

Roots & Gorillas

14-Day / 13-Night Voluntourism Programme

with optional 7-Day / 6-Night Week 1 Opt-In

Bwindi · Ssese Islands · Kampala · Uganda

This immersive 14-night programme weaves together three of Uganda's most distinct experiences into a single purposeful journey. Guests trek mountain gorillas in Bwindi's ancient forest, spend five transformative days giving back to the Ssese Islands community of Kalangala — home to the Ssese family that founded The Rift Valley Explorer — and close with Kampala's food, nightlife, and cultural scene. A portion of every booking goes directly to classroom construction at Ddagye Community Primary School on the islands.

The programme is available in full (14 days) or as a standalone Week 1 gorilla and Ssese experience (7 days / 6 nights). Both options include the community engagement sessions at the school built by the TRVE family and Rotaract Kampala Ssese Islands.

Our Story: A Family, An Island, A School

The Rift Valley Explorer is a family-owned Destination Management Company rooted in the Ssese Islands. The family behind TRVE — from Kalangala on Lake Victoria — helped build Ddagye Community Primary School and Daje Health Centre on the islands, working alongside Rotaract Kampala Ssese Islands. This programme is an extension of that commitment: inviting travellers to witness, participate in, and contribute to the community that shaped TRVE.

Every booking on this programme contributes a percentage of the package price to ongoing school construction — classrooms, sanitation, and learning materials — channelled directly to the school. Guests are not passive donors. They arrive, they engage, and they see exactly where the contribution goes.

Programme Overview

Duration	14 days / 13 nights (or 7 days / 6 nights — Week 1 only)
Destinations	Bwindi (Days 1–4) · Ssese Islands / Kalangala (Days 5–10) · Kampala (Days 11–14)
Accommodation options	Impact-first (Ride 4 a Woman, Bwindi) + Mid-Luxury / Luxury tiers
Community engagement	3 half-day structured school sessions + a community market day

Safari highlight	Mountain gorilla trek — Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (\$800 permit) - Optional
Contribution	% of package price goes to Ddagye Community Primary School classroom fund
Group size	2 to 12 guests (private, not group departures)
Target participant	25–45, diaspora travellers, university cohorts, corporate CSR groups, conscious luxury travellers
Best timing	August (peak safari + school in session) · January (low season, 15% discount opportunity)

Detailed 14-Day Itinerary

WEEK 1 — Gorillas & Giving Back

Day 1	Arrival at Entebbe · Transfer to Bwindi Arrive at Entebbe International Airport. TRVE driver-guide meets you at arrivals. Depart next day for Bwindi Impenetrable National Park — approximately 8 hours by road via Mbarara. En route briefing on the programme, the school, and the Ssesse Islands community. Overnight at Ride 4 a Woman Guest House, Buhoma (Dinner & Bed). Optional evening visit to the Ride 4 a Woman craft workshop — meet the women, see the weaving, give back to the community.
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Day 2	Gorilla Trek — Bwindi Impenetrable National Park Early morning briefing at UWA headquarters in Buhoma. MOUNTAIN GORILLA TREK — spend up to one hour with a habituated gorilla family in their natural habitat. Permit: \$800 per person. Return to the lodge for lunch. Afternoon: Batwa Cultural Experience with community give back. Evening: community dinner with women from Ride 4 a Woman. Overnight at Ride 4 a Woman Guest House (Full Board).
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Day 3	Depart for Kampala Depart Bwindi mid-morning for Kampala. Lunch stop en route — Mbarara or Masaka. Check in to Kampala accommodation. Overnight in Kampala (Bed & Breakfast).
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Day 4

Transit Day — Kampala to Ssese Islands

Morning at leisure in Kampala — optional city drive (I love Kampala) or Nakasero/Owino Market visit.

Afternoon: transfer to Nakiwogo ferry landing, Entebbe.

FERRY crossing to Kalangala, Ssese Islands — approximately 2.5 hours on Lake Victoria.

Arrive at Brovad Sands Lodge, Kalangala. Check in and settle.

Welcome dinner on the lake — full board begins.

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge, Kalangala (Full Board).

