

It's such a privilege to have these mountain gorillas in our midst



BASE CAMP: Gorilla's Nest (left) is one of the few places to stay near to the Virunga Volcanoes National Park



INCREDIBLE JOURNEY: Natives carry their crops across Lake Kivu in a wooden boat, left, while a two and a half hour trek into the Rwandan forest, right, brings us face to face with the gorillas. Below, Dian Fossey in 1982 with her beloved giants



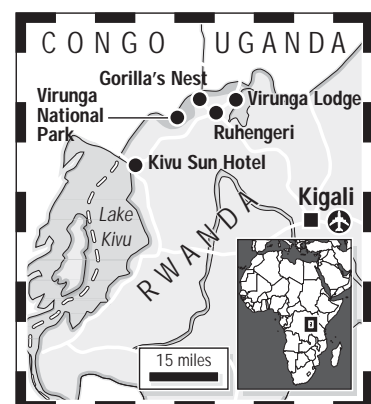
Picture: AP/ALAMY

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

get booked up to two months in advance.

If the gorillas haven't completely satisfied your primate passions there are alternative - and considerably cheaper - treks to see the hilariously acrobatic golden monkeys, plus nature walks to the volcanoes or the graveside of Dian Fossey, near the site of her old Karisoke Research Centre and alongside the resting place of her favourite gorilla Digit.

Accommodation close to the national park for the 7am trek is limited to places such as the Gorilla's Nest, where we had stayed the night before - and indeed where King Kong himself, Andy Serkis, stayed during his trip. It consists of a circle of



stone cottages surrounded by a ring of 150-foot tall, arrow-straight trees.

If you are looking for real luxury Rwandan-style, a 30-minute drive away is the

spectacular Virunga Lodge. It's easily the pick of the bunch of the hotels nearer the park. The breathtaking view of all five volcanoes is superb.

The exquisite rooms are simply presented with traditional dark-wood furniture. The lack of electricity is easily solved with candles and a torch, while the water is heated by solar panels. The fantastic staff and the food (including the delicious local Tilapi fish) complete the experience.

Those visitors after something more Westernised are probably better off with the Kivu Sun Hotel in Gisenyi, an hour's drive south-west of Ruhengeri. On the shores of Lake Kivu, it is an ideal location to either start or end your Rwandan trip, relaxing on the deserted beach and

exploring the local market and craft shops. Wherever you stay, though, the hotels will always play second fiddle to the main attraction in Rwanda - the gorillas steal the show.

Dian Fossey lived among them for more than 18 years. After just one hour with these truly amazing animals, it's easy to see why.

● GETTING THERE: Kuoni Travel (01306 747 008/ www.kuoni.co.uk) offers a range of tailor-made holidays to Rwanda. Two nights at Gorilla's Nest, with two nights at Virunga Lodge and two nights at Kivu Sun costs from £2,880pp (two sharing), including full-board accommodation, flights and gorilla passes. Rwanda Tourism: www.rwandatourism.com



EXPRESS travel offer

See The Lion King, Billy Elliot, Mamma Mia or Mary Poppins

from only **£79**

Top 4 hotel deals for the TOP SHOWS in town!

The Lion King

Mamma Mia!

Billy Elliot

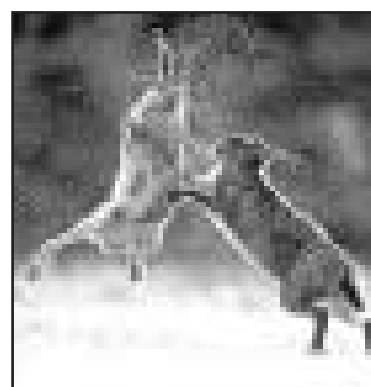
Mary Poppins

0871 434 6684

EXPRESS travelshop

MOBILE-FREE ZONE

CONSIDERING that Carol Thatcher, the Queen of ITV's I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!, found the main joy of the jungle was being away from mobile phone, The Adventure Company (01420 541 007/www.adventurecompany.co.uk) has just the trip for her - a Mobile Phone-Free Holiday. With destinations including Iceland, Morocco and Peru, guests must hand in their phones to the group leader at the start of their trip. The



HARE RAISING: Mating season

ARRIVALS

first departure is a 16-day guided Indian Himalayas trip departing May 20 2006, from £1,354pp, including flights from Heathrow.

ENLIGHTENING NATURE

FROM the picture of the zebra poised among the herd of wildebeest to that of the two hares in mating conflict (left), Light on Earth (BBC Books, £30) is a compilation of the winning images from the 20-year-old Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition. To order a copy for the publisher's price (p&p free), contact Express Bookshop (0871 434 6091/ www.expressbookshop.co.uk).

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

NEED a last minute Christmas present? Great for budding birdwatchers, Boots and The National Trust have joined forces to create a Bird's Eye View kit. Featuring a pair of ultra-lightweight, folding binoculars, a book covering 530 species across Britain and Europe, and a CD with over 500 birdsongs and calls, it's the ultimate



twitcher treat. It also has a log book so you can keep track of all your sightings. Price: £20. Stockists: 0845 070 8090/www.boots.com.

TRAVEL TREATS

CHIC and downright gorgeous, the Aspinall of London (0808 144 3302/www.aspinalloflondon.com) travel collection, above, is a must-have for anyone who wants to travel in style. All fine leather, it features a passport cover, two luggage tags, and a travel wallet lined in silk and plush suede. Sets come in five colours, including sky blue, amethyst and red. Price: £99.

ADOPT A FILM STAR

WHETHER their favourite is Aslan the lion from the new Chronicles of Narnia film - released this week - or Hedwig the snowy owl from Harry Potter, why not surprise your little ones this Christmas by adopting them a film star?

Paignton Zoo in Devon and Living Costs are offering people the chance to adopt everything from penguins, below right, (from March Of The Penguins) to King Kong himself. Adopters will receive a certificate, photograph, one free ticket to visit their animal and even have their name engraved on a plaque near their animal's enclosure. Costs from £30. For more information call 01803 697 508/ www.paigntonzoo.org.uk

JAWS FOR THOUGHT

YOU'RE standing just feet away from the world's largest shark, with nothing but glass between you... scared? Test your nerves at the new Georgia Aquarium (www.georgiaaquarium.org) in Atlanta USA (top right) where you

can come face to face with two 18-foot whale sharks - which can reach 40 feet when full grown - as they glide around a massive saltwater tank.

Housing more than 100,000 species, there is a rehabilitation centre for injured creatures, an area where visitors can touch horseshoe crabs and sea stars, and a cinema with special effects. Admission \$22.75 (£13) adults, \$17 (£10) children.



NICOLA ISEARD SCARY: Get close to the sharks



STAR TURN: P-p-p pick up a pet penguin

WINTER & HOLIDAY

OLYMPIC

EXPRESS travelshop

What are your Christmas plans?

OLYMPIC