

7 DAYS IN UGANDA



Photos and videos by Ken Lovell and Geniene Preston / Text by Geniene Preston





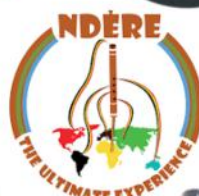
EXPLORE
UGANDA
THE PEARL OF AFRICA



Jikoni
RESTAURANT



Sheraton
HOTELS & RESORTS





She is Uganda

**She greets you in the mountains where her
fields are green and children play**

**She greets you in the trees where the birds
wings cool the tropical air**

**She greets you in the wild where the primates
roll and swing**

**She greets you in the villages where the sounds
echo in a community who lives together**

**She greets you in the savannahs with the
trumpeting of elephants to the choir of a pond
full of frogs**

She is Uganda....

Geniene Preston

My 7 days in Uganda has to be the highlight of my travels over the years. I was invited by Uganda Tourism Board and Explore Uganda on a FAM trip to see what Uganda has to offer. I have visited over 84 countries and I can honestly say that the smiles of the Ugandan people, their hospitality and their ability to make me feel right at home was so memorable. Uganda Airlines efficiently flew us there.

OVERVIEW

We started in Kampala with a couple of nights at the Sheraton Kampala Hotel which was beautifully decorated with the spirit of Christmas. The hotel buzzed with events and the beat of Africa. We had the privilege of visiting the Ndere Cultural Centre which was one of the best cultural entertainments I have seen in a long time. I was riveted. We all were. We also stopped at the Uganda Martyrs SS Namugongo centre to hear more about the history of the martyrs and what they had to endure. Our tour guide was interesting and knew so much about the story behind the story. The sculptures were carved to precision and it was almost as if we had been there.



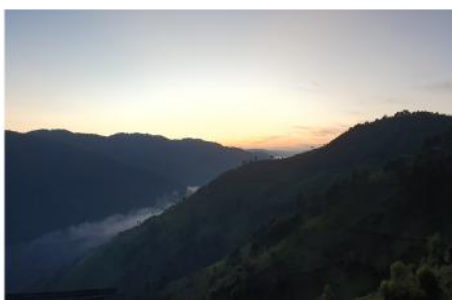
We left Kampala and headed to the Primate Park in Kibale where we stayed over at the fabulous Chimpundu Lodge where leaving your room seemed insane to climb in the deep forests of the Uganda Wildlife Authority Primate Park. But that's what we did. And I saw the chimps in their natural environment. Rain and all. The forest floor was not an easy walk but our guides who stayed close were on hand to help and ensure we could have a memorable visit. I was blessed to return to a hot bath, great meal and superb accommodation in a 4 poster bed with a room that had a great view.

