



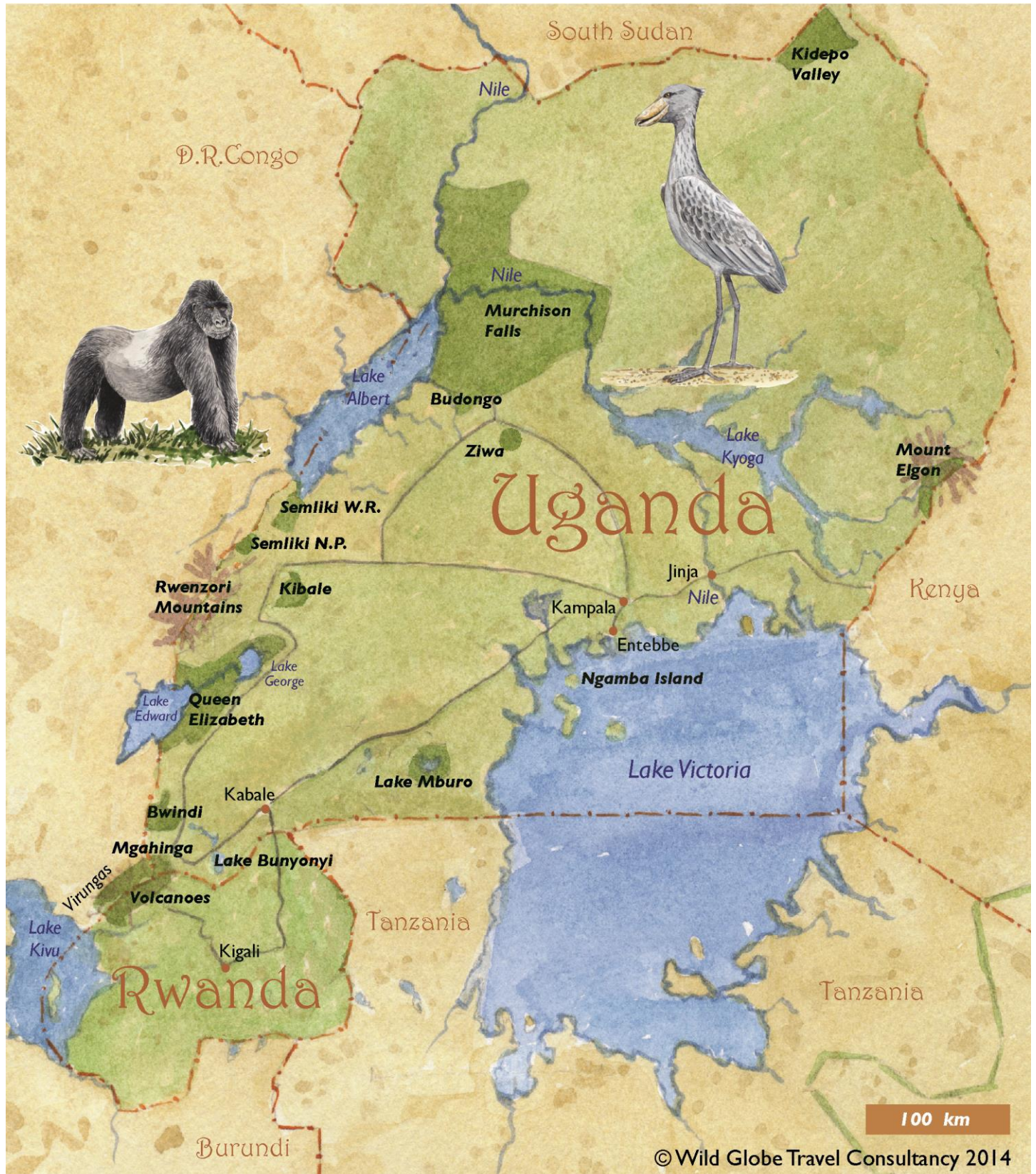
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Uganda: The Long Way Round - 50 Days

Major Destinations

Entebbe - Lake Victoria - Ngamba Island - Jinja - Mabira Forest Reserve - Sipi Falls - Mount Elgon National Park - Kidepo Valley National Park - Murchison Falls National Park - Budongo Forest Reserve - Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary - Semliki Wildlife Reserve - Semliki National Park - Kibale National Park - Bigodi Wetlands Sanctuary - Rwenzori Mountains National Park - Queen Elizabeth National Park - Bwindi Impenetrable National Park - Mgahinga Gorilla National Park - Volcanoes National Park - Kigali - Lake Bunyonyi - Lake Mburo National Park - Entebbe



Tour Highlights and Activities

Uganda's geography is very different than its East Africa neighbours Kenya and Tanzania, as it has far more of the lush forested areas that flourish across the 'equatorial forest belt' of central and western Africa. Consequently it does not have the vast rolling savannahs of Kenya and particularly Tanzania, or the huge proliferation of plains animals that these countries are famous for. It is also only now recovering from the widespread poaching that went unchecked during years of violent conflict and political turmoil, which resulted in the destruction of massive animal populations and the local extinction of the rhino and wild dog. Although poaching does still occur in Uganda, as it sadly does all over Africa, the wildlife is now receiving a serious level of protection and is recovering remarkably well in most areas. The 2012 Uganda Wildlife Authority figures fully support this recovery, as the populations of many large species have more than doubled since the previous census in 1999, with the number of impala rising from around 1,600 to over 35,000. Elephant, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, hippo and waterbuck populations have all increased significantly, confirming what those of us visiting regularly already knew, the animals are returning and Uganda is once again featuring as one of the top wildlife destinations on

this or any other continent. In a country where it all started for me in terms of exploring Africa, this tour has been designed to showcase the incredibly diverse ecosystems and breathtaking scenery of all ten of Uganda's stunning national parks, where it is possible to spend one day in the intimate company of a mountain gorilla family and another scanning the plains for elephant, lion and cheetah. The birdlife is just as diverse, with 11% of the planet's bird species living within the epic volcanic landscapes and fertile borders of one truly unique country. The activities available are almost as varied as the wildlife, from thrilling white water rafting and exhilarating jet boat tours, to adventurous light aircraft flights and demanding horse-rides. The many contrasting hikes and cruises take place in some of the most spectacular settings imaginable and the people of every region are as friendly and welcoming as anywhere in Africa. Although encounters with the magnificent mountain gorillas are a highlight of a lifetime, they are only part of a very special picture in these ancient, green lands.

