



UGANDA COUNTRY INFORMATION



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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Uganda has shaken off its earlier associations with the 1970s regime of Idi Amin and the global backlash to the Kony2012 video has set the record straight on the LRA – whose rebels left Northern Uganda in 2006 and have been many hundreds of miles away in Central African Republic ever since. Uganda has enjoyed steady economic growth and relative stability for nearly 30 years now, and despite having one of the worst AIDS epidemics, the rate of infection has dropped yearly from a staggering 30% in the mid 1990s to an estimated 6% in 2009.

Geographically, the country is located on the African Equator, where the savannahs of East Africa meet the rainforests of Central Africa. The country is relatively compact – no larger than the UK or the US state of Oregon with a rich variety of terrain. The ancient forests are full of rare bird species and endangered primates. These adjoin rolling savannah plains inhabited by the big game favourites – with none of the crowds of the better known circuits of Kenya and Tanzania. It also boasts the snowy peaks of Africa's highest mountain range, the island-studded expanse of Africa's largest lake, and the headwaters of the world's longest river. The result is a uniquely varied safari destination with wildlife, scenery, adventure and culture all in one place.

Best of all are Uganda's people – proud, friendly and tolerant. Ugandans display no trace of their country's turbulent past, and provide a warm welcome to any visitor. Ethnic groups in Uganda are as diverse as the habitat and wildlife – from the *Bantu* tribes of central Uganda, to the *Nilotic* peoples in the north and east, to the ancient forest peoples found in the south west such as the proud *Batwa*.



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GEOGRAPHY

Country Size	241,038 km square
Location	East Africa, bisected by the Equator, west of Kenya
Capital	Kampala
Rainfall	Annual avg 1,000-1,600mm; Wet seasons Mar-May, Oct-Dec
Climate	Temperate; Avg of 21.5-27.0° C; Hottest Jan & Feb
Altitude	Most of the country lies between 900-2,000m above sea level; Highest point Margherita peak on Mt Stanley at 5,110m; Lowest point Lake Albert at 621m
Terrain	Mostly plateau ringed by mountains, ancient crater fields, and some rolling hills.
Vegetation	Savannah grassland, wetlands and tropical forest dominate central region, with semi-arid regions in the north and east
Land Use	22% arable land, 9% permanent crops, 69% other
Natural resources	Copper, cobalt, hydropower, limestone, salt, arable land, gold, oil, gas
Main exports	Coffee, tea, cotton, tobacco
National Parks	Lake Mburo (south west), Bwindi Impenetrable (south west), Mgahinga Gorilla (south west), Queen Elizabeth (west), Semuliki (west), Rwenzori Mountains (west), Kibale Forest (west), Murchison Falls (north west), Kidepo Valley (north east), Mount Elgon (south east)

HUMAN STATISTICS

Population	35.8 million
Ethnic groups	Baganda 16.9%, Banyakole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Banyoro 2.7%, other 29.6%
Life expectancy at birth	Women 54.5 years, men 52.4 years
Religions	Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42% (Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1.5%), Muslim 12.1%, other 3.1%, none 0.9%
Official languages	English (official national language, taught in grade schools, used in courts of law and by most newspapers and some radio broadcasts), Ganda or Luganda (most widely used of the Niger-Congo languages, preferred for native language publications in the capital and may be taught in school), other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic
GDP per capita	US\$1,300



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POLITICS/ADMINISTRATION

Government	Republic of Uganda; presidential single-party system
President	Yoweri Museveni
National Flag	Six equal horizontal bands of black, yellow and red; with a white disk in the center depicting a crested crane; the black symbolizes the African people, yellow the sunshine and vitality, red African brotherhood; the crane is the national symbol of Uganda
Administrative divisions	112 districts including Kampala

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Time	GMT +3 hours
Currency	Uganda Shilling
Electricity	230/240 volts at 50Hz
International Country Code	256
Airport	Entebbe International Airport (EBB)

GETTING THERE AND AWAY

Airport Tax

For all passengers on international departures from Entebbe International Airport, airport taxes of US\$ 57 (or the equivalent in Uganda Shillings) may be payable if not included in the price of your ticket. Please be sure to bring the right change, otherwise it can cause delays in your check in procedure. For domestic flights, this tax is included in the price.

