

Gorilla Trekking in Uganda – Families for visiting

SECTOR/TRAILHEAD	MOUNTAIN GORILLA FAMILY(s)
Ruhija	Oruzogo, Bitukura
Rushaga	Bweza, Kahungye, Mishaya, Nshongi Busingye,
Buhoma	Rushegura, Habinyanja, Mubare
Nkuringo	Nkuringo

A. BUHOMA AREA (NORTH OF BWINDI) GORILLA FAMILIES

1. Habinyanja Mountain Gorilla Family This family is quite migratory. Sometimes it can be seen an hours' drive before arriving at the Buhoma trailhead but they reside more in the northern part of the forest. The group's habituation started in 1997 and it was under the leadership of an old silverback called Mugurusi whose name means "old man". After some time Mugurusi passed on and left power in the hands of two brothers Rwansigazi and Mwirima; the latter very reserved while the former very adventurous. They ruled together for some time but their leadership styles were highly dissimilar and this caused divisions in the family. In order to prevent a possible battle, the group decided to peacefully split in 2002. The group that left with Rwansigazi still has the name Habinyanja while the other family members who preferred Mwirima's leadership style remained at a place called Rushegura to form the present day Rushegura mountain gorilla family. The Habinyanja mountain family has 17 members including one dominant silverback a blackback, eight (6) adult females, two (2) sub-adult females, three (3) juveniles and four (4) infants.

2. Mubare Mountain Gorilla Family This was the very first mountain gorilla family to ever be habituated in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The family is named after the nearby Mubare hills and can be found in the Buhoma sector of Bwindi under the leadership of an alpha silverback called Kanyonyi. The habituation process for the Mubare mountain gorilla family started in October 1991 by the skillful Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) experts and ended two (2) years later. At the time of its habituation it was under the leadership of Ruhondeza who fathered a family of eighteen (18). Over its many years it has suffered a number of misfortunes like raids by wild mountain gorilla families, kidnappings, deaths and defections by some members which greatly reduced the group's numbers. The group received one of its worst raids by a wild mountain gorilla family in 2012 which injured and kidnapped most of its members. Ruhondeza tried to fight them off but because of his old age he was over-powered. He therefore absconded deep into the forest because of the unbearable sadness in his heart. We are told that he died three (3) months later in his sleep when he was above his fifties and his grave can be visited by tourists today. The five (5) members who were deserted by Ruhondeza in 2012 have been increased to eight (8) by the effortless contribution of their current alpha silverback called Kanyonyi.

3. Rushegura Mountain Gorilla Family This is a sister family to the Habinyanja mountain gorilla family and can also be found in the Buhoma area of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The family is led by an alpha silverback called Mwirima who is late in his

20's and is the brother to the former dominant silverback of the Habinyanja mountain gorilla family called Rwansigazi. The group is named after a place where the two brothers split to form their independent families. This is one of Bwindi's most friendly mountain gorillas led by a calm and peaceful leader who greatly defines it. The family is calm and very welcoming to visitors. Mwirima will only demonstrate the might in his arms if he feels that the safety of his family is threatened.

B. RUHIJA AREA (EAST OF BWINDI) GORILLA FAMILIES

4. Bitukura Mountain Gorilla Family The mountain gorilla family as named after the river where it was first seen (a time when it had 24 members). This group can be found while enjoying a trek along the Ruhija trailhead of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Impressively, Bitukura's habituation began in July 2007 and ended in October 2008; this was shorter than the average habituation time which takes at least 2 (two) years. More to the wonders, this group is not led by the oldest silverback but by Ndahura the second youngest of three (3) silverbacks in the group. The group has over the years lost some of its members (including Rukara silverback) to other mountain gorilla families but its leader has not let down the mantle; he continues to keep them united. Ndahura and Ruhara (one of the adult females) had a baby to add to the family. The group also has periodic "get-togethers" with the Kyaguriro mountain gorilla family of the same Ruhija sector. The group currently has 14 individuals

5. Oruzogo Mountain Gorilla Family On 20th June 2011, the Oruzogo mountain gorilla family was opened up to tourists' visits making it the newest of all Bwindi's habituated mountain gorilla families. The group currently has 23 family members under the leadership of Tibirikwata the alpha silverback. The females have surely been doing their duty in this family, seen in the births of cute mountain gorilla babies by Musi and Ntamurungi in 2011; and Kakoba's twins in March 2012. Tourists to this family will enjoy seeing the lively juveniles who are smart enough to pose for the camera.

C. NKURINGO AREA (WEST OF BWINDI) GORILLA FAMILIES

6. Nkuringo Mountain Gorilla Family This mountain gorilla family lives in one of the most tedious and challenging gorilla tracking trailheads in the whole of Bwindi but encountering it is one of the most satisfying experiences of a lifetime. The family was named after their founding alpha silverback called Nkuringo whose name in Rukiga translates as "Round Hill". The family's successful habituation ended in 2004 and Nkuringo died four years later. He was survived by two sons called Rafiki (meaning friend in Kiswahili) and Safari. Safari took on the leadership of the family and has been able to firmly hold all its members together through times of happiness and seasons of trial. The family blissfully welcomed healthy baby twins just seven months into Safari's reign and they were named Muhoozi and Katungi. Unfortunately, Katungi could not live to see his second birthday. Today the family has 19 members including two (2) silverbacks.