Day 1 - Entebbe

Arrive in Entebbe and transfer to our elegant colonial style hotel overlooking the illustrious Lake Victoria. The afternoon is free to relax around the enticing pool and manicured gardens of our hotel. For those who wish to explore further, several local tours can be arranged, including to the botanical garden for an introduction to the impressive birdlife of the country and Mabamba Swamp for any birding enthusiasts keen on an early sighting of the highly distinctive shoebill, one of Uganda's iconic birds. Back at our hotel we can settle in front of the shimmering lake to admire the first of many mesmerising African sunsets.



Day 2 - Entebbe and Ngamba Island

Our tour begins in earnest this morning with a boat trip to Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Lake Victoria. Located off the northern shore, just over 20km from the international airport at Entebbe, Ngamba is a small forested island that currently homes more than 40 orphaned or rescued chimpanzees. Whilst it is always more rewarding to encounter animals behaving naturally in the wild, for those interested in chimpanzees and the conservation of these endangered apes, a visit to Ngamba is an ideal way to start a tour of Uganda, as later in the trip we will have the pleasure of watching the same intelligent primates in a totally natural setting. As full-day visitors we will have the opportunity to observe both of the daily feeding sessions from a purpose built observation deck and one of the chimps devoted carers will explain how exactly the project works and why the conservation efforts here are so important. A second island is planned for the burgeoning population in need of care and the Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust, who administer the project, also operate wide-ranging educational field programmes, all of which our visit will help support. In the late afternoon we will return to the hotel by boat and prepare for the exciting first leg of our marathon journey.

Day 3 - Entebbe to Jinja

Before we leave Entebbe this morning, we have the opportunity to take a memorable light aircraft flight with superb views of both the capital Kampala and the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria. Given that this tour has been designed as a road trip to enable us to explore as much of the country as possible, this is a highly recommended option and is probably the best way to fully appreciate the sheer

majesty of one of Africa's great lakes. Rather appropriately, as soon as we touch down we will drive the short distance to Jinja, a town marketed, entirely reasonably, as East Africa's adrenalin sports capital. Although the white water rafting is certainly the main attraction, Jinja is also famous for the exploits of the British Indian Army Officer and explorer John Hanning Speke, who solved a seemingly impenetrable mystery when he discovered the source of the White Nile at nearby Rippon Falls in 1862. There are a couple of plaques commemorating his initially disputed discovery, but, given that Rippon Falls was completely flooded by the Owen Falls



Dam in 1954, probably the best way to experience Speke's achievement is on the cruise that we will take this afternoon, a round trip past the Source of the Nile Gardens and out into Lake Victoria. We will return to the tranquil atmosphere of our arresting lodge, sympathetically designed in a traditional African style and overlooking a particularly scenic stretch of the Nile.

Days 4 to 5 - Jinja

If it appeals, one of our two days at Jinja has been reserved to tackle the sensational rapids that have been attracting and terrifying backpackers and overlanders in equal measure for years. Although the white water rafting and kayaking here is intense, and the Bad Place is very well named, the full-day option is actually a great deal of fun and we will get plenty of

time to relax and swim on the calm sections as we prepare ourselves for each onslaught. The character of the rafting has changed somewhat in recent times, as the new Bujagali Dam has submerged several of the early infamous monsters, the Bad Place and many of the other major rapids have fortunately survived, and the tours now begin a few kilometres downstream in order to include additional stretches of chilling white water. Our adventure will end with a well deserved late afternoon barbeque and an opportunity to watch the dvd of our efforts, as every thrill and spill will be filmed by our expert and friendly guides. If the sensational rapids are not enough for you, the area around Jinja can also offer exhilarating high-speed jet boat rides, bungee jumping, mountain biking and quad bike trails, as well as gentle horse safaris, kayaking and peaceful boat cruises for those of a less adventurous disposition. The horse riding here is extremely professional, as each group is designated with a number of guides to allow the more experienced riders the freedom to canter and gallop. The nearby Mabira Forest Reserve has a number of excellent walking trails and a first opportunity to observe some of the many primates we will encounter on the trip, including grey-cheeked mangabey and red-tailed monkey. As the last major indigenous forest in central Uganda, Mabira is of extreme ecological significance and more than 300 bird species have been recorded here and about the same number of butterflies and moths.

Day 6 - Jinja to Mount Elgon National Park

We will have time for another morning activity before we leave Jinja, as our next destination, Mount Elgon National Park, lies only a short drive east. Rising to a height of 4321m and partly shared with neighbouring Kenya, Mount Elgon is regarded principally as a hiking destination and offers a number of picturesque trails that require a reasonable level of fitness, but no technical climbing ability. The summit, Wagagai Peak, is located entirely within Uganda and can be reached in two fairly demanding days, although more leisurely tours of several days are also available for those who want to explore the mysterious caves and tempting hot springs and to descend into the pristine caldera. As we do not have sufficient time to scale the peak on this trip, we will instead enjoy an early afternoon walk to see all three of the waterfalls collectively known as Sipi Falls, the second of which is actually situated within the grounds of our charming lodge. The trail takes us through some very pretty countryside and several local farms and as we gradually ascend to the highest of the three cascades, the views of both Elgon and the distant plains grow evermore spectacular.



Day 7 - Mount Elgon National Park

This morning will be a relaxed one, as we take some time out to enjoy the fabulous grounds of our lodge and a mouth-watering breakfast of locally produced honey, freshly baked bread and fruit grown within the very gardens that we will contentedly wander. For the slightly more adventurous, there are several rock climbing possibilities, including bolted climbs ranging from very easy for total beginners to extremely challenging for even the most experienced climbers. The same company also offer various abseiling options,

the most popular of which is a somewhat alarming 100m descent directly beside the main Sipi Falls. In the afternoon we will visit the national park and take one of the popular, though never crowded, forest trails, all of which converge at a main vantage point for outstanding views of the summit of Mount Elgon. None of the trails are overly arduous and we are likely to encounter a few of the forest primates, certainly eastern black-and-white colobus and blue monkey, as well as possibly common duiker and bushbuck and a varied selection of the 300 or so resident birds. Other larger mammals also occur, but they are generally well hidden within the densely forested lower slopes and foothills. We may of course be fortunate and chance upon any number of creatures, but if we are not on this occasion, we certainly will be over the next few days, as we prepare to depart for one of the best reserves in the country.

