

## DRC: VIRUNGA



This Handbook contains everything you need to know about this Secret Compass epic expedition to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Read on to discover our ethos and team-centred approach and for the nitty gritty like flight and visa advice, insurance requirements and kit recommendations. Use the buttons below to ask questions or to apply for this team or, once approved, to secure your spot on the team with a Booking Form and a £400 deposit.

### Key facts

- Arrive: by 1800 on 6 July 2019 into the team hotel in Kigali, Rwanda.
- Depart: leave Kigali any time on the 20 July 2019 onwards.
- Insurance: Ensure you have comprehensive cover.
- Docs: send your flight, insurance and passport copy in.
- Balance due: 90 days before departure on 6 April 2019.
- Find [FAQ](#) and [Testimonials](#) online.

### Overview

#### Aim

Climb the volcanically active Mount Nyiragonga, home to the world's largest lava lake, before searching for mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park. Then trek into the little-visited Rwenzori mountains.

#### Summary

This expedition aims to climb volcanic Mount Nyiragongo within Virunga National Park, sleeping on the crater rim before heading into the forests of the national park in search of the critically endangered mountain gorillas in the company of the dedicated rangers who protect them. The expedition's secondary aim is to trek into the little-visited DRC Rwenzori mountains towards the foot of Mount Stanley, Africa's third highest mountain. This is located amongst the world-renowned Mountains of the Moon, the glaciers of which are a source of the Nile.

## Highlights

- Climb Nyiragongo volcano, overnighing on the crater rim.
- Take a gorilla trek in Virunga National Park.
- Explore the Rwenzoris on the DRC side: the Mountains of the Moon.
- See the world's largest active lava lake.
- Safari in Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park.
- Discover the ecological diversity of Africa's oldest national park.

## To do

### Flights

You need to organise your own international flights to arrive at the team hotel in Kigali by 1800 on 6 July 2019.

It is advised that you book a flexible flight ticket that can be changed or refunded if the expedition dates are changed or if it is cancelled for any reason. See our online [Terms and Conditions](#).

### Visas & Permits

Visas are required for Rwanda, DRC and Uganda and are your responsibility.

Rwanda: You will enter Rwanda twice. British, Australian, German, Israeli, New Zealand, South African, Swedish and US citizens can obtain a single-entry visa on arrival, multiple-entry visas can be applied for in advance at the relevant embassy. Citizens of all other countries should check requirements with the relevant embassy.

DRC: Secret Compass will arrange this visa through the Virunga National Park and send you an application form to complete. The \$105 price is included in your expedition cost. Secret Compass will require a clear copy of your passport information page and a completed application form.

Uganda: Most visas-on-arrival have been replaced with an e-visa which must be applied for in advance of travel. Citizens of all countries should check eligibility with the relevant embassy.

East African Visa: Please do not rely on this visa as there have been incidences of it being refused at border posts.

Yellow Fever: All team members will require an original valid yellow fever certificate, issued more than 10 days before the start of the expedition. WHO advice now states that Yellow Fever Vaccinations are valid for life instead of the original 10 years claimed – please note that this information is not widely known so if necessary you should insist on a medical practitioner issuing a new, valid certificate or extending the expiry on your existing one. Do not accept an exemption certificate as an alternative to a vaccination certificate, as these too are not widely recognised.

Permits: All relevant tourist permits will be organised by Secret Compass.

### Passports

All expedition members should have valid passports. These should have at least six months' validity remaining from date of entry to Uganda. You should have at least four free pages for immigration stamps. Please send a clear, colour copy of your passport to Secret Compass ahead of the expedition and carry photocopies with you on the expedition in a safe place.

### Insurance

[Travel insurance](#) that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all expeditions. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all

aspects of a remote expedition and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. Secret Compass cannot comment on the suitability of your cover so if you are in any doubt please contact your policy provider and ask them to confirm that you are covered to our minimum standard (below).

