

Travel Blog

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27 May 2010

[Rwanda Eco-Tours Makes it to The Guardian Green List 2010](#) by [Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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The number of mountain gorillas in Rwanda is now in a far healthier state, thanks to companies such as Rwanda Eco-Tours which has convinced local communities that these magnificent animals are worth more alive than dead. Co-run by local Rwandan Edwin Sabuhoro, the company organises guided treks to see the gorillas in the heart of the Parc National des Volcans. Gorilla treks range from a one-day hike from the base of the Virunga mountains to tours lasting several days that include a visit to the Dian Fossey Research Station.

- +250 500 331, rwndaecotours.com. One-day trek US\$716, four days \$1,880.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2010/feb/20/guardian-green-list-2010-community-projects>

[A volunteer Experience at Excella School](#) by

[Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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By Charlotte Broom Subjects studied English – Handwriting and reading for Nursery, French, Kinyarwanda, Maths, Science, Social Studies, Traditional Dance and Music, Sport, Drama School Ethos To produce a well-rounded child with not only a great academic education but also an education about good inter-personal skills along with wide ranging inter-curricular activities that are not solely academic based. This gives the students an all

round education which allows everyone to find success in different areas of school life. This also contributes to the future and can make each individual an upstanding community member thus contributing to community spirit. **Voluntary opportunities** When visiting Rwanda I not only wished to see all the fantastic resources available for tourists to get involved with, but I wished to get involved with the community in a more direct way. By asking Rwanda Eco tours (www.rwandaecotours.com) what opportunities were available and along with other voluntary opportunities I decided that Volunteering at Excella school would be the most ideal option for me to not only get a great experience but also to give back to the community and hopefully leave a lasting impression other than just my financial investment. While volunteering at Excella School, you will be welcomed not only by the children but also by the staff of Excella. The atmosphere is warm, caring and happy. I have never met so many children that cannot wait to begin school on a Monday morning and this was so refreshing. The teachers matched the enthusiasm of the children through their teaching as well as pastorally caring for the students. This positive attitude to education and striving to be a success will be mirrored in later life and therefore provide more positive, well rounded and successful pillars of the community. As a volunteer I shadowed several teachers over a couple of school days before sitting down with the headmaster to discuss how many days a week I felt comfortable teaching, and how many hours of those days I would teach. As well as this, I was given full rein as to what I wished to teach! I chose Drama as a start, so I could first assess the students' English abilities and then from there we could pick topics of interest that would be most appropriate to the students' lives. Not only will you furthering their education by assisting the students but also the teachers in turn will learn from your methods. Having a foreign influence at Excella will not only allow the school to gain a great experience from having voluntary input but also will also help subsequently produce positive, educated and successful communities. My experience shows just how much control of your teaching experience you are able to have at Excella. If you wish to only be there one or two days a week for morning lessons this is fine or if you wish to be there five days a week teaching as many hours as there are free, then Excella can offer this too. If you choose to just support or shadow a teacher, this can be arranged or if you choose to take classes individually on a subject of your choice then this is also a choice you can make. The staff and children at Excella believe in the importance of an all round education and they believe that a part of this can come from volunteers from other cultures. The invaluable input that international volunteers can have on moulding the students of Excella, by adding to their development as people, will be immeasurable. **Voluntary Benefits** Accommodation, transport and what you can be involved in can be organized by Rwanda Eco-Tours. A genuinely fantastic experience for those maybe looking into whether they wish to go down the educational career path or for those well experienced and qualified teachers that want a change. This experience will contribute directly to the students and staff of Excella school and will also contribute to the development of future generations in Rwanda.

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[From poachers to protectors: Young conservationist honoured](#) by [E](#)
[dwin Sabuhoro](#)