Day 8 - Mount Elgon National Park to Kidepo Valley National Park

We leave our lodge early today, as we have a full-day drive north to Kidepo National Park, a destination that the majority of visitors fly directly to. We also have this option, but the drive covers a great deal of the country and we have a number of interesting stops, including a brief detour at Lake Kyoga, that the White Nile flows through from Jinja and a slightly longer one at the impressive Nyero rock paintings near Kumi. Given the historical issues along the border with Kenya, we will probably cut into central Uganda and travel via Kitgum, instead of going directly north via Mount Moroto. In total contrast to the moist, tropical forests that dominate



most of the reserves across the country, Kidepo Valley National Park sits within a more traditional East African landscape of sprawling grass savannahs, thorny acacias and rocky outcrops. A dramatic and inspiring place where gentle hills rise out of a sea of grass against a backdrop of imposing mountains, Kidepo is the best reserve in Uganda to see predators and the only destination at which we can even hope to encounter cheetah, caracal, bat-eared fox and black-backed jackal. Although it does not receive many visitors, given its location in the extreme northeast of the country on the border of Sudan and close to Kenya, those intrepid souls who do make the effort are richly rewarded both in terms of the sweeping panoramas and the abundance of wildlife. Lion, occasionally seen sprawled across branches of the sausage trees, leopard, spotted hyena and side-striped jackal are all resident here, as well as impressive herds of buffalo, elephant, zebra, giraffe and a diverse array of elegant antelope, four of which, greater and lesser kudu, mountain reedbuck and guenther's dik-dik, occur nowhere else in Uganda.

Days 9 to 13 - Kidepo Valley National Park

Given the density of wildlife and the presence of certain animals rare elsewhere in Uganda, we will spend five full days exploring



Kidepo and participating in some of the best game viewing activities in the country. The guides here are as knowledgeable and enthusiastic as anywhere in Africa and all game drives are conducted in open-sided vehicles for the best possible photographic opportunities. Game walks are a speciality of our first class lodge and it is possible to approach a variety of animals on foot, which always adds a thrilling extra dimension to any sighting. Night game drives are another appealing and significant aspect of our stay, as we have the chance to spotlight each evening for the elusive nocturnal creatures that abound in almost every reserve, but are rarely encountered. Aardwolf, striped hyena, common and large-spotted genet, bushpig, white-tailed mongoose, northern lesser galago, armadillo, African civet, honey badger and ground pangolin all occur here and wild dogs are also occasionally seen



during the day. Although they may only be transitory packs moving between South Sudan and Kenya, it is heartening to hear of them in Uganda after such a long absence. Superbly situated within the prime game viewing plains of the Narus Valley and overlooking the seasonal Narus River, our lodge attracts a wealth of wildlife all year round, particularly in the dry season, as the river begins to wane and a host of animals migrate to the shrinking pools around the lodge. Buffalo, elephant, giraffe, zebra and waterbuck are all commonly observed from the large stone bathtubs situated on the sheltered terrace of every room.



Day 14 - Kidepo Valley National Park to Murchison Falls National Park

We have another long drive today, but will still have time for an early morning safari before we depart for Murchison Falls National Park, where the wildlife is recovering extremely well after many years of persecution. Towards the end of the 1960's Murchison Falls was one of the most densely populated, and consequently one of the most popular, national parks in Africa. Although it will take a long time for the numbers to even begin to approach their former levels, the elephant and buffalo populations alone totalled more than



40,000, there are once again over 1,000 elephants in the park, from a low of around 200 in the early 1990's, and much of the remaining wildlife is doing equally well. The largest national park in Uganda, Murchison Falls is actually divided into two sections by the White Nile and one of the best game viewing areas is the Buligi circuit on the peninsula between the Nile and Lake Albert. We will concentrate much of our time in this area and could encounter, with the essential element of a little good fortune as always, lion, leopard, spotted hyena, side-striped jackal, elephant, buffalo, giraffe, waterbuck, kob, oribi, bushbuck, hartebeest and the patas monkey, which is more generally found in central and west Africa. Much of the wildlife will be viewed from our riverside lodge, conveniently located on the northern bank of the Nile to enable us to access the prime game driving circuits early each morning without having to wait for the ferry.

Days 15 to 18 - Murchison Falls National Park and Budongo Forest Reserve

Our first morning will be reserved for one of the undoubted highlights of this or any other trip, the magnificent boat safari along the Nile to Fajoa Gorge, the base of the spectacular Murchison Falls. Although at just over 40m, the falls are not particularly high, the volume of water and power generated through a narrow channel is hugely impressive and, to make the most of the experience, we will

leave our boat at the base of the falls and hike up Fajoa Gorge to several exceptional vantage points and the glorious view at the very top. The boat safari alone is probably one of the finest north of the Rufiji River in Tanzania, with an evocative African feel and the opportunity to photograph a host of animals and birds among the palm trees and acacias that line the riverbank. Hundreds of hippos wallow in the shallows and huge crocodiles slip out of the water to bask in the sun as elephants and buffalo make the reverse journey to cool down at the water's edge. Antelope converge at different points to drink safely in numbers, lions, spotted hyenas and leopards all appear for the occasional lucky visitor and the birdlife is as remarkable as you would expect in a park that has recorded over 450 different