- Emergency medical repatriation (to home country) including any associated expenses abroad of at least \$500,000.
- Activities: ensure that any expedition activities are included, these could be trekking, horse riding, rafting, MTB etc.
- Geographical region: check the geographical region you are going to is insured (often the US and Canada or countries such as Afghanistan are not insured).
- Foreign Ministry advice: check your insurance is not sensitive to any travel warnings issued by your respective foreign ministry. In the UK, many insurers will not insure you when the Foreign Office warns against travel to this area. Foreign Office advice will not necessarily mean we cancel an expedition or do not travel to a particular area. Please check @FCOtravel and the [Travel Aware](#) site.
- Dates: make sure the period of cover begins at the departure and ends at the return to your home country. Many flights take a day or two and time zones vary. Insurance companies may prejudice your claims due to this.
- Pre-existing medical conditions: disclose these to your insurance company and to Secret Compass.

Prior to travel Secret Compass will require the name of your insurance policy provider, their 24-hour emergency contact number and your policy number. For full information on travel insurance and links to suggested companies, please visit the [insurance page](#) on our website.

## Itinerary

### Day 1: Jul 6 – Kigali (Rwanda)

Arrive at the FivetoFive hotel in Kigali, Rwanda by 1800 for team dinner and briefing.

### Day 2: Jul 7 – Goma (DRC)

Breakfast at hotel in Kigali before driving to the DRC border at Goma. Visa formalities may take several hours before you enter DRC. 4x4 transfer to a permanent camp in the heart of the National Park.

### Day 3: Jul 8 – Virunga National Park

Day hike to visit the gorillas within Virunga National Park before returning to camp.

### Day 4: Jul 9 – Virunga National Park

Acclimatisation hike up Nyiragongo volcano (3,470m), home to one of only 5 lava lakes in the world of which it is currently the largest. Sleep in basic huts at the summit.

### Day 5: Jul 10 – Virunga National Park

After an early start to catch sunrise from the summit of Nyiragongo descend the volcano and transfer back to camp. Spend the afternoon organising supplies and equipment for the next phase of the expedition.

### Day 6: Jul 11 – Rwenzori Mountains

Internal flight from Goma to Mutwanga, gateway to the DRC Rwenzoris. Spend tonight at the Ranger Post.

### Day 7: Jul 12 – Rwenzori Mountains

After final preparation and meeting your local guides – experienced Virunga Park Rangers, trek to Kalonge Shelter

at 2138m.

#### **Day 8: Jul 13 – Rwenzori Mountains**

Trek to Mahungu Shelter (3310m).

#### **Day 9: Jul 14 – Rwenzori Mountains**

Walk to Kiondo Shelter (4200m).

#### **Day 10: Jul 15 – Rwenzori Mountains**

Rest/contingency day with the option of a short walk to a viewpoint over Mt Stanley and the equatorial glaciers at its summit.

#### **Day 11: Jul 16 – Rwenzori Mountains**

Walk down to Mahungu Shelter (3310m) if not Kalonge Shelter (2138m).

#### **Day 12: Jul 17 – Rwenzori Mountains**

Walk out of the park and back to the Ranges Post at Mutwanga where a small river for swimming and hot showers are a perfect way to relax.

#### **Day 13: Jul 18 – Queen Elizabeth National Park (Uganda)**

Drive from Mutwanga to the Ugandan border. Continue onto Queen Elizabeth National Park and spend the afternoon on safari on the Kazinga Channel.

#### **Day 14: Jul 19 – Kigali (Rwanda)**

Drive back to Kigali for a final meal with the team.

#### **Day 15: Jul 20 – Kigali (Rwanda)**

The expedition officially ends today, team members are free to fly home at any time or extend their trip.

#### **Note on this expedition itinerary**

Please remember that this itinerary acts as a framework plan. It provides guidance as to our intentions but will not be followed religiously, this is an adventure and by definition the outcome is uncertain. The leadership team may flex and change the plan depending on numerous frictions encountered en route. An adaptable, team-centred approach is required.