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A Rwandan conservationist who helped turn mountain gorilla poachers into tourism guides has been given an award by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and the International Ranger Federation. Edwin Sabuhoro, 32, was selected as winner of the 2008 Young Conservationist Award, which honours outstanding achievements by young people in protected areas. Edwin developed incentives for local people to protect gorillas' habitat by founding the Iby'Iwacu Cultural Village, a community-based tourism initiative, in the Musanze district of Northern Rwanda. Revenue from tourism has encouraged communities to protect gorillas and develop small-scale businesses. Today, the outcomes of the project are astonishing. Local people own 100% of the project. The cultural village has increased tourism arrivals by 40% and has generated a sustainable income base for the village. Poaching of gorillas has been reduced by 60%. "I feel extremely proud, honoured and excited to be awarded the second IUCN-IRF Young Conservationist Award," says Edwin. "I know just how much this means to my continuing efforts but also for inspiring other young conservationist in Rwanda, the African continent and the whole world. I would like to express my utmost appreciation to IUCN and IRF for this award." Edwin, who has already been internationally recognized for the development of pro-poor ecotourism in his country, will be presented with the award at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona this October. "The IUCN-IRF Young Conservationist Award honours the contribution of young people to conservation," says David Sheppard, Head of IUCN's Programme on Protected Areas. "Edwin's outstanding work has benefited gorillas and local people in Rwanda. It has shown that the involvement of local people with wildlife conservation can result in win-win outcomes. We warmly congratulate Edwin on his well deserved award." Edwin will be invited to become a member of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas and its Young Professionals Working Group. "What impresses me most about Edwin Sabuhoro is that he found a local solution for a serious protected area problem," says Deanne Adams, Acting President of the IRF. "He established a way to provide a new economy for local communities that also provides new protection for threatened animals in the area – and this is a source of inspiration for other communities." The Young Conservationist Award is a joint initiative launched by IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas and the International Ranger Federation. In 2004, the two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote collaboration on protected areas and the rangers responsible for their protection. For more information, please contact Djinn Pourkiani on djinn.pourkiani@iucn.org

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4 Jan

[Power to the People](#) by [Edwin Sabuhoro](#) [Comment \(0\)](#)

By: CATHERINE MACK. ETHICAL TRAVELLER: I ONCE HAD an editor who told me that I shouldn't write about people in travel. "Holidaymakers only want to know about the place, not the people. They're irrelevant to travel articles," he told me. But writing about beaches and budget airlines is not really my bag, as regular readers will know by now. People who create incredible places to stay or things to do, and also care deeply for their local environment, community and climate change, sell a holiday to me just as much as any piece of beach lit. And 2009 was definitely a year about people in tourism. Those who have been surviving the recession without compromising their principles of responsible tourism merit huge recognition in my book. Some even dared to set up businesses last year, such as Tripbod

(tripbod.com), which puts travellers in touch with local guides before they travel. For a small fee you get e-mail contact with local guides who give you all the inside, finger-on-the-pulse information on the place you plan to visit. Tripbod works with an ethical ethos, and sources “bods” who think the same way as it does – and top bods they are, too. One organisation that nearly lost its battle for survival in 2009 was Tourism Concern (tourismconcern.org.uk), a charity that has been fighting for human rights in tourism for 20 years. It made an international appeal for rescue funding, and has managed to see its way into 2010: the appeal will continue. Taking on tourism multinationals over employment conditions and governments over indigenous land-ownership issues, as well as demanding equal access to basic resources such as water – so often usurped for tourism purposes – Tourism Concern has an invaluable role in protecting people affected by tourism. Thanks to all of you who donated after I wrote about this, last October. Many thanks also for all the lovely feedback last year, such as from the two women who travelled to Africa with People and Places (travel-peopleand places.co.uk), which was named best volunteering organisation at the 2009 Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards. These readers had great experiences and felt as if they had made positive contributions to the communities they visited. People and Places won the award because it not only offers a sustainable, transparent approach to volunteering holidays but also campaigns for an end to the many cases of bad practice in the sector, such as lack of consultancy with local communities, no police checks and the abandonment of volunteers in situ. Very importantly, it also confronts the problem of where volunteers’ money ends up. People and Places gets what “voluntourism” is about, and, if you are thinking of giving time and money to people who need it, they are the ones to call. But my People of 2009 award goes to the Kieffer family in France. They run Itinerance, a walking-holiday company in the Mercantour region. They sent us off to the Lower Alps last year: we walked from gite to gite, with a donkey to carry our bags. They bring hundreds of visitors to their spot in the Alps every year, teaching children about the joys of nature, bringing money to many rural villages, sharing their love of slow travel and slow food, and running one of the most exemplary ethical tourism businesses I have come across (itinerance.net). So bah, humbug to that editor: he was wrong. It’s people like this who are creating an ethical tourism industry and ensuring that travel is still one of the most exhilarating, eye-opening ways to spend our precious time. Untagged

[HAPPY NEW YEAR, 2010.](#) by [Edwin Sabuhoro](#) C
[omment \(0\)](#)

