

Uganda – A Photography Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Arrive Entebbe and overnight.
Day 3/4	Lake Mburo National Park.
Day 5/7	Mbarara.
Day 8/10	Queen Elizabeth National Park.
Day 11/12	Kibale Forest National Park.
Day 13	Depart Entebbe.
Day 14	Arrive London.

Departs

September or October.

Focus

Photography, particularly of birds and mammals, but other wildlife will be included too.

Grading

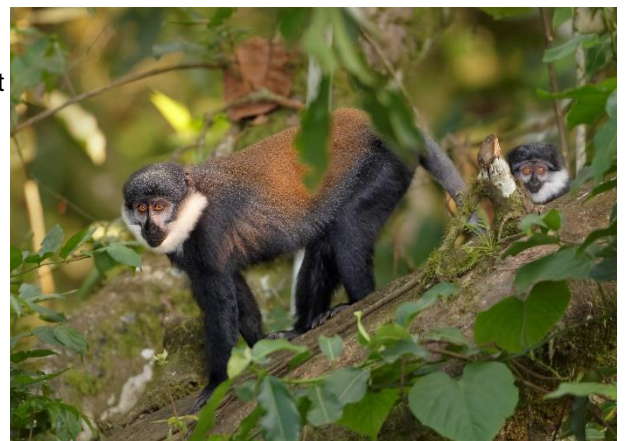
Grade B (Gorilla Trek Grade D).

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code UGA03) or the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- Trek for Mountain Gorillas in the Bwindi Forest
- Search for Chimpanzees in Kibale National Park
- Other primates including Guereza Colobus, L'Hoest's Monkey & Red-tailed Monkey
- Look for Shoebill in the Mbamba Swamp
- Take a boat trip along the Kazinga Channel between Lakes Edward & George for water birds
- Plenty of forest & savannah birds
- Led by professional photographer



From top: Mountain Gorilla, Shoebill & L'hoest's Monkey. Images courtesy of Tom McJannet, Jackie Edwards & Shutterstock.



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Introduction

Described by Winston Churchill as 'the pearl of Africa', Uganda is a small landlocked country supporting a wide range of animal species, reflecting its diversity of habitats and transitional point between the East African savannah, the West African rainforest and the semi-desert to the north. Uganda has a lot to offer the wildlife enthusiast and is happily rising in popularity following years of political unrest. Tourists are welcomed and are increasingly being catered for all over the country, indeed Uganda is one of Africa's most friendly destinations!



Queen Elizabeth National Park

This photography tour packs in some of Uganda's finest and most diverse habitats including, Lake Mburo, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Queen Elizabeth and Kibale Forest National Parks as well as Uganda's best Shoebill location, the Mabamba Wetlands. The tour uses the best located lodges and hotels to optimise the potential to find wildlife, which vary from simple to occasionally luxurious in nature.

The equatorial climate in Uganda remains stable all year round, with slight seasonal variations in rainfall. Most of Uganda is on a plateau at 900 - 1,800 metres above sea level. It is comfortably hot most of the time and rain showers are common, but do not hinder the wildlife. Average daytime temperatures are in the mid 20's Centigrade. These climatic factors also help to explain why all visitors are struck by just how green, fertile and beautiful Uganda is, which again is reflected in its abundant fauna.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London's Heathrow Airport this evening on a scheduled overnight flight to Entebbe (normally via Nairobi).

Day 2

Entebbe

On arrival into Entebbe we will meet our local guide and transfer to a comfortable hotel near the shores of Lake Victoria for a 1 night stay. There will be time for brunch/lunch before visiting the nearby Entebbe

Botanical Gardens. (We can sometimes check in our rooms at this stage, but they may not be available until mid-afternoon.)

The Gardens were established in 1901 and sit on the papyrus-lined shores of Africa's largest lake, Lake Victoria. The mature trees are home to fruit-eating birds such as Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, Ross's Turaco and the large Black-and-White Casqued Hornbill, whilst the small remnant patch of rainforest is home to both Guereza Colobus and Vervet Monkeys. Other species to look out for include Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Woodland, Striped and Pied Kingfishers, Diderik Cuckoo and Splendid Starling. It's a good opportunity to get used to the bright equatorial light and shadowed under canopy that we will be dealing with throughout the tour.