Day 5

Community School — Education & Mentorship

Guests are introduced to the TRVE family's connection to the islands and the school's history.

Half-day at Ddagye Community Primary School

VOLUNTEER SESSIONS: Reading and storytelling with younger pupils. Career guidance conversations with older students. School library organisation and book sorting.

Lunch at the lodge.

AFTERNOON: Historic island drive — Kalangala villages, palm plantations, and coastal scenery.

Optional: purchase stationery, books, or school materials to donate directly at the school.

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge (Full Board).

Day 6

Community School — Arts, Sport & Wellbeing

Half-day at the community school.

VOLUNTEER SESSIONS: Art therapy and creative expression workshops (drawing, collage, painting). Guided movement and group games. Music and rhythm activities.

Students and guests create a collaborative mural or artwork that remains at the school.

Lunch at the lodge.

AFTERNOON: Canoeing on Lake Victoria — paddle along the island shoreline.

Evening: guest reflection circle — share the day's experience with fellow travellers.

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge (Full Board).

Day 7

Community Market Day — Giving Back

A structured community giving day coordinated by TRVE.

Morning: guests visit Kalangala market with a TRVE guide and purchase food parcels, household supplies, and fresh produce for selected families identified by the school.

Distribution is coordinated and dignified — no cash handouts. Guests join families for tea where appropriate.

This is the opt-in endpoint for WEEK 1 ONLY guests. Those departing after Week 1 take the ferry back to Entebbe this evening.

Full 14-day guests remain on the island.

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge (Full Board).

WEEK 2 — Environment, Island Life & Kampala

Day 8

Community School — Environment & Sustainability

Half-day at the community school.

VOLUNTEER SESSIONS: Tree planting on school grounds — guests and students plant together. Waste management and composting awareness activities. Discussion of Lake Victoria conservation with a local guide.

Lunch at the lodge.

AFTERNOON: Free time — island beach, lodge grounds, or optional boat cruise.

Optional: support the school feeding programme (cash or kind, entirely at guest discretion).

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge (Full Board).

Day 9

Island Immersion Day

A fully free island day — designed for recovery and authentic island life.

Options: Lake Victoria fishing trip with local fishermen at dawn. Bicycle ride around the island interior. Sauna and steam at Brovad Sands. Island nature walk to a fishing village.

AFTERNOON:

Evening: bonfire dinner on the beach. **Presentation of the classroom contribution certificate — showing the exact amount channelled to Ddagye Community Primary School from the group's booking. Presentation of Volunteer Certificates.**

Overnight at Brovad Sands Lodge (Full Board).

Day 10

Return to Kampala

Ferry back to Nakiwogo / Entebbe.

Transfer to Kampala.

Check in to Kampala accommodation.

EVENING: Welcome to Kampala — orientation walk or rooftop sundowner.

Overnight in Kampala (Bed & Breakfast).

Day 11

Kampala — Culture, Food & History

	MORNING: Guided cultural Kampala tour — Kasubi Royal Tombs (UNESCO), Uganda Museum, Rubaga Cathedral, and the Namugongo Martyrs Shrine. Lunch at a TRVE-recommended local restaurant — Ugandan cuisine only. AFTERNOON: Craft and art gallery tour — Nomad Gallery, Afriart Arts, or a curated studio visit. Street food walk through Kampala's evening market — rolex, muchomo, fresh juice. Optional: Kampala Serena rooftop bar or Sky Lounge for sundowners with views over the seven hills. Overnight in Kampala (Bed & Breakfast).
Day 12	Kampala — Cuisine Deep Dive & Evening Experience MORNING: Cooking class with a Ugandan chef — matoke, g-nut stew, mandazi. Guests cook, eat, and take home a recipe card. Optional: Kampala City Tour — Parliament, Independence Monument, Nakasero Market. AFTERNOON: Free time for shopping — Craft Village on Buganda Road, fabrics at Owino, or Nakasero supermarket. EVENING: Kampala Nightlife Experience (curated by TRVE) — guest choice of dinner at Endiro Coffee for the low-key option, or Karveli Restaurant and The Haandi for a signature Ugandan fine dining experience. Night cap at 1000 Cups Coffee or Choma Zone. Overnight in Kampala (Bed & Breakfast).
Day 13	Kampala at Own Pace · Farewell Experience Completely free day — guests explore Kampala independently or rest. Optional: Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary day trip (Lake Victoria — 45 min by boat, additional cost). Optional: Baha'i Temple visit for panoramic Kampala views. EVENING: Farewell dinner — hosted by TRVE at a signature Kampala venue. Overnight in Kampala (Bed & Breakfast).
Day 14	Departure — Entebbe International Airport Breakfast and checkout. Transfer to Entebbe International Airport. Departure.