We want to take this opportunity at Rwanda Eco-Tours to wish you a Happy New Year, 2010. We look forward to working with you, and thank all those that we worked with and supported us throughout 2009. We are starting more projects: www.cbtrwanda.prg and we are very optimistic that we will reach out more to local people, conservation and above all giving you an educative and lifetime experience. Untagged

[Doing Conservation and Tourism Together- a story from Rwanda](#) by
[Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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By: Jeremy, 4th December 2009. Last week at the DICE 20th birthday I met an inspiring man called Edwin Sabuhoro, who works in gorilla conservation in northern Rwanda. His innovative work combining development and conservation earned him the IUCN Young Conservationist of the Year in 2008, and his projects have also won eco-tourism awards. “When I was growing up I was involved in conservation work,” says Edwin, “and then I went to work for one of the national parks. The biggest problem in the parks was poaching, people coming in from the outside and killing wildlife, encroaching on park land. We saw the wildlife diminish and the parks degraded. Our answer as park rangers was just guards and guns – we’d run after people, shoot them or chase them away. We didn’t have any other message than ‘this is a park – don’t come in here. If you come in here, I’ll shoot you.’ That didn’t work. There had to be a better way to stop people killing wildlife.” Edwin came to do a masters at DICE, expecting to be given the answers. Instead, they told him to find his own, and that the people most likely to have the answers were the ones currently being shot at. “I was involved in rescuing a baby gorilla, but five gorillas were killed and the men were caught. I talked to the families responsible, and their challenge to me was that if they were not employed to do a job, not getting paid, how were they going to eat? They are struggling to feed themselves, and if you were starving and you saw wildlife, would you not kill it? That’s when I realised we needed to do conservation in a way that would benefit local people, helping them to understand the resource they have, and want to protect it.” “You can’t avoid it – conservation and development have to go hand in hand. Local people have to be involved in the planning. It was too easy to care for the wildlife, and forget about the people living around them. They are suffering, languishing in poverty, they don’t have food, but these are the people that should be the number one custodians and first beneficiaries of the resource.” The first priority then, was to create an alternative source of food, turning poachers into farmers. “Instead of poaching wildlife,” Edwin explains, “we gave people start-up funds and enrolled them in a farming programme. Then when they get seeds the following year, they pass those on to another family.” This took people off the park lands, but it didn’t go quite far enough – the local people weren’t killing the gorillas, but they weren’t benefiting from them either. That led to an eco-tourism venture. “We have tourists coming to visit the village, and we wanted people to benefit from this, so we started a cultural village. After visiting the gorillas, tourists come and learn directly from the community, with art, food, and dances.” Former poachers now lead western tourists in traditional dance and drumming sessions. Through the eyes of the tourists, the community came to view the gorillas differently. “Now people understand that the natural resource that people are coming to see is also generating an income.” “We’ve seen the number of poachers decrease, and the population of gorillas increase,” says Edwin. “I’ve seen that if we bring conservation and development together, with the local community right at the heart, then you get truly sustainable conservation.” The next challenge is to share that story more widely, in other national parks in Rwanda, and in other countries around the region. “As well as telling our story, we’re also raising the capacity of the local community to manage their own resources, through education” says Edwin of his future plans. “We’re teaching men and women about family planning, and encouraging them to keep their children in school, so that everyone gets to learn and be involved in conservation.”

