



# UGANDA TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Uganda is a beautiful country with lots to offer. It lies on the elevated basin which rises between the eastern and western branches of the Great Rift Valley. Most of the country is over one thousand meters in altitude, which generally gives it a very pleasant climate. Uganda's equatorial climate allows for maximum temperatures between 20 and 27 degrees Celsius with a minimum between 12 and 18. The wet seasons are from September to November and March to May although climate change is attributed to the drastic alteration to these patterns leading to major water shortages in recent years. The most mountainous parts of Uganda are in the southwest with the Rwenzori Mountains forming the highest mountain range in Africa. Almost 25% of the country's surface area is covered in water, due in part to the magnificent Lake Victoria. The official source of the Nile is reputed to be at Jinja, on the Lake Victoria shore.

Uganda attained independence in 1962. An initial period of stability was followed by two decades of turmoil under the regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote, involving civil conflict, serious deterioration of the economic and social infrastructure, gross abuses of human rights and widespread corruption. Since the overthrow of Milton Obote in 1985, Uganda has been led by President Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government.

Uganda is now one of the most stable countries in the region, and has shown leadership on governance and on tackling HIV/AIDS. In February 2006, the country's first multiparty elections in over twenty-five years were held, resulting in the re-election for a third term of President Yoweri Museveni and an overall majority in Parliament for his party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM). While the elections themselves were conducted in a transparent, relatively peaceful and free atmosphere, international confidence in the fairness of the process as a whole was undermined by the arrest and trial on charges of rape and treason of the leading opposition candidate during the election campaign.

There has been progress in the area of good governance. The functions of governance have been decentralised and power devolved to local governments with the aim of fostering participation in decision-making on development issues. Uganda has a respected and independent Human Rights Commission, a lively free press and active civil society bodies. The Justice, Law and Order Sector Programme was launched in 2001 to improve quality of both criminal and commercial justice in Uganda as a component of good governance. Progress has been made in strengthening the systems of public financial management to reduce opportunities for corruption.

However, issues of concern remain. EU Heads of Mission in Kampala have regular discussions with the Ugandan authorities on a wide variety of issues, including human rights and governance. The Partners for Democracy and Governance (PDG) group, which Ireland co-chaired in 2006-07, has regular meetings with President Museveni and other key government leaders, at which such concerns are discussed.

The twenty-year military conflict in northern Uganda, which has been the cause of massive suffering and a destabilising factor for the country and the region, has abated. Peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) began in Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan, in July 2006 and a cessation of hostilities agreement was signed on 26 August 2006. Former President Chissano of Mozambique has been appointed UN Special Envoy for Northern Uganda, and he has been very active since taking up the task at the start of 2007. After a break of four months, peace talks between the Ugandan Government and the LRA resumed in Juba (southern Sudan) in April 2007. All sides welcomed the addition of the African observers to the process. While major differences between the two sides remain, the cease-fire continues to hold and the peace process aimed at resolving that conflict is ongoing.

**Accommodation** While in Uganda you will be staying in local hotels with private bathrooms. Occasionally there can be water and electricity shortages and there may not be working showers. All meals will be provided by the hotel.

**Communication** Your mobile phone should work in Kampala if you are a Bill Pay customer. Otherwise pay phones and Internet is available in Kampala. Outside Kampala it is unpredictable.

**Crime** Although the capital of Uganda, Kampala, is a relatively safe city, you are advised to take the usual sensible precautions with your personal belongings. Do not carry all of your money at once and please ensure that your passport and valuable belongings are kept securely at all times. We strongly advise against walking after dark. Please avoid any political demonstrations and rallies in Kampala and other towns.

**Dress** The way you dress is very important culturally. Ugandans tend to dress very formally so while working, it is expected that men will wear long trousers and shirts and women wear long skirts or dresses and that your shoulders are covered. Covered shoes are expected.

