

2020 Global Travel Communicator

CAMPAIGN

Promoting Conservation Through Community Based Tourism in Uganda

January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019

Ashley Norman (SATW Member) and Katie Rees, [PHG Consulting](#)

OBJECTIVES OF CAMPAIGN

Uganda is one of the world's poorest countries, with many citizens living on no more than US\$1 per day. More than 75 percent of the country's population lies in rural areas where employment opportunities are needed most, such as the southwestern sector that is home to Uganda's endangered mountain gorilla population.

When adequate employment is not available in rural areas, the adverse effects are felt within both the local communities and the surrounding wildlife population. Individuals living in rural communities without the means to earn money to support their families often turn to poaching and other illegal activities. Those with small farm plots can become hostile toward wildlife who encroach on their crops and threaten their earning potential. These practices pose significant harm to mountain gorillas and other animals that are major drivers of Uganda's international tourism industry - the country's single largest export earner and generator of foreign exchange and its most promising job creation mechanism.

One of the most effective solutions to combatting human/wildlife conflict in rural areas is through community based tourism initiatives. Community based tourism provides opportunities for those in these rural communities to earn a living wage, and often improve their sense of self-worth, with a job that supports the tourism industry in a positive way. Community based tourism also offers the opportunity for tourism and conservation leaders to educate rural Ugandans on the importance of protecting indigenous flora and fauna to help create a brighter future for all.

On behalf of the Uganda Tourism Board, PHG Consulting endeavored to generate awareness of the destination's community based tourism programs among travelers in the United States and Canada via media coverage, social media exposure, and strategic partnerships.

STRATEGIES AND ELEMENTS UTILIZED FOR CAMPAIGN

PHG Consulting identified [Conservation Through Public Health](#) and [Ride 4 a Woman](#) as ideal community-based tourism organizations to highlight due to their unique story angles; press-friendly leaders; and proximity to Uganda's top tourism attractions. PHG Consulting emphasized the significance of these community based tourism experiences to the media by positioning them equally alongside the destination's coveted wildlife experiences. They were always pitched as must-do experiences, not just something to fill time between game drives and primate treks.

The goal of [Conservation Through Public Health](#) (CTPH) is to reduce human/wildlife conflict through educational programs, medical outreach, and job creation in Uganda's rural communities. CTPH was founded by world renowned wildlife veterinarian and conservationist Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka who PHG Consulting regularly uses as an expert source for North American media. CTPH's most successful public facing project is [Gorilla Conservation Coffee](#), an operation that pays farmers a premium wage to harvest coffee. The product is sold in retail outlets worldwide, with proceeds supporting mountain gorilla conservation efforts. Travelers visiting Uganda to track gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable International Park can learn about CTPH and Gorilla Conservation Coffee first-hand in a coffee tourism program at the organization's headquarters.

Also located in Bwindi, [Ride 4 a Woman](#) is an organization founded by Evelyn Habasa that supports Ugandan women struggling with poverty, HIV, and domestic violence by providing them with housing, food, and the opportunity to earn a wage while learning new skills. Started as an all-female bicycle repair shop, Ride 4 a Woman now welcomes 300 women from 11 villages who learn to pedal sew, weave baskets, dance, sing, drum, and cook – all while sharing their newfound skills with international tourists.

[Let's Go Travel](#), a Ugandan DMC supporting community based tourism, was selected as the ground travel partner for the two press trips in this program.

TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS

Press Trips: Working with Let's Go Travel, PHG Consulting designed community based tourism experiences for two media FAM trips, selecting media who were passionate about sharing the stories of CTPH/Gorilla Conservation Coffee and Ride 4 a Woman. To promote CTPH's coffee tourism initiatives, PHG Consulting organized a visit to the organization's headquarters in Bwindi where media learned about its mission, met coffee farmer partners, witnessed production of Gorilla Conservation Coffee, and enjoyed a guided tasting experience. When the journalists headed back to Entebbe to depart the country, they visited CTPH's Gorilla Conservation Café and met with Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka for one-on-one interviews.

Media were introduced to Ride 4 a Woman through a tour of their community center where they watched women crafting, interviewed founder Evelyn Habasa, and purchased souvenirs with cash vouchers provided by Let's Go Travel (part of their consumer tour package.) The media were eager to recommend Let's Go Travel's Ride 4 a Woman tour to their audiences based upon this experience.

Strategic Partnerships: Freelance travel writer and photographer (and SATW member) Matt Payne was especially moved by his experience in Uganda and wanted to use his position as a board member of the Oklahoma City Zoo, one of the top zoos in the U.S., to support the destination's community based tourism movement. PHG Consulting and Matt collaborated to source Gorilla Conservation Coffee to sell in the zoo's gift shop, an endeavor that generated considerable local media coverage.

Event Marketing: PHG Consulting promoted CTPH/Gorilla Conservation Coffee's coffee tourism offerings at *The New York Times* Travel Show and industry receptions held in coordination the Embassy of the Republic of Uganda.

RESULT MEASUREMENTS

- PHG Consulting secured in-depth media coverage featuring Ride 4 a Woman and CTPH/Gorilla Conservation Coffee in the following media outlets, resulting in more than 1.5 million earned media impressions:
 - *Zoo Sounds* (official magazine of the Oklahoma City Zoo)
 - *Muse by Robb Report* (6-page feature including Ride 4 a Woman's fashion partnership with J Brand denim; this bi-annual publication reaches affluent women and covers issues such as business and sustainability from the perspective of women.)
 - *Unearth Women*
 - *HERE Magazine* by Away luggage
 - *Vancouver Sun*
 - *Sophisticated Weddings*
 - UPROXX
 - Get Lost podcast

- The launch of Gorilla Conservation Coffee at the Oklahoma City Zoo was covered by the following outlets:
 - 405 Magazine
 - KFOR-TV (NBC)
 - Visit Oklahoma City
 - Oklahoma City Zoo holiday gift guide

- Uganda's community based tourism experiences achieved nearly 110,000 social media impressions (estimated) and 2,500+ engagements.

- The Oklahoma City Zoo sold 100 units of Gorilla Conservation Coffee in Q4 of 2019. The partnership will continue through 2020 and is the first of what PHG Consulting hopes will be many retail opportunities.

- Let's Go Travel has reported an increase in inquiries related to its community-based tourism activities.

UGANDA: CONSERVATION THROUGH COMMUNITY TOURISM

P·H·G
CONSULTING™



OBJECTIVES

- Raise awareness for Uganda's overarching sustainability efforts supporting venerable human and wildlife populations
- Secure high profile, targeted media awareness for Uganda's community based tourism initiatives
- Increase consumer interest in booking community based tourism activities in Uganda





STRATEGIES AND ELEMENTS

- PHG Consulting promoted Uganda's community based tourism offerings through immersive media experiences.
- PHG Consulting identified two of Uganda's most editorially relevant community tourism organizations – Ride 4 a Woman and Conservation Through Public Health/Gorilla Conservation Coffee – to highlight in this campaign.
- These organizations' tourism offerings were pitched as essential elements of a trip to Uganda and positioned equally alongside the destination's coveted wildlife experiences.

TACTICS

PRESS TRIPS



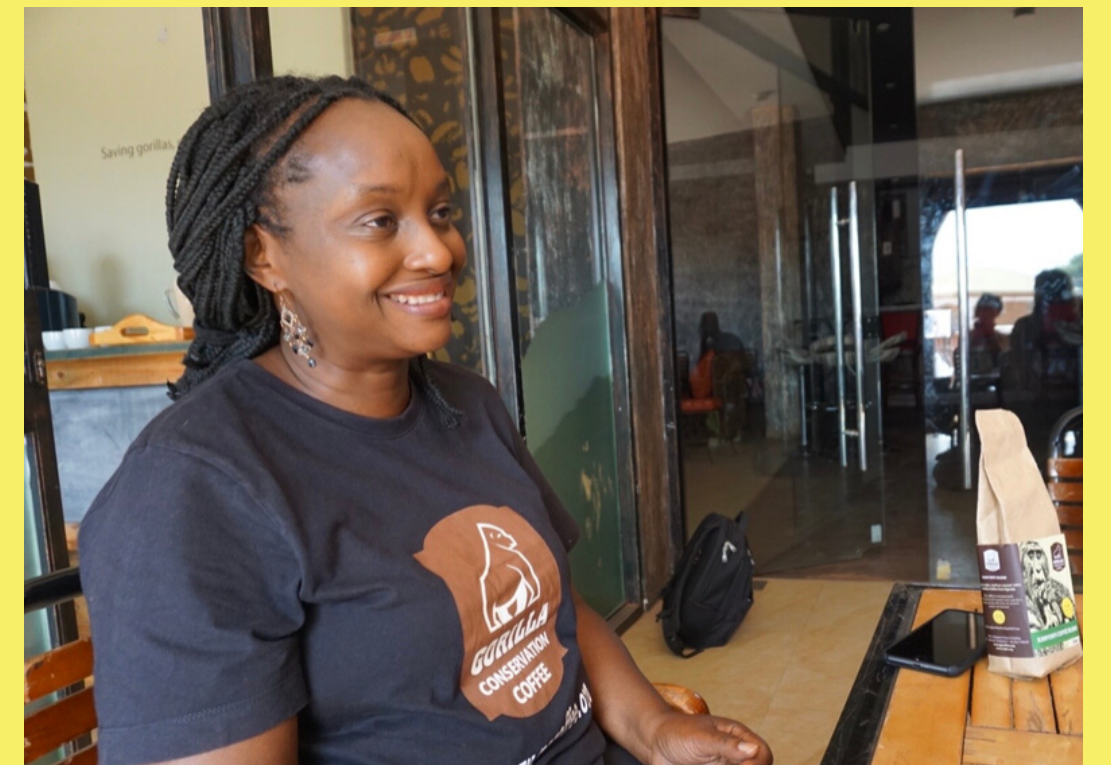
Prior to gorilla trekking, PHG arranged for four journalists on assignment for *Muse Magazine*, *405 Magazine*, *The Vancouver Sun*, and *Unearth Women Magazine* to visit Conservation Through Public Health's (CTPH) headquarters and meet the coffee farmer partners.



CTPH reduces human/wildlife conflict through educational programs, medical outreach, and job creation in Uganda's rural communities. Its most successful public facing project is Gorilla Conservation Coffee, an operation that pays farmers a premium wage to harvest coffee with proceeds supporting mountain gorilla conservation efforts.



After seeing the mountain gorillas, learning about CTPH's work, and meeting coffee farmers, PHG ended at CTPH's Gorilla Conservation Cafe to see the final product and meet with CTPH's founder, Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka.



TACTICS

PRESS TRIPS



PHG took four journalists on assignment for *Travel Agent Magazine*, *HERE Magazine*, *Sophisticated Weddings* and *Recommend Magazine* to tour R4W's community center and meet the women who benefit from the program's microfinancing.

Ride 4 a Woman (R4W) supports Ugandan women struggling with poverty, HIV, and domestic violence by providing them with housing, food, and the opportunity to earn a wage while learning new skills. Started as an all-female bicycle repair shop, women now learn to pedal sew, weave baskets, dance, sing, drum, and cook, and more.



PHG arranged for R4W's founder Evelyn Habasa to lead the tour and speak with the writers on her vision and future plans.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



PHG worked with journalist (and SATW member) Matt Payne to coordinate the sale of CTPH's Gorilla Conservation Coffee in the Oklahoma City Zoo gift shops.

The addition of the product was promoted locally during a holiday gifting related media push.

EVENT MARKETING



PHG promoted CTPH and Gorilla Conservation Coffee at *The New York Times* Travel Show and industry receptions in coordination with the Embassy of the Republic of Uganda.

RESULTS

- More than **1.5 million earned media impressions** in targeted media outlets including:
 - *Muse Magazine* by Robb Report
 - *Zoo Sounds* (official magazine of the Oklahoma City Zoo)
 - *Unearth Women Magazine*
 - *HERE Magazine* by Away luggage
 - *Vancouver Sun*
 - *Sophisticated Weddings*
 - UPROXX
 - Get Lost podcast
- Nearly **110,000 social media impressions** (estimated) and **2,500+ engagements**
- **100 units of gorilla conservation coffee purchased** by the Oklahoma City Zoo
- Uptick in inquiries about community based tourism offerings to ground DMC partner, Let's Go Travel

Robb Report
PRESENTS

M U S E

The Perfection Myth

Japan's kaiseki
revolution · Fashion
does the right thing ·
The new mind-set
for success

— Plus —

The Next Beauty
and Wellness
Pioneers

FALL 2019

A SPECIAL EDITION OF
ROBB REPORT





Making Good

Fourteen years after creating the J Brand denim label, Susie Crippen finds her calling—and her next big venture—in Uganda.