Untagged

[Rwanda's Mountain Gorillas Find a Friend](#) by

[Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2008/10/rwanda_after_thgen.html In 2004, when park worker Edwin Sabuhoro heard that a baby gorilla had been poached from the Volcanoes National Park, it became a turning point in his life. The native Rwandan had heard rumors before of gorillas being poached and offered for sale on the black market. Given their scant numbers, Sabuhoro knew intimately most of the gorillas in the park. Poaching or killing a gorilla is a serious offense in Rwanda, and the local authorities organized a sting operation in which Sabuhoro acted as mediator between the police and the suspected poachers. The baby gorilla was eventually rescued from the home of a villager and the poachers were arrested. The incident shook Sabuhoro. He kept asking himself, Why would anyone harm a baby gorilla and risk prison? He decided to ask the community himself. They told him that they were desperate and needed money to feed their families, and challenged him that he would do the same if his family were threatened with hunger. As it stood, the local community received little benefit from tourists, who paid \$500 to the Rwandan government for a daily gorilla trekking permit. Sabuhoro quit his job and gave part of his savings to the local villagers to plant crops. He then went to England to further his studies and earned a master's degree in conservation and tourism in 2006. When he returned, Sabuhoro began working with the community on development projects aimed at providing economic alternatives to poaching. Together they launched the Iby'iwacu Cultural Village, which sits on the edge of Volcanoes National Park and is entirely owned by the local villagers. Tourists who come to the region to see the gorillas can now also learn about local culture and history. Sabuhoro is proud of the fact that Rwanda's three main tribes, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, work together in this community. He says they see themselves as Rwandans first. Sabuhoro wants to ensure that his country's precious natural resources, including the mountain gorillas, are preserved for future generations and his work now is focused on encouraging the community to conserve its culture. Through a variety of efforts in recent years, poaching of all park animals has been reduced by 60 percent. This year, Sabuhoro launched his own eco-tourism company. His efforts in the community have been recognized by a number of international awards; most recently, he received the 2008 Young Conservation award from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

[Edwin Sabuhoro to speak to Redlands University Audience in California, USA](#) by
[Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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One Rwandan's Story A Rwandan native who has worked to turn gorilla poachers into protectors will discuss his community building work during an upcoming lecture at the University of Redlands. Edwin Sabuhoro will share his experiences in Rwandan conservation and eco-tourism Tuesday, Oct. 27 at 4:30 p.m. in the university's Orton Center. The event is free and open to the public. Sabuhoro was so troubled by the practice of gorilla poaching – capturing gorillas and offering them for sale on the black market – that he was inspired to quit his job, donate part of his savings to local villagers to plant crops, and move to England to earn a master's degree in conservation and tourism in 2006. After earning his master's, Sabuhoro returned to Rwanda and began working with the community on development projects designed to provide residents with other ways to make money, instead of poaching. Soon, the community launched the Iby'wacu Cultural Village, which sits on the edge of Volcanoes National Park. The village is entirely owned by local villagers and informs tourists who come to the region to see gorillas about the local culture and history. He has been a visiting lecturer at National University of Rwanda, teaching in both environmental law and conservation policy and law. He also has taught tourism and ecotourism management. This year he also launched his own eco-tourism company, which offers environmentally responsible safaris. The company is structured to directly benefit the local community and to provide incentives for conservation in the community. This program is co-sponsored by Redlands Environmental Studies, Center for Science and Mathematics, ASUR Convocations Lectures, Campus Diversity and Inclusion, College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office and Students for Environmental Action (SEA). *Untagged*

[It takes a village to rediscover ancient ways](#) by

[Edwin Sabuhoro](#)

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It takes a village to rediscover ancient ways Ex-poachers become cultural ambassadors Dan Robson Toronto star Published On Sat Jul 11 2009EmailPrintRepublish Report an error Share Article Photos (1)Comments (0) Warriors do a traditional dance, called an Intore, at the Iby'wacu Cultural Village. Many used to be involved in the illegal animal trade, but learned ancient arts that they share with visitors and Rwandans alike. DAN ROBSON PHOTO KINiGI, RWANDA–The cry of warriors punctuates the growing roar of beating drums, as men dance around waving spears. In the shadow of ancient volcanoes, nothing stirs between the thatch-roof huts – everything stops, everything is captivated. The men wear blue sarongs, matching straps across their bare chests, with long headdresses that flip and flop as they leap up and down. A short man shouts with a wide, toothless grin, stomping his feet with slow and deliberate thrusts. They are performing the Intore – the warrior dance. This is Iby'wacu Cultural Village, surrounded by dark volcanic soil, at the foot of the Virunga Volcanoes, in the village of Kinigi in northern Rwanda. We arrived here from Kigali after weaving up and around the rolling hills and deep green valleys of Rwanda. I came with Edwin Sabuhoro, owner

