

Uganda



Uganda is located in east-central Africa, situated north and northwest of Lake Victoria. It is a landlocked country bordered by Sudan on the North, Kenya on the east, Tanzania on the South, Rwanda on the southwest and Zaire on the northwest.

The greater part of Uganda consists of a plateau about 4,000 ft. in height. Along the western border of the Ruwenzori Mountains reaching heights of over 16,000 ft., while on the eastern frontier Mount Elgon rises to 14,178 ft. By contrast, the Western Rift Valley, which runs from north to south through the western half of the country, is as low as 3,000 ft. on the floor of Lake Edward and Lake George and 2,000 ft. on the flow of Lake Albert. The White Nile River has its source in Lake Victoria.

Uganda is Africa condensed, with the best of everything the continent has to offer packed into one small but stunning destination. Uganda is home to the highest mountain range in Africa, the Mountains of the Moon in the Rwenzori National Park. It is the source of the mighty Nile and around Jinja offers the best white-water rafting in the world. It has the highest concentration of primates on earth, including the majestic mountain gorilla, one of the rarest animals on the planet. Head to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park for a chance to get close to these great apes.

On top of all this, the scenery is so striking that it looks like an oil painting, the beautiful national parks see far fewer visitors than in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania, and the capital, Kampala, is safer and friendlier than most in Africa. In 1907 pioneering tourist Winston Churchill called it the 'Pearl of Africa'. He was right.

Mention Uganda to most people today and the first thing they'll think of is the brutality of Idi Amin. Their naivety is their loss as, thankfully for Uganda, the big man died in exile in 2003. The reality is vastly different. Stability has returned to most parts of the country and tourists are welcomed with open arms. Despite the trials and tribulations of the past, Ugandans have weathered the storm remarkably well. The people offer heart-warming hospitality up and down the country, their ever-present smile accompanied by 'Hello Mzungu!' They are truly some of the finest folk on the continent.

Take the plunge now, before the world wakes up to this magical microcosm of Africa.

Travel Alert: *Travel to the north and northeast of Uganda is advised against due to ongoing violence. Check Safe Travel for current government warnings.*

From *The Lonely Planet* (Last updated: Jan 11, 2010)

Politics

Uganda is a presidential republic, in which the President of Uganda is both head of state and head of government; there is a multi-party system. Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the National Assembly. The system is based on a democratic parliamentary system with universal suffrage for all citizens over 18 years of age.

Population

31.5 million made up of 52 tribes

50% under the age of 15 - 2.5 million orphans

Life expectancy: 51 years. High infant and maternal mortality.

85% rural

Capital city

Kampala, population 1,353,200

Culture

A diverse range of ethnic groups. Lake Kyoga forms the northern boundary for the Bantu-speaking peoples, who dominate much of east, central and southern Africa. In Uganda they include the Baganda and several other tribes. In the north live the Lango and the Acholi, who speak Nilotic languages. To the east are the Iteso and Karamojong, who speak a Nilotic language. A few Pygmies live isolated in the rainforests of western Uganda. Tribal loyalties and obligations are very strong.

Language

Uganda is ethnologically diverse, with at least forty languages in usage. Luganda is the most common language. English is the official language of Uganda, even though only a relatively small proportion of the population speaks it. Access to economic and political power is almost impossible without having mastered that language. The East African lingua franca Swahili is relatively widespread as a trade language and was made an official national language of Uganda in September 2005. Luganda, a language widespread in central Uganda, has been the official vernacular language in education for central Uganda for a long time.

Youth literacy rate

74%

Standard of living

GNI per capita US \$340 or 76% below international poverty line of US \$2.00 a day.

Religion

85% Christians (RC 41%, Anglican 35.9%)

12% Muslim

2% Other - mostly Sikhs and Hindus

1 % Traditional

Major sports

Football (National team *The Cranes*), Cricket, Basketball

Food

Ugandan food is varied and healthy. The main staple is steamed plantain, or *matooke*. Other common foods include potatoes (sweet and "Irish"), yams, peas, beans, pumpkin, cassava, millet and rice. Groundnuts are favourite snacks, and groundnut sauce accompanies most meals.

Meats include mainly goat and chicken, but also pork and beef. A favourite fish is tilapia. Both meat and fish may be served stewed or grilled.

Fruit in Uganda is sweet, delicious and plentiful. It includes banana, pineapple, papaya, mango, passion fruit, jackfruit and avocado.

Clothing

In Uganda, the Kanzu is the national dress of men in the country. Women from central and eastern Uganda wear a dress with a sash tied around the waist and large exaggerated shoulders called a Gomesi. Women from the west, northwestern drape a long cloth round their waists and shoulders called (Suuka). Women from the southwest wear a long baggy skirt and tie a short matching cloth across their shoulders.

Travel Clothing

Lightweights, rainwear, hat and warm cover-ups for the evenings advised. Good walking shoes.

Dress Code at Uganda Christian University

The definition of the decency has been spelled out in a number of student's debates and discussions at the University. The following has been generally defined as indecent dressing and **must be avoided**.

Indecent ladies wear is considered to be:

- very tight pair of trousers and shorts, pedal pushers, attires showing knickers
- very short (mini) skirts and dresses above the knee
- tops/blouses that expose the belly or back (kundi show)
- all transparent clothing
- caps in class of chapel

Indecent dress or appearance for men:

- shorts and sleeveless shirts, vest (except for specific activities like games)
- plaiting, treatment of hair
- caps, hats in class, library and chapel
- Earrings and other similar ornaments

Risk

- Uganda is relatively safe with the exception of the North
- Local transportation is somewhat risky, particularly "boda-bodas". Small motorcycle taxis advisedly avoided
- It is safe to travel out at night providing you travel by taxi
- It is safe to walk around in Kampala and Mukono in the daytime
- Street kids can be dangerous and should be avoided
- You can travel safely to the Nile and to Queen Elizabeth National Park
- Avoid wearing jewellery as it draws attention. Watches are fine

Weather

Uganda enjoys a tropical climate

Dry seasons from December to February and from June to August

Rainy seasons from March to May and November to December

Average temperature: 26 degrees Celsius – rarely above 29 degrees Celsius

Take me back home

Abago Mary Nyar' Obote
(*Uganda Poetry Anthology*)

I want to go back home
For here my heart is forlorn
I want to go back home
Where I can find my love
Where I can find my people
Where I can lie together with the cows
With chicken clucking by my bedside
And goat urine sweet to my lungs

I want to go back home
For here meaning is lost
I want to go back home
Where my muscles stretch over the millstone
Singing praise to the bravest of men
Turning grain to powder
Sweat sweat dropping
Where I can balance the pot on my head
My little one leaning from my back

I want to go back home
Here all roots are rotting
I want to go back home
Where deep in the woods
I will go hunting
Running after the birds
Home, where I will wade in the waters
Bathe in the sands
Dance at the moon
And pray to the sky

There where my heart is
There where my home is
There where my grave shall be