BY KATHRYN ROMEYN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHEL AMBROSE

SUSIE CRIPPEN IS ON A MISSION. Striding through a color-soaked textile market in Uganda's capital city of Kampala, she makes for a strange blip among the bundles of batik and kitenge (traditional batik-dyed fabric worn by African women) fabrics that stretch from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. Her cropped brown hair and casual Western look—jeans and a loose cotton tee with a miniature cross-body bag slung across her torso—couldn't be more out of place in this hyper-color scene, and yet the 55-year-old entrepreneur proceeds with laser focus, weaving through a crowd of young boys tying hefty bundles and women draped in the same vibrant patterns they stock in their stalls. She is on the hunt for the perfect pattern—1,900 yards of it.

MAKING GOOD

"I woke up at 3:30 a.m. thinking about the fabric I bought yesterday and worrying about if it was the right one," Crippen says as she holds up a stiff swatch bearing a Moroccan-style zellige pattern. In this sea of fabric, she's searching for the one—and eventually finds it. The design looks straight out of Dries Van Noten's sketchbook. She decides it's the perfect look for an obi belted wrap dress and wades back into the rainbow bright stacks for more.

Crippen is no stranger to big ideas waking her in the night. The cofounder of the J Brand denim label has a well-honed talent for following her instincts to success. When she launched her business in 2005, her concept for the perfect jean was simple, if not particularly popular at the time. "Nobody was doing a clean, dark jean," she says. "But I didn't want rips and appliqué Buddhas on my butt." Apparently, neither did most women: Five years later, J Brand was bringing in more than \$80 million in gross sales with its minimalist, polished jeans.

In 2010, Crippen and her partner sold 52 percent of the company to Star Avenue Capital, which two years later sold the majority stake to Fast Retailing for close to \$290 million. It was an indisputable win for the former stylist. But when Crippen returned as J Brand's creative director seven years later, she found herself in a decidedly less favorable position. After six months in the job, she was fired over creative differences with management. So Crippen followed her instincts once again, this time to a self-imposed six-month sabbatical and, eventually, a safari in Uganda.

That trip turned out to be so much more. Crippen had come to Uganda to see the mountain gorillas of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, but she paid an impromptu visit to Ride 4 a Woman, a nonprofit organization in the nearby village of Ruhoma that teaches women new skills such as weaving home goods and sewing textiles, that turned out to be the pilgrimage that would set her next chapter in

J Brand cofounder Szale Crippen (below, in a 4 dress) found the inspiration for her next big venture in Uganda, at the Ride 4 a Woman workshops (right and below right).



motion. The designs the workshop was turning out were lively—the women even more so—and as she watched the technicolor fabrics being fashioned into traditional wraps, the creative spark that conceived J Brand began to light up once again.

But when she returned to Los Angeles, the idea persisted: "Every time I would think about it, my feet would get hot." Inspired by the vivid fabrics she had seen in Bwindi, she began experimenting with the bit of kitenge she had taken home. Nine months later, she returned to Uganda with her first prototype—a wrap dress with rolled dolman sleeves—and a business plan for 4 (thisis4.com), a new fashion label of dresses, skirts and shirts bringing together modern cuts and traditional African fabrics. Moreover, she brought life-changing work to the employees of Ride 4 a Woman.

BACK AT THE TEXTILE MARKET, Crippen has been joined by Evelyn Habasa, Ride 4 a Woman's founder. "Evelyn is one of the most charismatic human beings you'll ever come in contact with," Crippen says. "She's like the Gandhi of Uganda." Habasa established the NGO with her husband, Denis Rubalema, in 2009 and it has since grown to employ 50 women, all of whom have become breadwinners for their families after learning to sew and weave baskets. With the addition of 4's first collection—two dresses, a skirt and a top—to the production line, that staff is poised to double.

Crippen plows through fabrics, climbing higher and higher among the unsteady stacks while Habasa negotiates with stall owners for the price of each swatch that's unearthed. There's an easy camaraderie among the women—one that the J Brand vet struggled to find in her previous roles. "I've never had that experience where I wasn't in battle and constant explanation mode to men about what women want to wear," says Crippen, draping a vibrant cobalt fabric with a triangle pattern over her shoulders. "Evelyn just lets me do my thing. She provides all the support of making the dresses and gives me the space to let my creative vision unfold."

"I've never had that experience where I wasn't in battle and constant explanation mode to men about what women want to wear."



MAKING GOOD

The benefit, of course, extends far beyond the two women. A few days later, at Ride 4 a Woman's workshop, Habasa's team assembles at 9 a.m., dressed in fluorescent green T-shirts over full kitenge skirts, to greet their new designer. Crippen has just arrived from Kampala, but she's hardly travel weary. Instead, she's beaming, and the women are jubilant, too, as they welcome their visitor with a dance, jumping high to the beat of a drum, then landing barefoot on the packed dirt only to spring back up once again.

"It's a sign of love and welcome," says Habasa. "They do this every morning before they start working to say thank you for the gift of happiness, togetherness and Ride 4 a Woman." Today, however, there's a palpable energy surrounding Crippen's curious new project.

"I brought some things for you," says Crippen, pulling out a mesh bag of flower-shaped pincushions and sliding one up her forearm like a corsage. Fabric shears, snips of material and slivers of tailor's chalk emerge as the women ooh and aah at their new tools. "And I brought 4 labels. Our goal is to make 600 dresses, and we have 600 labels, so you can't make any mistakes," she jokes rather seriously, while Habasa translates.

There's an interactive fashion show so the team understands what they're making, and before long the pavilion is buzzing, with the women washing, measuring, sorting, cutting, pinning and stitching the new collection together. Crippen is right in the mix, encouraging and complimenting the cutting team, pinning fabric to patterns and triumphantly holding up the first completed sample. There are language

Crippen and Habasa scour a textile market in Kampala for the perfect fabrics (below), which the Ride 4 a Woman team fashions into contemporary dresses, skirts and tops (opposite).



M
60

MUSE FALL 2019

CPC_Muse_01_14_Crippen.indd 60

8/29/19 1:09:15M

“Spending the time I have with these women has made me feel more connected to everyone in the world.”

barriers—she's a talker and wonders whether they catch on to her humor—and hiccups to troubleshoot, but the collective confidence soars.

"I've always been a bit of a perfectionist about fit," admits Crippen as she twirls in the first completed skirt of the day—a long, fitted wrap of subtly flared panels that's both sexy and effortless. Though these pieces, which are priced from \$185 to \$195, may not come with faultless seams, authenticity—and opportunity—is clearly sewn into them. Crippen plans to return to Bwindi every spring—the low season, when Ride's women most need work—to produce another capsule collection. Like a favorite pair of jeans, each dress, skirt and top is a classic, no fuss piece that gets better and softer over time.

Crippen herself has gotten bolder over time, having regained her voice since her second departure from J Brand. "It took me a long time to re-establish myself esteem in terms of my ability to make creative choices and stand in my aesthetic vision," she says. "Spending the time I have with these women has made me feel more connected to everyone in the world. That's something I've been looking for ever since I went into business: a vocation I can thrive in and that people benefit from. That's the ultimate dream job." ■



Join the Ride

To follow in Crippen's footsteps—tracking mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park or visiting the ladies of the nonprofit Ride 4 a Woman—contact Abercrombie & Kent (abercrombiekent.com). Those seeking more immersion in Ride's hub of female empowerment can also stay the night in one of the NGO's 11 guest rooms, where the decor, including wax batik curtains and pillows, is provided by the women in Ride's workshop, naturally. Proceeds go directly to Ride 4 a Woman and support other projects created to benefit the women of the village.

MUSEBYROBBREPORT.COM

M
61

8/29/19 2:10:15M

CPC_Muse_01_14_Crippen.indd 61



MUSE » THOUGHT LEADERS

How a Trip to Uganda Transformed Fashion Designer Susie Crippen's Career

The J Brand co-founder is empowering the women of Uganda via her latest venture.

By Kathryn Romeyn On October 29, 2019



Photography by Rachel Ambrose

Susie Crippen is on a mission. Striding through a color-soaked textile market in Uganda's capital city of Kampala, she makes for a strange blip among the bundles of batik and kitenge (traditional batik-dyed fabric worn by African women) fabrics that stretch from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. Her cropped brown hair and casual Western look—jeans and a loose cotton tee with a miniature cross-body bag slung across her torso—

couldn't be more out of place in this hyper-color scene, and yet the 55-year-old entrepreneur proceeds with laser focus, weaving through a crowd of young boys tying hefty bundles and women draped in the same vibrant patterns they stock in their stalls. She is on the hunt for the perfect pattern—1,900 yards of it.

"I woke up at 3:30 a.m. thinking about the fabric I bought yesterday and worrying about if it was the right one," Crippen says as she holds up a stiff swatch bearing a Moroccan-style zellige pattern. In this sea of fabric, she's searching for the one—and eventually finds it. The design looks straight out of Dries Van Noten's sketchbook. She decides it's the perfect look for an obi-belted wrap dress and wades back into the rainbow-bright stacks for more.



Crippen allocating fabrics.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

Crippen is no stranger to big ideas waking her in the night. The cofounder of the [J Brand denim label](#) has a well-honed talent for following her instincts to success. When she launched her business in 2005, her concept for the perfect jean was simple, if not particularly popular at the time. "Nobody was doing a clean, dark jean," she says. "But I didn't want rips and appliqué Buddhas on my butt." Apparently, neither did most women: Five years later, J Brand was bringing in more than \$80 million in gross sales with its minimalist, polished jeans.

In 2010, Crippen and her partner sold 52 percent of the company to Star Avenue Capital, which two years later sold the majority stake to Fast Retailing for close to \$290 million. It was an indisputable win for the former stylist. But when Crippen returned as J Brand's creative director seven years later, she found herself in a decidedly less favorable position. After six months in the job, she was fired over creative differences with management. So Crippen followed her instincts once again, this time to a self-imposed six-month sabbatical and, eventually, a safari in Uganda.



Washing and drying dresses.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

That trip turned out to be so much more. Crippen had come to Uganda to see the mountain gorillas of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, but she paid an impromptu visit to [Ride 4 a Woman](#), a nonprofit organization in the nearby village of Buhoma that teaches women new skills such as weaving home goods and sewing textiles, that turned out to be the pilgrimage that would set her next chapter in motion. The designs the workshop was turning out were lively—the women even more so—and as she watched the technicolor fabrics being fashioned into traditional wraps, the creative spark that conceived J Brand began to light up once again.

But when she returned to Los Angeles, the idea persisted: “Every time I would think about it, my feet would get hot.” Inspired by the vivid fabrics she had seen in Bwindi, she began experimenting with the bit of kitenge she had taken home. Nine months later, she returned to Uganda with her first prototype—a wrap dress with rolled dolman sleeves—and a business plan for 4, a new fashion label of dresses, skirts and shirts bringing together modern cuts and traditional African fabrics. Moreover, she brought life-changing work to the employees of Ride 4 a Woman.



The Ride 4 a Woman workshop.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

Back at the textile market, Crippen has been joined by Evelyn Habasa, Ride 4 a Woman’s founder. “Evelyn is one of the most charismatic human beings you’ll ever come in contact with,” Crippen says. “She’s like the Gandhi of Uganda.” Habasa established the NGO with her husband, Denis Rubalema, in 2009 and it has since grown to employ 50 women, all of whom have become breadwinners for their families after learning to sew and weave baskets. With the addition of 4’s first collection—two dresses, a skirt and a top—to the production line, that staff is poised to double.

Crippen plows through fabrics, climbing higher and higher among the unsteady stacks while Habasa negotiates with stall owners for the price of each swatch that’s unearthed. There’s an easy camaraderie among the women—one that the J Brand vet struggled to find in her previous roles. “I’ve never had that experience where I wasn’t in battle and constant explanation mode to men about what women want to wear,” says Crippen, draping a vibrant cobalt fabric with a triangle pattern over her shoulders. “Evelyn just lets me do my thing. She provides all the support of making the dresses and gives me the space to let my creative vision unfold.”



Crippen and Habasa scouring a textile market in Kampala.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

The benefit, of course, extends far beyond the two women. A few days later, at Ride 4 a Woman's workshop, Habasa's team assembles at 9 a.m., dressed in fluorescent green T-shirts over full kitenge skirts, to greet their new designer. Crippen has just arrived from Kampala, but she's hardly travel-weary. Instead, she's beaming, and the women are jubilant, too, as they welcome their visitor with a dance, jumping high to the beat of a drum, then landing barefoot on the packed dirt only to spring back up once again.

"It's a sign of love and welcome," says Habasa. "They do this every morning before they start working to say thank you for the gift of happiness, togetherness and Ride 4 a Woman." Today, however, there's a palpable energy surrounding Crippen's curious new project.



Cutting dress patterns.

"I brought some things for you," says Crippen, pulling out a mesh bag of flower-shaped pincushions and sliding one up her forearm like a corsage. Fabric shears, snips of material and slivers of tailor's chalk emerge as the women ooh and aah at their new tools. "And I brought 4 labels. Our goal is to make 600 dresses, and we have 600 labels, so you can't make any mistakes," she jokes rather seriously, while Habasa translates.

