

ONIB

OVERNIGHT BUSES

MAGAZINE



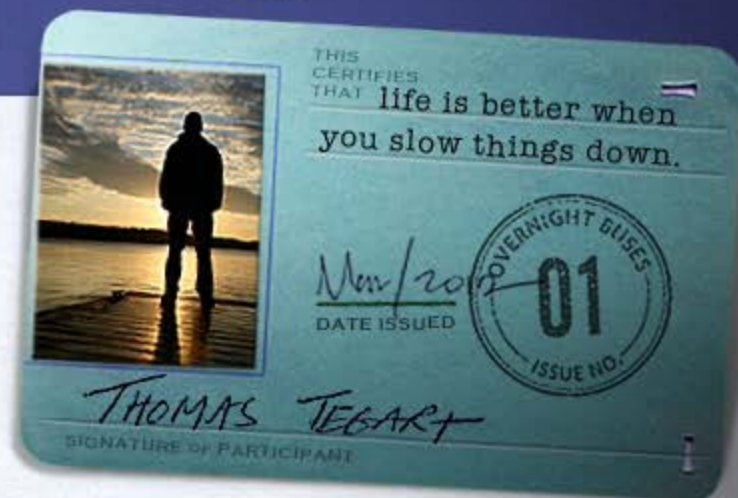
01 BENEATH THE RIM
EXPLORING
THE COLORADO RIVER
MICHAEL SHAPIRO

02 GREEN PASTURES
AND THE GHOSTS OF RWANDA
MARCIA D'ESANCTIS

03 MY MOUNTAIN
CLIMBING KILIMANJARO
FROM THE AUTHOR OF
NO TOUCH MONKEY!
AYUN HALLIDAY

NATHAN J. COMP • IAIN MANLEY
CLAIRE VAN DEN HEEVER
SIMON FENTON
MICHELLE YACHT

TRAVEL ADVENTURES OFF THE BEATEN PATH



The inspiration for Overnight Buses began with a journey we took through Kenya from Malindi to Nairobi. Initially, we had wanted to take a train, enticed by the romantic notion of riding the rails through a strange country. But our friend in Kenya sternly told us no. Too dangerous, too slow, too prone to breakdowns. Take a bus, she said.

The bus trip was everything you expect from third-world transportation: packed, stuffy, long. There were no movie-cliche chickens tied to the roof rack but someone did ride in the cargo compartment. Every so often we would pull to a halt outside a dusty Mobil gas station with a hole in the ground for a toilet and no soap.

We joked about the train we could have taken. Instead of being stuck in truck traffic along dusty roads we could have been riding along smooth rails in first class. At the time, we imagined fine china in the dining car, plush pillows and places to stretch your legs; all things our bus was missing. Our journey ultimately ended well, although we firmly pronounced that we were forever disowning Kenyan overnight

Michael Shapiro makes a modern, 24-day expedition down the Colorado River that takes him in the footsteps of early explorer Captain John Wesley Powell.

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AN
EMOTIONALLY
ENGAGING
JOURNEY



02



SILVERBACK GORILLAS

RWANDA, AFRICA

Marcia DeSanctis visits Rwanda and finds ghosts of the past everywhere she looks. But is this what Rwanda is really about?

[read more >>](#)

FROM
THE AUTHOR OF
**NO TOUCH
MONKEY!**

MV



**BOARDING
PASS**

Flight No.
RW

Seat Row Seat
A B  C D E

This part to be presented to
the purser upon embarkation



SILVERBACK GORILLAS

RWANDA, AFRICA

GREEN PASTURES

MARCIA DESANCTIS 

Kigali was opaque with night when I landed there. As always, I already envisioned my departure. Airports have this effect on me. They are my

hello and goodnight, the place I cross with an exhausted shuffle when I arrive and impatiently want to ditch when I leave. They are miserable, inhuman places, churning people in and out like an automatic dishwasher, offering lattes to the unthirsty and warm water in the restroom, if you can figure out that country's faucet mechanics. But when I travel somewhere entirely new, the airport simply highlights my inability to delay gratification, or in this case, comprehension. I wanted my trip to Rwanda behind me. I wanted to have seen what was still ahead of me. Like some extraordinary blind date, I knew that Rwanda would be different and frankly, the prospect was terrifying.

