

Rwanda Development Board (RDB), through Visit Rwanda has launched a new innovative use of technology to protect and conserve mountain gorillas and promote sustainable and responsible wildlife tourism in the country.

Dubbed Gorilla Gram, visitors to Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park will not just get to spend time with the country's famed mountain gorillas, but they can also utilise social media platform, Instagram and Facebook to help play an active role in gorilla conservation by sharing their own experiences and photos through the platforms.

Rwanda is home to over a third of the remaining populations of mountain gorillas in the world, and their protection has been a conservation success story in Rwanda.

Over recent decades, the population has grown to over 1,063 individuals, up from just 480 in 2010.

With the intentions of continuing conservation efforts and further growing their population, the Rwandan mountain gorilla families are now the first wild animals in the world that have an active social media presence that helps with vital research, management and protection.

Using Instagram photos and videos, visitors to Volcanoes National Park can now become citizen scientists during their visits by adding optional provided tags that help rangers, researchers and monitoring teams keep track of the groups and individuals via aggregation systems that store the photos in smart galleries.

Speaking at the launch of Gorilla Gram during a World Tourism Day event organised in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation in Kigali, Michaela Rugwizangoga, the RDB Chief Tourism Officer noted:

"We're excited to launch Gorilla Gram today, a truly innovative approach to tourism and conservation as the sector recovers globally. Through Gorilla Gram, we're enabling today's digital savvy traveller to be part of our citizen science approach to mountain gorilla conservation by using Instagram to share content that is very useful for our day to day monitoring of the endangered primates. Each visitor now has the opportunity to play an important role in ensuring that the species continue to be protected and will prosper and thrive in Volcanoes National Park."

The smart galleries of tourist photos will vastly expand the knowledge base and monitoring abilities of the park rangers and scientists, making these more than just

treasured memories.

The daily content from park visitors will also be available to the public alongside links to support mountain gorilla populations and habitat conservation, or to plan a trip to visit Rwanda.

“Those looking to make positive change and environmental impacts through travel need look no further than gorilla trekking in Rwanda. Gorilla Gram allows guests to have an unparalleled opportunity to make an unforgettable encounter with the mountain gorillas and play an active role in the conservation work that can be shared with family and friends.

We look forward to welcoming guests to Rwanda and inviting them to work with us and share their own experiences with Gorilla Gram,” the RDB Chief Tourism Officer noted.