species. Saddle-billed storks, grey crowned cranes, goliath herons and raucous fish eagles all compete for our attention and dazzling red-throated bee-eaters adorn the air as they flit in and out of their nests along an exceedingly colourful stretch of sand bank. To complete a very special day, we will meet our vehicle at the top of the falls and drive to a delightful spot for a wonderful bush lunch followed by an afternoon game drive in some of the best possible areas for both lion and leopard. Depending on your preference, and given that we will certainly encounter them later in the trip, there is also the option of spending an enchanting afternoon trekking a large group of habituated chimpanzees among the huge ironwood and mahogany trees of the Kaniyo Pabidi section of the Budongo Forest. Spending time with chimpanzees at close quarters is always an unforgettable experience and we are also likely to encounter a number of other primates along the attractive forest trail. A second river cruise, away from the falls and through the papyrus delta of Lake Albert, is also highly enjoyable, with an excellent chance of seeing shoebill among the dense reeds, as well as a host of waterbirds and larger animals drinking in the heat of the afternoon. For birding enthusiasts the 'royal mile', an easy trail within a different section of the Budongo Forest, is considered to be one of the most productive walks in Uganda for a variety of forest dwellers and is also a good spot to catch a glimpse of the chequered sengi or elephant-shrew, a small, distinctive insectivore, common within its range, but rarely observed. On our final evening our lodge will arrange a magical bush dinner, where we can enjoy a delicious meal in a remote section of the park, with only the spellbinding calls of the African night to disturb our blissful reverie.





Day 19 - Murchison Falls National Park to Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary

After a final game drive we leave Murchison Falls this morning for a brief, but memorable detour to Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, a hugely significant conservation project and home to the only population of wild rhinos in the country. Once prevalent across the region, the last rhino was believed to have been killed in Uganda in 1982 and they remained extinct locally until four white rhinos were translocated to Ziwa in 2005 from the Solio Ranch in the Aberdare region of Kenya. Four years later, on the 24th of July 2009 to be precise, Ziwa and rhino conservationists across the continent celebrated, as the first rhino was born in Uganda for a generation. Two more calves have followed and it is hoped that in time it will be possible to restore these heavily persecuted creatures to other parks and reserves across the country. Ziwa also operate and support various community and education programmes, as well as a nursery and junior school for the local children, and our visit will help fund their essential work. We will view the rhinos both in a vehicle and on foot within their large, highly protected natural area and will overnight at the newly opened Amuka Lodge within the sanctuary.



Day 20 - Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary to Semliki National Park

After a morning spent in the presence of some of the most majestic animals on the continent, we will transfer south after an early lunch to Semliki National Park. Nestled in the foothills of the ravishing Rwenzori Mountains and directly on the border with Democratic Republic of the Congo, Semliki is generally regarded as being suitable only for dedicated ornithologists and is often

overlooked as a result. Although the national park is certainly a haven for many extraordinary birds, so is most of Uganda and this area in general, including the adjacent wildlife reserve that borders Lake Albert, is one of the most diverse we will visit. Our classical tented lodge is ideally situated within the reserve section of the stunning Semliki Valley, which forms part of Uganda's Western Rift Valley. We will divide our time largely between the national park and the reserve and this afternoon we can savour a relaxing cruise on Lake Albert, where we have another very good chance of seeing shoebill.

Days 21 to 23 - Semliki National Park

Although we will have other, more certain, opportunities to see them, both the national park and wildlife reserve protect healthy chimpanzee populations and we will be able to track them with the expert assistance of a research team involved in the long-term



study of these fascinating apes. Spending time with such clearly intelligent and highly sociable creatures is always a captivating experience and another unforgettable highlight of our stay in this alluring country. Primates in general are well represented in the region and de brazza's monkey, grey-cheeked mangabey, red-tailed monkey, blue monkey and eastern black-and-white colobus are a few of the diurnal species that occur here. The nocturnal ones are of course a great deal harder to find, but on our night game drives we will be looking for several galago species, including thomas's dwarf galago, spectacled lesser galago and the northern lesser galago, as well as the potto, an endearing arboreal member of the Lorisidae family. We will also search for a wide variety of other nocturnal creatures each evening and during the day can enjoy productive game drives and

walks along a multitude of trails. Patience is the key to game viewing at Semliki, as there are a lot of animals here, but they are often hidden within the pristine semi-deciduous forest. The smaller forest elephant and buffalo species are both resident, as well as less commonly observed lion and leopard and a mob of boisterous hippos and far more nonchalant crocodiles along the Semliki River, which acts as border in places with the DRC. The elegant Uganda kob can generally be seen in large numbers and other unusual antelope species include the water chevrotain and bate's pygmy antelope, neither of which occur elsewhere in East Africa. We will also reserve some time to visit the Sempaya Hot Springs within the national park and have the option of visiting the local Batwa community, marginalised pygmy forest dwellers who have struggled to survive since they were evicted from Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in the early 1990's.

Day 24 - Semliki National Park to Kibale National Park

After a short detour to photograph the sublime scenery of Lake Kyaninga, our easy transfer takes us south this morning to Kibale National Park, the premier chimpanzee destination in Uganda and one of the best places to view these enthralling creatures in all of Africa. Adjoining Queen Elizabeth National Park via a migration corridor to the south and the stunning crater lake region to the east, Kibale is home to thirteen primate species, including l'hoest's monkey, eastern red colobus, potto and almost 1500 chimpanzees, the largest population in Uganda. The habituated chimps are generally easy to see on the daily walks and we may also have the rather special opportunity to spend a magical full-day with them to observe the habituation process. To be certain that we see the chimpanzees, we will take at least two specific treks during our stay here and the first will take place this afternoon, following lunch at our charming, secluded lodge, set deep within the heart of the lush rainforest.



