

CLOSE UP

RWANDA *RISING*

One&Only brings two remarkable wilderness sites closer together in the Land of a Thousand Hills

BY LAUREN JADE HILL

The exterior of a villa at One&Only Gorilla's Nest

A Silverback Suite bedroom at One&Only Gorilla's Nest



I'm standing right behind our guide as he lets out a low rumble from the back of his throat, mimicking the sound that shows the gorillas we're approaching that we come cordially. Before entering the rainforest of Volcanoes National Park in northwestern Rwanda, our guide, Christoph, had given our small group a crash course in gorilla communication. Now, as we enter a small clearing in the dense wilderness, we come face-to-face with a group of these majestic primates.

We'd set out that morning to trek through the forest in search of the Hirwa gorilla family. A close-knit group of adult females, blackbacks, juveniles and infants led by the dominant silverback, the family's name means "lucky one," given because it is one of the few mountain gorilla families to have had a set of twins. The youngest tumbles rambunctiously through the undergrowth, colliding and wrestling with family members, while the silverback keeps a wary eye over the group. Standing and beating his chest, the eldest male begins to charge toward us to assert his dominance before pausing and returning nonchalantly to his chosen resting spot.

Over the course of an hour, we follow the gorillas, who by now are unfazed by our presence, as our guide cuts a path through the

thick vegetation with his machete. The silverback pulls vines from above, gorging on the leaves, and the baby of the group rides through the dense thicket on the back of one of its seniors. When our time is up, we leave the gorillas to retreat further into the forest as we follow our makeshift path out, ducking beneath overhanging vegetation and carefully treading through the thick undergrowth. Finally, we reach the edge of the park, which is bordered by verdant farmland foraged for potatoes by a large troop of golden monkeys.

I'm staying at the nearby One&Only Gorilla's Nest, which consists of a small collection of sumptuous treehouses and suites alongside high-style communal spaces including a spa, infinity pool and forest-view dining area. All of this lies amid a cornucopia of indigenous and exotic tropical plants and flowers beneath towering eucalyptus trees with a backdrop of green-blanketed volcanoes. The surrounding nature immerses you in this opulent setting, with elements of Rwandan culture brought into every aspect of the stay.

While the lodge understandably attracts widespread attention for its heady combination of luxury and adventure and proximity to Rwanda's gorillas, One&Only has even more to offer in this impossibly scenic country. Joining the forest-enshrouded resort in the northwest is its sister hotel, One&Only Nyungwe House, several



One&Only
Nyungwe House

“Days are spent *venturing* along the park’s scenic trails, going *in search* of its chimpanzees, and *picking leaves* in the surrounding tea fields.”



Colobus
monkeys



The resort’s
wellness
pool deck

hours’ drive away. To make it easier to visit both remote sites in one go, One&Only has now introduced the One Escape package, combining three nights at each property with a 35-minute helicopter transfer between them through a new partnership with Akagera Aviation.

On arriving at One&Only Nyungwe House, it’s immediately evident this lodge is just as special as its more famous sister property. Nyungwe House sits amid vivid green tea fields on the edge of Nyungwe National Park, one of the oldest rainforests in Africa. It’s home to many species of primates including chimpanzees and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2023 for its ancient forest, endemic species and overall biodiversity.

During a stay at this inviting lodge, which encompasses stand-alone suites, a spa and infinity pool commanding views over the ancient forest, days are spent venturing along the park’s scenic trails, going in search of its chimpanzees, and picking leaves in the surrounding tea fields before taking part in a tea tasting session. During my stay, I follow the forest trail leading down into a valley and back up to the thundering Kamiranzovu Waterfall and hike the circular Igishigishigi Trail, taking in the park’s towering tree-top canopy walk. As I watch the lowering sun cast a golden glow across the forestscape from high up on this second trail, I’m struck by the sheer beauty of a wilderness that more travelers should surely include in their Rwanda itinerary. oneandonlyresorts.com

HOW TO DO IT

Traveling with the East Africa specialist Cheli & Peacock Safaris allows you to combine your time with One&Only with a discovery of lesser-known sites across the capital, Kigali, and beyond. In Kigali, stay at boutique sanctuary The Retreat by Heaven, fusing contemporary luxury with Rwandan authenticity. Fly in with the national airline Rwandair, which offers spacious business class seating. Their codeshare with Qatar enables flights between the U.S. and Rwanda, and there are plans to launch direct U.S. routes in the not-so-distant future.

chelipecock.com; theretreatrwanda.com; rwandair.com