FIVE VOLCANOES BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Gorilla Trekking Essentials

The practical guide to permits, preparation, packing, fitness, trek-day support, gorilla etiquette, photography and tipping.

CALM PREPARATION. MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTER.

A concise companion to the complete pre-trek guide

What matters most at a glance

Gorilla trekking is a protected wildlife encounter, not a staged attraction. The system is designed to make the experience possible while safeguarding the gorillas and supporting nearby communities.

MAX 8	1 HOUR	15 YEARS	7 METRES
VISITORS PER FAMILY	VIEWING TIME	MINIMUM AGE	DISTANCE WHERE POSSIBLE



What the official permit provides

- Official access on your confirmed, date-specific trekking day.
- Ranger and tracker support, a maximum of eight visitors per gorilla family and one hour with the gorillas.
- Funding for conservation, ranger teams, veterinary care, habitat protection and community revenue sharing.

Will I see the gorillas?

Trackers follow the families from early morning, so sightings are extremely likely. This remains a wild encounter: trek length, terrain, visibility and proximity vary, and no particular family or photograph can be guaranteed.

Why Rwanda feels manageable

Kigali to Volcanoes National Park is usually around 2.5 hours by road. Five Volcanoes is approximately 15 minutes from park headquarters, allowing a calmer morning and coordinated permit, transfer and trek preparation through one team.

Build the journey around the permit

The Gorilla Permit is usually the most fixed part of the trip. Confirm the trekking date first, then shape accommodation and transfers around it.

To arrange your Permit

- Confirm the preferred trekking date and every participant's full passport details.
- Provide the required prepayment through the official booking process.
- Remember that Permits are limited, date-specific and subject to official conditions for changes.
- Book early when travelling from June to September or over festive periods.

What is separate from the Permit

- Accommodation and meals.
- Kigali, airport and trek-day transportation.
- Porter hire, gratuities and any sedan-chair arrangement.
- Optional activities such as Golden Monkey Trekking.
- Gaiters and walking sticks are provided by Five Volcanoes at no cost.



How many nights?

2 nights | Compact

Arrival, trek the next day and departure soon afterwards. Possible when time is tight, but with little buffer or recovery time.

3 nights | Recommended

Time to arrive calmly, trek without rushing and recover or add Golden Monkey Trekking. This is the best balance for most first-time guests.

4+ nights | Relaxed

Best for a second trek, extra recovery, families, active travellers 50+ or guests who simply prefer more flexibility.

The night before matters

Arrive, rest, receive the pre-trek briefing and avoid beginning an important day tired or under pressure.

Wear what works in a wet, changing forest

Grip, protection and comfort matter more than brand or appearance. Use clothing and footwear you already trust.

Must bring



- Waterproof hiking boots with reliable grip and, ideally, ankle support.
- Long trousers in darker, neutral colours such as khaki, olive, grey or brown.
- Lightweight long-sleeved layers; avoid bulky or delicate clothing.
- Light gardening or hiking gloves for bamboo, nettles and thorny vegetation.
- Long hiking socks, refillable water bottle and a small daypack.
- Light rain protection, sunscreen and insect repellent.
- USD cash in small denominations for porter fees and gratuities.

Provided by Five Volcanoes

- Gaiters for mud and wet vegetation.
- Walking sticks for added stability.
- Pre-trek briefing and practical clothing guidance.

Keep the pack light

A phone or familiar camera, spare battery and one versatile lens are usually enough. Avoid large camera bags, excessive equipment, heavy trekking gear and light-coloured clothing that shows mud immediately.

Honest preparation makes the trek more possible

Trek difficulty varies with the gorillas' location, mud, gradient and distance. It should not be described as easy for everyone, but the day can be prepared around the right support.





Tell us early

- Age, regular walking ability and general fitness.
- Knee, balance, stamina, breathing or mobility concerns.
- Recent surgery, asthma, immune suppression or other relevant health matters.
- The altitude from which you are arriving.

Support on the day

- Fitness information is shared in advance to assist the park team with group allocation.
- A porter is strongly recommended, even for reasonably fit guests.
- Porters carry your bag and provide a steady hand on steep, slippery or muddy sections.
- A sedan chair can be arranged in advance for more significant mobility concerns.

The right mindset

The trek is not a competition. The goal is to experience the gorillas safely and fully. Asking for help does not diminish the experience; for many guests, it is what makes the experience possible and enjoyable.

A structured morning, step by step

The day begins early, but every stage is coordinated - from breakfast and briefing to the assigned trailhead and return to the lodge.

