



COUNTRY BRIEFING: UGANDA



Sunbird

Uganda is where Africa's largest lake meets savannah plains, dense jungles and hill country, home to troops of chimpanzees, a huge diversity of birdlife, and of course, the mountain gorillas. You won't find the Big Five in Uganda, but for travellers seeking adventure and a different kind of safari, look no further. Katie Fewkes explores some of the country's top spots for a unique wildlife experience.



Shoebill stork



Semliki National Park

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

Deep in the southwestern corner of Uganda lies Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, the best place for that electrifying first sighting of mountain gorillas. Three groups of gorillas have been habituated to visits from travellers and each day a group of eight people trek to see them through the dense forest. The gorillas aren't the only inhabitants of the forest though – keep your eyes peeled for black and white colobus monkeys, whose long white tails stand out brilliantly against the dark forest canopy, as well as L'Hoest's monkeys, red-tailed monkeys, bushbucks, forest elephants and forest duikers. Bird-watchers will also delight here, with more than 350 recorded species, including the brown-necked parrot and African green broadbill.

Queen Elizabeth National Park

This enormous reserve was designated a national park in 1952, and whilst the wildlife in this region declined dramatically under Idi Amin, numbers are now greatly improving. In the south of the park, the Ishasha Plains are home to tree-climbing lions and herds of elephant and buffalo. Further north, the Kasenyi Plains boast leopard, lions, hyenas, bushbucks, reedbucks, side-striped jackals and elephants. Here you can also enjoy a boat trip on the Kazinga Channel (a stretch of water that links Lakes George and Edward) and witness hippos wallowing while fish eagles stand watch from the top of acacia trees. You can track chimpanzees at Kyambura Gorge and for something truly different, spend a day or two in the Maramagambo Forest, where you can encounter blue monkeys, black and white colobus monkeys, pygmy antelopes and giant forest hogs. A variety of walks are available through the forest, skirting along the edge of the crater lakes, or into the darkness of bat caves.

Kibale Forest Reserve

The main attraction of this vast and scenic forest is the opportunity to track chimpanzees – Kibale has the highest population of chimpanzees in Uganda and your chances of finding a troop is around 90%. There's also the option of doing

guided night walks of the forest to find nocturnal primates including bushbabies and potto. Bird watching is also superb in this region, particularly at the nearby Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary where you can expect to see the blue-headed bee-eater and the great blue turaco. The nearby crater lakes are scenically stunning and most of the accommodation in the area is located to afford good views of the rolling hills and lakes dotted around the landscape.

Semliki Wildlife Reserve

This is Uganda's oldest wildlife reserve and arguably the worst affected by poaching during the civil war. The opening of Semliki Safari Lodge ten years ago marked the turning point for the region's wildlife, which is now recovering well. You'll find good numbers of Ugandan kob, as well as reedbuck, buffalo, forest elephant and waterbuck. If you opt for a night drive here you may well come across leopard, as well as owls and night-jars. There's the chance to enjoy several guided walks through the forest or along the riverbanks, and you can accompany the researchers to track the troop of 40 chimpanzees resident in the Mugiri River Forest. For many, though, the highlight is a boat trip on Lake Albert in search of the prehistoric-looking shoebill stork.

Uganda offers a real diversity of activities, landscapes and wildlife encounters, making it a fascinating place to explore. In some regions, the infrastructure for visitors is still relatively undeveloped, but this makes the experience all the more exciting and rewarding.

Katie Fewkes

Uganda Specialist

FACT FILE

A two-week trip to Uganda including visits to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, a day of gorilla tracking and visits to Queen Elizabeth National Park, Kibale Forest and Semliki Wildlife Reserve, starts from £3,300 per person. Please contact Katie for further details on 01993 838 513.

