

MARK NOLTING IN EAST AFRICA – Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda

On arrival in Africa, I had the pleasure of spending the night at the House of Waine, located in the suburb of Karen outside Nairobi. Set in beautiful gardens with a large heated swimming pool, this small luxury hotel is now my favorite place for guests to overnight before beginning their safaris in Kenya or flying to Tanzania.

Tanzania

After taking an hour scheduled flight by Mt. Kilimanjaro to the airport bearing the same name, I was transferred to Ndarakwai Camp, a small, personable permanent tented camp located on a 10,000 acre private reserve set on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. The owner Peter Jones, the camp guide and I took an afternoon walk through the bush and encountered many herds of eland, along with other plains game. As the sun was going down, we walked to a Maasai Village located just outside of the reserve. The villagers were very welcoming - especially as our guide was Maasai and knew them all very well. Later we took a night drive. As night drives, walks and quality Maasai visits are not possible in the national parks, Ndarakwai should be considered as an add-on to a traditional safari. We feature this sustainable tourism and eco-conservation property in our Signature program Serengeti Unexplored Group Safari.



I spent time in Arusha meeting up with all the guides who take our clients out on safari and where the guides of the year were announced - Omar Seif and Mohamed Rassul. I also visited Teneguru School for a formal presentation of a \$5,000.00 donation in partnership with Rotary – Fort Lauderdale



Kenya

I flew by a private charter flight to **Shompole**, located near Lake Natron and the Tanzanian border. The flight took me over Lake Magaadi with views of flamingo below.

Shompole is a small, luxury lodge set on a high ridge overlooking a private reserve. The units are architecturally spectacular, each with private plunge pools and surrounded by pools of water – the evaporation from which helps cool the air in this arid land. (*See our 15 Day Legends of Kenya Safari*)



This is one of the best reserves to see lesser kudu, and we were fortunate enough to see a number of herds, along with buffalo and other plains game. The night drive was very productive, with sightings of African wild cat, bat-eared fox, black-backed jackal, civet, large-spotted genet, and banded mongoose. We walked through a beautiful forest, and visited a small Maasai village where we were warmly received. This and Ndarakwai are two of the best places for Maasai visits I have experienced in East Africa !!!



Oi Donyo Wuas, located between Amboseli and West Tsavo national parks, was my next stop. The camp has been totally rebuilt to a five-star status. Each unit has a private plunge pool and rooftop observation deck where some guests spend the night to view the millions of stars that seem so close you could almost touch them. During my stay the waterhole in front of camp was dominated by elephant bearing some of the largest tusks I have seen in years.

The food, service and management of this camp are superb. Day and night game drives, quality escorted walks, and some of the best horseback riding available on the continent are offered. This is certainly one of Africa's best camps!

Oi Donyo Wuas received recognition as a finalist in the *Tourism for Tomorrow Awards* for the wildlife and tourism partnership with the local Maasailand community. The property is featured in our *10 Day Kenya Exclusive* program.



Campi Ya Kanzi, situated with a magnificent view of Mt. Kilimanjaro offers an “Out of Africa” experience at the beginning or end of your safari. Your hosts are Luca Belpietro and Antonella Bonomi and their brood of children. This is a very homely style of accommodations with hands on attention. His partnership with the local community has also been a successful conservation story in securing the future of the local wildlife. The property is featured in our *10 Day Kenya Exclusive* program.



Rwanda

Next – off to Rwanda! Kigali must be the cleanest city in Africa. There was no litter to be seen at all. Plastic bags are not allowed. Even along the roadsides I saw no litter whatsoever. We visited the Genocide Museum, which was very moving. I ran out of time to visit the local market and the www.womenforwomen.org.

The 2.5 hour drive to Ruhengeri (Volcanoes National Park) was very scenic and beautiful. During the day there are always people walking along the road, riding or pushing bicycles often laden with banana or sorgum beer. We toured the market at Kinigi. There are many bicycle taxis and motorcycle taxis taking clients short distances in and near town.



On arrival at Park Headquarters trekkers fill out a form including their ages. The driver/guides will have a short briefing with the chief warden when they request special groups or short/medium/long hikes. Trekkers are then separated according to the gorilla groups they will be visiting and given a briefing by their guides that lasts about 15 minutes. Trekkers then return to their vehicles and are driven to the departure points by their guides.

Our guides have a very good relationship with national parks, and because of that, they have a better chance than any other tour company of getting guests assigned to gorilla groups that are the level of difficulty that the clients request. Most travelers in good condition can trek to the close groups, as the guides take many rest breaks enroute. There is no rush to find the gorillas as you will have 1 hour with them regardless. Seven gorilla groups are visited by tourists and seven groups are visited by researchers. The Parks Department always sell 56 permits; if one of the tourist groups goes to the Congo or Uganda, then one of the research groups will be substituted.

Once at the departure point, trekkers are given a walking stick and assigned a porter if you wish to choose to have one, for a \$10 tip.



You hike to the stone wall marking the border of the park, which is designed to keep the buffalo and elephant in the park and to mark a clear border of the park for the people not to cross. After a gorilla etiquette briefing, you begin trekking. When you are getting close to the gorillas you leave your hiking sticks and backpacks and bring on ly cameras.

My first trek was to the *Kwitonda Group*. It was a beautiful hike through cultivated fields. The guide stopped frequently to talk about the crops and other plants along the way. This gave the slower trekkers time to catch their breath and rest.

We were fortunate to encounter the group in fairly open areas with scattered sunlight. The group is made up of 17 individuals including one silverback. At one point I laid down on the forest floor and a baby approached several times within one meter. The guide said it was curious about my camera, and he kept chasing the baby gorillas away. The whole experience was exhilarating and was over in a flash.





The following morning we hiked to the *Sabinyo Group*, composed of nine individuals including the largest silverback in the park – Guhondo. He is getting quite old and was not too active, but the rest of the group was active indeed. This trek was longer than the first one, mostly through bamboo forests that were sometimes so dense we had to crawl through rough sections. Francois, our guide, worked with Diane Fossey. He was very entertaining as he would demonstrate what the gorillas eat by eating it himself. I tried the bamboo, which they say can make the gorillas a bit drunk, and it was quite sweet.

I stayed at the **Sabinyo Silverback lodge** – a five-star property with two guest suites, five cottages and one family complex and is definitely the best lodge in the region. During my time not trekking I made site inspections of **Gorilla Nest Lodge, Gorilla Mountain View Lodge, Volcanoes Virunga Lodge** and a fifth new lodge that is coming on line (name still to be advised).

There is a cultural village near Kinigi that is worth a visit to get a good idea of the history and cultures of the area. Another attraction of Volcanoes National Park and Gisenyi area is that they have no mosquitoes, and I encountered no flies anywhere.

We drove for 1.5 hours to Gisenyi, set on the shores of Lake Kivu. I overnighted at the **Kivu Serena Hotel**, which is set right on the lake with a private sandy beach, large swimming pool and attractive common areas. This was an enjoyable ending to my stay in Africa. Our *4-Day extension to Rwanda with two gorilla treks* is featured in many of our combo trips,



A highlight was spending time with Francois – the highest ranking conservationist at Parc d u Volcanoes!