driven from a group by another silverback, it is likely the new leader will kill all the young infants to establish his mating rights.

Communication

Gorillas communicate in a variety of ways, including facial expressions, gestures and calls. Adult males use barks and roars during confrontations or to coordinate the movement of their groups to a different area. Postures and gestures form an important element of intimidation and it is possible for a clash to be diffused by a display of teeth-baring, stiff-legging and charging. And if all this fails, a terrifying scream is enough to deter most outsiders.

Friendly communication is an important part of group bonding and includes grunts of pleasure, particularly associated with food and foraging. Upon finding food, gorillas will grunt or bark to alert other members of the group. Grooming, however, is not as common as among other primates.

Biology

Gorillas are the largest primates in the world and adult males weigh as much as 200kg (440lbs). Females are about half this size. Mountain gorillas are the largest of the three gorilla species, although the largest gorilla ever recorded was an eastern lowland male.

Males reach maturity between eight and 15 years – their backs turning silver as they enter their teens – while females enter adulthood at the earlier age of eight. Conception is possible for about three days each month and once a female has conceived for the first time, she spends most of her life pregnant or nursing.

The duration of pregnancy is about 8½ months. Newborn infants are highly dependent on adults, and a young infant will rarely leave its mother's

Dian Fossey spent most of her life fighting to protect the mountain gorillas and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund (www.gorillafund.org) continues her work through antipoaching measures, monitoring, research, education and supporting local communities.

The International Gorilla Conservation Project (IGCP; www.mountaingorillas.org) is a unique partnership between the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Their goal is the protection of mountain gorillas and their forest habitat in Rwanda, Uganda and the DR Congo.

For a better understanding of how intelligent gorillas are, take a look at www.koko.org, dedicated to Koko the gorilla at San Francisco Zoo, who can understand more than 1000 words.

The heaviest gorilla on record was an eastern lowland gorilla, weighing a whopping 210kg or more than 460lbs.

No mountain gorillas have ever been successfully reared in captivity, contributing to the precarious nature of their existence.

arms during its first six months. Initially the infant clings to the front of its mother, but gradually it spends more time on her back.

In its second year, a young gorilla begins to interact with other members of the group and starts to feed itself. Infant gorillas and silverbacks often form a bond and it is not uncommon for a silverback to adopt an infant if its mother dies. This distinguishes gorillas from other primates, where child-rearing duties are left to females.

From about three years, young gorillas become quite independent, and build their own nests. However, 30% of gorillas die before the age of six.

WHERE TO TRACK THE GORILLAS

For many visitors to East Africa, a gorilla visit is the single largest expenditure they'll make in the region. It is worth putting some thought into where to visit these incredible creatures, not only to get the most out of the experience, but to ensure a safe visit as well.

In the last few years the choice really came down to Bwindi National Park in Uganda or Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda, as the Mgahinga gorillas aren't always in Uganda and DR Congo was closed. However, with DR Congo welcoming visitors once more, it's easier to get a permit than it used to be. Rwanda offers 40 permits a day to visit five habituated families, DR Congo offers 36 permits a day, also to visit five habituated families, while Uganda offers 32 permits daily to visit four families. The towering Virunga volcanoes are a majestic backdrop, making Rwanda and DR Congo the more evocative settings in which to track the gorillas.

During peak season it can be very difficult to get gorilla permits in Uganda and Rwanda, so book ahead if you are planning to visit in December and January or July and August. Flexible travellers who don't want to fix a date in advance should consider DR Congo, as the waiting time is much shorter than in Rwanda and Uganda.

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda

Since the middle of the 1990s, Bwindi has been the number-one place to track the mountain gorillas – although Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda is almost as popular these days. Its popularity and reputation took a plunge after the murder of eight tourists here in March 1999, but security has since been considerably beefed up and it is once again regularly booked out.

As the name suggests, this is a dense forest with steep slopes, so tracking the gorillas can be quite hard work. Visibility is often poor, and fast film or push processing is necessary for good photographic results.

The trip to Bwindi can be done in a car, but a 4WD is preferable. Public transport dries up within 17km of the park. See p523 for more information.

ILLEGAL GORILLA VISITS

We hear occasional reports of illegal gorilla visits in the region. Usually this takes the form of tourists bribing rangers into taking them into the mountains to view the gorillas, but it is not unknown for rangers to approach tourists – particularly if business is booming and there are simply no gorilla permits available.

Illegal gorilla visits can increase the animals' stress levels, which in turn reduces immunity to disease. The threat of increased stress levels should not be underestimated, considering three out of 10 gorillas die before adulthood. Although seeing gorillas may be the highlight of your trip, the only way illegal visits can be stopped is if visitors play by the rules.