Days 25 to 27 - Kibale National Park

As with all of the rainforest that we will visit during the chimpanzee and gorilla trekking section of our tour, Kibale protects a rich and highly diverse ecosystem teeming with wildlife, much of which can be observed despite the heavily forested environment. The smaller forest elephant is a seasonal migrant to the area and two of the less common species include the Congo clawless otter, at the most easterly extreme of its range, and the golden cat, which can actually be found all over Uganda, but is highly elusive and rarely encountered. There are seven species of mongoose and eight squirrel types and the dense forest floor conceals buffalo, giant forest hog, bushbuck and the diminutive duiker, which the chimpanzees have been known to predate on. The semi-aquatic sitatunga can sometimes be observed within the Magombe Swamp section, where leisurely walks are available to the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, all proceeds of which go to the local community. At night, guided spotlighting walks will introduce us to some of the nocturnal forest mammals, potto, galago, genet and civet are regularly spotted, and serval, African palm civet, zorilla, a highly enigmatic member of the weasel family, bush pig and honey badger are just a few of the other reasonable possibilities. If we are visiting at the right time of year, one full day will be reserved for us to participate in the chimpanzee habituation process, an incredible experience where we will join researchers to observe the chimps as they leave their nests in the early morning and follow at a respectful distance as they interact and forage throughout the day. The evening is a particularly special time, as the chimps ascend to the canopy and quietly begin building the transitory nests that they will use for just the one night. We also have the option of spending a night overlooking the forest, as our lodge has an idyllic tree house, where we can relax within a gorgeous natural setting and fall asleep to the evocative calls of the African rainforest.



Day 28 - Kibale National Park to Crater Lakes and Rwenzori Mountains National Park

This morning we transfer south to explore a small area within the mid section of the spectacular snow-capped Rwenzori Mountains, which are generally visited for their demanding hikes and, for experienced mountaineers only, challenging climbs. Commonly known as the Mountains of the Moon, the Rwenzori Mountains are the tallest range in Africa and extend over approximately 120km. At 5109m, the highest individual peak is Margherita on Mount Stanley and climbs to the summit generally take seven to ten days. Although our drive is a short one, we will take most of the day leisurely exploring the Ndali/Kasenda cluster of pretty crater lakes that proliferate another area of extraordinary natural beauty and have the option of taking the Top of the World hike for dramatic views of several lakes, the Kibale forest and the imperious Rwenzori massifs to the west. Our accommodation this evening will be in authentic bandas just within the boundary of the national park.

Day 29 - Rwenzori Mountains National Park

Today we have an opportunity to explore the foothills of the mysterious mountains that have adorned the distant horizon since we entered the Semliki Valley. The day hike is part of a community programme and our excellent Bakonzo guide will spend time teaching us about the area and explaining some of the local customs and stories. If the weather is fine our trail will lead to superb views of Margherita and some of the best photographic opportunities of a country rightly famed for its exquisite scenery and breathtaking panoramas. We can expect to see a variety of wildlife during our walk, including the ubiquitous primates, and when we return in the evening we will have the chance to relax and savour a demonstration of the local tribal dancing.

Day 30 - Rwenzori Mountains National Park to Queen Elizabeth National Park

Our day begins with a village tour to learn more about the lives and culture of the Bokonzo, a Bantu-speaking people who live on both sides of the border with the DRC and are considered to be the historical custodians of the mountains. In addition to visiting homes, small farms and the craft centre within the village, we will be introduced to the Rwenzori Community Forest Project, an initiative that protects an area of indigenous forest for the benefit of the local people. Large patches of reclaimed farmland are being replanted with native trees and our absorbing visit will directly support this important project, as well as the education of the village children. We then head south once more for lunch at our lodge within Queen Elizabeth National Park, the most popular national park in the country, with, not coincidentally, the largest variety and concentrations of animals, the majority of which are easier to see here than in most other reserves across the country. Not surprisingly, given the presence of two major lakes, Lake Edward and Lake George, Queen Elizabeth National Park attracts a wonderful variety of birds, particularly waterbirds, raptors and the highly prized shoebill. Over 600 bird species have been observed here, around 60% of the species recorded in the entire country, and we will see a dazzling selection of them this afternoon, as we take the gentle boat cruise along the Kazinga Channel between the two lakes. As an introduction to the park, our boat safari could not be much more ideal, as large herds of elephants head to the refreshing water in the heat of the afternoon sun and buffalo, Uganda kob and waterbuck all further decorate a riverbank already teaming with ornate storks, herons, egrets, ibises and cranes. As the sun falls, hippos haul themselves out of the water to begin a busy nights grazing and the occasional leopard will be spotted cautiously lapping at the water's edge after another tough day sprawled in a totally obscured sausage tree.



Days 31 to 34 - Queen Elizabeth National Park

As there is so much to see and do here, we have four days to explore each distinct section of the park and to participate in a variety of compelling activities. In the north the game driving is more conventional in terms of the wide open savannah absent across much of the country. Lions are routinely encountered and, of the other major predators, leopard, spotted hyena, side-striped jackal and serval



are all reasonable possibilities. This is the best reserve in Uganda to observe giant forest hog and our game driving will be conducted in open vehicles against the gorgeous backdrop of the arresting, mist-shrouded Rwenzori Mountains. Lions can also be encountered further south within the sparsely wooded plains of the Ishasha section of the reserve, although unusually they are just as likely to be sleeping in the trees than under them, as several prides have taken to routinely climbing and relaxing in the expansive fig trees. More traditionally, leopards can often be found reclining in the shaded trees along the bank of the Ishasha River, which supports, along with the other water courses in

the park, one of the highest concentrations of hippo in Africa. To the north east, the glorious Kyambura Gorge is home to a small troop of isolated chimpanzees that are relatively easy to find on foot and many other primates occur within the steep walls of the heavily forested gorge. Primates in general, including a much larger but less easily observed chimpanzee population, are also well represented within the thick canopy of the Maramagambo Forest and one of several walking trails will bring us to a sizable cave, famous for its significant bat colony and at least one resident rock python. If we are in the area as the light begins to fade, we may even see one of several opportunist fish eagles predating on the bats as they leave the protection of the cave. Shoebills nest within the secluded swamps around Lake George and the same papyrus reeds conceal a healthy population of sitatunga antelope. Of the many attractive volcanic crater lakes within the park, we will certainly make time to visit Kitagata and Kyemengo, as well as Flamingo Lake within the Kyambura Wildlife Reserve section, which, appropriately enough, supports thousands of lesser and greater flamingo. One additional highlight is the opportunity to spend time with a research team, collecting valuable data on a variety of animals, including lion, hippo and mongoose. If this is all too much for anyone, there is always the sanctuary of our outstanding lodge, where we can watch elephants cooling down in the Kazinga Channel, as we take our own refreshing dip in the enticing pool.