Accommodation Recommendations

Bwindi — Buhoma Sector (Nights 1–2)

Primary recommendation: Ride 4 a Woman Guest House, Buhoma

Why Ride 4 a Woman fits this programme perfectly:

Ride 4 a Woman is a Ugandan NGO that employs over 60 women facing poverty, domestic violence, HIV, and single parenthood. Income from the guesthouse directly funds microloans, education for children, solar panel installations, and safe drinking water for the Buhoma community. Guests can participate in sewing, basket weaving, and cooking sessions with the women. The guesthouse sits minutes from the Bwindi park gate — hot meals, clean en-suite rooms, and a genuine community-rooted experience. Staying here adds a second layer of giving back before guests have even reached the Ssese Islands.

Alternative (luxury upgrade): Bwindi Lodge (andBeyond), Mahogany Springs, or Silverback Lodge for guests requiring mid-luxury or luxury-tier accommodation at Bwindi.

Ssese Islands / Kalangala (Nights 4–9)

Brovad Sands Lodge — the principal island lodge with beach access, lake views, and full board capacity for groups. Retains consistency with the existing 7-day package.

Kampala (Nights 3, 10, 11, 12, 13)

The Kampala accommodation choice sets the tone for the urban close of the programme. Three options are proposed at different tiers, each with a clear rationale for this audience:

Option A — Impact-Aligned	Explorers Backpackers / Red Chilli HideawayFor university cohorts, budget-conscious voluntourists, and gap-year participants. Red Chilli Hideaway, Butabika (Lake Victoria shores) — pool, Lake Victoria views, group-friendly, budget tier. Explorers Backpackers (Kololo) — walkable to central Kampala, good mix of independent travellers. Both fit the 25–35 cohort and remove price sensitivity from the Kampala nights.
Option B — Mid-Luxury	Hotel No. 5 (Kololo) · Le Petit Village · Casa SoladaBoutique properties with Kampala character. Hotel No. 5 is ideal — it sits in Kololo, close to restaurants and nightlife, and is well-regarded by international guests.
Option C — Luxury	Emin Pasha Hotel (Nakasero) · Latitude 0 DegreesFor the luxury tier, Emin Pasha has a garden setting, boutique feel, and is the most walkable option from Kampala's fine dining strip. Latitude 0 Degrees on Ternan Avenue is well-positioned for nightlife.

The Community Contribution Structure

This is not a donation-linked add-on. The contribution is embedded in the package price and communicated transparently at the point of sale.

Contribution rate	5% of the full package price per booking goes to the Ddagye Community Primary School classroom fund.
Managed by	TRVE — accounted for separately, with annual reporting to participants.
What it funds	Classroom construction and finishing materials, school sanitation, and the library supply programme at the partner school in Kalangala.
Guest visibility	On the final evening (Day 13), guests receive a printed certificate showing the exact amount from their booking that has been allocated to the school. Group bookings also receive a named plaque contribution record.
Transparency	Photos and project updates from the school are shared with past participants twice a year via email. University partners receive a formal impact report.

Indicative Pricing

Pricing is based on private guiding throughout, gorilla permits included in the full package, accommodation at the mid-luxury tier, and the community engagement programme. Luxury-tier supplements apply. Prices valid 2026/27 and subject to gorilla permit rates set by Uganda Wildlife Authority.

