

# Travel Tips and General Information

by

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## **Pace of Life**

Uganda is relatively new to tourism compared to Kenya and Tanzania. The infrastructure, accommodation, transport network and quality and availability of services and facilities are basic by Western standards. Things work more slowly on the African continent. Pearl of Africa Tours and Travel (PATT) will do everything in its power to ensure you have the most enjoyable and comfortable trip, however unexpected delays and difficulties may be experienced. Please be patient and enjoy the more relaxed rhythm of life. You're on holiday after all!

## **Gorilla Tracking**

This is a strenuous activity and one should be physically fit to enjoy this safari. Professional guides will accompany groups but no porters are available to carry personal belongings. Minimum age is fifteen years. Anyone with signs of communicable disease will not be allowed to trek.

While possession of a gorilla permit is a guarantee of trekking, it cannot be a guarantee of sighting. However the chance of sighting is high - 95% or more. Maximum time allowed with the gorillas is one hour at a minimum distance of 7 meters.

No flash photography is allowed and fast film is therefore recommended (minimum 400-1600 ASA). Personal DVD recorders are allowed. Special arrangements need to be made for professional film makers and filming permits are required for commercial photography and filming.

For Gorilla Tracking, we strongly recommend a breathable and lightweight rain jacket or poncho, a warm jacket or fleece for overcast days and evening, long-sleeved shirt and trousers, sturdy waterproof walking boots (seasoned or well worn footwear), leather gardening type gloves, sunscreen, cap or sun hat, sunglasses, insect repellent, comfortable day pack for carrying water and minimum amount of personal items. Cameras and video cameras are allowed, but bring film and batteries from Kampala.

## **Accommodation**

Uganda is still relatively new to international tourism. The seasoned traveler will find many lodges and camps are not as luxurious as in some African countries, then other properties may exceed expectations. There are accommodations of different standards throughout the Country. Electricity and piped/mains water supply may not be available, although clients will always find a hot shower waiting for them after a long days trek. In some remote locations long-drop or compost toilets may be found. Food may be basic, but you are usually assured of fresh produce and a variety of tropical fruits which taste so much better than supermarket imports in the West!

The more up market lodges and hotels offer excellent facilities on par with other safari destinations. However, please remember we are a developing economy and expectations should not be unrealistic.

PATT takes care in booking the best accommodation available for your budget. All of our prepared itineraries start from Kampala. If you require pre-or post-safari hotel bookings in Kampala please advise us and we will make the necessary arrangements. Reservations should be made in advance to avoid disappointment.

## **Health/Medical**

More adventurous activities such as mountaineering and hiking, gorilla and chimp tracking, white-water rafting, canoeing and kayaking may pose additional risks and should be undertaken with care and caution. Clients must be fit and healthy. Gorilla and Chimp trekking is not permitted to those individuals who have signs of a communicable disease such as colds, flu and other airborne diseases. Chimps and gorillas are highly susceptible to human diseases and it is therefore essential that Clients declare all illnesses and seek our advice if you are unsure. National Park Authorities reserve the right to deny access to individuals.

Anti-malaria tablets and mosquito repellent are essential. Seek advice from your home country on vaccination and inoculation requirements. Uganda is part of the Yellow Fever belt and although not always checked by Ugandan Immigration on arrival, a Yellow Fever card is required by law.

Please bring all personal medications required. Medical services and facilities are basic. Clients are fully responsible for securing adequate medical insurance which should include evacuation cover.

It is recommended that you drink bottled or boiled water only.

## **Airport**

Most guests arrive by air, landing at Entebbe International Airport. The drive to/from Entebbe/Kampala City is approximately 45 minutes. We can organize transfers to and from the airport for any size group.

## **Airlines**

Several airlines service Uganda regularly including Air Tanzania, British Airways, Egypt Air, Ethiopian Airlines, Emirates Airlines, Kenya Airways - KLM and Brussels Airlines. There are several reputable domestic charter companies offering internal air travel.

## **Visas**

Single entry tourist visas are available on arrival at Entebbe airport priced at US\$50 and at the land borders. We recommend clients obtain them on arrival.

Uganda follows a policy of reciprocity (if your Country requires a Visa for Ugandans to enter, Uganda will impose the same). Irish Nationals do not require visas.

## **Roads**

Main roads are generally good and recent road works have much improved the road network in and around Kampala. Secondary roads vary in quality and may be poorly maintained. Be prepared for long and sometimes bumpy car journeys. We call it 'African Massage'!

## **Climate**

Uganda is on the Equator which gives it an ideal climate with little variation. Mean temperatures are between 21c and 31c all the year round. There are two rainy seasons from March to April and October to November. Travel is often slower in the rainy season and trekking more difficult. Mountainous areas tend to be much colder than the plains and receive more rain. Temperatures in mountainous areas can go down to 10°C in certain months. Lodges and other facilities are open all year round.