05:50-06:00	Early breakfast at Five Volcanoes.
After breakfast	Private transfer to Volcanoes National Park headquarters.
Briefing	Tea or coffee, official rules, fitness-based group assignment and gorilla-family allocation.
Trailhead	Your driver continues to the assigned starting point; porters are hired here.
In the forest	Follow the ranger, move calmly and expect changing terrain and duration.
Afterwards	Return for lunch, local tea and a complimentary post-trek foot massage.

When you are near the gorillas

Stay calm and follow the ranger. Keep voices low and avoid sudden movement.
Keep about 7 metres away whenever possible. If a gorilla approaches, do not run. Stand still, look away and follow instructions.
Wear the required mask. Do not trek if you have a cold, flu, fever or another contagious illness.
No flash photography. If you cough, cover your mouth and turn away from the gorillas.
Remember: this is a genuine wildlife encounter, and ranger guidance always takes priority.

A practical gratuity guide

Tipping is discretionary, but it is customary and deeply appreciated. Bring clean USD notes in small denominations so each payment is easy to manage.

PORTER	**USD 20** base fee	**+ USD 10-15** suggested gratuity
GUIDE / RANGER	**USD 15-20** per guest	
TRACKER	**USD 5-10** per guest	
TREK-DAY DRIVER	**USD 10-15** per vehicle / service	
SEDAN-CHAIR TEAM	**ABOUT USD 300** total gratuity	**Give to head porter** to divide among the team

Hotel staff and longer journeys

The full guide does not set a fixed amount for the hotel team or for multi-day drivers. For hotel staff, a shared staff tip can be left at reception at the end of the stay. For a driver accompanying you over several days, base the gratuity on service, duration and your satisfaction. Our team can provide a current, personalised suggestion during your stay.

Stay present, travel light and prepare early

The forest is often darker, denser and less predictable than photographs suggest. Familiar equipment and sound health preparation matter more than perfection.





Photography essentials

- A smartphone can be completely sufficient.
- Useful lenses: 70-200mm for versatility; 24-70mm if gorillas come closer; a 55mm or 85mm prime for lower light.
- Starting point: ISO 800-1600, wide aperture, around 1/500 sec and continuous autofocus.
- Keep flash switched off and avoid carrying more equipment than you can manage comfortably.

Health essentials

- Consult your doctor or travel clinic about malaria, vaccinations and your complete itinerary.
- Yellow-fever requirements depend on where you arrive from or have recently travelled through.
- Arrange comprehensive travel insurance, including medical evacuation.
- Discuss asthma, recent surgery, immune-suppressing medication or other relevant conditions early.
- Do not trek with contagious symptoms; this protects the gorillas.

Medical advice

Five Volcanoes can explain trek conditions and support options, but medical recommendations must come from your doctor or travel-health clinic. Entry and vaccination requirements should be reconfirmed shortly before travel.

Rwanda is a year-round destination

There is no perfect month. The best choice depends on your comfort with mud, your preferred travel rhythm and how early you can secure the Permit.

Drier periods | Jan-Feb & Jun-Sep

Trails are often less muddy and visibility may feel easier. June to September is the main peak season, so rooms and Permits should be arranged early.

Greener periods | Mar-May & Oct-Nov

Expect a lusher forest, potentially muddier trails and often fewer guests. Rain can occur in every month, including the drier periods.





A well-paced combination

For most first-time visitors, three nights works particularly well: arrival and preparation, Gorilla Trekking, then recovery or a second experience. Golden Monkey Trekking is lighter in feel and makes a natural companion activity.

Low-season discount routes

RDB may publish conditional lower-season Gorilla Permit offers linked to qualifying stays and paid activities in Akagera and/or Nyungwe. These are not general discounts. Always check the current official conditions, eligibility, required receipts and Permit limits before planning around them.

FINAL CHECK

Your last 24 hours before the trek

- Passport and Permit details are correct; collection and departure times are confirmed.
- The lodge knows your fitness, mobility and health considerations.
- Boots, long trousers, long sleeves, gloves and rain layer are ready.
- Camera flash is disabled; batteries are charged.
- Small USD notes are separated for porter fees and gratuities.
- You are free from cold, flu, fever or other contagious symptoms.
- You have rested, hydrated and kept the daypack light.

We are here to help.

Five Volcanoes Boutique Hotel is approximately 15 minutes from Volcanoes National Park headquarters. Our team coordinates the preparation before the trek and welcomes you back afterwards for lunch, local tea and a complimentary foot massage.

bookings@fivevolcanoesrwanda.com **www.fivevolcanoesrwanda.com**