There's an interactive fashion show so the team understands what they're making, and before long the pavilion is buzzing, with the women washing, measuring, sorting, cutting, pinning and stitching the new collection together. Crippen is right in the mix, encouraging and complimenting the cutting team, pinning fabric to patterns and triumphantly holding up the first completed sample. There are language barriers—she's a talker and wonders whether they catch on to her humor—and hiccups to troubleshoot, but the collective confidence soars.



Fabrics.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

"I've always been a bit of a perfectionist about fit," admits Crippen as she twirls in the first completed skirt of the day—a long, fitted wrap of subtly flared panels that's both sexy and effortless. Though these pieces, which are priced from \$185 to \$195, may not come with faultless seams, authenticity—and opportunity—is clearly sewn into them. Crippen plans to return to Bwindi every spring—the low season, when Ride's women most need work—to produce another capsule collection. Like a favorite pair of jeans, each dress, skirt and top is a classic, no-fuss piece that gets better and softer over time.

Crippen herself has gotten bolder over time, having regained her voice since her second departure from J Brand. "It took me a long time to re-establish my self-esteem in terms of my ability to make creative choices and stand in my aesthetic vision," she says. "Spending the time I have with these women has made me feel more connected to everyone in the world. That's something I've been looking for ever since I went into business: a vocation I can thrive in and that people benefit from. That's the ultimate dream job."



Susie Crippen wearing one of 4's designs.

Photography by Rachel Ambrose

Join the Ride

To follow in Crippen's footsteps—tracking mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park or visiting the ladies of the nonprofit Ride 4 a Woman—contact [Abercrombie & Kent](#). Those seeking more immersion in Ride's hub of female empowerment can also stay the night in one of the NGO's 11 guest rooms, where the decor, including wax batik curtains and pillows, is provided by the women in Ride's workshop, naturally. Proceeds go directly to Ride 4 a Woman and support other projects created to benefit the women of the village.

A FEMINIST TRAVEL MAGAZINE BY WOMEN

UNEARTH WOMEN

THE
INCLUSIVITY
ISSUE

The Age of Disruption

HOW EVITA ROBINSON
CHAMPIONS TRAVELERS
OF COLOR

TRANS TRAVEL
An Israeli Drag
King Gets Candid

TRAVELING WITH
DISABILITIES
Tried and
Tested Tips

TACKLING AGEISM
From a Pan Am
Girl to Senior
Travel Advocate

+

WOMEN'S
STORIES
FROM...
Uganda
Sri Lanka
& more

*Guest
Edited by*
Annette Richmond
of Fat Girls
Traveling



The Ugandan Vet Saving Gorillas and Empowering Local Communities

By Christina Newberry

At the Gorilla Conservation Café in Entebbe, Uganda, I order a latte while I wait for Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka. It's not just any coffee in my cup, and as the name of the locale implies, this is not just any coffee shop. Both the café and the coffee are part of Kalema-Zikusoka's collection of social enterprises that support her non-profit organization, Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH). >>>>>>

Photo © LMapence / Shutterstock



UNEARTHED

communities are healthy and thriving, there's far less risk of disease spreading between the two species, which share 98.4 percent of the same DNA.

As a vet, Kalema-Zikusoka had the most health education of anyone in the organization, which had become the Uganda Wildlife Authority by the early 2000s. She created CTPH to provide sanitation and family-planning options for locals, who, at that time, had an average of 10 children per family.

"Family planning fit in very well with our mission in Bwindi," Kalema-Zikusoka says. "Only 20 percent of women were using modern family planning methods. Now we're up to 60 percent. We present it as a way of balancing the family budget, so even the men in the household become interested." She adds: "The women are happier. They feel liberated. It's good for maternal health not to have babies every year."

At the same time, Kalema-Zikusoka helped create a cooperative of about 75 coffee farmers, which provides production, training, and marketing support to brand their Gorilla Conservation Coffee as a premium product, and pay them a living wage. They earn 50 cents per kilo above market price for their beans, which are processed in Kampala, and \$1.50 from every bag sold directly supports the work of CTPH. Participating farmers also offer a coffee safari program that teaches tourists who have come to Bwindi for gorilla trekking about how coffee is produced, and how the social enterprise supports community and gorilla welfare.

Bags of beans are for sale in the café as well as 60 other locations, including the duty-free shop at Entebbe International Airport. CTPH distributes trademarked Gorilla Conservation Coffee in the European Union, Switzerland, and the United States, where the beans are available from Pangols, a wildlife and sustainability-focused e-commerce site. Each bag of Arabica beans features the image of Kanyonyi, a silverback from Bwindi. His image also looms large in the café.

Through her work, Kalema-Zikusoka has strengthened the bond between gorillas and the people who live alongside them, improving the health of both parties along the way. In October 2018, she received a Sierra Club Award for her "Unique contribution to international environmental protection and conservation."

In November, mountain gorillas were removed from the critically endangered species list, though they are still endangered. The World Wildlife Fund cited "Community engagement, prevention of disease transmission and law enforcement" as key factors in the gorilla population rebound.

"Gorillas are so similar to us," Kalema-Zikusoka says. "We want people to feel inspired to protect them forever." •

Christina Newberry is an award-winning Canadian writer now living in Amsterdam, where she's learning to speak Dutch and navigate bike lanes. Her work has appeared in Canadian Traveller, Roads & Kingdoms, Time Out, and Fodor's. Connect with her online at christinaneewberry.com/hello.

Photo © Travel Stock/istock





Kalema-Zikusoka, known to most as Dr. Gladys, is a pioneering wildlife veterinarian who has dedicated her career to saving the endangered mountain gorilla. She does so by improving the lives of the people who live on the edges of the gorillas' habitat in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Kalema-Zikusoka's unique approach to conservation embraces the inherent difficulties of motivating a community to reserve concern for animals when they, themselves, are struggling.

Kalema-Zikusoka arrives wearing

a black T-shirt featuring the Gorilla Conservation Coffee logo and slogan: "Saving gorillas one sip at a time." She's become a shrewd businesswoman—she earned her MBA with a focus on social entrepreneurship in 2016, and she's often photographed in shirts that highlight her initiatives.

Kalema-Zikusoka tells me she's been interested in helping animals since she set up a wildlife club in her Kampala high school some 30 years ago. She attended the University of London's Royal Veterinary College in the early 1990s, where about half of her classmates were women. When

she returned to Uganda at age 25, she was hired as the first female veterinary officer for the country's national parks. But when she spoke to local veterinary classes, she realized all the students were men.

"When I first started working with wild gorillas, there were no female rangers—hardly any women at all," she says. "Now, about a third of the rangers, trackers, and wardens are women. There are more vets as well, but there is a long way to go."

At around the same time that Kalema-Zikusoka was studying in London, the Uganda Wildlife Service was beginning to recognize the tourism potential of its large primates—mountain gorillas and chimpanzees. Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the only three countries with wild mountain gorilla populations, and none live in captivity. There are just over 1,000 mountain gorillas left in the world, and about 60 percent of them are in Bwindi.

Conflict between humans and gorillas has always existed on the edges of Bwindi. Gorillas come out of the forest to feed in the banana plantations, destroying the farmers' livelihood. The animals pick up human diseases from dirty clothing on scarecrows. When the farmers are struggling, they enter the forest to hunt and gather wood for fuel, disturbing the gorillas' habitat and creating more opportunities for disease transmission.

Kalema-Zikusoka identified human scabies as a fatal problem for the gorilla community during her early research in 1996. She realized that in order to improve gorilla health, she had to improve human health. When

Photo © Christina Newberry





The Globe

What the hell does the phrase “hot list” even mean?

This world was around long before any of us and, with any luck, it will still be here long after we're gone. Tracking our movements on a year-by-year basis is kind of silly when you think of it in the “we're specks of matter, sitting on a big floating rock, warmed by a single star in a seemingly infinite sea of stars”-sense. Besides, after a decade that gave us the **six hottest years on record**, with increasing panic over species death, ocean acidification, and global warming, isn't *everything* sort of on the hot list? (*Zing!*)

So why do it? Why track down the best collection of travel writers, influencers, experts, and

photographers currently roaming this big, spinning rock and ask them: “Where should people visit in 2020? What should they do once they're there? Where should they stay, eat, and drink? What parties should they go to?”

Because while “right now” is meaningless in the cosmic sense, it matters greatly to all of us living it. And where you decide to spend your hard-earned time, money, and energy is inextricably tied to our current cultural/ political moment and all the freight that that carries. So although the destinations on this list aren't “new” in any true sense, our reasons for choosing them are. The questions “why here?” and “why now?” hung over every debate about what belonged and what didn't. Sometimes the defining factor was a country's embrace of a trend, like Belize and eco-tourism; other times, we recognized ancient destinations that seem particularly relevant this year, like the sacred sites of the Navajo Nation; and others still, we chose to highlight recommendations because we trusted the authority of the travelers pitching them. (This list features famous influencers, Explorer's Club Members, Travel Channel hosts, and award-winning writers — when they talk travel, we're eager to listen.)

Through it all, diversity — in how people identify, what **makes them burn**, and their distinct worldviews — is the axis around which this list rotates. Like so many fields, travel writing has long been plagued by the sort of gatekeeping that routinely rewards **the same voices year after year**. For the 2020 list, UPROXX Life Deputy Editor Zach Johnston and I made a sincere effort to upend that tradition. Our December kick-off call featured writers of various gender identifications, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds sharing their distinct perspectives about what feels “hot” in travel right now. We're thrilled to share those insights with you here and hope that besides connecting you with new places to visit, this list introduces you to fresh, potent voices in the travel space.

At the same time as we strived to be inclusive, we created this for our core audience — young, socially conscious people, many heading out on the road for the first time, eager to explore and grow but also often keen to jump off cliffs, get a little rowdy, and dance 'til 4am (there's a whole “festivals” section this year). The list also has a distinctly American gaze. When we call something “unique” we aren't exoticizing it so much as noting that for most American travelers it's going to carry a sense of newness. If done in the spirit of respect, we believe modern-day “exploration” can **support Indigenous communities**, aid **rebuilding efforts after a disaster**, and help us **evolve beyond our prejudices**.

All that said, to pretend that a list — even one this expansive — doesn't contain blindspots is absurd. Its very creation is a contradiction. A common trend suggested by our travel writers,

whose job is ostensibly to fly around the world on jets powered by fossil fuel, was the quest for environmental accountability across all segments of the industry. Though many of us seem to believe in setting personal carbon caps, no one felt fully ready to publicly commit to one. Is that hypocritical? Maybe. But travel writers also deserve some of the credit for the [airline industry's recent sustainability push](#). Perhaps the best answer when wrestling with these pinch points is: "Let's all try our hardest." On the ecology front, UPROXX and its writers are committed to finding solutions for the impact of the travel writing genre (through carbon offsets, slow travel, and "microcations"), though we also believe that to properly fight for something you need to bear witness to its beauty.

In the early days of 2020, [Greta Gerwig said](#): "Quentin Tarantino makes movies as if movies could save the world." That's how we feel about travel. Travel connects us. It reminds us of the natural marvels that we are called to be stewards for. It brings us face-to-face with life's universal aspects: birth, death, art, storytelling, humor, sex, food, intoxicants... the list goes on. Those simple, core pieces of existence are shared across all cultures. Simultaneously, travel reminds us that the real world is far less black and white than it is online. The fury that we often feel on Twitter when someone thinks differently from us quickly dissipates as our journeys shade in the context and background that led a certain person to arrive at a particular way of thinking. On the road, we realize that there has to be some sort of [allowance for cultural/moral relativism](#) or every trip is going to be a series of constant battles and little growth.

Perhaps the overarching point here is: travel is messy. Just like life.

So here you go, the 2020 UPROXX Travel Hot List. A sprawling, messy, imperfect-but-often-lovely reflection of a sprawling, messy, imperfect-but-often-lovely planet. We believe that these destinations, experiences, hotels, restaurants, bars, and festivals will bring you some sense of joy. We believe they have something worthwhile to teach or reveal, this year in particular. Above all, we believe that travel can save the world, and we hope that's reflected in every word, photo, and idea presented below.



PROTECT MOUNTAIN GORILLAS WHILE LEARNING ABOUT COFFEE

Uganda

Coffee plantations near Bwindi Impenetrable Forest employ ex-poachers while helping preserve one of the planet's most treasured species.

A rainforest hike to visit the mountain gorillas of Uganda's [Bwindi Impenetrable Forest](#) is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It's equal parts other-worldly and deeply human. But, visitors only get an hour with these magnificent creatures — with whom we share [98.4 percent](#) of our DNA — before returning to the lodge. Then the next safari begins, a coffee safari.

Uganda's robust Arabica plays a pivotal role in keeping the gorillas and their habitat healthy. When guests extend their stays to participate in Coffee Safaris, farmers — often reformed poachers — provide insight into the local coffee culture, as they walk visitors through the process from growing to roasting, ending the experience with a tasting at the edge of the rainforest.

