

FIVE DAYS & FOUR NIGHTS

WITH
BEYOND THE GORILLAS EXPERIENCE

★★★★★

GEORGE BAGUMA

“

Adventure is the bridge between dreams and reality.”

Anonymous

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INTRODUCTION

FIVE DAYS OF EPIC ADVENTURE



Rwanda's landscapes are a tapestry of towering peaks, shimmering lakes, and vibrant communities. This booklet chronicles a tour organized by Beyond the Gorillas Experience (BGE), taking readers through some of the most beautiful parts of the Land of 1,000 Hills. From the summit of Mount Kabuye to the tranquil fishing camps along the shoreline of Lake Kivu, the expedition was simply captivating.

One page after another, you will encounter breathtaking scenery, experience life in rural Rwanda, and witness the spirit of Rwandans in its purest form. Whether you are a seasoned traveler or a curious explorer, I invite you to connect with nature, culture, and the people that make Rwanda truly remarkable.

DAY I

MOUNT KABUYE HIKE



Standing at 2,700 meters (8,858 feet) above sea level, Mount Kabuye is the third-highest peak in Rwanda outside the Volcanoes National Park. Nestled in the country's northern highlands, this imposing elevation dominates the landscape.

Our journey began at BGE's Gakenke branch, approximately 1,600 meters (5,249 feet) above sea level. Step by step, we climbed higher—burning calories, connecting with nature, and immersing ourselves in the rhythm of rural Rwandan life.

After an hour of steady ascent, we took our first break. As we comfortably sat on benches provided by BGE, we marveled at the panoramic views of the green swathes of land. From that vantage point, the Kigali–Musanze highway snaked through the hills below, resembling the winding path of the Nyabarongo River.



Two more breaks followed before we made the final push to the summit. During each breather, we were served water and organic energizers. Apart from the benches mentioned earlier, BGE folks have set up trash bins and decent toilets along the trail.

One step after another, we rambled our way upward, weaving through scattered settlements and farms. The full trail spans a distance of about 9 kilometers.

The final 100 meters are more physically taxing, but not strenuous. Overall, I'd rate the hike as moderately challenging. Yes, you can conquer Mount Kabuye even if your level of fitness is below superb.

When we made it to the top, I wandered around the crest, letting the eucalyptus-scented breeze invigorate my senses. At some point, I paused to soak up the view of the twin lakes shimmering in the distance. Farther ahead, I caught a fleeting glimpse of Muhabura, Gahinga, and Sabyinyo—just before they ducked behind a thick cloud.

As dusk settled, the highlands slowly dimmed under a blanket of twilight, and the horizon glowed with shades of gold and purple. The world below felt far away—villages turned into tiny clusters of flickering lights, while the sky above revealed a dazzling sweep of stars. Sitting by the campfire with fellow hikers, I realized that Mount Kabuye is more than just a climb; it is an invitation to slow down, reconnect, and witness Rwanda's beauty from a perspective few ever experience.

MOUNT KABUYE CAMPING EXPERIENCE



After a refreshing bath, I joined fellow campers around the campfire. We began with appetizers before indulging in a heart course, paired with a selection of beverages.

Dining at Mount Kabuye Campsite feels like a feast in the clouds. Here, guests swap the ordinary campsite snacks for healthy meals prepared using ingredients sourced from surrounding farms. Imagine savoring a warm, carefully plated dinner in the sky, or enjoying breakfast while morning mist drifts over the twin lakes below. At this campsite, dining becomes more than a necessity—it's an elevated experience where culinary delights meet breathtaking panoramas, turning every meal into a memory.

As the campfire crackled, we shared stories that stretched from lighthearted laughter to thoughtful reflections. With no Wi-Fi on the mountain, we discovered a better kind of connection—one built on warmth, conversation, and the shared wonder of being fully present under a sky full of stars.

DAY II

TREKKING TO LAKE RUHONDO



After a peaceful night on top of Mount Kabuye, we laced up our boots and set off toward Lake Ruhondo. The 11-kilometer trail snakes through parts of Gakenke, Burera, and Musanze. Long distance notwithstanding, this path is relatively easy to navigate.

