

## Connected in Akagera

There is a feeling of being connected here in Akagera National Park, a game park that is, relatively speaking, still in its infancy. If you allow it, you will feel a bond with the land and the animals, and like your children, you will root for their future.

For the lions, leopards, elephants, giraffes, black rhinos, buffaloes, impalas, zebras, hippos, baboons, warthogs, and various other water and land inhabitants re-introduced into the park within the last ten years or so (18 black rhinos arrived at the park this past May), their future looks rosy, cushy, and downright happy; circle of life aside.

It was not always like this and that is what makes this park so special today – a sad and disheartening story as a result of the genocide turned into a story of life, hope, protection, and growth.

It feels real here. Not manufactured like so many other places in the world. It is pure, and every so often you need to connect with nature on this level and this is the place to do so.

With your safari guide's permission, in certain parts of the park, you can sit on the savannah grass silently and feel the power of the setting, the zebras, the giraffes, the baboons and the impalas. The animals in Akagera do not seem afraid and many leisurely saunter about, viewing a mere mortal head-on with a sense of curiosity.

Their beauty is breathtaking, as are the park's visual layers of pastel-yellows, rich browns, deep greens and a range of colours picked from the orange palette. When the sun shifts positions, various contours of light and shadow change the illumination.

There is a romance to this park, as is with many game parks in Africa. But Akagera is different. Maybe it is being with animals learning to cohabitate with each other. Maybe it is because it is a storied park where the chapters of its book are now happy ones. Or maybe it is simply the wildlife and a human connecting on a level that is organic.

Most likely, though, it's all of them combined.