Ross's Turaco



Day 3 & 4

Lake Mburo National Park

We will make a very early start this morning, probably leaving the hotel around 0600 hours. The drive to the Mbamba Wetlands will take approximately an hour and a half, depending on the road conditions, and we hope to arrive between 0730 hours and 0800 hours to give us the rest of the morning to search for the magnificent Shoebill. On arrival we will transfer to wooden canoes and head out into the dense papyrus swamps in search of our quarry (please make sure that you have a waterproof covering for your camera). The Mbamba Wetlands, on the edge of Lake Victoria, are probably the easiest place in Uganda (and perhaps the whole of Africa) to see Shoebill, and we should have a very good chance of seeing this magnificent bird, although as in all wildlife watching sightings can never be guaranteed! Mbamba also offers a large selection of other species which might include Saddle-billed Stork, African Pygmy Geese, African Jacana, Goliath Herons, African Fish Eagle, Long-toed Plover, White-winged Tern, Blue-breasted Bee-eater and Fan-tailed Widowbird. The rare and elusive Sitatunga antelope also occur here but they are very shy and rarely seen.



Shoebill Stork

Late in the morning we will leave Mbamba and begin the drive to Lake Mburo National Park, a journey of around 4 hours. Part of the drive will take us along the shores of Lake Victoria, the largest lake on the African continent and the second largest expanse of fresh water in the world, being about 250 kilometres long from north to south with an average width of 200 kilometres. The shores are shared by three countries, the other two being Kenya and Tanzania.



Burchell's Zebra

The Ugandan shoreline is clothed in lush vegetation and patches of forest making it the most attractive part of the lake. On arrival at Lake Mburo National Park we will check into Lake Mburo Safari Lodge, our home for the next two nights.

Lake Mburo is a relatively small (256 square kilometres), but attractive park comprising rolling hills, flat bush, grasslands and papyrus-fringed lakes. As well as the main Lake Mburo there are 14 other lakes within the park, forming an extensive wetland area, home to many hippos and crocodiles. Mammals such as Oribi, Burchell's Zebra, Impala, Eland, Common Waterbuck, Buffalo, Warthog, Leopard, African Civet, Spotted Hyena, and Bohor Reedbuck occur here, together with a good range of bush and grassland birds, including large numbers of Marabou Stork and Grey Crowned Cranes (the national bird of Uganda).

During our stay we will also take a boat trip on Lake Mburo to observe some of its fantastic bird life. Interesting and striking birds we hope to see will include Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, African Darter, Hamerkop, Sacred Ibis, African Fish Eagle, a variety of herons and the rare African Finfoot.

Day 5

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

After a leisurely breakfast we will set off for the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Although very scenic, this is a long and bumpy journey that will take us much of the day (with refreshment and photography stops enroute). On arrival this afternoon we will check into Mahogany Springs Lodge, our base for the next 3 nights, and relax this evening in preparation for tomorrow's Gorilla tracking.

The Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is one of Africa's most extensive belts of primary montane forest. Its exceptional altitudinal variation - rising and falling from deep river gorges and low hills at 1,200 metres to high forested ridges at 2,500 metres - ensures a unique range of flora and fauna, in particular primates and birds.



Around Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Day 6

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Today is the day for our exciting gorilla tracking, which with luck will live up to our expectations of being one of the world's most exciting and intimate wildlife experiences. The Mountain Gorillas are undoubtedly the prime attraction of this area. Over three hundred – half of the world's population – live in the park, and three of the family groups living close to the park headquarters at Buhoma have now been successfully habituated to allow humans to approach. Each day, 24 visitors – split into three parties – are allowed access to these gorillas for up to an hour's viewing.... often in exceptionally dense cover. Please note, however, that it can take up to 8 hours of tracking in the most arduous of terrain in order to find



the gorillas (although 2 to 4 hours is more typical), and so this part of our itinerary is only suitable for those who are fit enough to walk several miles, over rough, uneven and sometimes steep terrain, in humid conditions. Not only will we be moving, off-trail, through dense forest all day, we will be continually moving up and down on the steep, plant-covered slopes of very rugged hills. At the end of the day we will certainly appreciate why this forest has earned its name, though it will be well worth the effort!

