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AFRICA
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AVIATION & TOURISM: CLEAR SKIES OR TURBULENCE AHEAD?

PLUS:

WILL OPEN SKIES REALLY BENEFIT AFRICA?
GROUND HANDLING IN AFRICA: A FRAGMENTED INDUSTRY?
FASTJET: MAKING FAST MOVES TO FACILITATE OPEN SKIES?
GROWING AFRICA'S DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM
TOP 10 LEAST VISITED COUNTRIES IN AFRICA
EXPERIENCE THE WILD SIDE OF AFRICA
THE BATWA PYGMY PEOPLE OF BWINDI



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expert contributors



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Kate is a travel journalist who travels the globe in search of vivid imagery and compelling stories that capture the essence of the places she visits. Born out of a life-long love of travel and fascination with the world around her, is Kate's inspiration behind her work. Africa is a continent that has captured Kate's heart, drawing her back time and time again. When she's not bouncing around the world on ramshackle buses, overcrowded trains, or on the back of a rickshaw, you can find her based in the Gold Coast, Australia eagerly planning her next adventure.



MARTIN CHEMHERE

Martin is a South Africa based Zimbabwe born Journalist, Media Consultant, Arts Writer & Critic with many years' experience working in Zimbabwe, South Africa and across the African continent. Most recently he worked in aviation and in his early professional career in travel and tourism. He is the founder of Tipindewo Afrika Media, a Johannesburg based new entry in the arts, events, media consultancy and entertainment production space.



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Renate is an avid freelance travel writer and photographer based in New Jersey, USA. Travel and adventure have been an intrinsic part of her life. Renate has lived in Venezuela, Germany, Mexico, Japan, Switzerland and the United States, and has visited 54 plus countries. Every year, she and her husband add new exciting destinations to their list, such as Cuba in 2016 and Namibia in 2017. Fluent in English, Spanish and German. She loves travelling and enjoys good food and wine. Renate Strub is a member of the International Travel Writers and Photographers Alliance and present on Facebook and Instagram.



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Urban is a freelance writer and non-fiction author based in southern Sweden and in southern Spain. He has worked as a news reporter for newspapers and the Swedish news agency for a decade. The last ten years he's been a freelance writer for magazines and newspapers throughout Scandinavia, England, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Romania, Singapore and Poland. Major topics are travel, food, interior design and lifestyle. Urban has also written ten non-fiction coffee-table books about different topics.

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THE BATWA PYGMY PEOPLE OF BWINDI

Uganda's Bwindi National Park is home to some of the world's last mountain gorillas and once was home to the Batwa People – the original People of the Rainforest. **KATE WEBSTER** treks into the forest to spend time with both gorillas and Batwa People.

I reached Bwindi National Park at dusk, a journey that took many hours along the dusty, rough roads of Uganda. The drive was scenic, winding through villages of mud huts mixed with the occasional splash of coloured door, to rolling hills of tea plantations.

Nearing the national park, the villages became more sparsely scattered amongst the hills and the roads turned more treacherous. The temperature had dropped as we climbed higher into the mountains.

Arriving at Chameleon Hill Lodge in the dying light, I was in awe at the view. The lodge sits perched on the hill overlooking Lake Mutanda with the Virunga Volcanoes as a magnificent backdrop. The mist clung to the lake and surrounding mountains as I stared out at the view – the 'Gorillas in The Mist', I recently watched made complete sense. I couldn't help but think about the journey that lay ahead of me. It had been a long day travelling, and

with the early morning start, it was early to bed.

Waking at sunrise, I was already packed from the night before in anticipation of the early start. In daylight, the Chameleon Hill Lodge revealed its true colours. Literally – the flamboyant, colourful and vibrant lodge was quite the unique place to rest one's weary head. Individual chalets lined down the hill and flaunted their own identity and colour scheme with high quality, hand-made furnishings that boasted a unique Euro-African style.

The friendly staff set me on my way with a packed lunch, and it was time for the hour-drive deeper into the National Park. Once at the departure point, I was met with a team of trackers and porters before being briefed on the trek. A permit for gorilla trekking will set you back USD\$600, and a porter USD\$15. I was soon to learn the USD\$15 for the porter was money best spent.

Located in southwestern Uganda in the

Kanungu District, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is one of the world's largest primeval forests. Bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Virunga Volcanoes, Bwindi is one of the most biologically diverse areas on Earth and has been recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its biological significance.

I am told by my driver Moses, the name "Bwindi" was derived from the Runyakitara language, meaning "impenetrable". To hear that word impenetrable forest conjures up images of a dense undergrowth, a kaleidoscope of greens, vines and vegetation intertwined so dense it takes a machete to cut a path through. This is exactly what met me at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda, as I embarked on a six-hour trek in search of the region's infamous mountain gorillas and the Batwa pygmies who once shared the forest with them.

These mountain gorillas are only found in this region of the world, so I felt privi-



leged to be spending time with them in their natural environment. The family I spent time with is called the Bweza family and consist of 12 gorillas in total. While not all 12 were present, I turned my attention to the left of me, where I spotted two silverbacks. They were well hidden in the foliage, content on laying back, legs sprawled as they relaxed in the nest they had made from the ground creeping vines. They seemed so at home in this forest of theirs.

Until recently, Bwindi's mountain gorillas shared their forest with the Batwa People – the original People of the Rainfor-

est. Also known as Batwa pygmies, they are a tribe of hunter-gatherers who lived in its caves and trees for more than 4,000 years. There was no farming, there was no destruction of the forest, no charcoal making, their shelters did not disturb the environment, they lived in harmony with their beloved forests, wildlife including the Mountain Gorillas and left a low ecological footprint behind them.

Although they never hunted the gorillas, the Batwa's proximity increased the risk of infection to animals and when the National Park was gazetted in 1991, the

Batwa were evicted from the forest to protect the primates. They had become conservation refugees. With no land rights or compensation, they were left to fend for themselves, living in a society that stigmatised them and for which they were totally unprepared. They are now one of the most endangered group of people in the world.

My encounter with the Batwa Pygmies was a colourful and musical event. Having hiked down from the forest, to be greeted by four elders and ushered towards the rest of the group was a welcoming experience. I personally felt



uncomfortable calling them pygmies, even though they use the term themselves. Yes, they were smaller than myself and I am vertically challenged at just 5 foot 4.

It did not take long before the singing and dancing commenced, the older women taking centre stage at the front as they soaked up the adoration of their audience.

I got the feeling they were enjoying themselves, as evident in the faces in

front of me that radiated sheer joy during their dancing display, full of jumps and rhythmic stomping, passionate, energetic and energising. This was not a tacky tourist sideshow, as I later learnt the importance of the dancing for Batwa children, most of whom have never set foot in their ancestors' forest homeland. The elders demonstrate their traditions, hoping they will be preserved in childhood memory.

In order to preserve the culture of the

Batwa people as they are adapting to their new way of life, tourism is playing its part. For those trekkers who come to see the mountain gorillas, spending time with those who once shared their rainforest is equally as important.

I purchased a hand-carved gorilla from one of the Batwa elders, a symbolic reminder that these gentle, wonderful people and the gorillas are both as important as each other to preserve for generations to come. 🐼