## **Clothing**

Light summer cotton clothing supplemented by a sweater or jacket should be sufficient all year round for most of Uganda. In the hilly and mountainous areas, waterproof jackets or ponchos, strong waterproof walking boots and warmer fleece or heavy sweaters will be required in the evening. Informal dress is usual, although Ugandan's appreciate modest dressing. Cotton slacks and flat comfortable walking shoes are recommended on safari. Don't forget to bring a hat and sun protection, along with your swimsuit. Request additional details at the time of booking for specific areas.

## **Security**

Occasional security issues may arise as in any other developing country. Pearl of Africa Tours and Travel maintains up-to-date information on all parts of the Country and will advise Clients accordingly at the time of booking if any risks appear to be present. Basic precautions should be taken, as in all countries, and common sense should be used. It is not advised to display expensive jewelry, leave bags unattended or money lying around.

Most hotels and lodges have safe deposit boxes available. We recommend that you leave original travel documents and passports with us in our safe (if you wish) and travel with photocopies. East African residents will need to show copy Passports and Work Permits to obtain resident discounts. If in doubt please ask us and we will advise you.

## **Photography**

No photographs of, or near military buildings or soldiers is allowed. It is only polite to ask people before taking photographs. Film is available in Uganda. Fast film (400-1600 ASA) is recommended for gorilla tracking and forest walking. For digital photography, we recommended you bring extra batteries and a car charger.

## **Telephone/Internet**

International telephone communication is good from Kampala but more difficult in some rural areas. Uganda has a good mobile phone network throughout most of the Country and local SIM cards can be purchased throughout the Country. International roaming facilities are available. Internet services are widely available in Kampala through internet cafes and most major towns will have access, although the quality and speed of the connection varies. All our drivers/guides have cell phones and maintain contact with the Head Office throughout safaris. Airtime can be purchased by Clients for use of driver/guide mobile phones if necessary.

## **Electricity**

Uganda: 240 volts. 3-pin (square) sockets. It is recommended that you bring your own adaptor. Most hotels, lodges or camps can make arrangements for recharging batteries. Please ask us on booking if you have specific requirements.

## **Alcohol**

Several brands of local and international beer are available, including leading local beers: Bell, Club, and Nile Special beers. Most spirits and wines are imported and are readily available. Drinking and driving is prohibited and purchase of alcohol under the age of 18 years is also illegal.

## **Currency**

The currency in Uganda is the Uganda Shilling. It is issued in denominations of 1000, 5000, 10,000 and 20,000 Uganda Shillings notes. Coins are available for smaller denominations of 50, 100, 200 and 500 cents.

US dollar, GB Pounds and EUROS are readily exchangeable. Large US dollar bills attract the best exchange rates. Currency exchange rates vary and are posted at all banks and forex bureaus around Kampala and in the local newspapers. The rate as of Oct 2007 was US\$1 = 1740 Uganda Shillings and GBP1 = 3340 Uganda Shillings. There are no restrictions on other international currencies.

It is recommended that you change money in Kampala prior to safari where more favorable rates are offered.

ATM machines are available in Kampala and most offer access to international banks.

NB: US Dollar bills pre-2000 are often not accepted in Uganda or are exchanged at a less favorable rate. Poor quality foreign currency notes may be rejected. Please ensure you bring with you new or notes in excellent condition with no stains or tears.

**Travellers Cheques**

TC's are accepted in Kampala, but at a less favorable rate than cash. Most lodges and hotels up Country will accept TC's although rates are generally poor.

**Credit Cards**

AMEX, VISA and MASTERCARD may be accepted at a few choice establishments in Kampala and some up-country hotels and lodges.

**Banking**

Several international banks operate in Uganda including Barclays, Standard Chartered, Stanbic, and Citi Bank. Many local banks and forex bureaus also operate across the country. Generally the banking hours are 8.30 am to 4.00 pm, Monday to Friday. Some institutions are open longer hours and on Saturdays. There are no legal restrictions on foreign exchange transactions and currency is easily convertible.

**Begging/Donations**

We do not recommend clients give money to beggars or street children as this only lends to the culture of begging and dependency. Donations can be made to established international and local charities that work with the homeless, street children or orphans. We can arrange visits to local projects or institutions on request. If personal donations are preferred, we would suggest exercise books, pens or pencils are useful gifts.

**Gratuities**

Ugandans tip according to level of service and there are no fixed or assumed rates. Culturally people may not feel it appropriate to outwardly show their appreciation for money given, however salaries are generally low in Uganda compared to neighboring tourism destinations and all tips will be greatly appreciated. On average tips are in the region of: 5-10% in restaurants; US\$5-10 per day, per client for safari driver/guides and US\$5-10 per client, per day for Ranger Guides; US\$5 per day for porters on mountaineering/hiking safaris and US\$3-5 for Forest Walk guides. Tips are very personal and this is only a guide. Feel free to ask for advice.

This information is provided in good faith for the use of tourist and business travelers visiting Uganda. It is deemed to be accurate at the time of presentation, but conditions are subject to change. This is after all, Africa, a fantastic continent still growing and developing in many areas. If you have questions or comments regarding the above, or any aspect of your trip or safari, please feel free to contact us at Pearl of Africa Tours and Travel Limited for our advice and support. We stand ready, willing and able to be of assistance.