



GORILLAS (2): JENNY BOWEN; MURCHISON FALLS: SHUTTERSTOCK



PACKED WITH EMOTION

Find a sense of solitude in all-encompassing Uganda, says **Jenny Bowen**



was welling up. This was an emotional overload. A silverback gorilla reclined against a large tree trunk while a four-month-old infant rolled around nearby, clutching his toes. It was adorable, cuteness to the max. My tears, which had been threatening to materialise, did so as the young infant wobbled on his legs, looking at us with huge round amber eyes. I looked around... there was not a dry eye to be seen.

That morning, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park had loomed over us; its dark and mildly threatening ambience resembling a fairytale forest protecting an inaccessible castle. Mist rose in wisps and weaved between the vegetation, creating an ethereal feeling — daunting and silent.

There's something special about being with gorillas in the wild. With them sharing 98 per cent of the same genetic code as us, it's hard not to feel a connection — as if there is an understanding and mutual respect. This wasn't my first rodeo: I've been on gorilla

treks before, in the same place. However, this sighting was the one that hit home the most. You know you're having an experience of a lifetime when the local rangers and guides have their phones out too, videoing the spectacle.

Visiting Uganda is all-embracing, not to be taken lightly. The country is so diverse and offers a host of activities and locations. It is famous for its primate tracking and, believe me, that is something out of this world. But there are also wide-open plains teeming with wildlife, tree-climbing lions, dramatic landscapes and boat excursions where you drift past pods of honking hippos.

There is an energy in Uganda too, not just felt within its welcoming people but in the environment as well. Murchison Falls is surely Africa's most powerful waterfall, both in force and magnetism. You can feel it when standing at the top of the Falls, where the Victoria Nile forces its way through an 8 metre-wide gap before plummeting 45 metres to the pool below. Looking over the railing, you feel a siren-like enticement into the melee. While the spray drenched

us, the sun caught the droplets, creating rainbows overhead.

When travelling through Uganda, you feel a sense of freedom, whether passing through villages, with their colourful houses and market stalls, or driving through wildlife-rich national parks. Seeing the sweeping plains dotted with kob antelope (*inset*) and towers of giraffe is uplifting, especially when there are few other vehicles around. There is always somewhere in Uganda where you can feel crowded by animals and solitude from people. Here, it is easy to reconnect with nature.

Then there is the peace and tranquillity of seeing the country from one of its many bodies of water: exploring the waterways themselves, watching elephant gracefully come down to drink, or spotting its myriad colourful birds. Listen for the plaintive cry of a fish eagle, the *pripp* of a kingfisher or the laugh of a Hadedda ibis, and feel the exhilaration of searching for shoebill in papyrus-clogged swamps. Being on or near water is always good for the soul; it is a calming and mindful way of travelling.

Many safari destinations have all these emotions woven into them, yet Uganda seems to pack it all in... nearly to the point of exhaustion.

