

# MAHALE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

## CHIMP VIEWING REGULATIONS

Chimpanzees are a man's closest living relative, and we share 98% of our genes with them. As a result, chimps are susceptible to most human infectious diseases but because chimps and humans are not the same species, the outcome of infection can be very different. Even simple human cold and flu viruses can be fatal to chimpanzees. In both Gombe and Mahale National Parks chimps have died following outbreaks of flu-type illnesses that have been traced back to human visitors. As a result of these outbreaks, and similar ones affecting gorillas in other African parks, a strict set of rules has been established to regulate great ape viewing. These rules were drawn up by an international team of doctors, researchers and vets, and we ask you to follow them carefully, to help us protect Mahale's precious chimps.

- Maintain a distance of at least 10m from the chimps at all times. This minimizes the risk of you transmitting bacteria and viruses to them.
- Always wear a mask (provided by your guide) over your nose and mouth when you are close (<50m) to chimps.
- DO NOT eat or drink while you are near the chimps - move at least 250m away first.
- DO NOT leave personal belongings on the ground or where they are accessible to the chimps. They are curious animals and your belongings can transmit disease. If you need help carrying bags, your guide will be happy to assist you.
- DO NOT leave any rubbish behind. It can be harmful to all kinds of wildlife and it can transmit diseases to the chimps.
- If you feel the urge to cough or sneeze when you are near the chimps, please cover your nose and mouth to reduce the distribution of germs.
- Try not to go to the toilet in the forest. If it is unavoidable, move at least 250m from the chimps and ask your guide to dig a deep hole.
- It is not permitted to visit the chimps if you are sick or have infectious disease. Please be responsible and tell your camp managers if you feel unwell. They will decide whether you would be risking the chimps' health by visiting them.
- No person under the age of 12 is permitted to visit the chimps. This is for their own safety and because young people are more likely to transmit infectious disease.
- No more than 6 visitors (plus one guide) are permitted close to the chimps at any one time. If another group is with the chimps when you arrive, please wait at a spot chosen by your guide, at least 250m away from the animals.

- Maximum viewing time is one hour. If the chimps are moving and viewing is interrupted, your time will be paused until they have been relocated, but tracking is not permitted for longer than 3 hours after the initial chimp sighting, even if the one hour total has not been reached. This is to minimize disturbance to the animals and to the forest.

## **GENERAL SAFETY RULES**

**Mahale's chimps have been studied and habituated for more than 40 years, and are well accustomed to people. Nevertheless, they are wild animals and it is important that you avoid doing anything that may antagonize them or that they may see as a challenge or threat.**

- When near the chimps, please remember to keep your voices low. This will also help you to observe the other wonderful and varied wildlife of the Mahale forest.
- Do not point at the chimps or make any sudden movements, and avoid direct eye contact with them because they may perceive this as aggressive or threatening behavior.
- Do not use perfume, smoke or spit.
- Stay in a tight group when near the chimps, and try to sit or squat rather than standing, as this minimizes disturbance. Also be sure that your group does not completely surround the chimps.
- In the unlikely event that a chimp charges towards you, move to the nearest tree, stand up and hold on tightly to the trunk. Above all, don't panic or run. Follow your guide's example.
- If the chimpanzees move closer to you than permitted 10 meters, don't make any sudden movements to increase the distance. Simply back slowly away.
- Camera flashes must be switched off. Flash photography can disturb and antagonize the chimps.