Doctor Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka's non-profit [Gorilla Conservation Coffee](#) works with more than 500 coffee farmers around Bwindi Impenetrable Forest to harvest and export coffee around the world. The proceeds go back into her sister non-profit [Conservation Through Public Health](#), dedicated to the health and wellness of the surrounding community.

It's an ethical, important approach which you can witness in person or support by ordering imported beans. After all, a healthy community means healthy gorillas.

By Matt Payne
Contributing Writer

Gorilla Coffee at the Zoo

Gorilla Coffee at the Zoo

A taste of Uganda in OKC

BY MATT PAYNE



In this month's *405 Magazine*, the travel article "[Uganda's Vibrant Life](#)" contains an effort to promote tourism to the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, home to many of the world's remaining beloved mountain gorillas.

While a trip to Uganda may (and should) sit high on your bucket list, getting there isn't exactly easy. Now though, thanks to the Oklahoma City Zoo, you can experience a taste of Uganda while helping give back to the mountain gorillas – by stopping into the zoo's gift shop and picking up a bag of [Gorilla Conservation Coffee](#).

The non-profit Gorilla Conservation Coffee was the brainchild of famed Uganda gorilla veterinarian Dr. Gladys Kalema Zikusoka, founder of [Conservation Through Public Health](#). In working with declining mountain gorilla populations, Dr. Zikusoka realized that since gorillas share 98.4 percent of the same DNA as humans, they were susceptible to many of the same illnesses. She thought that in enlightening local communities about healthcare issues, wellness and family planning, it would incentivize locals to save money, be healthier and focus more on business development, including tourism – all of which have led to a healthier gorilla population.

Uganda's equatorial climate makes the area around Bwindi a prime coffee growing area, so to raise more money for Conservation Through Public Health, Dr. Zikusoka began to work with local farmers to grow premium coffee crops. These beans are then exported across the globe as Gorilla Conservation Coffee. Not only is the brew some of the best you'll ever have, but it generates awareness for gorilla conservation, in addition to creating income for local farmers – many of whom are reformed poachers.

The money earned in selling the coffee is then put back into Conservation Through Public Health, allowing it to continue to thrive, as well. So head over to the [OKC Zoo](#) and visit the Great EscApe exhibition – and if you feel moved to help these fascinating animals survive in the wild, stop into the gift shop on your way out.

CARE-CONNECT-CONSERVE

SUMMER 2019 *for members and friends of the oklahoma zoological society*

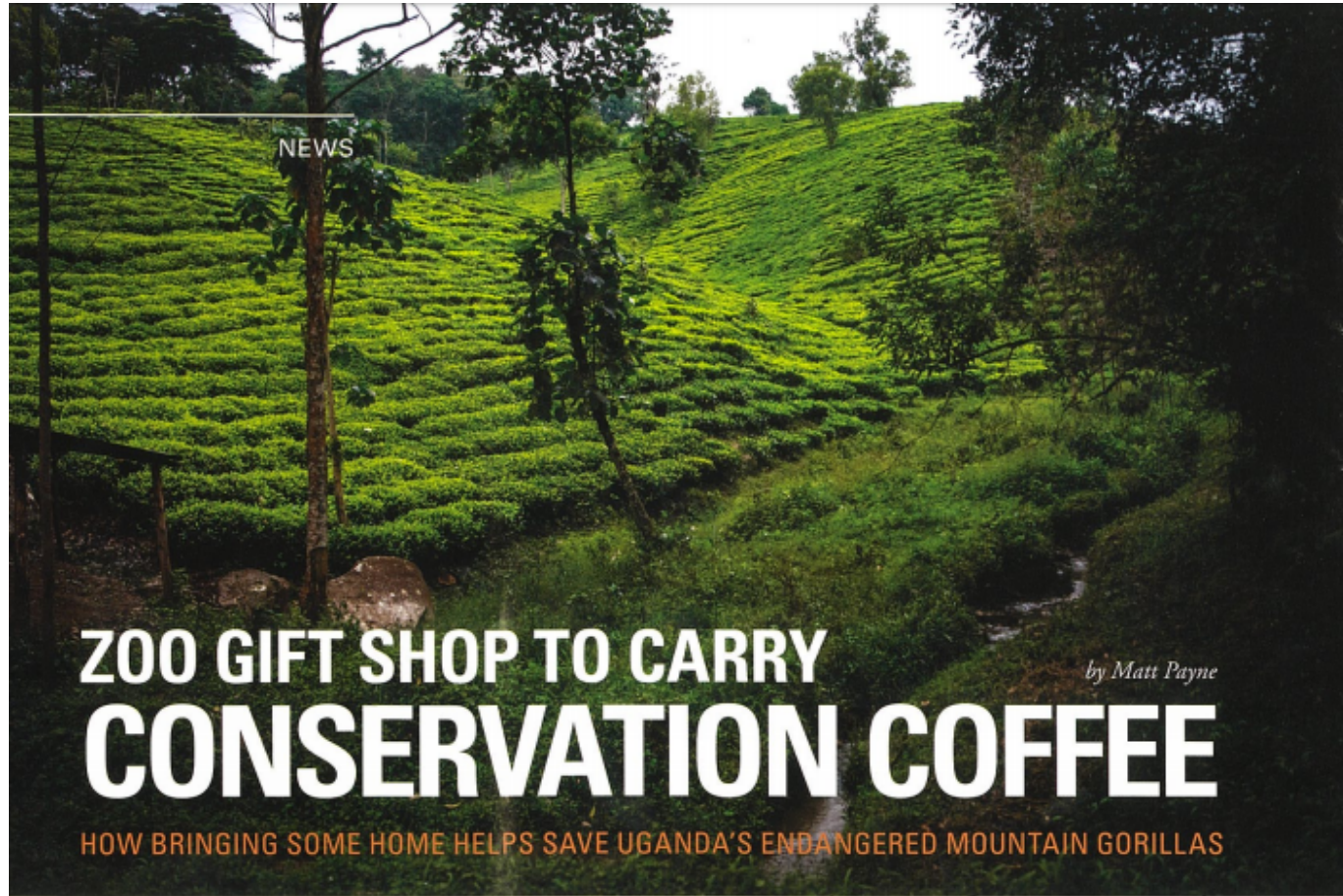
ZOOSOUNDS

MEET SEA LION PUP ISLA

OZS SPRING EVENTS

TORTOISE REINTRODUCTION





ZOO GIFT SHOP TO CARRY CONSERVATION COFFEE

by Matt Payne

HOW BRINGING SOME HOME HELPS SAVE UGANDA'S ENDANGERED MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

"DO NOT MOVE," said our gorilla guide as Bwengye, a 200-pound female mountain gorilla, sauntered towards us. Typically guides can ensure this type of approach doesn't happen but this gorilla was too fast and too determined. "Do. Not. Move," he said again, and with that, Bwengye, with her giant human-like gorilla hand, grabbed my leg. A million thoughts go through your mind when a gorilla – deep in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest – grabs your thigh. First, you hope you keep your leg. Next, you hope she doesn't decide she wants your camera. But as she let go and moved back towards her baby, then looked once again at us with her venerable eyes – I couldn't help but get lost in the beauty of these remarkably relatable creatures that surrounded us – their smell, their deep eyes and in my case, the very human way in which they grasp – and think how close they are to the edge of extinction.

Thankfully though, the mountain gorilla is making a comeback. In 2018, their numbers surged past one thousand, taking them from critically endangered to endangered. A remarkable win in the conservation world. Many factors have played a role in this success story. Tourism revenue coming into Uganda has certainly played a role but most notable – to many – is the work of Dr. Gladys Kalema Zikusoka.

Dr. Gladys began her career as the first female gorilla veterinarian for the Uganda Wildlife Authority and went on to start a non-

profit called Conservation Through Public Health. Realizing that because gorillas share 98.4% of the same DNA as humans, they were susceptible to many of the same diseases that plagued communities surrounding areas where the gorillas lived. CTPH educates local communities on issues of health, wellness and family planning, and in doing so, creates business opportunities – including tourism – all of which have led to a healthier gorilla population.

Furthermore, Uganda's equatorial climate makes the area around Bwindi a prime coffee growing area, and Dr. Gladys has begun working with local coffee farmers to grow premium coffee beans that are then exported around the world under the brand Gorilla Conservation Coffee. This premium coffee brand creates awareness for gorilla conservation but also brings in income to local farmers, many of whom are reformed poachers. The money earned in selling the coffee is then put back into Conservation Through Public Health allowing it to continue to thrive as well. All of which ensures that Uganda's mountain gorilla population continues to thrive for generations to come.

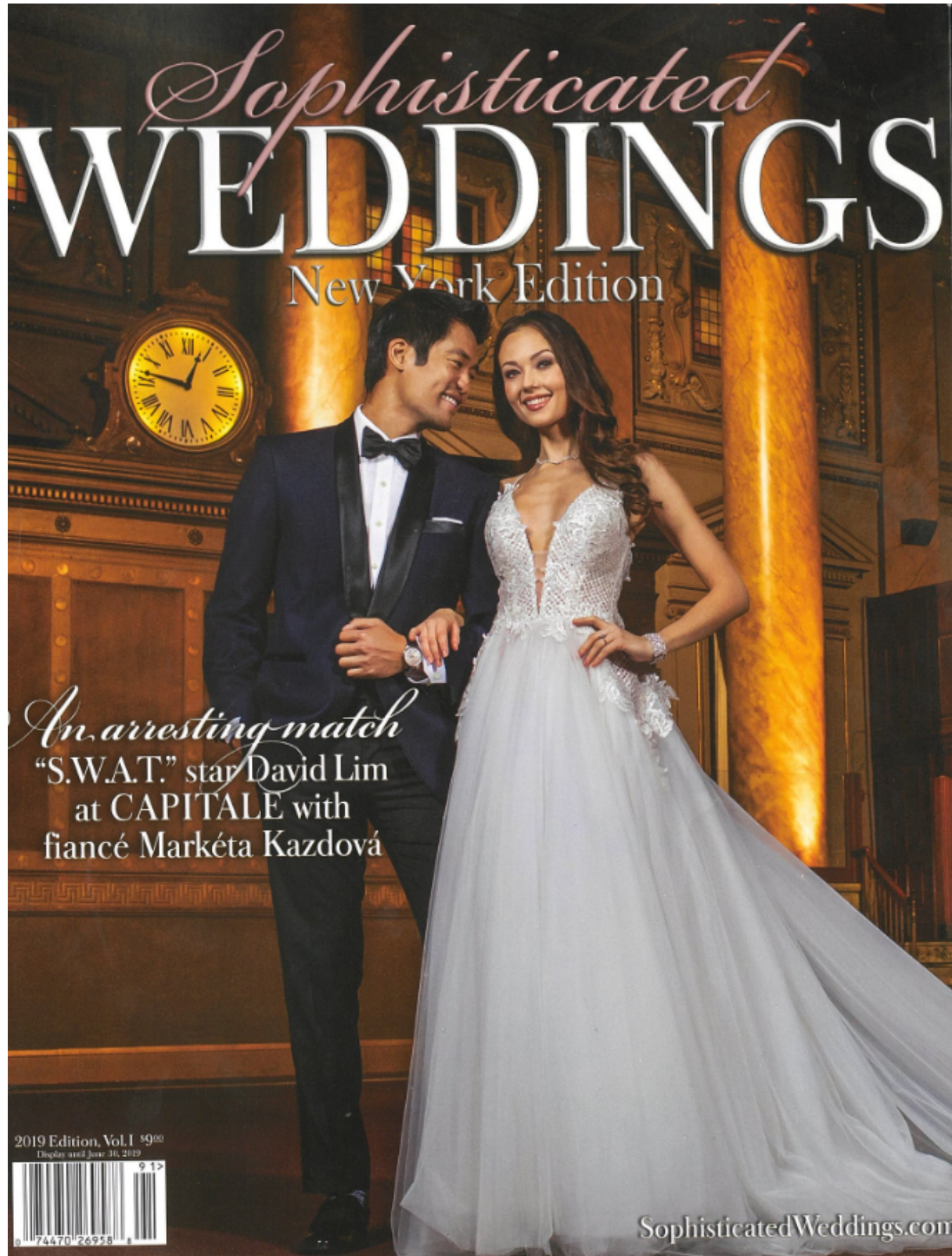
The Oklahoma City Zoo is proud to be among the first zoos in the United States to sell Gorilla Conservation Coffee and is available in the gift shop. Stop in and pick up a bag to support a better life for the Uganda's that keep the world's gorilla population intact.




BINOCULAR BORROW PROGRAM

Presented by **Dean McGee EYE INSTITUTE**
Vision...for Life.

Check out a pair of binoculars for a fresh look at the Zoo! Stop by the Guest Services office in the Zoo's entry plaza during your next visit. Valid ID required to check out binoculars.