**Economy** Since Museveni took power in 1985, Uganda's economy has maintained a steady growth rate. Coffee, tea and tobacco are the major export crops. Over 90% of Ugandans are either subsistence farmers or work in agricultural related fields.

**Fitness** While you will not be expected to carry out any heavy work or excessive physical activity, it is recommended that you try to get reasonably fit, as the environment can be difficult at times.

**Food** Local food is based around a meat or chicken stew eaten with one of four staples: rice; chapatti; ugali (a stiff maize porridge); matoke (a cooked plantain dish served boiled or in a mushy heap), often accompanied by a groundnut sauce.

**Homosexuality** A draft anti-homosexual bill is currently being discussed in the Ugandan parliament. If this is adopted, Gay and Lesbian people can be put to death for engaging in same-sex intercourse, if they are serial offenders. This is a highly sensitive subject and we do not recommend that you even get involved in discussing this matter.

**Language** The official language, English, is spoken as a second language by most educated Ugandans. But over 50 ethnic groups speak more than 33 local languages throughout the country.

**Luggage** Aim to travel light. Clothes should be loose fitting, easy to maintain and light to carry. It might be advisable to borrow or invest in a good travel rucksack/kitbag and comfortable sandals. Travel items like travel towels, environmentally friendly shower gel/shampoo/washing detergent are always handy but all toiletries can be readily bought in Kampala.

**Money** Credit cards are not widely used in Uganda, although ATM's are available in Kampala and Euro can be exchanged in banks. €1 = UGX 2700.

**Population** The Ugandan population is growing all the time. It now stands at approximately 26 million with 87% of the population living rurally.

**Religion** Approximately 85% of Ugandans are Christian, divided roughly equally between the Protestant Church of Uganda and the Roman Catholic Church. Roughly 11% of Uganda is Islamic and the remainder is of tribal beliefs.

**Sunstroke** Be aware that you are losing fluids, overheating and prone to sunstroke and heat shock. This will be particularly the case during the first few days. Take it easy at first and drink plenty of water.

**Swine Flu** There are confirmed cases of the A (H1N1) virus (Swine Flu) in Uganda. Visitors arriving at Entebbe Airport will need to complete a form providing details of their recent travel history and may be screened by medical staff.

**Terrorist Activities** Kampala quickly returned to calm following an outbreak of rioting in some parts of the city in September. Elections are due to take place in Uganda in 2011, and as the elections approach, it cannot be ruled out that demonstrations may take place more frequently. Visitors are therefore recommended to keep themselves informed through local contacts and media.

**Time** +3 hours

**Travel** Many roads in Uganda are in very poor condition or are too small to handle an ever-increasing volume of traffic. Driving standards are low, vehicles are often poorly maintained and the accident rate is very high. Other road users may well be driving without lights and pedestrians and livestock can cross roads unpredictably. People travelling on buses should ensure they are travelling with a reputable company and that vehicles have seat belts. It is advised not to travel on overnight long distance buses due to numerous accidents and occasional banditry. Travel on small motor-cycles (known as boda-bodas) in urban areas is strongly advised against due to the lack of helmets, poor road conditions, poor driving skills and the risk of attack. Matatus (small taxis) are generally poorly maintained, badly driven and do not have adequate insurance and thus should be avoided. Always keep vehicle doors locked and valuables out of reach from open windows. Valuables should not be left in unattended vehicles. We advise against driving after dark outside central Kampala, or between Kampala and Entebbe International Airport for reasons of road safety and security. Travellers can overnight cheaply in several hotels in Entebbe when departing Uganda early in the morning. Ugandan authorities accept full Irish driving licenses.

**Water** Only drink bottled water in restaurants and from street vendors and ensure that the seal has not been tampered with. Don't take ice in drinks unless you know it is from purified water, ensure salads are washed in treated water and don't sing in the shower.

**Wildlife** Uganda is famed for its mountain gorillas but there are also premier savanna reserves where one can encounter lions, buffalos and elephants. There are also over a thousand recorded bird species.