#### **Plan B**

Should events in the region dictate that this itinerary is no longer possible, Secret Compass will move the expedition location – this decision may be taken prior to departure or at any point during the expedition duration. An interesting and robust, alternative itinerary in Rwanda and Uganda has been developed to showcase the diverse nature of the region including volcanic summits in Volcanoes National Park, gorilla trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and trekking through the Rwenzori mountains. For more information on this alternate itinerary, please contact Secret Compass.

#### **Prepare**

## **Fitness**

All our expeditions are achievable by people with an active and healthy lifestyle. However, this is an arduous expedition that will test you and at times you may be sore, tired, hungry and possibly wet! You must be prepared physically and mentally for the expedition and for living in basic conditions for the duration. Please ensure that you train for the expedition and arrive fit and ready to go. You will be required to be fit enough for the following.

- Grade: 270 degrees.
- Daily activity: varies but up to approx. 10 hours per day.
- Walk: up to 25km a day.
- Carry: up to 20kg.
- Terrain: cope with rough, rocky, wet, slippery, mountainous and steep terrain at altitudes up to 4,600m.
- Climate: deal with an exposed yet temperate climate.

## **Previous experience**

No previous experience is necessary to join this expedition but at a basic level, team members should be comfortable jogging for at least 45 minutes and be able to walk for eight hours per day for three consecutive days in the British hills (or equivalent) carrying 25kg.

## **Medical**

Vaccinations. Please seek advice from your health professional on recommended vaccinations. The NHS [Fit For Travel](#) site and [Travel Health Pro](#) are both useful.

There is a high risk of malaria so you should seek advice on appropriate medication.

All team members will require an original valid yellow fever certificate, issued more than 10 days before the start of the expedition. WHO advice now states that Yellow Fever Vaccinations are valid for life instead of the original 10 years claimed – please note that this information is not widely known so if necessary you should insist on a medical practitioner issuing a new, valid certificate or extending the expiry on your existing one. Do not accept an exemption certificate as an alternative to a vaccination certificate, as these too are not widely recognised.

Dental. It is strongly recommended that you have a dental check up prior to departure. Dental problems far from help are very unpleasant.

## **Money**

Rwanda. Bring US Dollars, to be changed into Rwandan Francs. ATMs accepting international transactions are available in Kigali.

DRC. Bring US dollars. These can be changed for local currency (Congolese Francs) if wished, although US dollars are widely accepted in Goma. Please ensure notes are clean and not torn. ATMs accepting international transactions are available in Goma.

Uganda. Bring US dollars.

US Dollars. Please ensure all notes are issued post-2009 and are in pristine condition. Notes with any damage or writing will not be accepted. Bring a mixture of notes with you as \$100 bills are sometimes hard to break.

This expedition is all-inclusive so you won't need much money except for costs of a personal nature such as tips (entirely optional but 65USD is a good estimation for the entire trip), beer in towns or souvenirs. The Virunga National Park office has a small gift shop selling clothing and postcards in aid of the 'Fallen Ranger's Fund'.

Secret Compass always suggest carrying an emergency fund of \$100-\$200 in cash.

## Communications

Home to You: Secret Compass will have an Ops Room manned in the UK throughout your expedition. If your family need to get in touch with you due to an EMERGENCY your family can call the Ops Room on +44 (0) 207 096 8428. The Ops Room will ensure the message gets to the expedition within 24 hours. Unfortunately we are unable to pass routine messages between your family members and you.

You to Home: Secret Compass will have satellite phones for emergency use only and these cannot be used for personal messages home unless in extremis. Please reassure your family that we have their contact details (NOK information provided on your Booking Form) and that no news is good news!

Cell Phone: Your mobile roaming may work in Kigali and perhaps Goma however you are very unlikely to get signal once in more remote parts of the country.

## Kit list

The following is Secret Compass's recommended kit list for the 2019 expedition to DRC. There is a reasonable chance that bags may be delayed when transiting through airports on your outbound flights to Kigali. Try to keep essential items in your hand luggage (check hand baggage restrictions first). Good quality walking boots and waterproofs are very hard to replace so it is advisable to wear/take these on the flight. There will be the opportunity to leave a small bag at the hotel in Kigali with flight clothes etc.