I was there to do some pro bono consulting for a small NGO and in return Aimee, the young woman who ran it, had composed an itinerary for me. So, while I would spend some days in remote villages or trekking up muddy hillsides to visit cassava plantations and apiary construction sites, I also had plans to see the gorillas, visit a game preserve and stretch myself out on the shores of Lake Kivu. But as the days spread out before me, I suspected it would be the spaces in between - the long drives, the solitary hours and wakeful nights - that would really inform my stay. The most I knew of Rwanda was genocide, but I was aware it wasn't fair. My challenge was to allow something else to sink in.

As Aimee directed the taxi to the Kiyovu neighborhood and the guesthouse she had arranged, I was hung over from a travel bender. Complimentary champagne, and lots of it, was the only way I could hack 24 hours in the back of coach with a pinched nerve up and down my shoulders. My teeth felt like they had sprouted fur, and my head grew heavy as the alcohol drained from my system. My room smelled slightly of age and disuse, but it was otherwise well-appointed and the bathtub was big enough for me to soak in for an hour, with the water plenty hot. Afterward, I walked to the edge of the property in clean jeans and a sweater. Lights were strewn before me in the distance so I knew I was on one of Kigali's many hills. I repaired to my too-quiet room and fell back on the bed. There was an occasional ping-ping on the tin roof. and a snuffle from the lone guard outside. Sensing

know I was on one of Kigali's many hills. I repaired to my too quiet room and fell back on the bed. There was an occasional ping-ping on the tin roof, and a snuffle from the lone guard outside. Sensing something more akin to mortal sickness rather than terror, I imagined the thousands of people who were killed in the neighborhood I slept in, and pictured their souls swirling around in the windy night.



SPARKLING MORNING IN KIGALI

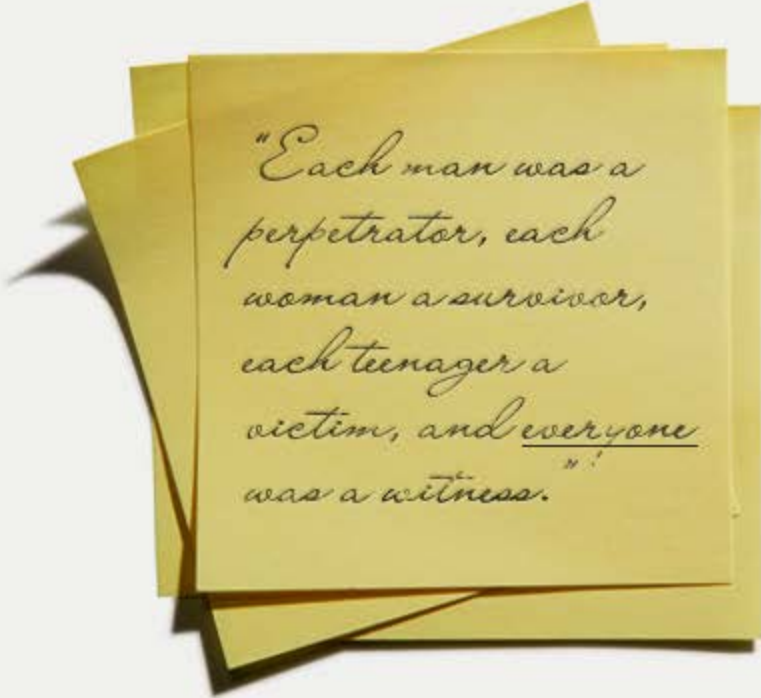
RWANDA, AFRICA

The next morning, two women from the NGO collected me for breakfast. Their group was too poor to have a vehicle, so we walked the good distance into town and I sucked down two lattes at Bourbon Coffee. Kigali is known to be the cleanest and safest city in Africa, and the country is rising to be a regional economic power. President Kagame's face smiled mildly from behind nearly every cash register. He resembles a slightly more avuncular Barack Obama, and the likeness lent some comfort to his gaze.