The trail is remarkably scenic, offering constant reminders of the area's natural splendor. Along the way, we were treated to sweeping views of the towering volcanoes, shimmering lakes, Mount Mbwe, and the Gashaki Peninsula—all unfolding like a living canvas. Blending physical challenge with awe-inspiring panoramas, this journey leaves an indelible mark on anyone exploring this corner of Rwanda.

Villages dotted along the route brought the human side of the landscape to life. Children waved enthusiastically while farmers paused to answer our questions and share insights into their way of life. These encounters reminded us that the trail is not only about reaching a destination, but also about meaningful connections.

ESCAPING TO PEACE HAVEN ISLAND



When we reached Lake Ruhondo, we boarded a boat and glided across the gentle waves to Peace Haven Island. True to its name, the island is a serene sanctuary, a perfect escape after two days of vigorous hiking. A boat ride on Lake Ruhondo is nothing short of exhilarating. Cool breezes sweep across the water as volcanoes rise in the distance, setting the perfect tone for the atmosphere that awaits on the island.

Speaking of the island, this piece of paradise is truly heavenly. The tranquility and peace of mind experienced here allowed us to recharge our bodies and minds before the challenging climb up Bisoke Volcano, scheduled for Day III of this unforgettable expedition.

When I unzipped my tent in the morning, I was awestruck by the beauty of the lake, neighboring islands, and the surrounding rolling hills. After a warm bath, I lingered for a while, soaking in the allure of the magical creation. As breakfast was served, a chorus of birdsong filled the air, each call weaving into the serene rhythm of the morning.

DAY III

VISITING VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK



We left Peace Haven Island with a renewed sense of energy and vitality—strength we knew we would desperately need for what lay ahead. Day 4 brought us face-to-face with the most demanding hike of the journey: the ascent of Mount Bisoke, one of the five majestic volcanoes lined up along Rwanda’s northwestern border. Bisoke is also part of the Virunga Massif chain, which comprises eight volcanoes.

Rising to 3,711 meters (12,175 feet) above sea level, Bisoke stands as the third-highest among the cluster of peaks straddling the boundary line. The climb was no small feat. It took us close to three hours to get to the summit.

Up there, however, every ounce of effort proved worthwhile. Before us lay the crater lake, a natural wonder shrouded in mystery and magic. Its calm, glassy surface seemed almost otherworldly, inviting quiet reflection. For an hour, we sat at the rim—gazing at the view, pondering its secrets, and sharing a makeshift picnic amid the clouds.

VOLCANO VIEW CAMPSITE



After the physically taxing Mount Bisoke challenge, our weary bodies found refuge at Volcano View Campsite. Nestled at the foot of the volcanoes and perched on the very edge of Volcanoes National Park, the campsite feels like a haven woven seamlessly into the landscape. Here, morning mist drifts lazily through lush vegetation, while birdsong and the soft rustle of leaves provide a soundtrack only nature could compose.

It was at this serene spot that we spent the third night of our tour. Managed by BGE, the campsite combines rustic charm with thoughtful hospitality. The tents, fitted with comfortable mattresses and warm bedding, offered a level of coziness that felt almost indulgent after the day's strenuous hike. I barely remember laying my head on the pillow before slipping into the deepest, most restorative slumber.

Volcano View Campsite doubles as a convenient base camp, where mountaineers can acclimatize and rent proper hiking gear before setting out to conquer the volcanoes. An overnight stay here is highly recommended before venturing into the park.

DAY IV

TEA EXPERIENCE



On Day IV, we bid farewell to Volcano View Campsite and set off toward the northern tip of Lake Kivu. Along the way, we made an unscripted but unforgettable stop in Jenda Sector, Nyabihu District, for a tea experience. Here, amidst the rolling green plantations, we traced the origins of the world's second-most consumed beverage. We learned the art of plucking tea leaves and engaged with local plantation workers, gaining insight into their daily routines and the care that goes into every cup.

This impromptu stopover offered a deeper connection with the land and the people who cultivate this iconic crop, making the journey to Rubavu even more enriching.

Our 'tea break' in Jenda refreshed our senses and curiosity, setting the tone for the adventures that awaited us in Rubavu and along the serene shores of Lake Kivu.