Baggage Allowance

Luggage should be kept to a minimum, and is best restricted to one main soft-sided piece and a day bag. Kampala Hotels provide storage facilities. For clients with internal flights booked as part of their safari, please note the baggage allowance is usually a maximum of 15 kg (33lbs), packed in a soft, flexible bag. However, it can change dependent on your destination or whether you are flying private or scheduled, so always check specific terms with your tour consultant.

Visas

Visa requirements vary according to the country of origin, and should be checked well in advance with the nearest Ugandan Embassy or High Commission. At the time of writing, a single entry tourist visa for a maximum of 90 days may be secured on your arrival at Entebbe on payment of a fee of US\$50. Visitors will have to queue to apply for the visa on arrival, so we advise procuring visas in your country of origin before travel to avoid any complications or delays.



PRACTICALITIES

Time

Uganda is three hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

Daylight

Sunrise is around 0630 hours and sunset at 1930 hours. This varies slightly, depending on location within the country and time of year.

Climate

The climate is warm, though pleasantly varied by location, with average daily temperatures ranging from 20-30° Celsius (approx 70-85 Fahrenheit) depending on location. Bwindi and the area around Fort Portal/Kibale can get cool during the night because of the vegetation and altitude, and northerly, or lower-lying parks such as Kidepo Valley, Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth National Park can be much hotter.

The 'wet' seasons are April to May for the long rains and October to November for the short rains (although these seasons are less defined as weather patterns become more unpredictable). However, when hiking in Uganda's rainforests, wet weather is common all year round. Due to the strong nature of Uganda's equatorial sun, we recommend that visitors take all sensible precautions.

When to travel

There is no set rule as to the best time to visit Uganda. It depends on individual preferences, and the destinations and activities included on the itinerary.

The wet season (or the months immediately after the wet seasons) can be a great time to travel – especially for photography – as skies are clear and bright after the frequent rain showers, making for excellent light. Lodges often offer better value at this time also. The downside of travelling in the wet season includes deteriorating road conditions, and higher chance of rain during tracking activities.

During the dry season, there is still a high chance of rain in certain areas (notably the rainforests where the primate tracking is located) and clients should still prepare themselves for the possibility of wet weather. However, on the whole it is drier, and in Jan/Feb it can get very hot. July and August offer dry weather patterns with cooler temperatures, though skies can be hazy from the dust.

Language

The official language of Uganda is English, with Kiswahili and Luganda also being widely spoken



Communications

Most large hotels in cities offer the facility of international calls for their guests. Nearly all lodges now offer some sort of wi-fi, but it can be comparatively slow and cumbersome, and is usually only available in the public areas of the property. Most areas of Uganda have mobile phone coverage, although in some cases you may have to travel a short distance to reach an area of coverage. If clients know they will be making international mobile phone calls, the Guest Relations Officer and Guide can assist them in the purchase of a local SIM card but the handset or device must be unlocked prior to travel.

Electricity

The mains electricity supply in Uganda is 220-240 volts. Most lodges use generator and inverter systems, with many increasingly introducing solar power or alternative forms of sustainable energy. All lodges have charging points for personal appliances in public areas, and some have them in the rooms also. Clients should ask about any power restrictions at each lodge to prevent disappointment – sometimes the use of hairdryers and other high-voltage items is forbidden. Visitors should bring electrical appliances that fit a 220-240V British-style 3 pin socket, or the required 3 pin adaptor.

MONEY

Local currency

The currency in Uganda is the shilling (UGX), and it is available in useable denominations of 50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000 in coins and 1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000 in notes. There are foreign exchange facilities at Entebbe airport and Kampala, which we recommend using as changing money on safari can be difficult. There is an ATM at Entebbe airport that accepts VISA and dispenses the UGX equivalent of US\$ 160 (GBP Sterling 100, EURO 115) per day, subject to availability. At the time of writing, the current exchange rate is US\$ 1=UGX 2,860.

Cash & Credit Cards

We recommend that you carry a mix of cash and credit cards for convenience and security, and that you change about US\$200-300 of this into Uganda Shillings at the start of your tour. Visitors are advised that if they are carrying US Dollar Cash with them, the notes intended for exchange should be no smaller than \$100 denomination to ease conversion into local currency at a beneficial rate (some smaller denominations can be carried to facilitate change for visa payments, airport tax, or provide tips). Notes printed earlier than 2006 will be rejected by banks or businesses, as will damaged or marked notes.