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"Each man was a perpetrator, each woman a survivor, each teenager a victim, and everyone was a witness."

It was a sparkling morning, with prosperous city dwellers going about their business, and still, everywhere there were embers. It was uncomfortable that death was so stubbornly on the brain, as if it would blind me against Rwanda's beauty and hope and promise. But to me, everyone seemed to bear a mark of the country's recent terror. Each man was a

perpetrator, each woman was a survivor, each teenager was a victim, and everyone was a witness. "Where were you, what did you do, whom did you lose?" These are the questions that were ready to leap from my throat. How does a country repair the irreparable, and how do people coexist with ghosts that outnumber the living? "How, sir, yes YOU, in the yellow shirt, how, sir, does a person go on after seeing what you've seen?"

We shopped at the Kimironko open-air market where tables groaned with yam and kale and passion fruit, and vendors practiced the art of the deal. For the first time that day, I was not thinking of bodies piled up on the side of the road. Aimee scooped up a handful of garlic and began to seek out pumpkin, carrots and mangoes. The air was thick

and began to seek out pumpkin, carrots and mangoes. The air was thick with the smell of soil and sweat. A toddler teething on a raw potato clung to her mother. A manicurist painted tangerine polish on another woman. American hip hop blared from the flower section, and with a sweeping motion, the man motioned me to his stall. I grabbed a handful of calla lilies, pressed my nose in the blossoms and suddenly felt dizzy.



“Are you okay?” Aimee asked. My hip was wedged on the corner of a table and I clutched the flowers. “You look awful,” she said. “Wait here.”

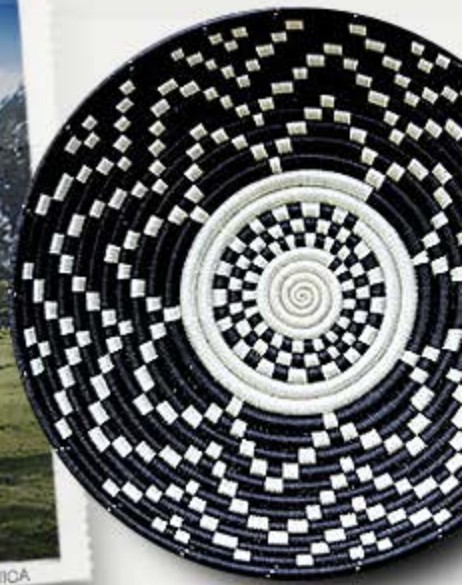
She returned with a bunch of finger-sized bananas, peeled one, and held forth the open skin with the fruit inside. “Try this.”

The banana tasted tart, like the inside of a key lime pie.

“Much better,” I said. “*Muzu*, over here!” A man waved me over to his table piled high with tree tomatoes and avocado. “*Muzu*” is short for *muzungu*, a Swahili word from colonial times that literally meant ‘aimless wanderer’, but then came to mean ‘exploiter’ and now is simply slang for ‘white person.’ He looked about forty-five years old, which meant he was twenty-seven during the genocide. I looked harder at him, his facial features and found myself trying to profile him: Hutu, the perpetrator, or Tutsi, a victim? If he were the latter, it meant that he was back from the diaspora — Congo, Burundi, or Kenya — where after 1994

him, his facial features and found myself trying to profile him: Hutu, the perpetrator, or Tutsi, a victim? If he were the latter, it meant that he was back from the diaspora – Congo, Burundi or Kenya, where after 1994, the only surviving Tutsi remained. Effectively all the Tutsis in Rwanda – almost a million – were butchered. “

I don't need any avocado,” I said. He laughed and I did too.



The next two days were a tornado of activity – a bus to Butare in the rain to visit two development projects, both more desperate and optimistic in the downpour. Men in straw hats and women wrapped in bright floral prints sang their gratitude to the NGO, and detailed the progress of their community improvement projects. Mothers nursed babies, the sick took their neighbors' arms to walk, and children in faded school uniforms and troublemaking grins kicked a ball with bare feet.

More work, and gallons of stout Rwandan coffee, then dinner and South African chardonnay at Hotel Mille Collines, and a party at Aimee's with creamy sweet potatoes the flavor of pound cake and curry boiling on the stove.

