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Uganda – The Pearl Of Africa Glows Again

By andrew muigai

Uganda is a beautiful country with an impressive people. This is one of my favourite countries in all

of Africa. The people of Uganda have survived the troubles of 1967–86 period and emerged standing upright and wearing a smile. In that short period, the country suffered under the caprice of two despicable despots. One was the indisputably insane Idi Amin and the other, the arguably insane Milton Obote.

This is now history – a testament of the dignity and endurance of this people. The transformation of the country in the period since normalcy returned is nothing short of astounding. And it shows in the faces of the people you meet. That the graceful beauties of Uganda have not received the recognition they deserve in international beauty pageants is for me incontrovertible proof that most of these events are really fixed.

Winston Churchill was so besotted by the country that he gave it the name that has endured: the "Pearl of Africa". His observations about Uganda remain true today: "The scenery is different, the vegetation is different, the climate is different, and, most of all, the people are different from anything elsewhere ...in the whole range of Africa"

Travelers to Uganda are drawn by its stunning landscape – green rolling hills, snowcapped mountains, rainforests, majestic rivers and massive lakes. There are also a number of outstanding national parks for your safari encounter with the wildlife for which Africa is renowned. Unfortunately, I have to advise you to skip a few well–resourced parks such as Kidepo Valley in the north and Mgahinga in the west as they are not considered safe. The country's edge as a worthwhile destination is further enhanced by its endowments for white water rafting and sport fishing.

It is in Uganda that you find the highest number of primate species anywhere in the world. Opportunities for tracking rare mountain gorillas and chimpanzees are unrivalled elsewhere. The primate conservation efforts the country has followed are bearing fruit. A recent survey carried out by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Jane Goodall Institute in collaboration with the Uganda government, revealed that there are now 4,950 chimpanzees in the country. Previously, scientists guess for this number was between 3000 and 4000, but nobody knew for sure. The chimp is our closet

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living relative, sharing 98% of our genes and much of our behaviour. Uganda is the best country in the world to view chimpanzees in their natural habitat.

The best place to see the rare mountain gorilla is at the 331 sq. km Bwindi National Park. This park was formerly known as the Impenetrable Forest with good reason. The trees are thick and the forest thicker with dense undergrowth, creepers, bamboos and parasitic plants such as mistletoe and orchids. This environment is the habitat for mountain gorilla's, chimpanzee, and 8 other species of primate. Not less than half the world's population of an estimated 600 mountain gorillas have sanctuary here, making Bwindi the base for an important scientific conservation program.

Gorilla tracking is limited to small groups and the licenses are issued to ensure minimum disruption to the routine of the animals. Tracking the gorillas is an arduous task and you should be prepared for up to 8 hours of hiking. Good physical condition is a must. You are advised to make arrangements 4–12 months prior to the date of your visit. Bwindi is essentially a rain forest and it is necessary to bring

along a raincoat, walking boots and gloves.

In addition to its star gorillas, Bwindi is host to elephant, bush pig, giant forest hog and over 300 species of birds including rare forest birds. Others who have found a home in this ecosystem include many types of bats and rodents, 14 species of snakes, 27 species of frogs and toads, 6 chameleon types, 14 lizards, skinks and geckos and 200 species of butterfly. Bwindi is to the west of the country and is 560 km from Kampala.

Though not as famous for safari as neighboring Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda still has some pretty good game sanctuaries. The 3,840 sq. km Murchison Falls National Park is the largest and most spectacular of them. Aside from game, this park is renowned for its scenic beauty. Rolling savannah, tall grasslands and thick bush woodlands make the park. But you are advised not to miss out the magnificent waterfalls after which the park is named. The waterfall is formed where the Nile tapers from 50 metres to rush through a 7 metre gorge, falling 45 metres in a breath taking leap. This phenomena is said to be the most powerful natural flow of water anywhere on Earth.