The team will be getting a domestic flight between Goma and Mutwanga. They have a very tight baggage allowance so please keep main bags to a limit of 15kg and hand luggage to a limit of 5kg. These are the maximum weights allowed so try and keep under these weights. Please bear in mind that you will be required to carry all your own kit and equipment during the expedition.

Secret Compass have arranged team members discounts with Cotswold Outdoor, Nordic Life, Outdoor Hire and Expedition Kit Hire, details of these will be sent through on booking.

## Baggage and sleeping

- RUCKSACK: 50-70ltr, all personal kit must fit into one bag.
- DAYSACK (optional): For use around town and whilst in transit, can be left at the Ranger Post in Mutwanga.
- WATERPROOF RUCKSACK LINER: Sealable "canoe" or "dry" bags made by Podpac or Ortlieb, etc.
- SMALLER DRY BAGS: As above, but smaller bags to put essential items in. The large rucksack liners sometimes leak so anything important needs to be waterproofed individually.
- SLEEPING BAG: Rated to at least comfort -5C comfort. At altitude, the temperature drops at night. Down is lighter and more compact than synthetic options but also invest in a waterproof stuff sack.
- SLEEPING BAG LINER: Silk or cotton. Coolmax are ideal. Used for extra warmth.
- SLEEPING MAT: Thermarest or equivalent. Bring repair kit.

## Clothing

- 2 x TREKKING SHIRTS: Thin trekking shirts that dry quickly. Long sleeves to provide insect and sun protection.
- 2 x THERMAL BASE LAYER: Long sleeved thermal top. Helly Hansen or equivalent.
- 2 x LONG TREKKING TROUSERS: Thin trekking trousers that dry quickly and are comfortable.
- 2 x MID LAYER: Fleece or equivalent.
- 1 x DOWN JACKET: It may be cold at altitude or in the evenings.
- 1 x WATERPROOF JACKET AND TROUSERS: Gore-tex or equivalent. Thin and light as lower elevations will be very humid.
- WATERPROOF GAITERS: To keep boots as dry as possible when walking on wet boggy ground.
- 1 x WALKING BOOTS: Must provide ankle support and be worn in before the expedition. Please consult

your nearest outdoor store for advice on choosing the correct boot. Waterproof liner is advised.

- 4 x MID WEIGHT HIKING SOCKS
- SANDALS: For use around camp (not flip flops).
- WIDE-BRIMMED SUN HAT
- WARM HAT FOR EVENINGS
- GLOVES
- 4 x UNDERWEAR: Sport or cycling shorts don't chafe.

## Eating

- MUG
- KNIFE, FORK, SPOON
- WATER BLADDER OR ROBUST BOTTLES: You need to be able to carry a minimum of three litres of water in a combination of camelback and water bottles.

## Health and Hygiene

- WASHBAG, TOOTHBRUSH AND TOOTHPASTE, RAZOR, DEODORANT (optional).
- SOAP (optional): Anti-bacterial and biodegradable.
- TRAVEL TOWEL/SARONG (optional).
- WET WIPES OR BABY WIPES (optional).
- ANTIBACTERIAL HAND GEL
- TOILET PAPER: Travel tissues work well.
- SANITARY PRODUCTS
- LIP SALVE WITH UV PROTECTION
- VASELINE: Keep readily available to prevent chafing skin and heel friction blisters.
- INSECT REPELLENT: Minimum DEET 30%.
- AFTER SUN/MOISTURISER (optional)
- FACTOR 30+ SUN CREAM

## Small first aid kit

A team medical kit with a comprehensive primary care provision will be carried.

WATERPROOF BAG OR TUPPERWARE BOX: Keep kit dry and safe.

PAIN KILLERS: Ibuprofen and Paracetamol.

ZINC OXIDE TAPE AND SMALL SCISSORS

COMPEED BLISTER PADS: Please note that Compeed produce several similar looking blister packs for corns, etc. Please ensure you purchase the standard/ original item.

DIARRHOEA TABLETS: Imodium.