TOUR OF DOWNTOWN RUBAVU



When we finally arrived in Rubavu, the city welcomed us with its lively energy. We took time to spin through its bustling streets, weaving past the vibrant commercial areas and the lively market, where the sounds and aromas reflected the heartbeat of daily life. Our route curved past the two border posts linking Rubavu with Goma, the capital of North Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo—a reminder of how interconnected these two cities are despite the boundary that separates them.

From there, we drifted down to the beach, where the gentle waves of Lake Kivu lapped against the shore. The lakeside breeze carried a sense of calm, making it the perfect backdrop for a leisurely lunch. With appetites satisfied and spirits restored, we proceeded to Labella Resort, our home for the fourth night.

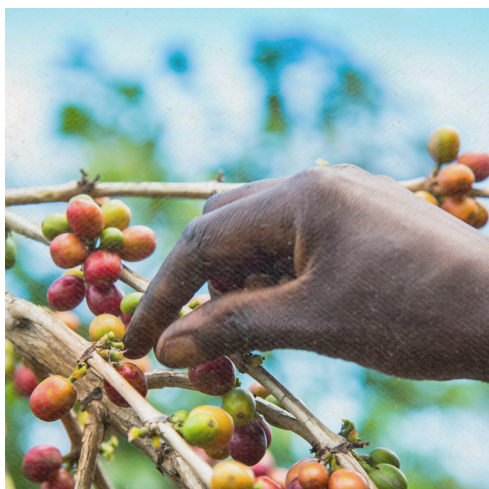
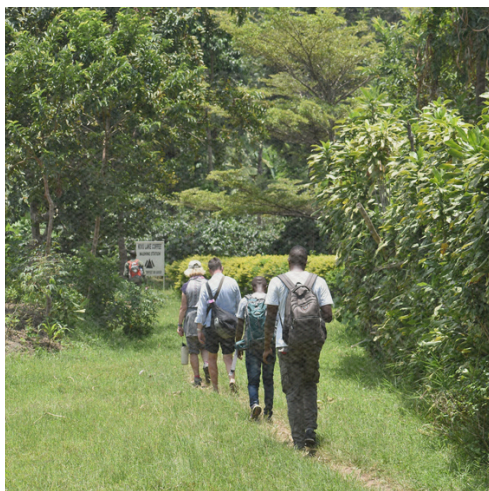
DAY V

ALONG THE CONGO NILE TRAIL



Day V marked the final leg of my journey with the group. While my fellow trekkers would push on for two more days, I had to return to Kigali to prepare for another expedition. Before shifting my attention to the next tour, I finished this one with a bang, rambling from Nyamyumba Beach in Rubavu to the tranquil village of Cyimbiri in Rutsiro District. I had done a lot of walking over the previous four days, but what was left in the tank was enough to cover 20 more kilometers comfortably.

Along the way, our trek became more than just a march through the countryside. We connected with locals, exchanged smiles and stories, and felt the rhythm of their daily lives. Each encounter carried its own unique energy—fishermen mending their nets, farmers tending to their coffee trees, and artisans crafting bricks from clay. We paused often, learning about the livelihoods that sustain the communities here: fishing, coffee cultivation and processing, and the intricate craftwork that supports local life.



The Congo Nile Trail itself is a marvel—stretching over 200 kilometers from Rubavu to Rusizi, through Rutsiro, Karongi, and Nyamashuke. Winding gracefully along Lake Kivu’s breathtaking shoreline, the trail is a magnet for adventurous souls eager to uncover the hidden gems of the magical Kivu Belt. Ever wondered why it’s called the Congo Nile Trail? It winds along the watershed that separates the drainage basins of Africa’s most legendary rivers: the Congo and the Nile.

Though my trek ended at Cyimbiri, the memories and impressions remain vivid. The Congo Nile Trail isn’t just a path through Rwanda’s western highlands—it’s an invitation to connect, to learn, and to carry a piece of the Kivu spirit wherever your journey takes you next.

After sharing lunch with the team at Cyimbiri Guest House, I bid them farewell and slung my backpack over my shoulders. From the village, I had a bumpy taxi-moto ride to the Kivu Belt Road, where the rough tracks gave way to a smooth tarmac. Then my rider twisted the throttle to the Rubavu–Kigali highway. Shortly thereafter, I boarded a Kigali-bound bus.



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