Eagle-Eye Tours



Why Visit Africa (… nowadays)?

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Africa, we are told, is our original home. It appears that fully modern humans evolved on the land mass we now call the continent of Africa. We were so successful there that we had to walk out, invent the wheel, build boats and make money; feats which would encourage us to try to subjugate the entire planet! Whatever the truth of the matter, Africa exerts a compelling pull on the imagination even of the most modern of humans. None more so it seems than upon those naturalists living overseas, outside her borders. One might say that a nature lover's life has not been fully lived unless a "pilgrimage" home to Africa has been made. An exaggeration perhaps, nevertheless it should be stressed that those who are able owe it to themselves to make one journey, at least, to the mother continent of Africa.



Olduvai Gorge is an archaeological site in Tanzania, where some of the oldest examples of humans have been found

Nowadays in many ways, tropical Africa, the land south of the Sahara, is almost an "island-continent", and it surely is the continent least modified by modern industrial civilization. Consequently, it remains the "**Mecca of Large Mammal Diversity**" on this our planet Earth. Elephants, giraffes, lions, rhinos, hippos and so many other great creatures ensure that this continent feels truly exceptional.



Rhino, elephant and Zebra in the Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

The zoogeographical realm referred to as the Afrotropics customarily includes all those lands to the south of the Sahara Desert. In addition, the isolated islands of the western Indian Ocean, including Madagascar, are often included in our understanding of Africa. Here however we shall focus on continental sub-Saharan Africa. For most of us, i.e. those naturalists who arrive by air from overseas, visits to the continent of Africa may become addictive. To quote more than one experienced nature traveller “It simply gets under your skin”. Because in addition to the unrivalled, and utterly incomparable, **African megafauna**, that is known to almost everyone on these electrical screens of our technologically sophisticated existence, there are many lesser known jewels. Gems that stud the crown of the Queen of Earthly Nature. Africa is a very old continent. Worn down over aeons her bulk is an elevated plateau planed down from the core of the supra-continental Pangaea and thence Gondwanaland. Along her eastern flanks are impressive mountain ranges. Aligned along the **Great Rift**, a tear in the planet's surface, that gives rise to some dramatic features, visible from far out in space, including volcanoes such as Kilimanjaro, the world’s tallest free standing mountain. Cold heights where glaciers still form, even now, even here, along an imaginary midway line between the poles, on the equator.



Giraffes with Mount Kilimanjaro in background

Below the ice fields the mountains support Afromontane alpine, and evergreen floral communities, of juniper, podocarps, hagenia and even of bamboo. Relics of pluvial periods, in climates of long ago, these forests remain havens of moisture, highland pockets that have survived the vicissitudes of climate change. They are home, and continue to nurture, a diversity of strange creatures some world famous, such as the chameleons. These Eastern mountains have become biological “islands in the sky” and their enduring verdant moisture is in marked contrast with the predominantly red and ochre colours of the smooth savanna lands below them. Vaulting out of the grassy savanna plains, far from these mountains of the eastern arc, out across the African plateau, rise isolated inselbergs. Rounded crystalline island mountains, steeply-cliffed and craggy, they are another remarkable landscape feature for which Africa is renowned. Huge piles of massive granitic boulders endure, especially across the eastern and southern savannas. These are last remnants of former mountain ranges - kopjes to use their Afrikaner name. One especially rich chain of mountains, which largely separates the great equatorial forests of the Congo of Central Africa from the influences coming

from the East, is still referred to by zoologists as the Albertine Rift. Here there be **Gorillas** - a primate species that is nowadays like no other. And from these mountains, spreading west across those forests of the Congo basin and into the great bulge of Western Africa are **chimpanzee** species, seemingly our nearest surviving relatives in the universe.



Gorilla in Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda

However for many of us it is the **birds** that make Africa such a compelling destination. North America is the continent of human innovation, Asia is the continent of cultures and South America is the bird continent. The undeniable centre of avian evolution on our planet. Nevertheless, it is in Africa where a majority of birds live unmolested lives, almost oblivious to human presence. Consequently, it is in Africa that they are easiest to observe. Nothing compares to the feathered pageant that one can witness, at the right time of year, in the savannas of eastern and southern Africa while on safari. To experience, at close range and in good light, brilliantly coloured tropical birds, in an array of shapes and sizes, unselfconsciously disporting themselves in an open park-like landscape is something which no birder, no naturalist, nor any keen photographer likely will ever forget.



Grey-crowned Cranes, courtship display