DIORALYTE SACHETS OR SIMILAR REHYDRATION PACKS: Consider Nuun or Zero tables (non-caffeinated) for regular use.

ANTISEPTIC WIPES

ANTISEPTIC CREAM

PIRITON TABLETS (for allergies)

EURAX CREAM (for bites)

ANY MEDICATION YOU NORMALLY USE: Find out the generic/chemical name for your medication in case you need to source more in-country. Please also check that your medication is legal in your destination. You must make Secret Compass aware of any medical conditions before you travel.

## Other

- TREKKING POLES (optional but highly recommended): Many team members find trekking poles useful on slippery or uneven terrain or for steep descents.
- WATCH (optional)

- **HEAD TORCH AND SPARE BATTERIES:** Petzl Tikka head torch or equivalent. Check the torch works before you leave home.
- **SUNGLASSES WITH UV-FILTER LENSES**
- **PENKNIFE** (optional)
- **GAFFER TAPE** (optional): For emergency repairs to your kit, you can take some off the roll and wrap it around something else in your kit.
- **1 x KARABINER:** For securing your rucksack (on top of minibuses, etc).
- **SPARE BOOT LACES** (optional)
- **SMALL SEWING KIT**
- **RE-SEALABLE PLASTIC BAGS** (optional): For dirty washing, wrappings, etc.
- **SMALL PADLOCK AND KEY:** To lock storage bag left behind.
- **10 ENERGY/TREKKING BARS** (optional): Keeps energy levels up if you start to feel low.

## **Approach**

### **Our approach**

Secret Compass organises expeditions, not sightseeing tours. Our expeditions are team-centred, flexible and dynamic. Teams are managed on the ground by Secret Compass staff: industry-leading professionals and guides of the highest calibre. They put the structure in place for your team to have an incredible experience while achieving your expedition's aims. Our people are as passionate as you are about achieving the extraordinary in the world's wildest places. Secret Compass teams often go to places that others don't. This makes our expeditions truly different, taking you beneath the skin and beyond the headlines of the world's most remote reaches. Inspired by history's great explorers and challenges, you'll be set ambitious goals and will overcome similar hardships to those experienced on the audacious journeys of the past.

Remember this is not an organised tour. It is an adventure. More often than not expeditions don't run smoothly! The nature of the areas we operate in mean that we will encounter a number of challenges that we expect everyone to meet and relish. Friction and hurdles are all part and parcel of an arduous expedition and also to our success as a team. These make the journey more interesting and are often the best and most amusing parts when looking back. Each expedition is thoroughly reviewed on its return and team members will have the opportunity to provide feedback which helps to inform planning for future expeditions.

### **Local partners and bureaucracy**

Our teammates can only achieve the extraordinary with the help of people in the communities we travel through. NGO and aid workers, guides, fixers and interpreters all work extremely hard and are generous in their hospitality to us and our teams: visitors in their land. They are crucial to our success. Please remember and respect that their perspectives and concepts of time, environmental responsibility and customer service might differ to yours. Occasionally there is no established protocol for outside visitors which means we encounter local power struggles or disagreements. Our leaders have years of experience in delicate negotiations like these and conversational chess – especially through an interpreter – and these interchanges are often memorable parts of any expedition.

### **Infrastructure and natural events**

The areas we travel to often especially remote. Transport infrastructure can be ageing, inadequate or non-existent. Flooded roads, collapsed bridges, fallen trees and vehicle break-downs are all par for the course. Our teams thrive on overcoming challenges like these – be prepared to get stuck in and push occasionally! Natural phenomena like desert sand storms, early monsoons, landslides across key routes, winter coming early, gale force winds and driving snow can all make for a more interesting time on the expedition.

### **Food**

In some areas our teams explore, we rely on local food sources. This can often be outstanding (but can also be very average) and we always make the best out of the resources available. In other cases, we will supply filling and



high-calorie dehydrated expedition foods (ration packs)

### **Part of a team**

Secret Compass fosters a team mentality across all its expeditions and projects. Like all teams you will have a leader who will give direction to your progress. Crucial to your team's success – especially when the going gets tough – is the attitude of the teammates working together to achieve the aim. You really are part of a team, not a cosseted guest on a tour. We ask teammates to muck in and help out any aspect of the expedition, from fetching water and helping to prepare and cook food, to carrying some group kit and equipment if required. The working language of all teams is English.

