

Uganda – The Pearl of Africa Glows Again

This report features on Uganda, the country described by Winston Churchill as the “Pearl of Africa”. Find out why these were no idle words. And why this beautiful country with its impressive people is one of our favorite countries in all of Africa....



Ugandan Crane

Brought To You By Africa Point



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1. Uganda – The Pearl of Africa Glows Again

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 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.

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 caldera 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.

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. It is a good idea if you are on self drive to get local advice 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.

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2. Destination Facts: Uganda

Full Country Name: Republic of Uganda

Area: 241,139 sq km

Population: 24.7 million (2002)

Capital City: Kampala

Other Major Towns: Jinja, Entebbe, Mbarara, Fort Portal, Mbale

Peoples: Baganda, Toro, Ankole, Acholi, Basoga, Lugbara

Language: English, Swahili, Luganda & indigenous languages

Religion: Christian (66%), Muslim (5%) and traditional religions

Government: Republic

Time: GMT + 3 hours

Currency: Uganda Shilling (Ush)

Electricity: 240 V, 50 Hz

Weights and Measures: Metric

Economy: Coffee, sugar, cotton, tea, tobacco, textiles

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3. Travel Basics: Uganda

Health

Visitors over 1 year of age from yellow fever infected areas require yellow fever international certificate of vaccination. Exemptions are made for visitors arriving from non-endemic areas such as Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Visitors from non-endemic areas, if traveling outside urban areas are encouraged to obtain a vaccination. Cholera is a serious health risk in this country and precautions are called for. Typhoid is also widespread and immunization is advisable.

Malaria is widespread throughout the country including urban centers such as Kampala, Fort Portal, Jinja, Mbale and the Kigezi area. Visitors are strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication commencing two weeks before travel. Note that resistance to chloroquine has been reported. Bilharzia is a risk and you are advised not to swim or paddle in fresh water lakes and rivers. Swimming pools in good hotels and clubs are usually well chlorinated and maintained and are safe. Tuberculosis and hepatitis (A, B & E) are present in Uganda.

HIV-AIDS is prevalent in the country and needless to say prudent measures are necessary. Good hospitals, health facilities and chemists are only to be found in the main towns. Medical facilities for advanced treatment including surgery are scarce even in Kampala.

Visas

Passports valid for 3 months from date of entry are required of all visitors. All visitors require a visa except for citizens of some Caribbean and African countries. There are also exceptions for citizens of Cyprus, Fiji, Malta, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and a few other countries.

Some visas may be issued on entry into the country. It is however advisable to obtain visa's in advance from Ugandan Embassies and High Commissions as some airlines may require it before allowing you to board. Entry may be refused to travelers with no proof of sufficient funds and return or onward tickets. Visa requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel.

Peoples & Culture

Uganda's people are complex and diverse. Bantu speakers, widespread in east, central and southern Africa, include the Baganda and a few other tribes. In the north, the Acholi and Lango are Nilotic speakers and have much in common with natives of southern Sudan. The Teso and Karamojong found in the east are related to the Maasai found in Kenya and Tanzania. In the west, the Ankole and Toro are culturally close to the natives of Rwanda. The famous Pygmies are found in the forests of the west.

As a nation, Uganda is an amalgamation of ancient kingdoms and independent chieftains. Among the indigenous kingdoms are the Baganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and Busoga. The Kingdoms were suppressed in the times of the troubles that razed the country in the two decades after 1967. Today they have been restored with their ancient privileges shorn and play only a ceremonial role in the life of the nation. The Baganda king, the Kabaka, whose domicile is Kampala has historically been the most prominent. His lineage stretches back to the 14th century.

Swahili, the language originating from the east African coast is widely spoken though not as well as in Kenya or Tanzania. Luganda, the language of the Kabaka, is also widely spoken. English is understood by good numbers though only in urban areas. For the most part, local cuisine consists of matoke (a staple based on green bananas), millet bread, cassava, sweet potatoes, chicken, goat and beef stews and freshwater fish. Ugali, the maize meal based filler popular in east Africa is used as an accompaniment for meat or vegetable dishes. You will easily find a decent locally brewed beer. Popular brands include Bell, Club and Nile Special. The national drink is however a banana gin known as *waragi*. This is a giant killer and if you imbibe it in immoderate quantities, you will sooner come to grief.