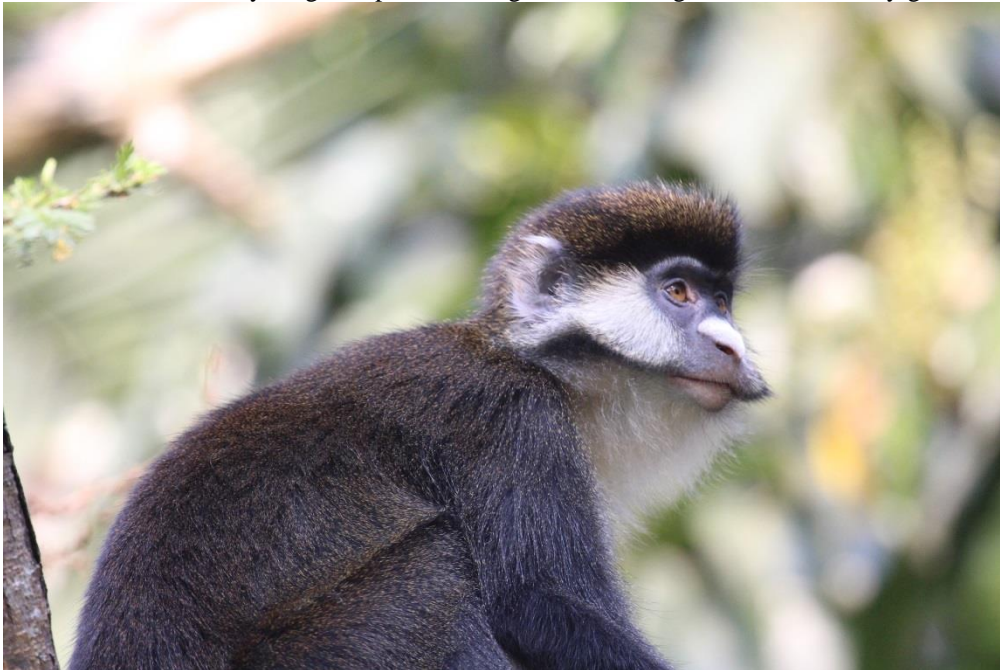
Day 35 - Queen Elizabeth National Park to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

As this will probably be our last realistic chance to photograph some of the larger predators, we will have one final game drive this morning before we transfer directly south and then west past Lake Bunyonyi to the world renowned Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. With the exception of some regions in the north, Uganda receives heavier rains than much of East Africa and is consequently far greener and more fertile. The combination of dense lush vegetation and moist, broadleaf forest, provides a perfect habitat for many of the primates so well represented in the country, including mountain gorillas, one of two subspecies of the eastern gorilla. Bwindi is one of only two protected areas in Uganda for the mountain gorilla, our next destination Mgahinga National Park in the Virunga Mountains is the other, and is home to almost half of the remaining 700 mountain gorillas on earth. Both parks offer visitors the very special privilege of seeing these magnificent and humbling creatures in the wild and, as we get ever closer to our destination, our thoughts and conversations will inevitably turn towards the momentous experience that awaits us. Although there has been some debate regarding the habituating of gorillas in order for them to be observed at close quarters, these animals remain wild in the true sense and have simply become used to the presence of humans without becoming alarmed. Whilst I share the basic principles of those who feel that these and other animals should be left in peace, it is unfortunately too late all over the globe to take that rather unilateral stance and the appalling reality is, if there was no international demand to see these gorillas in a natural environment, very few of them, if any, would still be alive. In my opinion, by purchasing a permit to watch these tender and playful creatures interact, you will not only experience one of the most rewarding and moving highlights of a lifetime, you will help to preserve an entire species. As we will probably have a fairly demanding day ahead of us, this afternoon we can relax and enjoy the tranquil atmosphere of our enchanting lodge and beautiful tropical gardens. A gentle trail ambles through the lush undergrowth down to a pretty mountain stream and the stone terrace is a perfect spot to sit and admire the verdant forest canopy. A sea of green, our setting could not be more ideal and a local gorilla family often build their nests in the surrounding trees and have even been encountered walking across the lawns around the bandas.



Days 36 to 37 - Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

Our first day at Bwindi is reserved for the most memorable experience of the trip and for many, one of the most memorable moments of their life. However, these are wild animals and before we get to spend our magical hour with the gorillas we have to find them and that can involve a fairly long, steep hike through dense undergrowth. It is actually good that some effort is required, as nothing this



special should be easy and eventually the hushed tones of our dedicated guides will tell us that the so eagerly anticipated moment has finally arrived. There is no real way to describe your first sight of a gorilla in the wild, it is different for everyone, a totally unique event for each individual fortunate enough to experience it. We will be able to approach to within a few metres of the gorillas, the guides will assess each specific situation in terms of picking a spot where we are not likely to disturb them, but often these gentle apes will come even closer, particularly the younger, more inquisitive members of the group. In all we will have an hour in the company of some of the most powerful creatures on the planet and they will barely give us a glance, as they continue quietly chewing on the

vegetation or climbing through the canopy above our heads. It will be over all too soon, but the walk back will go almost unnoticed and the memories will never fade. Unlike many of the visitors to Bwindi, we will not depart as soon as we have seen the gorillas, as this is one of Africa's few remaining primeval forests and its stunning expanses protect an astounding diversity of life. Eleven distinct primates, including a healthy population of chimpanzees, over 350 bird species and more than 200 butterflies have been recorded here and on our second day we will take a stimulating, although far more relaxed, trail through some of the finest scenery imaginable.

