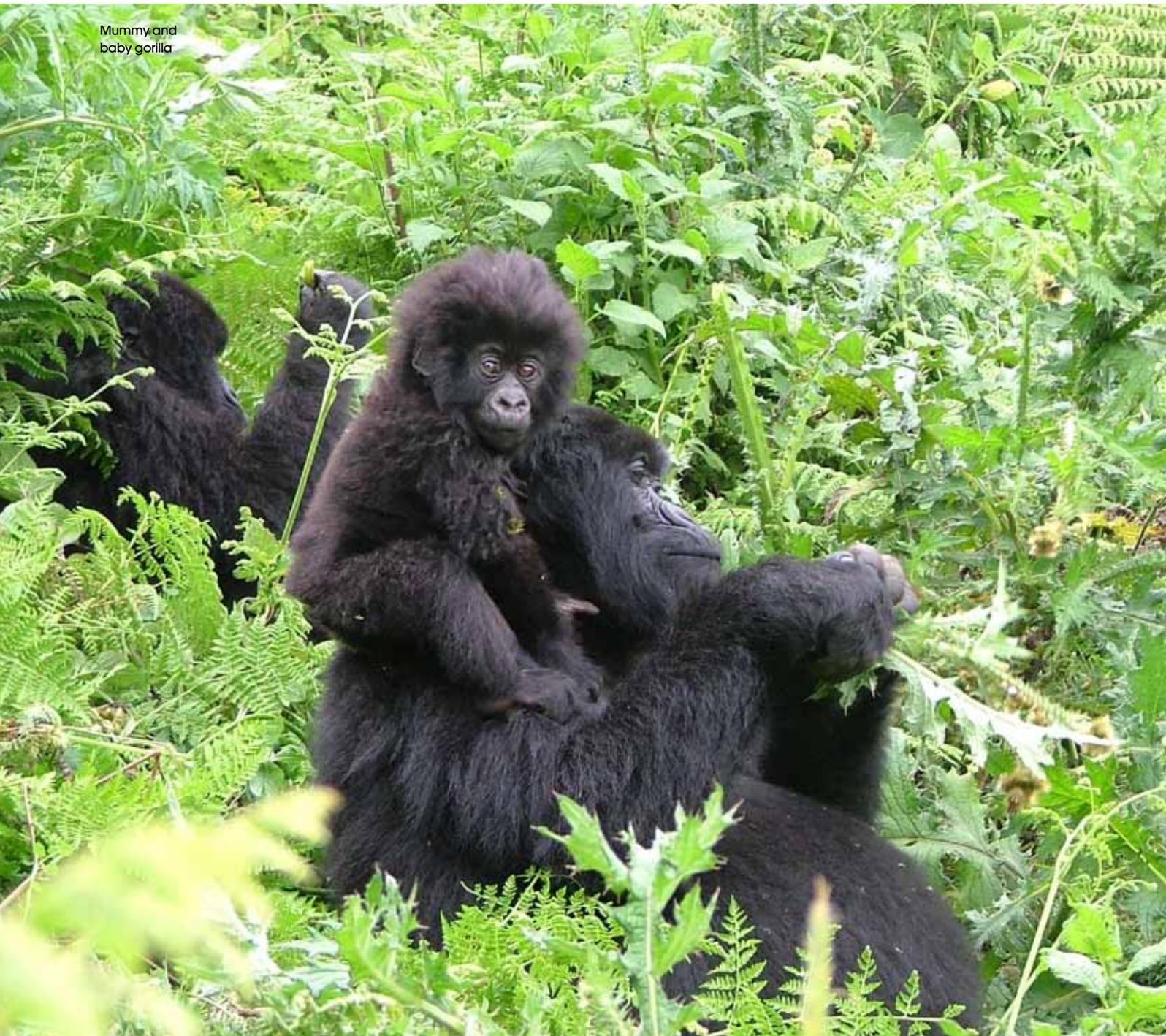


# FROM SUFFOLK TO RWANDA AND UGANDA

*Julie Croucher from Travel With Jules goes  
gorilla trekking in Rwanda and Uganda*

Mummy and  
baby gorilla



**M**y clothes were stuck to me and I was tired from crawling for ages on hands and knees through the undergrowth (there are no roads in the rainforest!)