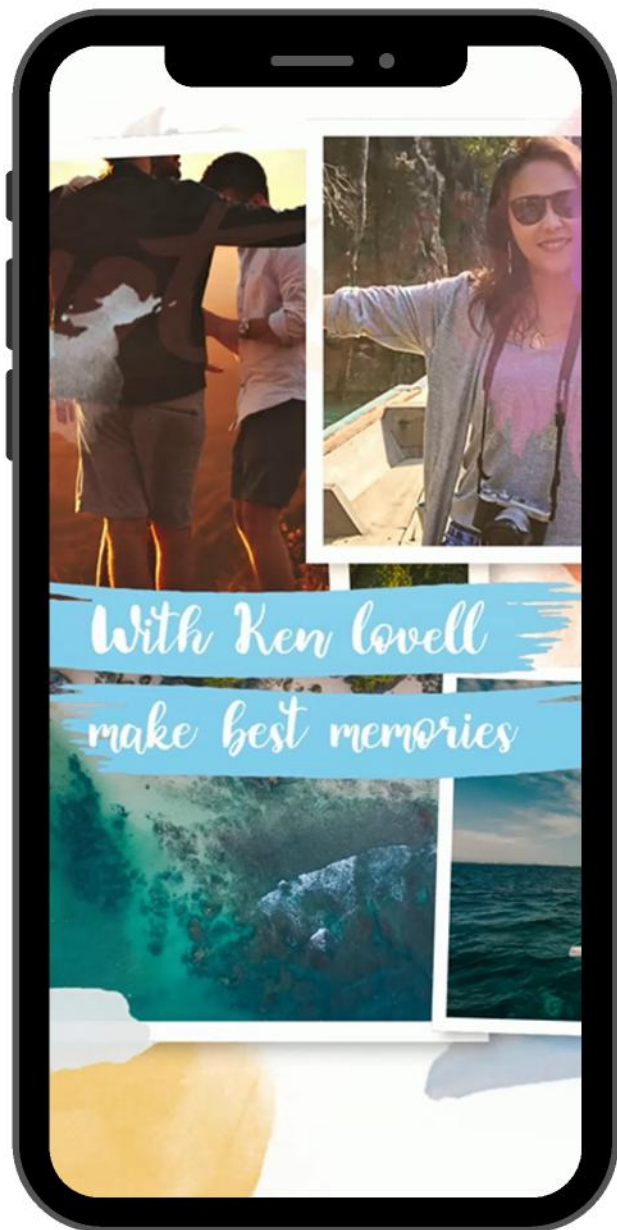


We headed off to our next destination Nkuringo, Bwindi in Kisoro via the Queen Elizabeth park where the proliferation of wildlife was there for all to see. And the wide savannah made it easy to see buffalo, elephant, crocodile and so so many birds. Our photographer, Ken didn't know where to point his camera first! During our journeys we were treated to seeing the local communities, their farming on the side of the mountains and their wonderful taxi system of motorbikes. I love how Africa turns a challenge into an opportunity.

Arriving at the Gorilla Heights Lodge was a welcome respite from the long journey and the chalets all have the most wonderful view. Celestine Masiga, the GM, was on hand with this smiling staff, to greet us with warm towels and a great meal served by their chef of many years. The chalets were just amazing and the sunrise the next morning told a story of its own. When you book into the lodge, you are booking into a community as they share their success with the local community.

The next morning it was time to find the Gorilla's and that is an adventure in itself. There was mist, rain, sunshine all in one day and finally after a steep climb, they were there. For all to see. What glorious creatures. It was soon time to head back to Kampala. Thank you for a memorable visit. I will definitely be back!





Symbols



VIDEO



AUDIO



Ken Lovell, professional photographer and myself Geniene Preston, publisher and CEO of FlipMagz and SA Commuter Radio and TV, were invited by Uganda Tourism Board and Explore Uganda to visit Uganda. Flipmagz publishes The Pearl of Africa monthly magazine and it was time to see the country for ourselves.

Uganda Airlines invited us to try the airline from Johannesburg to Entebbe in Uganda. We needed a visa for a South African passport (Ken) and I travelled on an Irish passport which did not require a visa. Our yellow fever injections were up to date and we were packed and ready to head for the adventure of a lifetime.

The checkin staff were friendly, efficient and helpful when it came to what we could take on board as Ken has an enormous lens and I have laptops, chargers and cables as I work on line.

The staff on board the flight served us lunch and the 72 seater plane was a little daunting for me as I do not enjoy flying. Although I have visited over 80 countries, I still am anxious while flying. We were able to book the emergency exits to accommodate Ken's long legs without an additional cost on the online check in. The flight was smooth and before we knew it, the 4 hours was up and we were descending into Entebbe. What a beautiful sight of Victoria Lake.

Founded in 2018, Uganda Airlines is the national flag carrier of Uganda. This airline is based at Entebbe / Kampala International Airport (EBB), from where it flies to destinations across East Africa.

The airline was founded as a revival of the old Uganda Airlines, which flew between 1976–2001. It launched flights in August 2019 with a flight from Entebbe to Jomo Kenyatta International and rolled out other flights to build its route network shortly after. The airline operates scheduled passenger flights across East Africa and to the Middle East.







Sheraton®

HOTELS & RESORTS



General Manager Jean-Phillippe Bittencourt has described Sheraton Kampala Hotel as “undoubtedly one of Uganda’s proudest hospitality resource and today still stands tall on the slopes of Nakasero Hill proudly marching towards its Golden Jubilee.” . Sheraton Kampala’s still recognized as the most respected Hotel in Uganda due to its services and heritage.

The Sheraton Kampala Hotel, one of the oldest five star Hotels in Uganda has been operating in in Uganda for the past 30 years. However the Hotel was officially opened on October 08th in 1967 and has gone through various management companies including the current operating company “Constellation Hotels & Resorts” which uses the Sheraton franchise to manage it.

It was built as Apollo Hotel, named after the then Prime Minister Apollo Milton Obote. When Obote was overthrown by Idi Amin in 1971, the hotel was renamed the Kampala International Hotel and following the overthrow of Amin by Tanzanian forces and the Uganda National Liberation Army in 1979, the hotel reverted to the original name Apollo Hotel.