Group Size	Full 14-Day PPS (USD)	Week 1 Only PPS (USD)	Week 2 Add-On PPS (USD)
2 Pax	From \$5,800 pps	From \$2,800 pps	From \$3,200 pps
3 Pax	From \$4,900 pps	From \$2,400 pps	From \$2,700 pps
4 Pax	From \$4,400 pps	From \$2,150 pps	From \$2,450 pps
6 Pax	From \$3,900 pps	From \$1,900 pps	From \$2,100 pps
8–10 Pax (uni group)	From \$3,500 pps	From \$1,700 pps	From \$1,950 pps

Gorilla permit (\$700 per person) is included in the full-package and Week 1 pricing. Not included in Week 2 standalone. Single supplement applies — ask for current rate.

Marketing Strategy

Timing & Seasonality

The programme has two primary launch windows and one secondary window:

August (Primary)	Peak gorilla trekking season. Schools are in session in Uganda (second term). Ugandan and East African diaspora in Canada, UK, and USA are on summer leave — highest probability of 2-week travel blocks. North American universities run study abroad summer intensives in July–August. Target departure window: 1–31 August. Marketing push: May–June. Early bird booking open: March.
January (Secondary)	New Year 'reset' travel behaviour is strong among 25–45 professionals. Low season discount of 10–15% makes the package more accessible to university cohorts. Schools reopen in February in Uganda — January school visit still viable with advance coordination. Target departure window: 2nd–4th week of January. Marketing push: October–November (alongside World Tourism Day content).
March (University)	Northern hemisphere spring break — 10–14 days aligns perfectly with the full package. Canadian and American universities break in March. Strong overlap with TRU Faculty of Adventure and Tourism fieldwork calendar. Smaller groups (8–12) are the typical university travel cohort size.

Target Audience Segments

Segment 1: Impact-Conscious 25–35	Young professionals and recent graduates in Canada, UK, USA, and Australia who allocate 1–2 weeks per year to travel with purpose. They research independently on Instagram and TikTok, respond to authentic storytelling, and make bookings after seeing real community interactions. Price point: Week 1 only, or full package with a roommate to share costs.
Segment 2: Diaspora Travellers	Ugandan, Rwandan, and East African diaspora based in North America and Europe. This segment has a strong emotional pull toward 'roots' travel — returning not just as tourists but as contributors. The Ssesse Islands origin story of the TRVE family is a direct hook. They are more likely to book the full 14 days and more likely to become repeat bookers.
Segment 3: University Cohorts	Students in tourism, social work, global health, international development, and environmental studies. Group size 8–12. The academic calendar alignment with August and March is strong. Thompson Rivers University (Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism) is the

	lead institutional target — TRU has existing service learning infrastructure and a named interest in Indigenous and community-led tourism models.
Segment 4: Corporate CSR Groups	Companies with East Africa operations or ESG commitments, seeking structured volunteer travel for employee groups. Group size 6–15. August is the strongest corporate travel window. The classroom contribution and impact certificate make this a documentable CSR event.

University Partnership Strategy

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) — Kamloops, BC, Canada

TRU has a Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism with programs in Tourism Management, Adventure Studies, and Event Management. The university actively runs co-op placements abroad, field schools, and service learning programs, with a stated commitment to community-engaged and Indigenous-led tourism models.

A partnership with TRU should be positioned as a field school opportunity — not a charity trip. The framing that works: students gain accredited field learning hours, produce a reflective impact report on ethical voluntourism in East Africa, and contribute to a live community development project. TRVE provides ground logistics, facilitation, and immersive access. TRU provides academic structure, student cohort, and institutional credibility.

Recommended first contact at TRU:

Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism — Tourism Management Department
 The Co-op and Career Education Office — careereducation@tru.ca · 250-371-5627
 TRU's Global Competency Certificate programme (formal recognition of intercultural and international experiences) is a natural fit for programme graduates.

Other University Targets

Makerere University, Kampala	Tourism and hospitality faculty — domestic cohort opportunity; lower price point; excellent for mixed national groups.
University of Alberta / UBC	Both have active international study programs and alumni networks with East Africa connections.
UK target	University of Edinburgh and Leeds — both have strong development studies and African studies departments with established East Africa travel programmes.