Gorilla-tracking permits generate vast sums of money for the countries involved. Rwanda can make US\$15,000 a day when all the permits are sold, Uganda stands to make US\$11,520 and DR Congo US\$9000.

RULES FOR GORILLA TRACKING

Before meeting the mountain dwellers of East Africa, all visitors must observe the following rules of gorilla etiquette.

- Anyone with an illness cannot track the gorillas. Shared biology means shared illness.
- Eating and smoking near the gorillas is prohibited – they might want to join in.
- Flash photography is banned; turn off the autoflash or you will be mighty unpopular with both rangers and gorillas.
- Speak quietly and don't point at the gorillas – they might get paranoid.
- Leave *nothing* in the park; take out everything you bring in.
- Stay very close to your guide. Keep a few metres back from the gorillas.
- Hard as it seems to stand still when faced by 200kg of charging silverback, never ever run away...crouch down until he cools off.

ARRANGING PERMITS

It can be very difficult to get permits for Bwindi. Numbers have increased to 32 per day, but local and international tour operators tend to book the bulk of them months in advance and there is no effective stand-by system in place. There are three mountain gorilla groups habituated to human contact which can be visited from the Buhoma sector of the park, and one family that can be tracked from the newer Nkuringo sector. A gorilla permit costs US\$360 including park entry fee and must be paid for in US dollars cash at the **Uganda Wildlife Authority** (UWA; ☎ 346287; uwa@uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd) headquarters in Kampala. Alternatively, try and book ahead through a Ugandan tour operator (see p95).

For more on mountain gorillas in Uganda, see the Uganda Wildlife Authority website at www.uwa.or.ug.

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, Uganda

Mgahinga encompasses part of the Virunga volcanoes, which span the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo. This park used to be popular with independent travellers as advance bookings were not possible due to the gorillas' tendency to duck over the border into Rwanda or DR Congo. That was the good news, the bad news is that they seem to have decided to stay in Rwanda for the time being, and that means eight fewer permits a day in Uganda. Mgahinga is more accessible by public transport than Bwindi (see p531 for more information).

ARRANGING PERMITS

Assuming the gorillas return to Mgahinga some day, the procedure for arranging permits is the same as at Bwindi (see opposite).

Parc National des Volcans, Rwanda

This was *the* place to view the mountain gorillas during the 1980s, but the security situation kept it off the travel map for much of the 1990s. However, the park reopened to visitors in 1999 and has regained its reputation as the best place to see the gorillas.

This park is where Dian Fossey was based and where the film about her work was made. If you want the most authentic gorilla experience, this may be the place to come, as the towering volcanoes form a breathtaking backdrop.

Security here is very tight, and an elite military unit guards the park. Access is quite straightforward from Kigali or southwestern Uganda. The

park is about 13km from Ruhengeri in northwest Rwanda (for more information, see p583).

ARRANGING PERMITS

As tourism in Rwanda takes off again, it is getting more difficult to get a permit during the peak seasons of July and August, and December to January. There are 40 gorilla permits available each day and the cost is US\$375, including the park entry fee. You can book a permit with the **ORTPN** (☎ 576514; www.rwandatourism.com; 1 Blvd de la Revolution; 🕒 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm weekends) in Kigali (see p575) or through Rwandan tour operators (see p96).

Parc National des Virungas, DR Congo

This is where gorilla tourism began, back in the 1960s, and now it is back in business at long last. The park closed in 1998 following the kidnapping of some tourists, but reopened again in 2004. It is currently the easiest place to pick up a permit in the region, as most tour operators are steering clear for the time being.

There are two places to track the gorillas, one at Djomba near the Uganda border and the other at Bukima 40km north of Goma. Djomba is currently more popular, but Bukima offers more permits. Both are stunning locations with a string of volcanoes behind.

Security at the park looks reasonable, but given recent events in DR Congo, it is probably fair to say that things are less organised than in Rwanda and Uganda. However, the Congolese are trying their best to attract visitors and deserve support as long as the security situation remains stable.

ARRANGING PERMITS

Parc National des Virungas is the easiest place to arrange a permit at the time of writing. There are 36 gorilla permits available each day and the cost is US\$250, including the park entry fee. There are eight permits available at the Djomba sector and 28 permits available at Bukima. Permits can be arranged through **Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 256-41-274767; www.backpackers.co.ug) in Kampala, the official Uganda representative for gorilla visits in DR Congo. Coordinator **Alex Mujambere** (☎ 256-71-626194; mujaalex@yahoo.co.uk) journeys up and down to Congo every week. This situation might change as the DR Congo re-establishes itself as a tourist destination; see p559 for more details.

For more on mountain gorillas in Rwanda, see the ORTPN website at www.rwandatourism.com.

For more on mountain gorillas in DR Congo, see the Institut Congolais pour le Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) at www.iccnrdc.cd.