### **Typical teammates**

There really is no typical expedition member, though everyone needs to be fit, healthy and ready to take on the expedition's aim by the time of departure. Participants range from 21 to 65+ in age and come from all over the world. Backgrounds include contract workers and engineers, IT specialists and students, teachers and literature lovers, journalists and keen photographers and so many more. What bonds our pioneering teams is their shared spirit of adventure and their sense of humour and positive outlook. A good teammate looks on the bright side when the 4x4 breaks down, the rain comes early and when a meal is distinctly pedestrian. Our teammates help each other, look out for each, encourage each other and help each other when needed. Our teams have done us proud in working together to achieve their common goal: the aim of the expedition. If this sounds like you, you've come to the right expedition company.

### **Teammate mentality**

You need a robust, spirited and can-do attitude to cope with demanding days and rough camping in rugged and wild places. You'll cover good daily distances (generally carrying your own kit and equipment), eating expedition foods or relying on local food sources. These elements combine to create the unique character of each expedition. On expedition, challenges, frictions and changes to plans are inevitable. Teammates should meet and relish these as an integral part of any arduous expedition and its ultimate success. Such things make the journey more interesting and are often most memorable parts when looking back.

### **Risk management**

Secret Compass is an expedition company not a tour company. Expeditions contain inherent risk. This is part of the appeal for teammates. We do not make expeditions safe as, by definition, that is impossible. We construct and implement a three-staged risk management approach to reduce risk to what we perceive as a tolerable level.

1. Risk assessment:

We conduct a thorough risk assessment of potential hazards and threats that may be encountered on the expedition and provide recommendations to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring/ severity if it does occur.

2. Safety plan:

As part of our expedition plan, we detail actions to be taken to implement and resource the recommendations of the risk assessment. This includes a detailed medical and communications plan.

3. Delivery:

The expedition leader is responsible for dynamic risk management on the expedition itself.

### **Key risks.**

Key risks encountered on this specific expedition include accident or medical emergency whilst trekking which is increased by the remoteness of the expedition and road traffic accidents. Also, poverty, political instability and persistent militancy in the DRC can lead to disruptive civil unrest. If you would like to see the full Risk Assessment for this expedition, please email [info@secretcompass.com](mailto:info@secretcompass.com)

## **Incident management and medical**

As part of the safety plan, Secret Compass has a full incident and emergency plan for medical and other emergencies. This will be discussed in full at the arrival brief, so everyone is aware what action will be taken. In summary, incidences are usually managed on the ground by the expedition leader in the first instance with remote support from Secret Compass's 24 hour Operations Room before evacuation to the nearest appropriate medical centre.

## **Informed consent**

It is your responsibility to understand the risks associated with adventure travel in remote areas. You also must understand that medical evacuation will take an extended period of time (potentially up to 5 days) and will require wilderness extraction techniques and long carries by stretcher. In-country search and rescue and emergency services are very basic or non-existent and the expedition will rely on internal resources for medical evacuation. By joining this expedition, you accept the risks associated with the venture. If you require any more information on specific risk management for this expedition, or would like to speak to us about our medical planning prior to the trip, please get in touch.

## **Testimonials**

Read team [Testimonials](#) or watch this short video featuring expedition teammates (filmed on location in Ethiopia) for an insight into life on expedition.

## **On exped**

### **Cultural**

Virunga is the oldest national park in Africa, and is a UNESCO world heritage site. The incredibly diverse habitat, home to endangered mountain gorillas, has a troubled past having been subject to poaching, armed militia and civil war. The local rangers are incredibly dedicated to protecting the park, and over 130 have been killed to date carrying out their duties. We recommend you watch the very informative Virunga film, to understand the context of the national park and the complex issues of the region we will be in.