2019 Edition, Vol. 1 \$9.00
 Display until June 30, 2019



SophisticatedWeddings.com

Letter From The Editor

A few short months ago, I had been tagging along with a friend as she began her search for the perfect wedding dress. Charmed by a profession that regularly has me surrounded by exquisite gowns, whether on-set at photo shoots, or viewing the latest and greatest designs to grace the runways, the running about town routine is not a foreign concept for me. Somewhere between the times she tried on her first and eleventh dress, it occurred to me that the fringe benefits of being intimately familiar with the season's collections were of secondary value; looking around me, I could see that the task at hand had been enhanced by the experience itself, and not by my knowledge of who carries what, or the ideal dress construction for a Hamptons beach wedding. On that day, I had observed countless brides, joined by their family and friends, attended to with seamless care and tokens of revealed spirit. Witnessing magic in the making, it was my divine pleasure to share in their happiness. It got me to thinking about the collective moments that make up this joyous occasion, and the industry that celebrates it. Reliving my glory days as a bride of yesteryear, my sights had shifted from that of a weddings editor to one of a much more personal nature. Shamefully, I admit that in the five plus years since my own wedding, I had almost forgotten how blessed a bride is to have such extraordinary and dedicated professionals in their corner, striving tirelessly to turn dreams into reality.

Nevertheless, planning a wedding is not an easy task comprised exclusively of smiles and sunshine. From the start, it can be consuming of time and energy, and a whirlwind right down to the big day itself. There are decisions to be made, clashes to mitigate, and timelines to draft. Well-intentioned thoughts and ideas inevitably seep through the cracks, with enough 'two-cents' to pay for the wedding itself. I'd love to tell you that I'm not here to be one of those people, but I too, come bearing advice. Live in the moment, just the way you

having a wedding planner is really necessary, my answer is a resounding yes! You deserve to enjoy your wedding the way your guests do. Have your cake and eat it too (seriously, don't forget to eat!), because when you marry the soul mate, the last thing you should be thinking about is when and where the vendors' load in should happen. Use that discerning eye that



Anguilla



Uganda

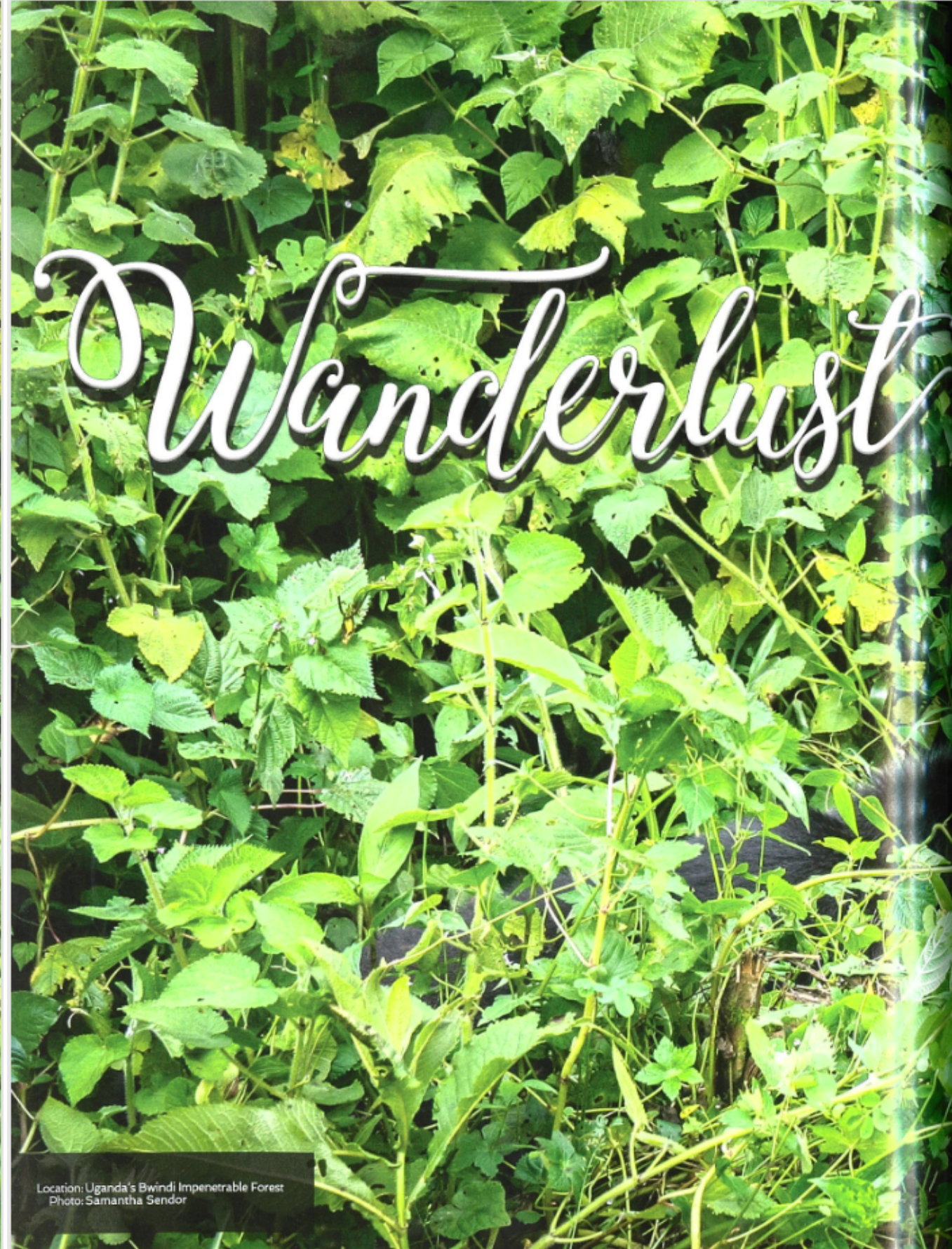
helped you find 'the one' to choose your team wisely. In this issue of Sophisticated Weddings, meet your match of dream makers. Uncover the finest venues, planners, photographers, designers, and more; in 2019, we aim to present you with a wealth of options to guide you in the direction that best suits you. Just like you, your wedding is a snowflake, and with that in mind, we have scoured the city, the country, and the world to cater the best of everything.

On the eve of a new decade, we caught up with newly engaged actor David Lim of CBS' "S.W.A.T." and his gorgeous fiancé Markéta Kazdová, as they grace our glamorous cover and editorial feature in "An Arresting Match" at New York City's enchanting Capitale. Love the city, but dying to break out? Find otherworldly beauty that is closer than you think in "Escape The City." Stretch your horizons even further, and take the journey with us around the globe, as we highlight the extraordinary passages of travel in Uganda, Anguilla, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and more. And just in case you need a heaping dose of something adorable and sweet, don't miss "Flour Girls and Cake Bearers," where little kids take on big cakes atop the picturesque rooftop garden of 620 Loft & Garden.

As always, our purpose and passion at "Sophisticated Weddings" comes down to the celebration of your love. We are so grateful to serve as your guide through this magical journey, and we insist that you keep in touch with your continued outpour of love in the form of stories, photographs, inquiries, and more.

May all your dreams come true as you eat, drink, and be married.

Samantha
 Samantha Sendor,
 Editor-in-Chief



Location: Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest
Photo: Samantha Sendor

Location: Murchison Falls National Park
Photo: Samantha Sendor



Embarking upon the excursion of a lifetime, my trip to Uganda caught me by surprise. As one contemplates a destination for a honeymoon, the East African country doesn't commonly join the shortlist of regions like Hawaii or Rome for a romantic getaway. Not one to turn down an adventure, I was optimistic that there was an angle here for jet-setting honeymooners, but I questioned the appeal for the everyday bride and groom, particularly lovers of luxury. Copiously studying the detailed itinerary provided to me, I thought to myself, "this trip is no joke."

This sentiment would be the only time I was on-point about the journey that stood before me. I consider myself a well-seasoned traveler. I have been to many places on this earth, yet nothing could have prepared me for the beauty, inspiration, and ultimately, the discoveries that lied within myself, prior to my Ugandan passage. There is simply no way to capture this experience through words or photographs. Call it a "you had to be there," cliché, but the fact remains; Uganda's beauty is found in the immersion of all five senses, through its culture, landscape, wildlife, cuisine, and overwhelmingly gracious spirit.

T-Minus 2 Days To Take Off

My borderline-obsessive need to be prepared for any and every possible scenario that may arise (no matter how unlikely) is now in full swing. Reviewing my packing list once more, I indulge myself for yet another run-through. Digital SLR camera? Check. Tourist visa, passport, Yellow (immunization) Card? Check. Check, Check. Excessive quantities of apparel, travel knickknacks, snacks, and enough DEET repellent to single-handedly starve an entire nation of mosquitos? Check.

This is around the time that I start to wonder if the two pieces of luggage I've filled are a tad over the top. I ask my best friend whom I can count on to take my side even when I'm being totally ridiculous, but this time she doesn't tell me what I want to hear. Maybe she's right, but perhaps I need a second opinion from someone in the know. Technically, the domestic aircrafts within Uganda require that luggage be soft-sided (check!) and weigh no more than 33lbs, and technically, I'm within those parameters. Now it's time to ask Andrea, my friend over at Brussels Airlines, who not only extended me the invitation to take this trip, but is also gearing up for journey herself in the coming days. "Hi Andrea! Am I totally crazy for packing two suitcases? I am trying so hard to unload into just one but

"For magnificence, for variety of form and color, for profusion of brilliant life- bird, insect, reptile, beast- for vast scale- Uganda is truly "the Pearl of Africa."
- Winston Churchill, from "My African Journey"

Seeing is Believing: A Safari of Splendor In The Spirit of Uganda

By Samantha Sendor

can't seem to get out of Armageddon mode over here," I text her with a quirky emoji, hoping she doesn't find me insane at best, high maintenance at worst. Six hours and eleven minutes later (but who's counting), she replies. "Haha, the only thing you need to keep in mind is that for the charter flights, they do have a weight limit. Channel that inner Jane of the jungle and go light!" And just like that, it's back to the drawing board. Goodbye, wilderness survival kit. Goodbye, supplemental stash of saltines.

Departure Day: NYC-Brussels-Entebbe

Is there anything better than traveling Business Class? I zip through security in the fast lane at JFK's Terminal 1, and make my way to the Lufthansa Business Lounge for a seat and refreshment. With a cup of tea and a bite-sized strawberry cheesecake beside me, I scope out the other loungers, trying to figure out which, if any, are among the fellow travel writers joining me on this trip.

Eventually we find one another pre-flight, and we're living the sweet Business Class life on Brussels Airlines in no time. A Kit Royale cassis champagne welcome drink upon boarding the aircraft kicks off the experience, as I settle in to my gen-

erously sized seat and personal area. A warm fleece blanket, fluffy pillow, and comprehensive amenity kit come in handy over the next seven hours. The fully horizontal lie-flat beds with integrated massage functions are very comfortable, and it's not long before I'm ready to call it a night, but I hang on just a little longer to indulge in Brussels Airlines' Belgian Star Chefs menu, which highlights multiple courses of fine culinary delights. When it comes to their Business Class, I guess you could say I have some serious FOMO.

Waking up in time for a light Belgian breakfast, it is almost time for our descent into Brussels, where we will make our transfer flight to Entebbe, Uganda, but not before the hospitable flight attendants distribute a fine large box of Neuhas Belgian chocolates as a parting gift for flying with Brussels Airlines. The journey to reach Uganda is surprisingly uncomplicated, with minimal layover time, and the supreme comfort of Business Class eliminates any fear I may have had surrounding jetlag. I'm feeling refreshed and like my best globetrotting self.

Day 1: Entebbe - Murchison Falls National Park

Waking up to the sound of roosters in the not so far distance is not a common experience for me in New York City.



We've spent the night at K Hotels in Entebbe, a metropolitan area in Uganda, which provides adequate comfort prior to our domestic flight to Pakuba. My first taste of Uganda begins with its leading export: coffee. While I'm not a coffee snob, I find its fragrant-rich aroma and full-bodied flavor is pretty spectacular. A hearty breakfast appears to be a mainstay of Uganda, no doubt in part due to the active nature of its activities; a heaping dose of carbs and protein fuel the day here. Joining us this morning is Alfie Kanya of Let's Go Travel, the tour operator that has dutifully mapped out our itinerary, making all recommendations and arrangements to ensure that we experience Uganda seamlessly to its fullest potential.

Finishing up our laidback breakfast fit for kings and queens, we head out to the airstrip, where our 11-passenger AeroLink aircraft awaits us. I dub these planes the Uber of aircraft carriers, because through the course of the week, they seem to come and go as we need them, landing on what is basically a lawn in the middle of nowhere, and making an occasional stop along the way to drop off another passenger. The bird's eye view from the aircraft as we fly over Lake Victoria, the third largest lake in the world, is outrageous. Looking down at the tiny dotted islands and fishing villages below, it might finally be sinking in that we're in Africa.