Whilst our tracker/guides will maintain our distance at a comfortable 5+ metres, we hope to afford some close views amongst the dense vegetation; an exciting and truly memorable experience. These habituated gorillas usually ignore human presence, but you never know when you might make eye contact, or a playful youngster will come to investigate! We would strongly encourage anyone that is unsure of their ability to complete the Gorilla trek to call the Naturetrek office for a more detailed discussion prior to booking. Please also note that it is possible to hire one, or more, porters to carry your bag and help you with the trek. This is organised and payable locally.

NB - It should also be mentioned that whilst the likelihood of seeing the Gorillas is very good, (Naturetrek groups have always been successful in the past), seeing the Gorillas is by no means guaranteed, but a good fitness level will certainly increase your chances!

Day 7

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

This morning we can take a more leisurely walk looking for birds and other mammals in this outstanding area. Apart from the Mountain Gorillas, Bwindi is rich in other primates and you might hope to see Guereza Colobus, L'Hoest's or Red-tailed Monkeys. Like all rain forest inhabitants, these mammals and most of the birds can be very difficult to see and birdwatching in such an environment requires stealth and patience! Amongst the bird species that we shall hope to see are African Goshawk, Augur Buzzard, Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Bar-tailed Trogon, Black Bee-eater, Grey-throated Barbet, African Broadbill, Equatorial Akalat, Forest Robin, Short-tailed Warbler, Ludher's Bush Shrike, Chestnut-winged Starling, plus a selection of forest greenbuls, warblers, flycatchers, sunbirds and weavers.

The afternoon is free to relax, shop for souvenirs at the many tourist stalls in town or join your tour leader on another birdwatching walk (outside the national park).

If anyone would like to go on a second gorilla trek this would be possible today, although please note that the cost of a second trekking permit is not included in the tour cost and your leader would not be accompanying you. It would provide you with an opportunity to take some additional photos, most likely of a different family group. Permits numbers are limited, so please do let us know as soon as possible if you would like an additional permit booked for you.

Day 8

Queen Elizabeth National Park

After breakfast we will drive to the famous Queen Elizabeth National Park, where we will stay in a comfortable safari lodge. The drive from Bwindi is on rough roads and will take much of the day. It is very scenic, however, and there will be plenty of wildlife to enjoy en-route. Upon arrival this afternoon, we will check-in at the lodge and relax before taking a short evening safari drive (time permitting). Queen Elizabeth National Park sits astride the equator on the Kazinga Channel between Lake Edward and Lake George and to the south of the great Rwenzori Mountains (which, despite their close proximity to the park, can only be seen during exceptionally clear weather). This national park is a typically east African reserve, allowing excellent game drives, and a unique variety of habitats. Comprising rolling grasslands, craters and crater lakes, tropical forests, papyrus swamps and extensive lake shore, "QE", as it is affectionately known, undoubtedly offers some of Uganda's best wildlife viewing and open country birdwatching.



Day 9 & 10

Queen Elizabeth National Park

We now have 2 full days to explore the spectacular Queen Elizabeth National Park. Each day after an early breakfast we will head out for a long morning's game drive returning for lunch. Common mammals to be seen include herds of Uganda Kob, Elephant, Warthog, African Buffalo and Lion. Other mammals we may hope to see include Giant Forest Hog, Olive Baboon, Bushbuck, Defassa Waterbuck, Leopard, Banded Mongoose and Spotted Hyena. Amongst the numerous open country birds to look for include a variety of vultures, Tawny and Martial Eagles, Red-necked Spurfowl, Little Bee-eater and a good selection of larks, cisticolas, flycatchers, weavers and finches.

During the heat of the day we will use the time to review our images and work on our photography techniques.