Communications

Telephone, fax, telegram, post and Internet services are available in urban centers. International direct dialing to many countries is available in the principal towns. In rural areas telephony services are unreliable. The country code for Uganda is 256.

Mobile phones are based on GSM 900/1800 network. Coverage extends to the principal towns. You can obtain a GSM card that will allow you to make international calls to any country. The main network operators are: Uganda Telecom (www.utl.co.ug), Celtel (www.msi-cellular.com) and MTN Uganda (www.mtn.co.ug). You will find Internet cafes in Kampala and some of the main towns.

Accommodation

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.

Money

The local currency is the Uganda Shilling (Ush). The import and export of local currency is not allowed. There are no restrictions on the import of foreign currency provided it is declared on arrival. On departure, export of foreign currency is restricted to the amount declared on entry. Visa, MasterCard, Diners and American Express are widely accepted at bigger hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and shops

Travelers cheques can be cashed at major hotels, banks and forex bureaux. You will do best when your travelers cheques are denominated in US Dollars or Sterling Pounds. Foreign currency can be exchanged at the Central Bank, commercial banks and forex bureaux. Generally you will get better exchange rates at forex bureaux. Changing money in the streets is a bad idea. Street traders sometimes deal in funny money.

Climate

Uganda enjoys a tropical climate tempered by altitude. The country is generally flat though the average altitude is about 1000m. Due to the rather high altitude, temperatures range between 21 to 25°C. The mountain areas of Mount Elgon and the Rwenzori mountains are even cooler and the top of both mountains experiences some snow. The hottest period of the year is from December to February when temperature rise 29 degrees Celsius. The country experiences two rainy seasons: April to May and October to November, with April being the wettest month. The north however has a wet season lasting from April to October. The best times to visit are December-March and June-September.

International Travel

Uganda's only international airport is at Entebbe, 35 km from the capital Kampala. Outside Uganda, the airport gained fame as the place where Israeli commandos rescued passengers on a hijacked plane, back in the days of the infamous Idi Amin. The dramatic rescue captured the imagination of the

world and is the subject of a few films. There are few direct flights to Entebbe from outside Africa and most travelers from Europe, Asia and North America will arrive via Nairobi, the Kenyan capital. Daily connections are available from Nairobi. Airlines landing at Entebbe include British Airways, Egypt Air, Emirates, South African Airways, Kenya Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, SN Brussels, Air Rwanda, and Air Tanzania.

To save on cost, some travelers disembark at Nairobi and take the overnight bus to Kampala. There are two overland crossing points from Kenya: Busia and Malaba. From Mwanza in Tanzania, you can get to Kampala by ferry. You can also enter the country from Tanzania through the Kagera salient between Bukoba and Masaka. Overland travel through Rwanda, Sudan and Zaire is uncertain due to security considerations. Make sure to check the latest situation with the security authorities before committing to travel.

Local Travel

Local flights depart from Entebbe to the principal towns. Charter flights are also available. There is an extensive service of minibuses connecting most parts of the country from Kampala. Bus service is rather unreliable except for the scheduled service between Entebbe and Kampala.

Driving in Uganda is on the left, a legacy of British rule. Rental cars are available at Entebbe and Kampala. 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. It is a good idea if you are on self-drive to get local advice about the condition of the roads you intend to use. Review our [rental cars in Uganda](#) web page and do your bookings.

Travel Insurance

Health and the usual travel insurance are recommended. Check that your travel insurance Includes emergency evacuation.

What to Wear

Light clothing is generally adequate in Uganda. But you need warmer wraps and sweaters for the evenings and early mornings. You are also advised to carry some rainwear, just in case. Usually dressing is informal. For both men and women, cotton slacks and flat-heeled comfortable walking shoes are recommended on safari. It is a good idea to bring along a hat and a decent pair of sunglasses for sun protection

4. About Africa Point

Africapoint.com is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya.

The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

What services do we offer?

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.

- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of " Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.

I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

What is the experience of other travelers with us?

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

5. Forward This Report

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!