Touching down on the Pakuba airstrip, a 4x4 safari vehicle awaits to transport us to Paraa Safari Lodge in Murchison Falls National Park. The tiered open-air seating of the 4x4 lends well for photographs, particularly as we reach the park. Our driver and guide patiently indulges our requests for repeated stops, as the Uganda terrain figuratively takes our breath away. The sweeping panorama of the wild is so mesmerizing, at times it's too much to even locate the shutter click on the camera, for we might miss a kiss between antelope, or a call among the buffalo. The purpose of the drive is to take us back to our lodge, but the ride is an adventure in itself, not unlike the many game drives before us. Although not concretely specified in our itinerary, we opt to get back out in the evening for an official game drive, where the silhouettes of the long necked giraffes and acacia trees stand out against the amber sunset. It's like a wildlife calendar photo shoot in the making, which I've never really been able to appreciate until this very moment.

In its three-hour duration, the game drive offers bewil-

derment beyond the imaginable. Surrounded by miles of raw nature and exotic animals sharing the land in harmony, with every turn, there is a new species to discover. In our path, we find a small lion den family, a herd of elephants, and a parade of giraffe, sharing tender moments with one another that is conspicuously humanistic at first, until I realize it is simply a primal way of life in the animal kingdom. Overheard from our safari vehicle, a fly in the night could witness the repetition of our sentiments, "I can't believe we are here to see such beauty."

Day 2: Budongo Forest and Murchison Falls

It's chimpanzee trekking day in the Budongo Forest, and in Uganda, us early risers are eager to get a jumpstart to our morning with the succulent taste of the region's freshly grown pineapple fruit. Even the bananas here taste better than anywhere else, and while the spread afforded to us by Paraa Safari Lodge is bountiful, the locally sourced produce is of particular interest. Over breakfast, we travelers discuss our prior visits to the exotic continent. I confess that I have never actually been to Africa before, not even South Africa (dubbed by many as "gateway Africa"), and I'm not sure if that makes me a badass or a noob. Among us, we have variable degrees of experience with safaris, but we later learn that it makes little to no difference; Uganda is for everyone.

Entering the Budongo Central Forest Reserve, we are met by our park ranger guide, Evalyne, who briefs us with information for our chimpanzee trek experience. It isn't long before we make our way into the forest, in search of not only chimpanzees, but other primates as well, including Black-and-White Colobus Monkeys, Red-Tailed Monkeys, and various bird species. The forest terrain is mostly flat to walk, but one must watch their step for uneven stones, logs in the path, and vines in the crossing. The first task is to locate the chimpanzees, and once we do, we have one hour with them to ensure they do not become accustomed to human contact. In the three hours we trek the Budongo, Evalyne's guidance is more than just informative, it is downright amusing. Her love for, and connection with, the species of this forest, has given her the gift of interpreting their thoughts and behavior patterns. While we might hear typical monkey calls from the trees, Evalyne translates their communications with witty assertion, offering what in her opinion, the monkeys would be saying if it were in plainspoken English. At the conclusion of our trek, Evalyne invites each of us to be guests at her wedding in December, and in our enthusiasm, we imagine what this celebration that reunites us would look like.

Next on our agenda is a nature trail hike beside the Nile River at Murchison Falls. At times it is wet, but the rain showers are brief, barely worth the effort of unpacking my raincoat. The view is picture perfect, with a rainbow arched above the waterfalls to complete the scene. The only thing standing between a Disney movie and myself are the tsetse flies that tend to inhabit the humid area. Luckily, they're not much more than a mere annoyance, and I escape any semblance of a bite by avoiding black or blue-colored clothing, as those hues are known to attract their unwanted attention.

Making our way to the bottom of the falls, a riverboat meets us at the ground, decked with bottles of water to keep us hydrated. We enjoy a boat tour in the gentle breeze of the Nile, spotting sinister looking hippopotamuses, and getting into staring contests with crocodiles (spoiler alert: the crocodiles always win), before making our way back to Paraa Safari Lodge for our barbeque feast. The skyline is filled with more bird species than I knew could possibly exist in one place, and it sheds new light on bird watching as a hobby, which before today, I've been inclined to think was just a peculiar interest to hold, like botany or taxidermy. Flying above them are a couple



of uncharacteristic helicopters, carrying Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, along with their entourage. Missing them by just an hour, it turns out the pair and their crew had enjoyed a delectable lunch back at Paraa Safari Lodge, signaling to me that they must have good taste.

Day 3: Queen Elizabeth National Park

Another day, another game drive; they are among my favorite activities since I landed in Uganda. Murchison Falls National Park is home to all of the Big 5 game animals to see, with the exception of the rhino. Here we also see the hippo, buffalo, giraffe, antelope, and more, before we board yet another small aircraft and head to the Mweya airstrip, en route to Mweya Safari Lodge in Queen Elizabeth National Park. The experience of staying in a safari lodge within a national park is truly unique in that it is essentially lodging in the middle of the wild, removed from civilization by miles. The expanse is enormous, and its illustrious safari horizon couldn't be farther from a day at the Bronx Zoo.

It is at Mweya that Andrea's provision to pack light proves to be good advice. I take advantage of the lodge's laundry services, which is both efficient and inexpensive. I do, however, stand by at least some of my packing choices. My emergency preparedness did me a solid as I channeled my inner MacGyver in the face of the ultimate safari travesty: bent prongs in my digital SLR camera memory card slot had put my photography ventures to an abrupt halt. Thanks to a little fashion tape, a SIM card pin, and a thin pencil, I was successfully able to rectify the internal mishap, and get back to snapping pictures.

Queen Elizabeth National Park was perhaps the buggiest of regions we visited, given its close proximity to Lake George, which Mweya Lodge gloriously overlooks in its line of view. Mosquito nets and room spraying keep the rooms comfortable and free of pests, while some potent DEET repellent helps just about everywhere else.

Over dinner, Dr. Ludwig Siefert of the Uganda Carnivore Program, pays us a visit in anticipation of our game drive together the next morning, where we will ride in and on top of his Land Rover using satellite devices to track lion movement. The multi-disciplinary organization devoted to the research and conservation of Uganda's largest carnivores, monitors its

predators and works to identify solutions to protect both the region's wildlife and the people that inhabit the area. Although longwinded at times, I find Dr. Siefert's insights into all aspects of life and the wild in Uganda fascinating, as he is a walking, talking Ask Me Anything expert. No question or topic was off limits, and it's clear he is a treasured asset to the local tribes, animal kingdom, and safari goers, uniting us all to find common ground and understanding.

Day 4: Uganda Carnivore Program, Hamukungu, and the Kazinga Channel

Like a real life movie thriller: wildlife edition, sitting atop a Land Rover, I witness the food chain in action. Tracking a pride of lions by satellite, we get up close and personal with lion king Sankara in all his masculine mane glory. A few yards away, a rhinoceros family mourns the loss of one of their own; a carcass laid limply on the khaki grounds in defeat. Every five to seven days, a pride of lions need a meal of their own, so Sankara preyed upon a rhino deemed weak enough to spring an attack, satiating his appetite until he had been chased away by a rhino herd, leaving any remains for the hyenas to scavenge in the night. Seemingly proud and content by the success of his hunt, he gracefully finds a nook high in a tree to take a nap. From the human bystander perspective, it is inspires amazement, if not a hint of sadness for the rhino, but above all, to observe the animal kingdom in its natural habitat is beyond exhilarating.

On to the fishing village of Hamukungu, this is the first real contact I make with the local human lives and culture of the Uganda people, other than the outstanding hospitality staff back at the lodges. Children line the dirt-paved roads, excitedly greeting us in the hopes that we come bearing candy and sweets. The moment we step out of the car, small children vie for the opportunity to hold our hands as they walk us around their village, welcoming us into their everyday lives. My maternal instinct is in full swing, and I take notice to the observations of the children around me. The chipped nail polish on my finger appears to fascinate one little girl, while her older brother takes interest in my Ray-Ban aviators slipping down my nose.





It is heartwarming, magical, and simply unforgettable to make such a connection with another life, but it would be naïve to not take notice of the considerable differences between life here versus back home. On the surface, a setting plagued by poverty stands before us, where many if not most children run without shoes or untethered clothes. It is important to note however, that these children are happy, and just because their lives do not resemble ours outside of a third world nation, it wouldn't be fair to rob them of what they do have, and that is pure, unadulterated joy. Nevertheless, I am tempted to share one item I do have on hand, and that is my young daughter's plush doll that I often bring with me on trips, so that I can send photos back home of its adventures abroad. Not wanting to stir up a riot of jealousy between dozens of children over an 8" toy, I confer with Dr. Siefert about the best manner to give it away, knowing my daughter would be delighted to share her doll with a friend in the distance. He speaks with a trusted friend in the community, and they discreetly introduce me to a mother of two boys that would very much enjoy it. Sharing even the smallest and simplest of items with a child in this beautiful country has melted my heart, but what I have given is no match for the cultural experience this small fishing village has afforded me.

After a little downtime back at the lodge, we visit the Kazinga Channel, a 32-kilometer long natural channel that links Lake Edward and Lake George. The boat ride is relaxing and breezy, and the water's reflective surface mirroring the skies makes it hard to tell which way is up from down. A sight for sore eyes, the channel has one of the world's largest concentrations of hippos, Nile crocodiles, buffalo, elephants, and a host of birds, from African fish eagles to storks and herons. The photographic opportunities are exquisite, but they are no match for the real thing in plain sight.

Day 5: Bwindi and Ride 4 A Woman

Hopping on board the puddle jumper plane, and on our way to the Kihiki airstrip, the flight is quicker than a yellow cab crossing midtown. I am reminded by this commute, like all my

others that came before it, that getting around Uganda is more than a means to get from point A to B; it is an essential facet to the experience from both the air and on the ground. Soaring above Lake Edward so peacefully, it is a feast for the eyes that evokes wonderment. From Kihiki, the drive to Bwindi is longer, but is a spectator's treat, rounding the precipitous cliffs, tea and coffee plantations, and local villages. On the side of the rocky unpaved roads, women walk up and down hill with tall urns balanced atop their heads, impressively without the support of their hands. Yet more evidence that it doesn't get any more authentic than right here Uganda.

Perched above the region's valley, and overlooking Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, the location of Silverback Lodge couldn't be more ideal. The exquisite beauty from the unobstructed mountainous viewpoint is celebrated by the inn's open-air veranda. Bewitched by the natural beauty that envelops it, this intimate gathering space lends as well to peaceful early morning coffee as it does a reflective nightcap among likeminded travelers.

Our first order of business in Bwindi was our greatly anticipated visit to the Ride 4 A Woman organization. At the home of the endangered mountain gorilla in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, is a large surrounding community of local people in a village called Buhoma. The women of this community form the cornerstone of their families with raising children, working the land, tending to their animals, and performing many other daily tasks that make them the backbone of their tribe. Busy trying to make ends meet, these women are largely without opportunity to learn new skills, develop a career, or earn money. Identifying a need to introduce empowerment into their lives, Ride 4 A Woman was formed in 2009, touching an entire community by fostering them with independence, empowerment, hope, and support. The organization began by renting bicycles to tourists with the hope of generating money to start a job-training program for women of the community. It has since expanded to providing skills training in areas of sewing, basket weaving, and crafts, in addition to providing access to

clean water, microloans, and education for personal health and safety. At Ride 4 A Woman, we make close connections with the inspiring women that make the program the culturally immersive experience it is. We are invited to take a spot in a basket weaving circle and learn to make local crafts alongside the local women; in doing so, our cultural differences become blurred. With an emphasis on teach-or-be-taught, the program celebrates the idea that everyone brings something to the table, and travelers are always welcome to find their place here. The artisan crafts rise to a whole new meaning, as just steps from their display we witness the magic in the making. Although our itinerary has us down for a day trip at Ride 4 A Woman, I not so secretly find myself wishing I had the opportunity to stay a night in one of the organization's eight on-site guest rooms, as part of the Bwindi Community Home Stay.



Day 6: Gorilla Trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

The pinnacle point of my Ugandan journey is here, both literally and figuratively speaking. The draw for most travelers that set ground in Uganda is the opportunity to come face-to-face with the mountain gorillas in their natural habitat in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. Only in Uganda and its neighbors, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which in the case of the latter, it is strongly advisable that one not visit this region), is it possible to witness such wildlife. The mountain gorilla's survival is dependent on a suitable habitat, and their existence is now endangered, with fewer than 1,000 left to roam the earth.

Well rested from the evening prior, and eager to meet my new friends of the wild, I came prepared. Decked out in water-resistant pants, high knit socks and gaiters, waterproof mountain boots, gardening gloves, a walking stick, water bottles and a lunch lovingly prepared by the Silverback Lodge, I have been waiting all week for this moment. The Ugandan Wildlife Authority runs a pretty tight ship, and upon arrival to the base of the park, unbeknownst to us, experienced park rangers size us

up, determining our path up the mountain, which is categorized by its difficulty. The forest is occupied by five separate families of gorillas, whose proximal whereabouts are tracked by foot hours prior to our hike, as to ensure we eventually find them. The mountain gorilla is free to roam about in their natural habitat, which happens to be rather massive, and without the preliminary tracking, we could potentially find ourselves in the forest for upwards of nine hours before we make an encounter.