The Rwenzori Mountains, AKA 'The Mountains of the Moon', are a world heritage site and the (rapidly retreating) equatorial glaciers are one of the sources of the Nile. The mountains straddle the border between DRC and Uganda and are home to many endemic flora and fauna species, which include giant lobelia, forest elephant, numerous birds and several primate species. The park has regular visitors, but as the majority approach from Uganda we can expect to be the only team on the DRC side of the peaks in the Northern section of Virunga National Park.

Queen Elizabeth National Park is understandably one of Uganda's most popular tourist destinations. The park's diverse ecosystems, which include sprawling savanna, shady, humid forests, sparkling lakes and fertile wetlands, make it the ideal habitat for classic big game, ten primate species including chimpanzees and over 600 species of birds. Set against the backdrop of the jagged Rwenzori Mountains, the park's magnificent vistas include dozens of enormous craters carved dramatically into rolling green hills, panoramic views of the Kazinga Channel with its banks lined with hippos, buffalo and elephants, and the endless Ishasha plains, whose fig trees hide lions ready to pounce on herds of unsuspecting Ugandan kob.

### **Terrain**

This expedition will encompass travel through a variety of terrains with habitats varying from thick jungle-type

vegetation at low levels to African-alpine vegetation and rocky lava flows at higher altitudes. We will be following known routes but, as they are not well trodden, we can expect these to be overgrown and badly maintained. We can also expect the paths to be very steep and wet, involving challenging scrambling on rocky, overgrown and mossy terrain. You should be prepared for river crossings and deep mud / bogs in places, which will hinder speed of progress.

## **Weather**

July is the driest time of the year in DRC with daytime temperatures expected to be between 20°C and 30 °C. Please note however that temperature will decrease with altitude, and at night it is not uncommon to experience frost and minus temperatures in altitudes above 3,000m. In July the Rwenzori Mountains have a small drier weather window. These mountains get a staggering 3.5m of rain a year. Although the DRC side is drier than the Ugandan side we should all still expect to see a lot of precipitation.

## **Leader**

You will have experienced Secret Compass staff with you, with extensive experience of leading groups in remote locations and over difficult terrain.

We are working closely with the Virunga National Park authorities who will provide the permissions, porters and park rangers to assist us in these remote parts of DRC.

## **Food**

In Rwanda and Uganda we will eat in local restaurants and cafes, whilst in the National Park meals will be a combination of fresh local produce and dehydrated ration packs with snack-style lunches. The first meal provided by Secret Compass will be dinner at the hotel in Kigali on 6th July. The last meal provided by Secret Compass will be breakfast at the hotel in Kigali on 20th July.

## **Transport**

International flights. You need to organise your own international flights. You need to be in Kigali (Rwanda) by 1800 on 6 July 2019 and are free to depart anytime on the 20th July. We have a unique partnership with Student Universe (part of Flight Centre, and don't worry you don't have to be a student); a specialist team of travel consultants who understand us and our destinations, and who have a team dedicated to helping Secret Compass teams. They have a 24-hour assistance helpline and access to the best fares. Fill in a contact form or call (UK) 0844 560 9799 for assistance in booking international flights. Please keep transits through African cities longer than normal to help get your baggage on the same flight as you!

It is advised that you wait for confirmation from Secret Compass that this expedition is a confirmed departure prior to booking your flights, and/ or that your travel insurance covers your flight costs in the event of cancellation by Secret Compass (see Section 9 of our Terms and Conditions). Expeditions will be confirmed when they hit minimum numbers and team members will be informed immediately.

We will be taking a domestic flight to travel from Goma to Mutwanga by plane.

We will be travelling from Kigali to the DRC border by minibus. Road transport within DRC will be in park authority 4x4s or minibuses. We will also be returning to Kigali through Uganda in a large minibus.

The majority of the journey will be by foot. Although the ascent of the volcano will be made with only 2 days of supplies, you should be aware that there will be days in the Rwenzori Mountains where you may be required to carry a full expedition pack with all your gear and food and a share of the group kit. Further details on terrain is provided below, but you should be prepared for scrambling as well as trekking.