Ugandan Kob

In the afternoon we will take another trip out into the park, although on one afternoon we will swap the vehicles for a boat and enjoy a cruise along the Kazinga Channel. This is a natural magnet for herds of Elephant, Buffalo, and abundant Hippopotamus - an unusual and outstanding opportunity for photographers to take some interesting and close shots of these mammals. The birdwatching is also excellent, including White and Pink-backed Pelicans, Open-billed Stork, African Skimmer, African Jacana, Water Thick-knee, African Wattled Plover and Yellow-backed Weaver. Several

reptiles also are seen along the banks of the river, including huge Nile Crocodiles, Monitor Lizards, African Rock Python and other snakes.

It would be possible to arrange a second boat trip on the other afternoon, however this would be at additional cost and should be arranged locally. Night drives can also be arranged locally, subject to availability.

Day 11

Kibale National Park

This morning we will leave Queen Elizabeth National Park and drive to Kibale Forest, stopping to look at wildlife along the way. This is another beautiful journey and we could be lucky enough to see a rare view of the snow-capped Rwenzori Mountains that usually remain shrouded in mist. We are likely to pass a number of the crater lakes found near the forest, often very picturesque and good places to look for wildlife. On arrival we will check into our lodge, where we will be based for the next couple of nights.

Day 12

Kibale National Park

Kibale Forest is home to an incredible eleven species of primates. Amongst them are Chimpanzees, some families of which have been habituated, and are therefore hopefully not too difficult to see. Amongst the other primate species are Guereza Colobus, Central African Red Colobus, L'Hoest's Monkey and Grey-cheeked Mangabey. In the morning we will join the organised Chimp tracking walks and later explore the park trail network, we might even hear some of the "forest" Elephants that live in Kibale. The tall forest also offers excellent, but challenging birdwatching. Walking amongst along the trails we might see species such as Afer and White-naped Pigeons, Pied Hornbill, Purple-headed and Chestnut-winged Starlings, Joyful Greenbul, White-headed Wood-Hoopoe, Petit's Cuckoo-Shrike, Fine-banded Woodpecker, Black-and-white Flycatcher, Willcocks's Honeyguide and Dark-backed and Yellow-mantled Weavers.



Chimpanzee

Day 13

In Flight

We should have a few hours this morning for a final explore near our lodge before starting our journey back to Entebbe, which will take us about five hours with refreshment stops enroute. Day rooms will be available at a hotel in Entebbe during the remainder of the afternoon/ early evening. Later on the evening we will return to the Airport and await our Kenya Airways or KLM return flight to London which departs late evening (usually changing aircraft in either Nairobi or Amsterdam).

Day 14

London

We are due to arrive back at London's Heathrow Airport around 0900 hours this morning.

Grading

This is a Grade B tour, as it mainly involves leisurely walking in the forest reserves and the use of boats and traditional vehicular game-viewing in the national parks, however the amount of travel involved can be tiring. Please also note that some of the forest trails can be steep, muddy and uneven in places and are poorly maintained, so a good level of fitness is preferable if you are to get the most out of this holiday.

It cannot be over-stressed that Gorilla trekking can be very strenuous and this part of the tour should be considered a C or D grade hike. Please confirm if you would like to do a second trek as soon as possible, so we can book the permits as they are hard to obtain. Chimp trekking in Kibale National Park can also be strenuous, particularly carrying photography kit.

Focus

This is a specialist photography safari aimed at amateur photographers of all abilities, focusing on Uganda's abundant natural history, but with a special emphasis on the country's birds, primates and other mammals. A professional, wildlife photographer will be your leader for the tour, providing tuition and workshops throughout the tour. Your local guide will also be keen on pointing out Uganda's diverse and colourful birdlife, plus any mammals, reptiles, amphibians and other wildlife you meet along the way.

Climate

A typically equatorial climate ensures that the weather will be varied, and you may encounter some rain. Days will generally be warm to hot and sunny; however overcast conditions are frequent, particularly in the forest and mountain areas. The stunningly beautiful volcano area along the west side of Uganda is home to lots of cloud forest and damp areas so bring a rain coat and a fleece! Nights will be mild to warm, cooler at higher altitudes.

Entry requirements

UK passport holders will need a visa for Uganda, which can be applied for on-line. You should have at least six months travel left on your passport from the return date of travel. Yellow Fever vaccination is mandatory for travel to Uganda and a certificate, or exemption letter, needs to be presented to the immigration officials on arrival. Malaria prophylactics should be taken as this is a high risk country. We advise you to visit your GP as far in advance as possible to discuss your travel plans to Uganda.