of Rwanda Eco-Tours, a company that promotes sustainable tourism. He's also the founder of the Iby'wacu Cultural Village (Iby'wacu means "our heritage" in Kinyarwanda). Sabuhoro, 32, is an active figure in Rwanda's wildlife conservation movement. The endangered mountain gorillas that make the Virungas their home have been almost entirely wiped out by poaching. Four years ago, Sabuhoro was working in Rwanda's Volcano National Park, home to the Virungas, when he rescued a baby gorilla from poachers, who stood to make around \$2,000 (U.S.) selling it illegally. After the men were arrested and charged, Sabuhoro and tried to find out what was driving them into the illegal trade. Local villagers told him that they faced the stark choice of poaching, or starving. "The reality was that if I was living there, I would also poach," Sabuhoro says. "So the question was: how can we use tourism to provide direct benefits to people?" In 2005, Sabuhoro created the Iby'wacu Cultural Village. A few thatch-roofed huts were built – including a replica of the Rwandan king's palace. Former poachers and other villagers who joined the group were taught traditional dances, woodworking, and basket weaving – Rwandan arts that had been eroding for decades. Today, about 300 former poachers are employed by the cultural village. But the impact goes even further. While 40 per cent of revenue from the village goes directly to employees, the remaining 60 per cent goes into a general community fund that supports education and other needs that are deemed essential by members of the local community. Since the village was created there has been a reported 40 per cent drop in poaching in the region. But I was far too lost in the experience to think about the significance of that statistic. After all, there were still people waving spears at me. The performance is mesmerizing, but when it's done the adventure doesn't stop. Emmanuel Harerimana, our 22-year-old guide and the only English teacher in Kinigi, shows us around the king's chamber. The highlight: an enormous bed, built up off the ground with layers of grass, and mats for comfort. The king had access to any woman in the village, Harerimana tells us, and his evenings sometimes included sleeping with at least five of them. The wall is lined with jugs and jars of food and booze – for nourishment to get through the busy night. Later, the local medicine man shows us his remedies for all of life's ailments: everything from the common cold to erectile dysfunction. He gives me two small beans, which when crushed into a facial lotion, are supposed to make me irresistible to women. I'm still waiting for the effects to kick in. As night falls, we sit warmed by piles of burning coals inside the king's hut (near the volcanoes, the climate is comparable to Toronto's in late spring). The dancers and drummers share songs and stories with us. They tell us about life before Iby'wacu, when they were still poachers. Barora Leonidas, 64, was once the most notorious poacher in the region; he's admitted to killing more than 200 animals. But as he tells me about his past, his animated excitement fades. His frown tightens the skin around his eyes – in a strain, a hint of something that pains. Yes, he used to be a poacher, he says. A very good one. But since 2005 he has worked here in the village, meeting people and making money doing it. The interpreter tells me that Leonides says he's happier now; the old poacher's frown loosens into a half grin and his eyes open softly. Since coming to the village he has met new people, and he's doing well. He thanks Sabuhoro for being "the father of the village," for giving them the opportunity to get out of the forest, to learn new skills, and to share them with new people. Jacques Bikorimana, 20, sits on a wooden bench near the coals chatting with Harerimana. In their chuckling banter, they sound like two schoolboys who have been friends for years. But Bikorimana and Harerimana have just met. In fact, this is the first trip that Bikorimana has ever been on. He lives in Gitarama, about 40 kilometres southwest of Kigali. Eco-Tours has given the trip to Bikorimana, as part of an initiative to encourage more Rwandans get out and learn more about

their own country. Tourists also come to visit the village, generating essential revenue. Usually they're on their way to visit the gorillas. The side trip costs \$20 (U.S.) plus \$50 if you want to sleep overnight in one of the village huts. The package includes freshly cooked meals and an incredible morning hike across scenic fields and through caves formed by the lava that once flowed through the region. For Bikorimana, a trip like this is invaluable. He says he'll never forget the experience, the chance to meet people who share the same heritage in such a unique place. "This is the happiest I've been," he says. "Ever." Sabuhoro hopes to expand that experience. "The idea is to build a network of culture villages around the country, where we can help other communities in different areas to share our knowledge," he says, "but also to share with them how to tap into the potential of tourism. "We want to be proud of who we are, where we come from, and where we want to be. As we do that, we pass on a sound and sustainable future for generations, that people can be proud of." Dan Robson is a summer intern with the Star.

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[Turning Gorilla Poachers to Farmers](#) by

[Administrator](#)

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This project intended to change the trend and turn poachers to farmers for the production of food and surplus for sale an effective ground for conservation education and sensitisation. Each year communities in different associations save seeds to plant for the next season from what they have grown a sustainable element to keep the project benefiting and on going.

The main objective of the project is to create an alternative means to local people around gorillas' national park with an alternative livelihood that will absent them from poaching of wildlife and degradation of mountain gorilla habitat.

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