Content & Channel Strategy

Instagram (Primary)	Reels and Stories are the primary conversion tool. Key content angles: the gorilla trek (Day 2 — raw, emotional, 60-second reel); the mural/art session at the school (Day 6 — collaborative and visual); the community market day (Day 7 — dignified, warm, no poverty framing); Ride 4 a Woman craft session (Day 1 evening — storytelling with the women). Posting rhythm: 3–4 posts per week in the 6-week pre-departure window.
TikTok (Secondary)	Day-in-the-life format. Michael or Ivan narrates from the road. '48 Hours in Bwindi' and 'What a voluntourism day actually looks like in Uganda' are proven TikTok formats that convert to DMs.
LinkedIn	For the corporate CSR segment and university partnership outreach. A short-form impact article from Belinda — 'Why we built a school on the islands and why we now invite guests to see it' — is the anchor piece.
Email / WhatsApp	For conversion. Once a lead comes in from social, follow up within 2 hours with a personalised voice note from Comfort or Belinda. The personal touch is a direct competitive advantage over international operators.
University outreach	A one-page programme brief (PDF) formatted for academic audiences — learning outcomes, itinerary summary, community partner details, and TRVE contact. Sent to faculty coordinators directly via email.

Messaging & Framing

AVOID: 'poverty tourism', 'charity trip', 'helping the poor', 'giving back to those less fortunate'. These framings attract the wrong audience and create a power imbalance that undermines the programme.

USE INSTEAD: 'purposeful travel', 'community-rooted experience', 'travel with impact', 'meet the people, not just the place', 'a percentage of every booking goes directly to the classroom fund'. The Ssesse Islands origin story of TRVE is a human hook — not a charity pitch.

Operational Notes

Gorilla permits	Book UWA permits as early as possible. For group departures in August, permits should be secured by April at the latest. Full payment required upfront.
School coordination	Community school sessions must be pre-arranged with the school principal at least 6 weeks before arrival. TRVE coordinates directly. School calendar for Uganda: Term 2

	(June–August), Term 3 (September–November) — August departures have confirmed school availability.
Photography	Child photography consent must be confirmed with the school in advance of each visit. TRVE advises guests of the school's specific policy. Hamza (TRVE field photography) can attend school sessions to create ethical content for social media with appropriate consent.
Fleet	The new short-chassis Land Cruiser is the primary vehicle for the Kampala–Bwindi leg. A second vehicle (partner operator or the minivan, if retained) should be available for groups above 4 guests to avoid overloading.
Community market day budget	TRVE should build a per-guest community market contribution into the package — suggested UGX 50,000–100,000 per guest — which TRVE manages and disburses during the market day. This removes awkwardness and ensures the experience is equitable across group members.
Classroom fund accounting	Open a dedicated account or sub-account for the classroom fund. Issue receipts to booking contacts. Annual school update with photos circulated to all past programme participants.

What Is Included / Not Included

Included (Full 14-Day Programme)

- Airport pickup at Entebbe and all road transfers throughout
- Ferry transfers to and from Ssesse Islands
- Professional English-speaking TRVE driver-guide throughout
- Mountain gorilla trek permit — \$700 per person (UWA, Bwindi)
- 2 nights accommodation at Ride 4 a Woman Guest House, Buhoma (Dinner & B)
- 1 night accommodation in Kampala on transit (Bed & Breakfast)
- 6 nights Full Board accommodation on Ssesse Islands (Brovad Sands Lodge)
- 4 nights accommodation in Kampala for the urban close (Bed & Breakfast)
- All 3 facilitated half-day community school sessions (Days 5, 6, 8)
- Community market day coordination and per-guest market contribution budget
- Farewell dinner in Kampala (Day 13)
- Classroom contribution certificate presented on departure evening
- Complimentary water throughout

Not Included

- International flights to/from Entebbe International Airport

- Uganda tourist visa (online at visas.immigration.go.ug)
- Yellow Fever vaccination certificate (mandatory for Uganda entry)
- Medical, travel, and personal insurance
- Gorilla Habituation Experience (\$1,500 — optional, Day 3)
- Personal donations to the school beyond the embedded classroom contribution
- Personal expenses, gratuities, tips
- Optional activities (Ngamba Island chimp sanctuary, boat cruise, sauna, etc.)

Get In Touch

Reservations & Enquiries

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University Partnership Enquiries

For field school proposals, group bookings,
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