If you are patient, you can catch some really huge Nile Perch at the foot of the falls. What kind of fish can withstand such a force that exists at the foot of the falls? Charles Norman describes his fishing day out with a companion who on seeing the massive fish "...let out a strangled squawk and I found myself staring at the hog-sized back of a huge fish protruding above the water at the rock's edge – a 100kg fish with scales the size of tennis balls. Swimming next to it was a smaller one, a 'midget' of a mere 40kg or so". This adventure is described by the prodigiously experienced Charles Norman as "...the most exciting morning's fishing that I have ever known." Other game fish found in the Nile include Barbel, electric Catfish and Tiger fish.

The game you come across in the park includes elephant, hartebeest, leopard, lion, giraffe, buffalo, hippo, crocodiles and many species of antelopes. Upstream of the Murchison Falls are the Karuma Falls, where the Nile cascades over 23 kilometres of rapids. Here you have some of the most exciting white water in Africa. Murchison Falls is located 330 km from Kampala.

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The Queen Elizabeth National Park is another outstanding treasure. It is a UNESCO designated a Biosphere Reserve for Humanity. The recognition arises from the tropical forest, green meadows, savannah and swamps that constitute the park. In terms of wildlife, you find elephant, buffalo, hippos, baboons, chimpanzees and over 600 species of birds. The park occupies 2000 sq km and is situated 440 km from Kampala. At the northern end of the Queen Elizabeth, you find Kibale. This park has a unique forest habitat and has an excellent diversity of animal and plant life. It is at Kibale that you find the highest number of primate species in Uganda, and one of the highest primate densities and diversities in the world.

Traveling from Kampala to the Queen Elizabeth or Bwindi, most visitors break at Lake Mburo National Park. The park is 230 km west of Kampala along the Mbarara road and is the most accessible in the country. It is a very attractive park of rolling hills, open grassy valleys, interspersed with thickets, woodlands and rich wetlands. In addition to viewing game including zebra, cape buffalo and eland, you can relax by taking a boat trip on Lake Mburo.

The fairly flat terrain of the country is interrupted to the west by the Rwenzori mountains and to the east by Mount Elgon. Rwenzori, otherwise known as "Mountains of the Moon" has the third highest peak in Africa after mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro. The Rwenzori is part of the national park of the same name and contains 6 snow-capped peaks. You can hike the trails of this mountain without any special

climbing equipment unless you want to go for the peaks. The mist covered mountain range stretches for about 100 km.

Mount Elgon sits by the Kenyan border and is the shell of an ancient volcano. The main attractions here are the waterfalls, caves that were once used by indigenous people, hot springs, the mountains vegetation, the various peaks, the Suam Gorge and the cladera itself. After millions of years of erosion, the oval shaped caldera now measures roughly 7 by 8 kms, one of the largest in the world.

The traveler with a sense of history will want to visit the source of the Nile at Jinja. Jinja is 60 km to the north east of Kampala and is easily accessible by road. This is where the White Nile begins, as it exits Lake Victoria on its 5,600 km journey to the Mediterranean. The source of the Nile was a thousand year old mystery that was decisively settled by the explorer John Speke in 1862.

If you are keen about culture, go for the The Kabaka's Trail. This is a unique journey through a part of Uganda's rich heritage that has been shaped by the region's kings over the years. The Kabaka is the ceremonial king of the Baganda and his lineage goes way back to the 14th century. The Trail combines a series of cultural sites, all within easy reach of Kampala. You can easily combine the Kabaka Trail with your Search of the Nile excursion to Jinja. The Trail offers much more than sightseeing and you will learn about the hidden and forgotten history of Uganda. You will also experience an authentic tribal culture – with traditional dance, music, craft making, spiritual healing and storytelling.

There is international standard accommodation in Entebbe, Jinja and Kampala. The quality is variable in the smaller towns and rated accommodation is scarce. All of the major national parks offer accommodation in game lodges and tented camps. See our Uganda hotels page to view info and book accommodation for your stay in Uganda.

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If you want to drive around Uganda, you need to show an international drivers license to hire a vehicle. Roads radiate from Kampala and are of varying quality. In the north of the country the security situation is still doubtful and so are the roads. Its is a good idea if you are on self drive to get local advise about the condition the roads you intend to use. See what we offer for rental at our [Uganda Rental Cars](#) page.

