

Uganda

Uganda is Africa condensed, with a bit of everything the continent has to offer packed into one small, stunning destination. It's home to the tallest mountain range in Africa, the glacier-capped Rwenzoris. The mighty Nile River, the world's longest, surges out of Lake Victoria, the continent's largest lake. One of the highest concentrations of primates in the world, including more than half of all remaining mountain gorillas, roams its forests. And the merging of habitats from eastern, western and northern Africa produces some of the world's best birdwatching.

On top of all this, a growing variety of activities has made Uganda the adrenalin centre of East Africa. There's no such thing as a crowd in even the most popular national parks, and the capital Kampala is safer and friendlier than most in Africa. Winston Churchill called it the 'Pearl of Africa'. He was right.

And now is an ideal time to visit because Uganda sits on the cusp of discovery. It's already popular enough that facilities are well developed in the places where most visitors go, but there's a genuine sense of adventure for those who get off the tiny tourist trail.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 241,038 sq km
- **ATMs** Widely available
- **Borders** Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; formerly Zaïre), Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan and Tanzania
- **Budget** US\$20 a day in towns, US\$50 in parks
- **Capital** Kampala
- **Languages** English, Luganda
- **Money** Ugandan shilling; US\$1 = USh1934, €1 = USh2784
- **Population** 31.4 million
- **Seasons** Rainy seasons in the south are March to May and October to November; in the north it rains April to October
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 256; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 3
- **Visa** US\$50 for up to three months, issued at most borders; single East African tourist visa expected to be introduced soon (see p737)



HOW MUCH?

- **Tracking mountain gorillas** US\$500
- **Meal at a decent restaurant** US\$5 to US\$15
- **National park entry** US\$25 to US\$30
- **Daily Monitor newspaper** US\$0.60
- **White-water rafting** US\$125

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.65
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1
- **500mL Bell beer** US\$0.75 to US\$1.25
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$7
- **Plate of matoke (mashed plantains) and beans** US\$0.90

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bwindi Impenetrable National Park** (p836) Jaunt through the jungle to marvel at mountain gorillas.
- **White-water rafting and kayaking** (p828) Take on the wild waters of the Nile River.
- **Murchison Falls** (p841) Check out the world's most powerful waterfall on a wild-life-watching bonanza of a boat ride up the Victoria Nile.
- **Lake Bunyonyi** (p838) Chill out at the most beautiful lake in Uganda.
- **Travelling overland to Kidepo Valley National Park** (p843) Cross unvarnished Africa at its wild and colourful best.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Uganda can be visited at any time of year. Most of Uganda enjoys the perfect tropical climate. Temperatures average 26°C during the day and 15°C at night. The hottest months are January and February, when temperatures can reach 32°C in the north. The rainy seasons in the south are March to May and October to November, the wettest month being April. In the north the wet season is from April to October.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Kick off in Kampala (p821) and then head south to track the gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable (p836) or Mgahinga Gorilla (p840) National Parks. After some

hard hiking, chill out at Lake Bunyonyi (p838) for a few days.

- **Two Weeks** Take some wild rides in Jinja (p828), East Africa's adrenalin capital, and then wind down in Kampala (p821) before heading north to Murchison Falls National Park (p841), Uganda's best all-rounder. Pick some places to explore around Fort Portal (p833) and finish off with a visit to the gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable (p836) or Mgahinga Gorilla (p840) National Parks.

HISTORY

Uganda experienced two great waves of migration. The first brought the Bantu-speaking peoples from further west in Africa, and the second, the Nilotic people from Sudan and Ethiopia. These broad families are still geographically split today; the Bantu in the centre and south of the country and the Nilotic peoples in the north.

Until the 19th century, landlocked Uganda saw few outsiders compared with its neighbours. Despite fertile lands and surplus harvests, trading links with the great Indian Ocean ports were limited. Firm contacts were finally made with Arab traders and early European explorers in the mid-19th century.

The British Arrive

After the Treaty of Berlin in 1890, when Europeans carved up Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar were declared British Protectorates. The Brits ruled indirectly, giving the traditional kingdoms a considerable degree of autonomy, but favoured the Baganda (the name of the people of the Baganda kingdom) people for their civil service.

Other tribal groups, unable to make inroads into the Baganda-dominated colonial administration or commercial sector, were forced to seek other avenues for advancement. The Acholi and Lango people from the north soon became dominant in the military. Thus were planted the seeds for the intertribal conflicts that were to tear Uganda apart following independence.

Independence Time

By the mid-1950s a Lango schoolteacher Dr Milton Obote had cobbled together a loose coalition that led Uganda to independence in 1962, on the promise that the Baganda would have autonomy. The kabaka (king),