The next day we headed north in our car, where billboards advertising mobile phone companies lined the highways, construction

ON THE STOVE:

The next day we headed north in our car, where billboards advertising mobile phone companies lined the highways, construction sites bloomed in the distance, and the countryside sped by in broad brushes of green. Banana palms grew far into the horizon and tea plantations rose, folded, and faded among the hills. Riverbeds were lined with bean plants and coffee trees. Red mud spilled down the hills and onto the street, and flecks of clay splashed onto the windshield.

On the road to Akagera Game Preserve, heavy rain caused the traffic to halt. The road was impenetrable and with our SUV stopped in the dead center, a tree fell onto the road, missing our car by ten yards or so. Out of nowhere, one after another, men appeared with machetes to hack the tree off the road. They worked quickly, and after I snapped a few pictures, I slipped back into the car. Aimee and I exchanged a glance. The machete is to Rwanda as the train is to Germany – an image so loaded, it can never be benign.



A team of baboons waited for us at the Game Lodge, as if they had been planted there for comic relief. One of them stole my bottle of orange soda, and I filmed him trying to open the bottle like a Skid Row drunk. In the park, giraffes nuzzled each others' necks, marabou minced

A team of baboons waited for us at the Game Lodge, as if they had been planted there for comic relief. One of them stole my bottle of orange soda, and I filmed him trying to open the bottle like a Skid Row drunk. In the park, giraffes nuzzled each others' necks, marabou minced around, and the leopard vanished into the brush. Fisherman trod lightly around hippos and crocodiles, who patrolled the waters.

Back in Kigali, I ordered dinner at another guesthouse, this time Kimihururu, the neighborhood where the genocide was first unleashed. I steamed myself in the shower and having soaked through the small red towel I used a bath mat, I hung it over the lip of the tub to dry. I went to the lobby, or common room, ordered a cold Primus beer and tried to engage the night clerk as I nibbled on a plate of vegetables and rice the underworked cook had prepared for me.

"What was this house, I mean..." my voice trailed off.

"It was always a house," he said.

"Did the same people always live here?" I asked.

He shrugged.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"I'm Rwandan," he said. "But I'm from the Congo. When I was little, I went to live with cousins there." That meant, he was Tutsi.

"Oh," I said. "Are your parents...I mean your family..."

"No, they're all dead," he said. "I never knew them, really."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It's not your fault," he said.

I ordered another beer, watched *Millionaire* on the flat screen, and went back to the room. I was the only guest checked in that night. I gasped when I entered the bathroom. The wet towel had dripped wide, crimson streaks in the bathtub. I lifted it, wrung it out, and watched with horror as a stream of blood-red water trickled thickly towards the drain.



The following day, I left for more development sites – a sanitation project and a woman’s cooperative, and saw two villages in the process of organizing themselves into thriving communities. That night, I slept in Musanze, to leave early for Virunga Park, to hike and see the gorillas the next morning. At a dinner of roasted chicken and cassava greens in the hotel dining room a group of men sat at a table near us. They had an aura about them, the protective shield that made it clear they were not to be messed with. They weren’t menacing, but they were formidable, dressed like businessmen on casual Friday, with a confident air that indicated they knew – but didn’t care – they were the center of attention.

“Who are these men?” I asked the waiter.

“The President is coming to town tomorrow,” he said. “This is his security.”

As I left, I passed the table and said “Hello.” They waved back, friendly, one said, “Hi,” another, “Have a good night.” I surmised they had all been guerillas, fighting alongside the President, and wondered as I had for almost a week, what men like these ones had seen.



I woke to one of Rwanda’s shimmering mornings – the volcano Muhabura was outside my window and I drove past brick colonial buildings to the staging area for the gorillas. Walking stick in hand I began my trek with seven other climbers, a tracker and two guides,

dressed rather like soldiers. I slipped on stones as I leapt across many streams. I caught my new hiking shoes on vines and roots, and strolled across a lush green meadow flecked with flowers. Hills hovered silently in every direction. Crisp air gave way to a dagger sun and back again; it felt like the Swiss Alps in June. I stripped off another layer before the final climb to the gorilla family, which had been tracked just over the stonewall – the one that runs for 50 miles along the border of Uganda and the DRC. We clambered up to the jungle – the one where

opposition Hutu factions have been rumored at certain times to be hiding out and to silently threaten the status quo - and soon found ourselves enclosed by trees and silence.