Day 38 - Bwindi Impenetrable National Park to Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

This morning we say a sad but profoundly satisfied farewell to Bwindi and journey south to Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, a small reserve, but part of the much larger Virunga Conservation Area, created specifically to protect the last few pockets of mountain gorillas and shared with neighbouring Rwanda to the south and the DRC to the west. The Uganda section of the park is dominated by three of the eight volcanic mountains in the magnificent Virunga range, which tower majestically from just over 3000m to 4500m across all three countries. Although Mgahinga is one of only two destinations in Uganda where gorilla trekking has been possible, these nomadic apes are free to traverse the entire Virunga range and the habituated group within Mgahinga often spend several months at a time further south across the border in Rwanda. It is therefore occasionally possible to obtain gorilla trekking permits on a last-minute basis here and I will look at this as a rather special additional option shortly before we arrive. However, to ensure that we have a guaranteed second gorilla encounter, this trip includes the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and at Mgahinga we will concentrate on other primates and exploring the brooding misty mountains of Uganda's most beautiful national park. This afternoon we are free to relax at our comfortable lodge, perfectly situated within the foothills of the Virunga mountains and overlooked by the three extinct behemoths to the south.

Days 39 to 40 - Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

We have several appealing options during our stay at Mgahinga, including an opportunity to trek golden monkey, a subspecies of the blue or sykes' monkey, endemic to the Virunga area. The three extinct volcanoes, Muhabura, Gahinga and Sabyinyo, can all be climbed on fairly demanding but immensely rewarding full day hikes and, while the views from all three are as spectacular as you would expect in an area of such outstanding natural beauty, the panoramas of Bwindi, Lake Edward and the Rwenzori Mountains are particularly impressive from Muhabura, the tallest of the three. At the peak of Sabyinyo you have the unusual distinction of standing in three countries, Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC, whilst the Gahinga trail winds through huge areas of pristine bamboo forest, where we are likely to observe the golden monkey. Other less strenuous trails are no less enjoyable and, as is the case with all of the Afromontane habitat we will explore, Mgahinga is home to a diverse array of endemic birds and less commonly observed mammals. The black-fronted duiker is only found in extremely isolated pockets beyond central Africa and leopard, golden cat, serval, spotted hyena and side-striped jackal are the main predators within a rich ecosystem that also protects several primates, as well as forest elephant and buffalo. For a greater understanding of the indigenous Batwa people, and a chance to support an entire community evicted from their home when the national park was created, the Batwa trail is an authentic introduction to the traditional way of life of the original inhabitants of these dense and bountiful forests. Our Batwa guides, only allowed back into the areas their ancestors roamed for centuries during this one activity, will demonstrate how a highly resourceful and skilled people thrived in such harsh conditions. They will point out a variety of edible and medicinal plants, the tracks of the animals they used to hunt, how simple traps were fashioned from a few twigs and vines and how honey was collected safely. Our fascinating and thought provoking day will culminate at the sacred Garama Cave, where the displaced Batwa sing moving laments to the forest that was once their home and enthusiastic songs of welcome to us as their guests.



Day 41 - Mgahinga Gorilla National Park to Volcanoes National Park

This morning will be a casual affair, with a relaxed breakfast against the dramatic mountains and an easy transfer south into Rwanda. Although sadly synonymous with the horrific genocide that took place here in 1994, when the world watched on as up to a million Tutsis were savagely slaughtered by the ruling Hutus in just 100 days, Rwanda remains an enthralling destination and the ordinary people are working hard to come to terms with those horrific events and to rebuild a united country. Whilst barely conceivable having just travelled from Uganda, the landscapes on the Rwanda side of the Virunga mountains are even more staggering and the views of Lake Bulera and Lake Ruhondo from the immaculately terraced gardens of our lodge, superbly positioned on a commanding hill, rival any across the globe. Excluding the short trail within the grounds of our lodge, which really has to be walked on the day of arrival for more exceptional views of the two lakes, we have nothing planned for this afternoon, as tomorrow we will need all our energy as we search for more gorillas.

Days 42 to 44 - Volcanoes National Park

The first day of our short interlude in Rwanda will be reserved for gorilla trekking and another chance to spend an intimate hour with a habituated family group. Despite the fact that today's encounter will not be our first, the occasion is in no way diminished and can in fact prove to be even more rewarding, as the first opportunity can often pass in a blur of adrenalin and emotion and this time we will be able to fully savour the captivating interaction of these highly sociable creatures. As the huge silverback watches on, occasionally disrupting his methodical feeding to check that all is well, we may be fortunate enough to observe the intimate grooming and bonding between a mother and her offspring or the boisterous wrestling between the younger, more playful members of the group. When you consider that for every one of the mountain gorillas we are watching there are 10 million people on the planet, whether we have seen

them previously is of no real import and this second visit will quickly become one of the abiding memories of the tour. Depending on your interests, there are a number of contrasting options available to us over the next two days. At entirely opposing ends of the



spectrum, we can take the two-day hike to the top of Karisimbi, camping overnight on the mountain and finishing the exacting final ascent on the second morning, or we can simply spend a day relaxing at Lake Kivu, one of Africa's Great Lakes and one of the finest inland beaches on the continent. In further contrast, and for those interested in learning more about Rwanda's turbulent history, we can visit the Genocide Memorial Centre in the capital Kigali, where a quarter of a million victims of the genocide were buried in mass graves. This is obviously a far from comfortable experience, the survivors stories are stark and tragic and the picture that evolves of those fateful days is as disturbing as it is unimaginable. That said, remarkable stories of hope and courage are also

revealed and the Memorial Centre stands as a fitting monument to the innocent victims and as an important reminder to Rwanda and the rest of the world. Another poignant trip will take us to Karisoke Research Centre within the Virunga mountains, where the leading primatologist Dian Fossey studied and helped protect mountain gorillas for eighteen years until her murder in 1985. Our hike will take in Dian Fossey's small home and grave, as she was buried in the mountains alongside a number of gorillas killed by poachers, including her beloved Digit, who died bravely defending his group from six poachers and their ferocious dogs, as the rest of his family fled to safety. Devastated by his death, Dian named the Digit Fund in his honour, a charitable institution created to raise funds to finance anti-poaching patrols and generate international awareness regarding the plight of these critically endangered apes. Renamed the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, the organisation is still funding essential conservation at Karisoke and beyond, including sophisticated anti-poaching teams and various community programmes aimed at reducing the crippling poverty that drives so much of the poaching across Africa. Although other less challenging trips are also available, including visits to local schools and a pretty hike to Lake Bulera, both the Genocide Memorial Centre and Karisoke visits are moving and thought provoking experiences that will provide us with a far better understanding of the historical issues facing Rwanda as a whole and a tiny gorilla population clinging to the very edge of survival.