“Realising that I was extremely unfit and embarrassed that the porters had to keep helping me along, I wondered why I was paying to be struggling up a mountain in central Africa!

“Then, round the next corner, the guides signalled to us to stop and stay quiet. Through the bushes I heard a grunt and something moved. Just a few feet away was the most magnificent creature I had ever seen. A huge silverback Gorilla lay on his tummy resting his chin on his hands in a human-like pose with his gentle eyes watching us.

“From somewhere beyond him a few screeches and crashing branches announced the arrival of black balls of fluff cavorting at top speed towards the big daddy, who tolerated their bouncing and chasing in the way of a wise old grandpa watching the children at play!

“We forgot the pain and the dirt of the climb and sat enthralled observing family life of one of the world’s most endangered species, the Mountain Gorilla.”

This was from my diary notes back in the late 1990s (during my time as a tour leader in East Africa), the first time I was privileged enough to see these incredible creatures. Everyone remembers David Attenborough sitting with the gorillas whispering in the giant thistles on his Life on Earth programme and it truly is like that!



TOP: Kingfisher  
BELOW LEFT:  
Silverback Gorilla  
BELOW RIGHT:  
Volcanoes

To experience the mountains where Dian Fossey carried out her pioneering research (featured in the book and film Gorillas in the Mist) and to meet these wonderful, gentle animals is a great privilege, and rightly is on a lot of peoples travel bucket list. I have been back to Rwanda in recent years, and the Gorilla trek gets harder each time (or I’m older...probably more likely!).

Your gorilla trekking day starts very early as it takes a while to organise teams, porters, and permits and the idea is to find the gorillas before they move off for a day foraging. Once you enter the park, your guides are in touch by radio with the rangers who always go ahead and locate the groups at sunrise each day. There are no paths or signposts and gorillas have a habit of charging off through twenty foot thistles or up and down steep slopes, so you need to be prepared for a lot of ‘up and down’ before you find them!

The trek can take anything from five minutes to nine hours. Once you find them you have one

hour in their company (which is rightly strictly adhered to). Returning to the base you will be presented with a certificate to confirm your achievement.

There are also other mountain treks if you are staying longer in the region and the Golden Monkey trek (cute little things). I have also visited Nyungwe Forest in the south where you can trek to find Chimpanzees. Rwanda and Uganda are also fabulous destinations for birdwatching. I spent many happy hours in the forests of Uganda with my binoculars!

Other fond memories I have of the area around the Virunga mountains in both Rwanda and Uganda, include the friendly people we met as we trudged through their fields and villages, usually followed by a procession of inquisitive children!

Back in my days as a tour leader, I shopped in the small villages in the foothills of the Virungas and got to know the people of this stunning rainforest region; colourful clothes and tropical fruits share market stalls with handmade pots and pans and very basic butchers shops. Did you know Uganda grows more banana species than any other country in the world? Pretty much everything from chips to wine is processed from bananas!

Rwanda is a truly beautiful country and I strongly recommend a visit there, not just for the once in a lifetime experience of looking a Mountain Gorilla in the eye, but to see what a forward thinking, clean and friendly country it is. The ‘land of a thousand hills’ will truly capture your heart! **I**

If you would like to trek gorillas in Africa then get in touch for first-hand experience to book your safari bucket list holiday. Julie Croucher is the owner of Travel With Jules based in Easton, Suffolk. She is a specialist in travel to India. Tel: 01728 748209. [travelwithjules.co.uk](http://travelwithjules.co.uk)