Outside Kampala and Entebbe, credit cards are only accepted in selected hotels or lodges, mostly limited to Visa (please check our lodge profiles for more information). It is standard practice in Uganda to charge a surcharge if processing payment by card – an addition of between 2-8% can be expected.

Drinks (extra to the full board allowance where relevant) are often priced in Uganda Shillings, whereas optional extra activities are usually priced in US Dollars. However, most lodges/suppliers will accept payment in either currency, at their stated rate. Please do check in advance if there is any doubt about what your itinerary includes or excludes, and please see separate guidelines on tipping.

Tipping

Please see separate guidelines on tipping.

Hotel Charges

Clients are usually expected to settle their extras in Uganda Shillings – please do check in advance if there is any doubt about inclusions and exclusions.

PERSONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Medical

There are basic medical facilities with European and American-trained doctors in Kampala. You are advised to take out your own medical and travel insurance before coming to Uganda. We will enquire as to your policy details before the safari starts to enable us to respond efficiently should anything occur. Most serious illnesses have to be treated outside Uganda, so we include AMREF Flying Doctors medical evacuation cover (to Nairobi) as standard, for every person travelling on our Uganda and Rwanda safaris, unless otherwise specified.

Health

We recommend all clients visit their doctor at least six weeks before travel to check which vaccinations they recommend for Uganda. Vaccinations normally recommended for Uganda will vary and usually include Yellow Fever, Tetanus, Typhoid, Diphtheria, Hepatitis and sometimes Meningitis.

For those who do not already possess a valid yellow fever certificate, we recommend that for this particular vaccination you enquire with your doctor as soon as you decide to travel. This is due to a growing shortage of the vaccine in certain countries, which could lead to problems if left too late before travel.



Malaria is prevalent in parts of Uganda, and all visitors should also consult their doctor and take one of the prophylactics prescribed.

Our vehicles are equipped with medical kits for the treatment of minor wounds and ailments and all full time staff trained in basic first aid.

Security

Despite common misconceptions, Uganda has had a stable government for nearly thirty years. Personal crime is rare and security measures in the national parks have been significantly enhanced. However, clients should take the usual precautions when travelling abroad in unfamiliar surroundings, and we recommend that clients take a taxi rather than walk at night.

MISCELLANEOUS

Food and drink

As a rule quotes are based on bed and breakfast in Kampala and Entebbe, and full board on safari. Standards of cuisine are reasonable but vary outside Kampala. We recommend that clients drink bottled water at all times, and do not purchase food at road-side establishments.

Smoking

Smoking (or holding lit tobacco products) in enclosed areas and public places including restaurants is prohibited. Both the smoker and the owner of the establishment where an offense occurs could face fines of \$10 to \$200 and would have to appear in court.

Gorilla tracking

Please see separate guidelines on gorilla tracking.

Clothing

The emphasis on clothing is comfort and modesty. Very rarely will visitors be expected to conform to a specific dress code (unless something particular is tabled on their itineraries). It's best to keep shorts and skirts knee-length, and dress appropriately for a relatively conservative and religious culture.

If primate tracking, long hiking trousers are required, with a good pair of walking boots worn with thick walking socks long enough to tuck trousers into. Ideally a good pair of protective leather or canvas gloves should be carried in the client's day bag, to be put on should they encounter thorns or nettles as they make their way through the rainforest. Needless to say, it is sensible to pack waterproofs as well.



Safari wear should be loose fitting and relaxed in style with warm clothing for the colder evenings at Bwindi or early morning game drives on the savannah. Neutral, natural colours are best – to blend into the background for the most unobtrusive wildlife viewing and for practical purposes. Avoid dark blues or blacks which can occasionally attract unwanted attention from some of Africa’s insect population. Most hotels and lodges have laundry services, so an excessive amount of clothing should be unnecessary. Please see our separate ‘What to pack’ list for a guideline to what to bring.

Photography

It is hard to source good quality camera accessories in Uganda so clients should bring all necessary photography equipment with them. Spare camera batteries are recommended, as charging facilities whilst on safari may be limited, and extra memory cards are always recommended.

Flash photography is not allowed while gorilla tracking so clients should familiarise themselves with how to alter their film speed setting to a high speed (800ASA equivalent or faster) before meeting with the gorillas – it also helps to be able to disable any sonic alerts or other noises where possible.

Local people should always be asked before their photograph is taken and photographing military installations (including the Owen Falls Dam at Jinja and the bridge at Karuma Falls), government buildings and policemen is prohibited.