## **Accommodation**

In Kigali and Uganda we will stay in comfortable mid-range hotels on a twin-share basis. There is a free shuttle bus from Kigali airport to the hotel on arrival and departure days.

In the Volcano Sector, the team will stay in a permanent camp made up of safari-style tents. These are on a twin or triple basis.

On our night at the summit of Nyiragongo we will be staying in basic huts shared between two. These provide limited protection from the elements and you will require sleeping bag and mat.

During the main expedition phase, we will aim to sleep in shelters and mountain huts. These provide limited protection from the elements and you will require a sleeping bag and mat. Due to the size and condition of the huts it may be that some of the team will sleep in tents. Tents will be provided by Secret Compass.

Reality of living wild for days. Occasionally people on our expeditions are not prepared for camping for multiple days. Living in these conditions can degrade your health and increase fatigue. You need to be highly organised so that your night and morning routine is done efficiently and quickly. If you are inexperienced at camping, it is essential that you get as much practice as possible prior to the expedition.

## **Communications**

Secret Compass staff will be carrying at least two methods of communication, usually a Satellite Phone and a DeLorme two-way communication device. These will be used for regular updates to head office and for emergencies. Unfortunately, routine communication between team members and family/friends is not possible – please reassure them that no news is good news! If there is an emergency and someone needs to contact a team member, they can contact Secret Compass's Operations Room on +44207 096 8428 who will endeavour to pass a message on within 24hours.

## **Exped FAQ**

Here are some frequently asked questions that are specific to this expedition. Read our [general FAQ](#) too for questions such as 'how do I join an expedition' and more. Can't find your answer? Contact SCHQ.

### **Will we definitely see gorillas?**

We definitely hope so! One of the highlights of the expedition is joining the national park rangers to spend an hour with one of the gorilla families, whilst we can't guarantee that your trip will be successful it is very rare for a group to miss out on this amazing experience. Secret Compass cannot guarantee gorilla sightings.

### **I'm a vegetarian. Can I join?**

Teammates with dietary requirements are welcome to apply for this expedition and should state their specific requirements when applying. The food situation is outlined in the Practicalities tab and Secret Compass may request further information before approving your application.

### **Can I arrive a day late?**

As The Plan outlines, there is a chain of transport to get teammates into DRC so late arrivals cannot be catered for. If you wish to arrive in Rwanda in advance of the trip or extend your stay at the end, you are welcome to do so but please make sure your visa covers your entire stay.

### **I've never been trekking before. Can I come?**

Yes. As long as you fulfil the fitness requirements and have an adventurous spirit and willing to work as a team, then you will have no problems.

### **What if the volcano erupts?**

Secret Compass have robust contingency plans and alternative routes for each aspect of the expedition and the volcanoes are constantly monitored by experienced park officials.

### **What if the park closes or it isn't safe?**

Virunga National Park has had to close to tourists either partially or in its entirety, several times over its history. If this occurs, an interesting alternative itinerary will be provided in Rwanda and Uganda which fits the same dates and start/end location for minimal disruption to team members. This itinerary may also be used if the Park remains open but Secret Compass considers the area too high a risk to visit. This option has been thoroughly recce'd by Secret Compass and offers a diverse experience through the Rwenzoris Mountains, Volcanoes National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable Rainforest. The decision to change to the back-up itinerary will be made by Secret Compass and that decision is final.

### **Can I charge electricals?**

There will be charging facilities at the hotels in Kigali and Goma (as long as there's no power cuts!) but none during the trekking section of the expedition – you will need to be prepared with extra batteries or solar panels.

### **Will there be telephone signal?**

There should be mobile signal in towns but you are unlikely to have any coverage in the mountains. Secret Compass carry a comprehensive emergency communications kit including a satellite phone.

### **Do you provide further advice?**

You might find our [Get Ready](#) section useful, with further advice about fitness, flights, travel insurance, visas and our approach to risk management.

### **How can I apply?**

Use the buttons below to contact Secret Compass with your questions or to complete our no-obligation Application Form to join this team. Someone will get back to you promptly.