Within ten minutes I saw my first gorilla, a baby, then its twin and then a mother. I had the sense, however, that they were checking us out, and that they enjoyed, or at least tolerated, visiting hours as much as we did. I felt as if I had been let into the cage at the zoo, but I spun around their living area, snapping pictures, transfixed by the infants' adorable faces and the nonchalance of their existence. We watched the silverback scowling, with his massive head as big as a ham. The twins and several babies crawled onto him, as if he were the best American Dad. He yanked a stalk of bamboo and shredded it in his mouth, and we shot more photos of him as he moved his dining spot, still outside the required seven yards from us, but thrillingly close to where we stood. The tracker made strange braying noises, to communicate something friendly, apparently, to the silverback.

I was on the edge of the group when I saw the 500-pound male gorilla start and head straight for us. His arms were outstretched to his sides, and as he moved, he struck me, a solid roundhouse swipe to my right kidney. My group had packed together so tightly in our rapid-flash panic, that there was no room for me to go flying, but I spun around and one of the guides caught me mid-twist.



My fellow trekkers were too stunned to speak, and while my whole body trembled, the soldier collapsed with laughter.

“He didn’t hurt you, did he?” he asked.

“Well, nothing’s broken,” I said, with tears that forced sunscreen to streak down my face, straight into my mouth. “No, I’m fine. Does this happen a lot?”

“Sometimes. They’re not aggressive,” he said, though the throbbing welt on my side suggested otherwise.

I had done enough research to know that the famous mountain gorillas were peaceful creatures. and I suppose I understood that it

I had done enough research to know that the famous mountain gorillas were peaceful creatures, and I suppose I understood that it wasn't me at all he wanted. As he walked towards his family, sitting half in the sun and half in the shadows, his arms propelled him to a rapid clip, and I was simply in the way, an obstacle in his path.

"Do you know why he chose you?" the guide asked me. He too was laughing, and I surmised he had seen these near-misses before.

"I don't think he singled me out," I said. "I was on the end." Maybe our group was too close, but I had no choice – the seven other people were huddled together, all taking pictures of each other. It was natural that I was shoved over to the side.

"I think he wanted to cheer you up," said the guide. "I think he wanted to show me who was boss," I said, trying not to look as weak and scared as I felt.

We laughed. There was a half hour left of our sixty minute gorilla tour. I felt fine, and my seven co-travelers fussed over me, as if I had lost an arm. I put my camera away and watched these thirteen animals caress each other, toss around the forest floor and leap up branches. I snatched a few eucalyptus leaves, crumpled them and held them under my nose. I draped my jacket over me and stood, hands in pockets, in a white shaft of sun as I listened to the rustle of the animals. Soon, we walked back to the vehicle, over ditches, through pastures filled with ox and acacia, and in spite of my protestations, the soldier helped me over the many rising brooks. As we said goodbye, he said, "I think the gorilla liked you."

"I'm not actually sure that's a compliment," I said.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "But you will surely remember him."

That afternoon, I drank tonic water and lime on the beach in Gisenyi, and tanned myself next to the chilly water of Lake Kivu, which was as sprawling and endless as the sea. The promenade was lined with colonial houses, giving the appearance of a down-at-the-heels European resort town. Mount Nyiragongo bubbled orange just over the border in the DRC, and I strolled the palm-lined avenue to Goma

European resort town. Mount Nyiragongo bubbled orange just over the border in the DRC, and I strolled the palm-lined avenue to Goma, stopping for a beer at one of the old stone hotels. I knew there had been horror in Gisenyi seventeen years earlier, but this day, I couldn't feel it, just the heat, the sun and the silverback's hand print around my middle, reminding me of something.

On the way back to Kigali, we detoured for the many genocide memorials. Most, like Gisenyi's, were simple concrete tombs festooned with purple bunting, the sign of a country still mourning almost one fifth of its population.