Day 45 - Volcanoes National Park to Lake Bunyonyi

After a memorable few days, we leave Rwanda this morning and drive back north into Uganda to begin the final section of our tour. Our first destination as we head towards Entebbe is the highly attractive Lake Bunyoni, which, as all the guide books and many locals will tell you, translates as ‘place of little bird’s’. Although the area is certainly a productive one in terms of bird spotting, particularly the papyrus specialists within the easily accessible Nyombe and Muko swamps, it is also one of the best in Africa to view otters, most notably spotted-necked otter. After a transfer by boat to our lodge on one of the many largely uninhabited islands scattered about the lake, we will have a first chance to look for the otters this afternoon, either with guides from our lodge or on our own in dugout canoes. As there are no hippos or crocodiles in the lake, which is probably why the otters thrive here without any competition for food, swimming is also a safe option and, if you prefer to simply relax for a few hours, our spacious safari tents are impeccably situated within a secluded woodland setting overlooking the lake and the distant terraced hills that surround it so spectacularly.

Day 46 - Lake Bunyonyi

This morning we can take a guided canoe safari for another chance to look for otters and waterbirds, as this is also a good spot to observe the highly ornate grey crowned crane, the national bird of Uganda. The afternoon will be reserved for a motorboat tour of the lake and an opportunity to explore a few of the islands and to learn some of the interesting history and folklore connected to them. Our trip will include the rather grim ‘punishment island’, where unmarried girls who fell pregnant were abandoned to either starve to death or drown if they attempted to escape, and Bwama Island, which operated as a leper colony until the late 1960’s. Visits to local schools, craft centres and community projects can also arranged, including the Lake Bunyonyi Development Company, which supports a large number of orphans in the area through various small business enterprises and also funds scholarships for the local children, as well as an important HIV prevention and awareness program.



Day 47 - Lake Bunyonyi to Lake Mburo National Park

We drive east this morning to Lake Mburo National Park, the last of the ten national parks that we will visit in Uganda and probably the best in terms of the varied game viewing activities. Although lions are intermittently seen at Mburo, and both leopard and spotted hyena are observed reasonably regularly here, this picturesque reserve is visited more for the opportunity to encounter animals absent elsewhere across much of the country. On our initial game drive this afternoon we can realistically expect to see herds of zebra and eland for the first time since Kidepo and impala for probably the first time on the entire trip. Buffalo, topi, waterbuck, reedbuck, klipspringer, bushbuck, duiker and warthog are also present, many of which can be seen at the waterhole of our exceptional ecolodge, one of the very best that we will visit, not only in terms of the facilities, but also regarding our hosts approach to wildlife viewing and the protection of the park’s major predators. A superb hide has been constructed overlooking the waterhole and the lodge supports a number of crucial conservation initiatives, including a scheme to compensate local farmers when they lose livestock, as their traditional response has always been to attempt to poison the predator responsible and at the same time any other scavengers unfortunate enough to stumble across an apparently free meal. Night game drives are also permitted at Lake Mburo, but again the difference here is that we will go out late after dinner to optimise our chances of seeing certain animals and we will be able to continue looking for more or less as long as we want. In addition to the highly visible eastern-thick tailed galagos that scamper around

the lodge every evening, the spotlighting here can be extremely productive, as leopard, serval, genet, African civet, spotted hyena, side-striped jackal, honey badger, aardvark, porcupine, marsh mongoose, white-tailed mongoose and bushpig all occur.

Days 48 to 49 - Lake Mbuho National Park

Our stay in Uganda will finish on a high over the next two or so days, as we explore the varied and attractive habitats within Mbuho and participate in some classically African safari activities. One of the real highlights will be a wonderful horseback safari across the



savannah to a generally well populated waterhole with outstanding views of several lakes beyond the park. As the often nervous plains animals tend to ignore our horses, we will be able to approach a wide variety of them at exceptionally close quarters and to observe the natural behaviour that is frequently missing during game drives or even walks. That said, walking safaris are still another rewarding experience here across a number of compelling landscapes, as are relaxing boat trips on Lake Mbuho to see the large hippo and crocodile populations, as well as some of the more than 300 birds recorded in the park. Three otter species populate the many sparkling waterways throughout the reserve and, as we search for these and the sitatunga antelope, we will also have one last chance to look for the elusive African golden cat, perhaps, if we are incredibly fortunate, to complete a full set of the seven beautiful cats found in Uganda. The

brehtaking views from our lodge, perched high on a rocky outcrop above the acacia doted savannah, are equalled only by those from the tempting infinity pool and our final evening will be spent savouring one last burning red horizon, as the sun finally sets on our epic African adventure.

Day 50 - Lake Mbuho National Park to Entebbe

We say farewell to the dark continent today with one last game drive and an unhurried breakfast before our tour comes full circle and we depart for the drive to Entebbe. Transfers to other destinations can be arranged, as can overnight accommodation depending on international flight connections.



Additional Options

Although this tour has been designed specifically as an introduction to the extraordinary wildlife and staggering landscapes of Uganda, your personal adventure can include any combination of these or many other alluring destinations across the country. The hidden forests and white sandy beaches of the Ssesse Islands, an archipelago of over eighty islands within Lake Victoria, have been attracting visitors for a number of years and the Rwenzori Mountains offer hikers and serious climbers an almost limitless range of multi-day trails and challenging climbs. Tours of the capital Kampala can easily be added to this or any other itinerary and there are numerous opportunities to explore the culture of the region, including overnight visits to a number of contrasting villages and communities. Whilst still effortlessly combined with neighbouring Kenya to produce a wonderfully varied wildlife trip, Uganda is once again becoming a fully independent travel destination and there are many reasons to visit this exceedingly beautiful and captivating country beyond the traditional gorilla trekking. Although it is fair to say that Uganda has suffered more than its share of problems in the past, with the animals recovering remarkably well in all of the major national parks, there is now far more opportunity to experience the country as so many visitors used to, full of vibrant, colourful people, majestic, sweeping landscapes and some of the most memorable wildlife encounters on the planet.





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