Placed into a hiking group of eight on a moderately difficult trail, just before we make our ascent, we are given the option to hire a porter from the local village, who will aid us through the trek, lending a hand for stability, and hold our day pack. I quickly learn what an invaluable presence the porters are. I may not be the most athletically inclined person I know, but I'm not too tragically out of shape either. Although the trek is approachable for every physical level, it is by no means easy. An hour in, I am sweating profusely, guzzling water like my life is dependent on it, and patting myself on the back for adding that microfibre towel to my Prime cart before I left home. The climb is steep and at times slippery, and if you don't look where you are stepping, you could find yourself taking a spill in the mud. I identify myself as the clumsy member of the group, and thankfully so do the porters trekking with us; they have saved my butt more times than I can count. I successfully navigate my way around safari ants, and through the thickets, but at one point I take a massive flop in the mud. In the middle of the hot dense forest, on the most physically grueling excursion of my life, surrounded by thousands of insects I can't even begin to identify, and now covered waist to toe in mud, I am laughing wildly. It is not that my phobia of insects has completely taken over me and I've lost my mind; it's that I unexpectedly realize that I am having the best time of my life, and I haven't even met a gorilla yet.

Two and a half hours into our trek, a silverback gorilla family emerges. Each and every one of us is struck with awe. They really don't have to do anything but sit and eat their bamboo shoots, and yet their graceful movements that share 98% of human DNA are nothing short of breathtaking. For conservation purposes, we spend an hour at most with the gorillas, and that time breezes by, as we stand merely feet from them. After we part ways, we find a spot to break and reflect on the experience as we devour our packed lunches, followed by another couple of hours making our way back down to the mainland. Sensations of elation, empowerment, and accomplishment overcome us, and it's how I imagine an Olympian feels upon landing a gold medal. The rush of adrenaline is unlike anything I've ever experienced. Miraculously, we beat the rain down the mountain, with the downpour beginning just minutes after our trek has come to an end. The experience concludes with a certificate of achievement by the Uganda Wildlife Authority, with which we pose proudly in photographs.

Since I've returned to my every day life in old New York, the most common question about my trip that I encounter is, "Weren't you scared being so close to the gorillas?" The funny thing is, it never occurred to me to be afraid. I felt incredibly safe in the care and expertise of the guides, rangers, and guards, and should the unexpected ever occur, they would know exactly what to do. The gorillas, while grand and potentially intimidating in their size and stature, are so strikingly beautiful and seemingly peaceful in the wild, that fear was actually quite foreign to the experience. Trekking with the gorillas worked out like a rite of passage, where I learned about my own capabilities and inner strength. Take it from an aspiring world traveler: Uganda is a country that simply no other place on this earth can compete with. It offers a unique luxury, an unforgettable journey, and a profound sense of wonder and adventure that every newly married couple should aspire to experience together. **SW**



Baboons climb on a sign at the entrance to Queen Elizabeth National Park, home to rare tree-climbing lions. PHOTO: LUCAS AYKROYD

UGANDA'S WILD AND CAPTIVATING BEAUTY

Magical moments with gorillas among abundant natural wonders

LUCAS AYKROYD

Bakwate, a 300-pound silverback, stalks through the underbrush, barely glancing at my trekking group, as he heads off to supervise the 19-member Oruzogo gorilla family.

It's a humid morning in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in western Uganda and my precious hour with the world's largest primates has just begun.

Using machetes, Ugandan guides slash through the thick foliage that gives this 331-square-kilometre UNESCO World Heritage Site its impenetrable reputation. A vigilant, sure-footed porter named Innocent tucks my knapsack, full of water bottles, as I clamber up steep jungle slopes, wearing garden gloves to protect my hands.

I'm fortunate. It's only about an hour's hike for my group of eight, despite rising elevations ranging from 1,360 to 2,350 metres, before we find Bakwate and his band.

Nyangoro, a serene female, grooms her baby, who stares wide-eyed at us. A young male gorilla named Bwengye relaxes on his side, playing with his feet.

We maintain a prescribed minimum distance of seven metres. If a gorilla charges, we're to remain still and keep our eyes averted so as not to seem challenging.

Time slows down as we gaze at their whimsical, expressive faces. Another silverback marches by. More gorillas sit in the crooks of nearby trees like wise sentinels.

There are only about 1,000 mountain gorillas worldwide. Half of them live in this East African nation, primarily in Bwindi.

On the way back, a refreshing rain begins to fall. One trekker inadvertently takes a tumble into the



A rainbow graces the powerful Murchison Falls, made famous in The African Queen starring Humphrey Bogart.

When we return to our van and receive our official gorilla trekking certificates, our trek through Bwindi has taken about three and a half hours.

The day's excitement slimmers down to a peaceful warmth as we drive past cows and helmetless motor-bikers. Finally, we head down a bumpy driveway to the Mahogany Springs Safari Lodge.

My room boasts a canopyed queen-sized bed and a spacious balcony overlooking the Munyangga River. After washing off the bug spray in my walk-in shower, I relax in the resort's high-ceilinged

tables, and bean sauses.

From the Kihibi airstrip, it's about an hour to Entebbe, Uganda's main airport, aboard an Aerlink Cessna Caravan. These turboprop planes limit passengers to 33 pounds of luggage in soft-sided bags.

It's another hour's flight to Murchison Falls National Park. Uganda's largest nature reserve is named after the world's most powerful waterfall. The 43-metre-high waterfall is famous for appearing in 1951's The African Queen (star-

Wildlife Authority (UWA), gets us safely to the falls.

After a hike to the summit, we cruise back down the Nile with beers at sunset, as colobus monkeys gather in the trees.

At Chobe Safari Lodge, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2020, we enjoy a sumptuous buffet, which includes carrot, coconut soup and goat stew.

The riverside resort, a favourite of longtime President Yoweri Museveni, offers a contoured outdoor pool, and before bedtime, I enjoy a quick dip.

Another quick flight south brings

IF YOU GO
A tour permit for gorilla trekking costs US\$600 per person. KLM (via Amsterdam) and Ethiopian Airlines (via Toronto and Addis Ababa) offer regular service to Entebbe. For more information on Uganda, see visituganda.com. To tour a proud Gorilla Conservation Coffee, a social enterprise that supports coffee farmers around Bwindi, visit gorillaconservationcoffee.org.

the park is well-known for Kalinzu Central Forest Reserve, a mecca for chimpanzee trekking. But it's baboons who clamber over roadside signs as we drive to Kyambura Gorge Lodge.

The staff at the recently-renovated luxury lodge, facing the Rwenzori Mountains, welcomes visitors with a traditional dance and a complimentary 30-minute massage. The lodge is operated by environmentally-minded Volcanoes Safaris, whose properties have hosted celebrities like Sarah, Duchess of York and Don Cheadle.

Spacious private villas include outdoor showers. While cooling off, I gaze over a coffee plantation and spot elephants in the distance.

Queen Elizabeth National Park also boasts rare tree-climbing lions. They do it to avoid tsetse flies and to spot potential prey.

Accompanied by armed UWA rangers, we take an early-morning drive on the savannah and soon come across four lions feasting on a warthog carcass. The cubs wait their turn.

In the afternoon, we take a guided chimpanzee tour, and soon find the group of 60 habituated chimps. Their eerie cries echo overhead as they swing through the Kalinzu forest canopy. Fruit is hauled at us.

bushes on a maddy hillside trail, but with remarkable speed, his porter breaks his fall.

lobby with Nile beer and crunchy groundnuts, followed by a Ugandan dinner of rice, steamed vege-

ring Humphrey Bogart). And it's the source of the Nile, the world's longest river at 6,700 kilometres.

During an afternoon Nile cruise in an 11-passenger boat, an Oklahoma visitor exclaims: "Water safari's the way to go, man! This is incredible."

I marvel at a group of eight elephants, fanning themselves with their African-shaped ears, splashing through the water, and ripping up grass to eat.

Hippos stare back like surly gang members.

Uganda is home to more than 1,000 bird species, and while I'm not normally a keen ornithologist, I gasp with glee when an African fish eagle, protecting its fishing territory, buzzes a riverside Goliath heron.

It's an excellent excess of natural wonders, and our knowledgeable guide, sanctioned by the Uganda

us to Kasese, the gateway to Queen Elizabeth National Park. Covering close to 2,000 square kilometres,

They urinate, procreate, and self-stimulate. Sneezing and grooming — that's the mild stuff.



Hippos wallow in the Nile River in Murchison Falls National Park.



A female gorilla sits amid foliage in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

Uganda's primates are wild, whimsical and rude

LUCAS AYKROYD ([HTTPS://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/AUTHOR/LUCAS-AYKROYD](https://vancouversun.com/author/lucas-aykroyd)) Updated: October 7, 2019

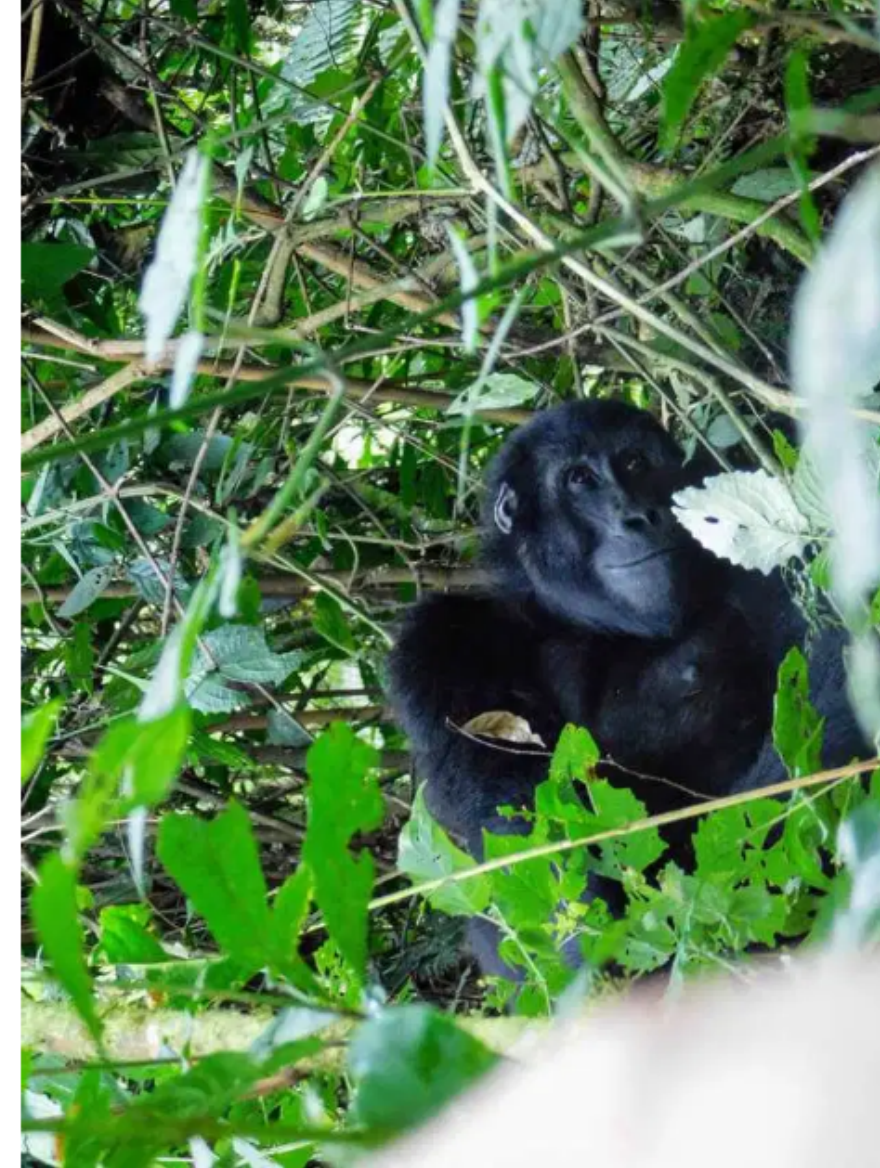


Baboons clamber on a sign at the entrance to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda. LUCAS AYKROYD

Bakwate, a 300-pound silverback stalks through the underbrush, barely glancing at my trekking group, as he heads off to supervise the 19-member Oruzogo gorilla family.

It's a humid morning in [Bwindi Impenetrable National Park](https://www.bwindiforestnationalpark.com) (<https://www.bwindiforestnationalpark.com>) in western Uganda

(<http://visituganda.com>) and my precious one hour with the world's largest primates has just begun.



A female gorilla sits amid foliage in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. LUCAS AYKROYD

Using machetes, Ugandan guides slash through the thick foliage that gives this 331-square-kilometre UNESCO World Heritage Site its impenetrable reputation. A vigilant, sure-footed porter named Innocent totes my

knapsack, full of water bottles, as I clamber up steep-jungle slopes, wearing garden gloves to protect my hands.

I'm fortunate. It's only about an hour's hike for my group of eight, despite braving elevations ranging from 1,160 metres to 2,300 metres, before we find Bakwate and his band.