"How many people are buried here?" I asked Andrew the driver, at one.

"Thousands, probably," he said.

"Did you know many people who died?" I asked.

"Thousands," he said again. I wonder if he had been thinking, "Why bother?" He knew I could feel, but never understand.

The driver and I were silent as he drove me back into Kigali, where he dropped me at yet a third place, this time a decent, if enormous hotel. We made plans to meet the next morning.

As 9:00 am, he collected me, and we drove first to Ntarama, a small church forty-five minutes from the city center. No one was there to greet us, just a couple of armed guards who unlocked the door to let us in. I walked past the purple bunting to the first enclosure, an open air shed. There were six white, reinforced bags on the left of the shelf, and a stack of mildewing books on the right.

"Are those...." I said, pointing to the white sacks.

"Bones," Andrew said. "They still dig them up. So many were tossed into the rivers and farms all over the place. This area was all Tutsi."

I picked up a notebook, a child's tablet. "They came here to do their homework," he said. "They thought they'd be safe but the Hutu threw grenades into the church."

There was a notebook with math exercises, a French workbook, a

There was a notebook with math exercises, a French workbook, a pad that contained what looked like writing samples and stacks of moth-eaten bibles. A young woman came to usher us around.

“Shouldn’t these be under glass?” I asked her. “Preserved?”

“I don’t know,” she said.



Inside the church were clothes, glasses, identity cards, sandals, pens. There were skulls lined up on shelves, showing the three primary ways of murder: machete, blunt force, and gunshot. She and Andrew showed me around the exhibit, wordlessly, and occasionally, when I had the stomach, I interjected a question.

We then drove to Nyamata, the church where thousands of Tutsi were murdered in the place they had gone to seek protection. The below-ground crypts were stacked top to bottom and end to end with bones. Upstairs, the clothes the victims were wearing were stacked limply on the pews. On the side of the church was a statue of Mary, looking helplessly down from her perch. The figure was covered in bird shit.

Every breath I drew that morning had been tainted with sorrow.

Every breath I drew that morning had been tainted with sorrow. Purple petals from the jacaranda tree rained down on our car as we left Nyamata. "Even the trees are in mourning," I said to the driver.

"No, the opposite," Andrew said. "The trees are very much alive."

Within two days I was back at the airport, my bag full of souvenirs: geranium oil, coffee, tea, bracelets, passion fruit syrup and akabanga – the hot pepper oil that comes in a dropper tube, which people tote around in their pockets. The driver was right. I kept thinking of tragedy when Rwanda just wanted me to see its colors, put my toe in the water, shake hands with living breathing people, and taste its sweet fruit. Despite, or because of, my predisposition to let my conclusions get in the way of my own judiciousness, I was besotted with Rwanda, its stately hills and red soil, and people who would not or could not talk about the past. I had to tell myself, experience is what matters, and that the heart can't quite feel what the eyes haven't yet seen.

As I went through passport control, I saw President Kagame's half-smiling picture one last time, with those eyes that had witnessed so much, which peered behind professorly glasses. I know he wasn't talking to me, but I'd like to believe that something in those airport walls telegraphed a message, maybe about mothers in a small village with the next generation of Rwandans at their breast. Or about a cold drink on Lake Kivu's sultry shore. Or about a cheap towel that dripped nothing but red dye. Or a gorilla that singled me out after all, simply to knock some sense into me.

I went through security with dried mud still on my shoes, and slipped on my jacket. Did I have any money left to buy a latte that I didn't really want? I fished through my purse, and unzipped my pocket. I pulled out a clump of eucalyptus leaves, still pungent, still sweet.



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Marcia DeSanctis is a journalist and writer whose work has appeared in many publications, including *Vogue*, *Departures*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Recce*, *Best Women's Travel Writing 2011*, *Best Travel Writing 2011*, *Coachella Review* and *Town & Country*. Her story "Masha" won the Solas Grand Prize Silver Award for Travel Writing in 2011. Formerly, she was a network news producer for ABC, NBC, CBS and Dow Jones. You can visit her website at marciadesanctis.com