Uganda enjoys a tropical climate tempered by altitude. The hottest period of the year is from December to February when temperature rise 29 degrees Celsius. For the rest of the year, temperatures range between 21 to 25°C. The country experiences two rainy seasons: April to May and October to November, with April being the wettest month. The best times to visit are December–March and June–September. Light informal clothing is generally adequate. But you need warmer wraps and sweaters for the evenings and early mornings. You are also advised to carry some rainwear, just in case.

Andrew Muigai is editor of AfricaPoint Insider online newsletter. It is part of [Africapoint.com](#) – the Africa travel website that has helped thousands of travelers discover Africa. You can view more info on Uganda safaris at the website.

<http://www.africapoint.com/tours1/ugantour.htm>

Experience Gorilla Safari In Uganda

By Jackie tusabe

Uganda a land endowed with misty forests, snow–capped mountain ranges, lake and Rivers, hills, wildlife and beautiful landscapes. The country has beautiful sceneries and dense tropical rainforests–some of the few in Africa, which are a home to roughly half of the world's mountain gorillas. I had an experience that proves that Uganda is truly " Gifted by nature".

Arrival in Uganda

We arrived in Uganda and had a short stay in Kampala, Uganda's capital city. It was so beautiful hanging out, relaxing and enjoying the experience in Africa with warmly welcoming people, beautiful people and service

Journey to the heart of South–West

After our night in Kampala, we set out early morning to southwestern Uganda with Churchill safari guides, anxious for experience in "the pearl of Africa."

The journey took us 6 hours drive, passing charming attractions en route like the royal drum makers, the Equator, and we stopped at the roadside market to enjoy Lunch, fruit and vegetables en route. The journey from Kabale to Buhoma took us 3–4 hours with a 4WD, since the terrain is hilly and roads are bumpy. The driving time was approximately 9 hours and we arrived late afternoon and spent the night at Bwindi Tented Cap.

Gorilla tracking safari at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

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Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is magnificent Rain Forest, lying across the steep ridges of the Albertine Rift Valley. The forest is a home to 326 gorillas, roughly half of the World's Mountain Gorillas. The altitude of the forest is above 5200 feet which means trackers need to be physically fit for tracking. Since the demand of Gorilla tracking is systematically growing, we had to book for gorilla permits in advance as well as organise our trip with the help of Churchill safaris and Travel.

Gorilla tracking experience started early morning with the guides waking us up, and preparing us for the all day adventure into the mountains. We then took long walk at 8:30 am local time early in the morning through the forest in search of gorillas. Accompanied by a guide and porters, we were fitted out in jungle boots and rain jackets because the park is often wet. The terrain can be difficult, with steep slopes covered in dense vegetation that gives the park its name. The time taken to track the gorillas varies from as little as half an hour to as much as 8 hours, and it may occasionally last the whole day! The Tracking was quite rigorous, and rain gears, sunscreens, insect repellants and a hat given the fact that the weather is un-predictable was part of the experience.

The walk through the dense forest with our guides took us to the spot where the Gorillas were last seen, and we started following their trail through the dense forests of Bwindi. Finally we had the most exiting experience when we had an encounter with the Gorillas. Looking at the gentle giants is surely the most exciting encounter Uganda has to offer. We were limited to one hour with the gorillas with rules of course. We were also allowed to take a few pictures of the Gorillas, an opportunity no one could miss. Parting from the Gorillas is not easy. Leaving the spectacular view was such a difficult task.

The day ended with a walk back after a long day, with scenes of other attractions like mammals including diurnal primates like the black and white colobus monkeys, buffalo and elephants, bird species endemic to the Albertine Rift and butterflies. The forest has a dense under storey of fern, shrubs, vines, and About different tree species have been recorded here, 10 of which occur no where else in Uganda. The day was full of experience and adventure Gorilla tracking remains the most popular activity in Uganda safaris, though its dependant on the seasonal movements of the habituated gorilla groups. The experience was worth every drop of sweat and money paid, very enjoyable and exciting. An experience hard to forget.

For more information on Gorilla Safaris, contact

<http://www.churchillsafaris.com>

Churchill Uganda

Safari Company The premier Gorilla Safari Company in Uganda.

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