Nyangoro, a serene female, grooms her baby, who stares wide-eyed at us. A young male gorilla named Bwengye relaxes on his side, playing with his feet.

We maintain a prescribed minimum distance of seven metres. If a gorilla charges, we're to remain still and keep our eyes averted so as not to seem challenging.

Time slows down as we gaze at their whimsical, expressive faces. Another silverback marches by. More gorillas sit in the crooks of nearby trees like wise sentinels.

There are only about 1,000 mountain gorillas worldwide. Half of them live in this East African nation, primarily in Bwindi.

On the way back, a refreshing rain begins to fall. One trekker inadvertently takes a tumble into the bushes on a muddy hillside trail, but with remarkable speed, his porter breaks his fall.

When we return to our van and receive our official gorilla trekking certificates, our trek through Bwindi has taken about three and a half hours.

The day's excitement simmers down to a peaceful warmth as we drive past cows and helmetless motor-bikers. Finally, we head down a bumpy driveway to the [Mahogany Springs Safari Lodge](http://www.mahoganysprings.com) (<http://www.mahoganysprings.com>).

My room boasts a canopied queen-sized bed and a spacious balcony overlooking the Munyanga River. After washing off the bug spray in my walk-in shower, I relax in the resort's high-ceilinged lobby with Nile beer and crunchy groundnuts, followed by a Ugandan dinner of rice, steamed vegetables, and bean sauce.



A rainbow graces the powerful Murchison Falls, made famous in *The African Queen* starring Humphrey Bogart. *LUCAS AYKROYD*

From the Kihhi airstrip, it's about an hour to Entebbe, Uganda's main airport, aboard an Aerolink Cessna Caravan. These turboprop planes limit passengers to 33 pounds of luggage in soft-sided bags.

It's another hour's flight to Murchison Falls National Park. Uganda's largest nature reserve is named after the world's most powerful waterfall. The 43-metre-high waterfall is famous for appearing in 1951's *The African Queen* (starring Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn). And is the source of the Nile, the world's longest river at 6,700 km.

When I take an afternoon Nile cruise in an 11-passenger boat, an Oklahoma visitor who exclaims: "Water safari's the way to go, man! This is incredible!"

I marvel at a group of eight elephants, fanning themselves with their Africa-shaped ears, splashing through the water, and ripping up grass to eat.



Hippos wallow in the Nile River in Murchison Falls National Park. *LUCAS AYKROYD*

Hippos stare back like surly gang members.

Uganda is home to more than 1,000 bird species, and while I'm not normally a keen ornithologist, I gasp with glee when an African fish eagle, protecting its fishing territory, buzzes a riverside Goliath heron.

It's an excellent excess of natural wonders, and our knowledgeable guide, sanctioned by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), gets us safely to the falls.

After a hike to the summit, we cruise back down the Nile with beers at sunset, as colobus monkeys gather in the trees.

At [Chobe Safari Lodge](https://www.chobe.org.za/lodge/chobe-safari-lodge/?wickedsource=google&wickedid=379143082993&wtm_term=chobe%20safari%20lodge&wtm_campaign=6461364914&wtm_content=85810544548&wickedplacement=&wickedkeyword=chobe%20safari%20lodge&gclid=EAlaIQobChMluozdweiK5QIVGcDICh2vzQu5EAAYASAAEgLTYPD_BwE) (https://www.chobe.org.za/lodge/chobe-safari-lodge/?wickedsource=google&wickedid=379143082993&wtm_term=chobe%20safari%20lodge&wtm_campaign=6461364914&wtm_content=85810544548&wickedplacement=&wickedkeyword=chobe%20safari%20lodge&gclid=EAlaIQobChMluozdweiK5QIVGcDICh2vzQu5EAAYASAAEgLTYPD_BwE), which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2020, we enjoy a sumptuous buffet, which includes carrot, coconut soup and goat stew.



The luxurious Chobe Safari Lodge in Uganda lies next to the Nile River. *LUCAS AYKROYD*

The riverside resort, a favourite of long-time President Yoweri Museveni, offers an contoured outdoor pool, and before bedtime, I enjoy a quick dip.

Another quick flight south brings us to Kasese, the gateway to Queen Elizabeth National Park. Covering close to 2,000 square kilometres, the park is well-known for Kalinzu Central Forest Reserve, a mecca for chimpanzee trekking. But it is baboons, who clamber over roadside signs as we drive to Kyambura Gorge Lodge.

The staff at the recently-renovated luxury lodge, facing the Rwenzori Mountains, welcomes visitors with a traditional dance and a complimentary 30-minute massage. The lodge is operated by environmentally-minded Volcanoes Safaris, whose properties have hosted celebrities like Sarah, Duchess of York and Don Cheadle.

Spacious private villas include outdoor showers. While cooling off, I gaze over a coffee plantation and spot elephants in the distance.

Queen Elizabeth National Park also boasts rare tree-climbing lions. They do it to avoid tsetse flies and to spot potential prey.

Accompanied by armed UWA rangers, we take an early-morning drive on the savannah and soon come across four lions feasting on a warthog carcass. The cubs wait their turn.

In the afternoon, we take a guided chimpanzee tour, and soon find the group of 60 habituated chimps. Their eerie cries echo overhead as they swing through the Kalinzu forest canopy. Fruit is hurled at us.

They urinate, procreate, and self-stimulate. Sneezing and grooming – that's the mild stuff.

IF YOU GO

A tour permit for gorilla trekking costs \$600 US per person.

KLM (via Amsterdam) and Ethiopian Airlines (via Toronto and Addis Ababa) offer regular service to Entebbe.

For more information on Uganda, see visituganda.com (<http://visituganda.com>).

To learn about [Gorilla Conservation Coffee](http://gorillaconservationcoffee.org) (<http://gorillaconservationcoffee.org>), a social enterprise that supports coffee farmers around Bwindi.

Worth Traveling For: Gorilla Trekking in Uganda's Impenetrable Forest National Park



A Silverback of the Mubare gorilla family.

SNAPSHOT

Emma Glassman-Hughes

Kristan Schiller

There are certain places—show-stopping hotels, Award-winning restaurants or local dive bars, incomparable vintage shops—that are worth planning your whole trip around. The Impenetrable Forest Gorilla Trek in Uganda is one of those places.

When we hit hour two of the total three that it took to track down a group of gorillas in western Uganda's Impenetrable Forest National Park, I noticed more than just the sensation of fire ants gnawing on my calves and mud seeping between my toes. (Turns out, both the forest and my hiking socks were more penetrable than promised that day.) I noticed that, to my surprise, I felt really, really good.

I consider myself relatively out of shape. Nothing severe, but at least out of shape

enough to imagine being carried out of a Pure Barre class on a stretcher before the warm-ups are even done. That's why, after two hours of mountain climbing in oppressive humidity, the last thing I expected was to feel healthy and able and, dare I say, even eager. As if trekking through a real life rainforest wasn't enough—breathing in the purest and most nourishing oxygen my blackened city lungs have probably ever tasted—there was, of course, the promise (or almost-promise—nothing is guaranteed!) of seeing endangered mountain gorillas in their natural habitat, something only a controlled amount of people get to do each year. All of that proved enough of a distraction to keep me going.

Finally at the top, our group of eight hikers, several life-saving porters, and one guide spent our allotted hour with the four gorillas—three females and one silverback male—we had trekked so far to see. As I watched them eat their weight in shoots and nettles from my position in the thickets seven meters away, I accidentally made and held eye contact with the silverback, something someone in my adolescence once told me was a major no-no. A shot of adrenaline pierced my body and my heart began to race—*have I made myself look like an aggressor? Is this vicious beast going to attack?!—*but short of a few grunts and moans, the gentle giant didn't seem all that interested in or aware of our group. Myth: busted. But even though I was freaking out, I was able to take stock of a few things: how the brown in each of their eyes was so rich it was almost red; how the silverback's coat made me think of outer space, as though dust from the stars had fallen and collected on his back.

The magic of spending time with gorillas in the wild will stick with me for the rest of my life, as will the knowledge that, when it comes down to it, I'm stronger than I once thought.

Wildlife Authority is very strict about keeping the gorillas healthy, however; if you have a cold or a cough, you may not be able to participate in the trek as you could be putting the gorillas at risk of contracting diseases.



Me and Malaya, the silverback of the group.

How to prepare: Bring a raincoat, thick hiking socks to tuck into your hiking pants, hiking boots, lots of water, a camera, and insect repellent. The Uganda Wildlife Authority will have hiking sticks for you to borrow and porters on staff that you can hire to help you carry your bags—and in my case, to keep you from walking off the edge of a gulf when you get too distracted looking at the pretty plants.

Pro tips: Be quiet, be respectful, and be present. Take some photos but don't forget to put your camera down at some points. Relish the time to simply observe and appreciate. Be humble—even with a walking stick and the help of a porter (I **highly recommend** both), you will probably fall on your ass or slip on a rock or get thwacked in the head by a thorny branch and look like a maniac as you bleed from the head! That's ok! It's still worth it!

While you're in the area: Don't forget that there are plenty of *humans* who also live in this region, many of whom would love to educate you about their communities and their histories. Shop for handicrafts at any number of roadside stalls and at Ride 4 A Woman, a local-owned-and-operated collective that provides employment and financial support to women who have survived abuse. Here you can watch some of them work and meet the artists responsible for the handmade crafts on which you will no-doubt be loading up before your trip home.



Impenetrable Forest National Park in Bwindi, Uganda.

Why it's worth the trip: Though it recently transitioned from "critically endangered" to just good-old-fashioned "endangered" thanks to the joint work of environmentalists and local communities, the mountain gorilla remains a vulnerable species that lives in rather isolated and heavily protected forest regions. Outside of Uganda, these animals can only be found in the Virunga Volcanic mountains that stretch into Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo. And though the population is currently on the upswing, rapidly accelerating climate change and habitat destruction remain a threat, so the possibility of seeing them in the wild will likely not exist forever.

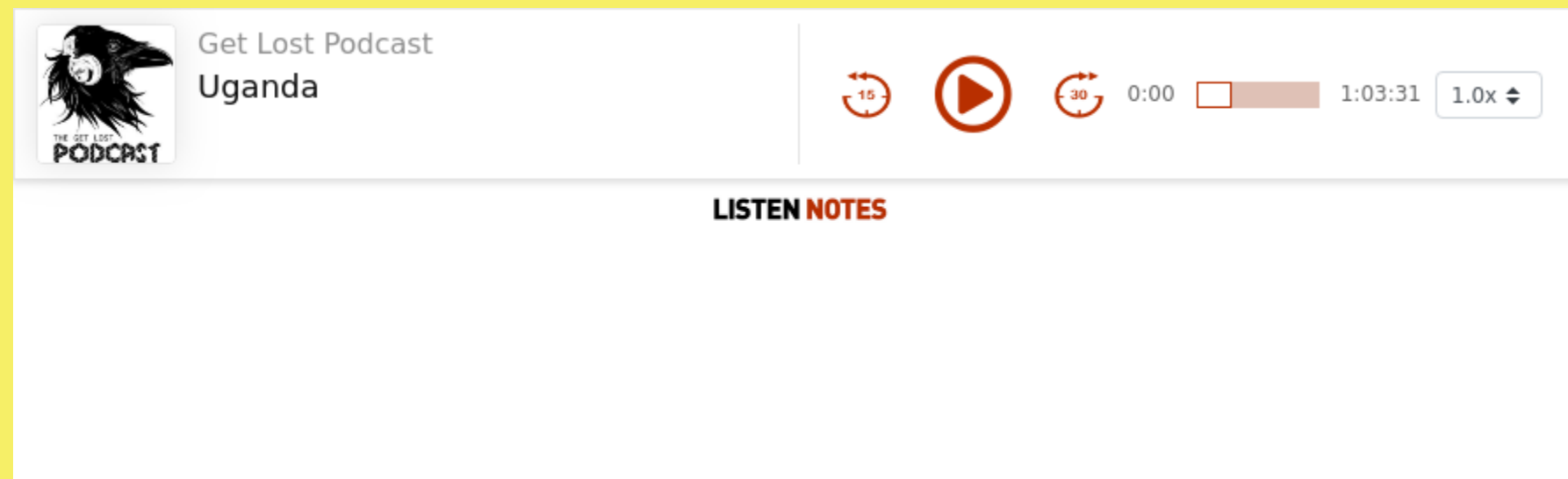
You'll like it here if: You're passionate about the environment and interested in learning about the relationship between the village of Bwindi, at the base of the forest, and the inhabitants of the forest itself.

Price breakdown: An 8-day gorilla safari with [Let's Go Travel](#) starts at \$2,856 per person. LGT also curates unique travel and safari opportunities based on your specific interests. Visit [their website](#) for a cost estimate.

The crowd: Everyone over the age of 18 can participate in a gorilla trek, and there are varying degrees of difficulty to accommodate different ability levels. The Uganda



PODCAST



GET LOST PODCAST
UGANDA JAN. 28, 2020



INTERVIEW VIDEO

[Interview with Matt Payne](#)