Accommodation and food

All accommodation and meals, from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 13 are included in the cost of the tour. We use a combination of comfortable lodges, tented camps and guesthouses on this tour. Whilst standards are improving in Uganda, some of the accommodation can be quite simple in nature. All rooms are clean, however, with private facilities and should be perfectly adequate for the group's needs. Occasionally, in some areas, even the best available accommodation can have issues with maintaining the property, so you should be prepared for a few problems like leaky plumbing, lack of hot water, lights not working, slow service in the restaurant, etc. If you do experience any problems with your room, please let your local guide know and they will always endeavour to rectify the problem with the lodge. A number of lodges operate generators for electricity, which are only run during the day so keeping a torch by your bedside is useful if case you need to get up in the night.

Additional Expenses

On this tour you will need to budget extra for:

- Your visa, which should be applied for prior to departure. The current cost is US\$50 if applying online for an e-visa.
- Any additional gorilla trekking permits are also excluded from the main tour cost and should be requested at the time of booking as there are a limited number available. The current cost of the permit is US\$700 per person (subject to change).
- Drinks other than bottled water (which is provided throughout).
- Personal expenses – souvenirs, laundry, postcards, etc.
- Discretionary tips to local guides and local staff.
- Additional activities not included in the tour itinerary, such as a second gorilla trek or additional boat trip
- Dinner in Entebbe on Day 13.

Your safety & security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/uganda or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

Transport

We will use 7-seater Toyota Landcruisers for this tour. Each vehicle has sufficient window seats for the whole group to have one, although we would ask that you rotate round the vehicle to give everyone the opportunity to have a seat towards the front of the vehicle. A good amount of our time will be spent away from the vehicles on walks. Some roads can be quite dusty, particularly on the longer drives, so you may find it more comfortable to wear either a face mask, neckerchief or scarf over your mouth and nose to reduce the chance of breathing in dust. You will also need a dust cover for your photography equipment.

There is enough luggage room in the vehicles for everyone to have one item of main luggage plus hand luggage, although we would ask that you keep your packing to a sensible and practical minimum. It's preferable if your luggage is soft sided as these are easier to pack in the vehicle. We do appreciate that photography equipment takes up a good amount of space, but ask that you keep this to a sensible amount and are considerate of the rest of the group.

At Mabamba Swamp, Lake Mburo and Queen Elizabeth National Park we will also use small boats or canoes to view wildlife from the water.

Group Size

This tour will be accompanied by a professional photography leader as well as a local Ugandan tour leader /ornithologist, who will also be your driver. The maximum group size will be 5, to allow everyone to travel in the same vehicle and to be able to make the most of the wildlife sightings and your leader's photography expertise.

Extensions

There are no set extensions for this tour, however there are a number of ways in which you can extend your Uganda tour, including a visit to the Budongo Forest and Royal Mile, Murchison Falls, Kidepo National Park and a variety of cultural or historical excursions. If you would like to discuss extending your tour please contact the Naturetrek office.

Photography Equipment

We recommend that participants have a DSLR camera to make the most of this tour, however our leader will aim to help you get the best possible photographs regardless of what type of camera you have.

We would suggest that you bring

- Digital single lens reflex camera (DSLR) capable of photographing at ISO 16,000 or above for lower light shots
- Telephoto lens (400mm or 500mm focal length is ideal) for most mammal photography
- Standard or wide angle zoom lenses for closer shots, particularly during the gorilla trekking (max. of 135mm focal length)

- Camera strap or harness – on the treks you may be walking some distance with your camera, so you need a comfortable, easily accessible way to carry it
- Monopod if possible (tripods are of limited use in the vehicle and on forest walks)
- Bean bag for use in the vehicle (since space and weight are likely to be a premium, you can bring this empty and your tour leader will arrange a suitable filling for the tour)
- UV and polarising filters
- Flash
- Dust & rain cover
- Camera cleaning kit, including blower, lens cloth, general cloth for wiping down
- Camera user manual

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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