D. RUSHAGA AREA (SOUTH OF BWINDI) GORILLA FAMILIES

7. Busingye Mountain Gorilla Family This group gets its name from its alpha silverback called Busingye. Like Bweza, Kahungye, Mishaya and Nshongi mountain gorilla families, this family is also found in the Rushaga sector of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The word "Busingye" translates in English to mean "peace" but this is not the accurate description of this family's silverback. He is aggressive and enjoys picking fights with other mountain gorilla families. Busingye silverback was formerly a member of the Kahungye mountain gorilla family (which can be found in the Rushaga sector). In June 2012, he

broke away from the Kahungye family with seven (7) members. Busingye has mastered the art of snatching females from other mountain gorilla families to add to his own. He has been able to grow the family to its current nine (9) members.

8. Bweza Mountain Gorilla Family Like Mishaya, this is another product of the Nshongi Mountain Gorilla family which was the largest mountain gorilla family in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The group's alpha silverback Bweza broke off from the Nshongi family to form his own family. His family has been open to tourists for over two (2) years now and can be found in the Rushaga sector of Bwindi.

9. Kahungye Mountain Gorilla Family Named after a hill in their resting place, the Kahungye Mountain Gorilla Family is one of the park's newest mountain gorilla families situated in the southern part of the park in the Rushaga sector. The group was opened to visitors in October 2011 after its successful habituation. The group was huge with 27 members including three (3) very powerful silverbacks. However a disgruntled Busingye mountain gorilla split with this family reducing the family to just above thirteen (13) mountain gorillas. Kahungye is now steered by its most dominant silverback called Gwigi whose name means "door" in a local dialect. The group is open to daily visits by tourists all year round who after finding it can spend up to sixty (60) minutes with it.

10. Mishaya Mountain Gorilla Family This group was named after its first alpha silverback Mishaya. Mishaya was the pioneer of rebellions in the Nshongi mountain gorilla family, breaking away with ten (10) of its members in July 2010. He laid an example for another silverback in the family called Bweza who also broke away from the Nshongi group two years later to form his own family. He was known as a starter of fights but in April 2012 he started a fight with a wild mountain gorilla group that lost him the life of an infant and almost cost him his own life, thanks to the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project which quickly came to his rescue. Mishaya later passed on in February 2014 but he had done a great job in growing this family to twelve (12) members who can be visited today. The family is now led by Mwiine the new alpha silverback and can be visited while on a Uganda gorilla trekking Safari in the Rushaga sector.

11. Nshongi Mountain Gorilla Family This mountain gorilla family can be found in the Rushaga sector of Bwindi Impenetrable National park and is led by an alpha silverback called Nshongi. The group received its name from a nearby stream which was named "*Omushongi Gwoboki*" which in English means honey. The stream was called so because of the brownish color of its waters. The group was opened up for tourists' visits in September 2009 with the biggest habituated mountain gorilla group to ever be visited by tourists (36 mountain gorillas in one place). Divisions began in July 2010 when Mishaya broke away with ten (10) members forming his own Mishaya mountain gorilla family. Just two years later another silverback called Bweza left with some group members to form his own family. The family is now left with 26 members who can be visited during a Mountain Gorilla trekking Safari in Bwindi's Rushaga sector.

E. MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK

12. The Nyakagezi Group Unlike the other twelve (12) habituated mountain gorilla families in Uganda which are found in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park; Nyakagezi is the only habituated Mountain Gorilla family in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and comprises of ten (10) members who can be seen while on a Mountain Gorilla Tracking Safari in Uganda. Nyakagezi is an itinerant mountain gorilla family which frequently crosses over to the neighboring countries of Congo DR and Rwanda. However Uganda Wildlife Authority

(UWA) has since 2012 observed the group to enjoy its Ugandan citizenship more. They have been more settled than they were in the past. They are believed to have fled the Congo side of the Virunga Conservation Area (VCA) because of the continued illegal logging there. The Nyakagezi mountain gorilla family was first led by an alpha silverback called Bugiingo (who today is way over 50 years). It was due to old age that he was replaced by one of his sons called Mark. Bugiingo is also the father of most of the mountain gorillas in the Nyakagezi mountain gorilla family. Mark currently leads a family which includes two other silverbacks, his brother Mafia and Mathew; juveniles called Nkanda and Furaha, females called Nyiramwiza and Nshuti and two (2) blackbacks called Ndungutse and Rukundo who often entertain tourists with their enthusiasm and playful nature. Due to Nyakagezi's nature of traveling, UWA has placed the gorilla permits for this family at the UWA office in Kisoro and this is the only place where the permits can be purchased.