Here below is our interview with Jean Phillippe as he tells the story of the Sheraton Kampala and how they are community driven and what they have to offer the discerning visitor.



Jean-Phillippe
Bittencourt



Basilica of the Uganda Martyrs Martyrs, Namugongo



The Basilica of the Uganda Martyrs, Namugongo is a Roman Catholic minor basilica dedicated to the Ugandan Martyrs.

The basilica is located at Namugongo, Kira Municipality, Wakiso District, in Central Uganda. Namugongo is located approximately 14 kilometres by road, northeast of the central business district of Kampala, Uganda's capital and largest city in that East African country.

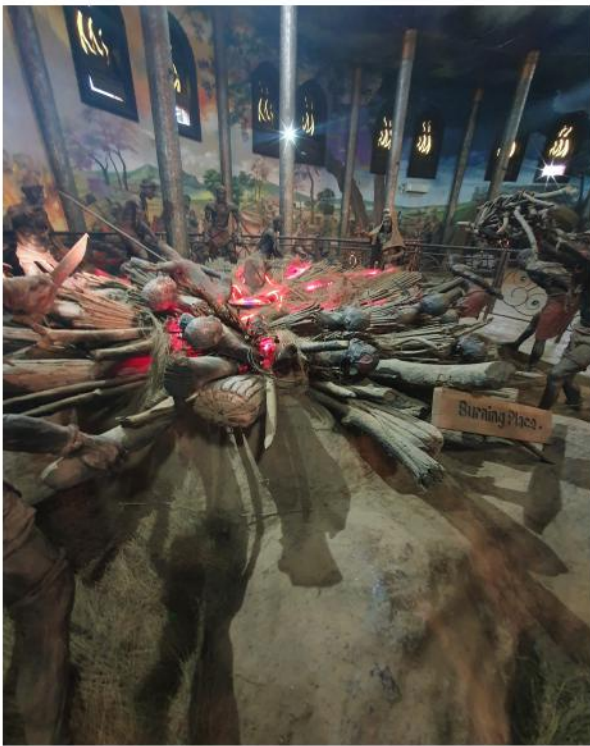
The Namugongo Shrines were first recognised by the Late Joshua Serufusa-Zake (1884 - 25 June 1985) when he was the Sabaddu of Kira Sub-County (1827 - 1928). Joshua Serufusa-Zake constructed a structure at the Namugongo site, where it appears shrines were built later for prayer.

His interest in Christianity was enhanced by his father's participation in the wars that brought Christianity to Uganda. Joshua Serufusa-Zake's father, Semei Musoke Seruma Katiginya had earned a name for brevity 'Ngubu' from the wars. It might be of interest to note that Joshua Serufusa-Zake was born in 1884, just a year before the killings of Uganda Martyrs started.



Groundbreaking for the construction of the basilica was in 1965. Construction was completed in 1968. The basilica was decreed on 28 April 1993, and is administered by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Kampala. It is built close to the spot where Saint Charles Lwanga and Saint Kizito were burned to death in 1886 on the orders of Kabaka Mukasa Basammul'ekere Mwanga II.

Incredible sculptures beautifully crafted and tells the story of the horror endured by the Martyrs. Our Tour Guide had a good knowledge and told the story with great enthusiasm and it was as if we were watching it in real life. Its really worth a visit just to see the artwork and to understand what actually happened.







Jikopi
RESTAURANT

Jikopi, a Swahili word for **kitchen**. We offer tranquility in a rich natural setting with capacity to host up to **400** guests. We serve a number of foods from multiple cultures around Uganda. Our staff is great, and well trained to make your visit worthwhile. **Come and Dine with Us**

SEE MENU

+256 757 270 332 <http://www.jikoni.ug>

LUWOMBO
HOUSE

Jikoni restaurant serves traditional food from Uganda and our experience as a group was quite interesting. We were welcomed by one of the servers who explained the concept of the restaurant. We were invited to then clean our hands at a table set aside for that purpose and given warm towels to dry off our hands.

I ordered a medium Talapia fish which made me smile as it said it came with food. I was soon to learn that Ugandans really know how to eat! My photographer, Ken, he ordered the oxtail and both were covered in sauce and served in a tumble of leaves prepared alongside the table by our server. It was as interesting to watch being prepared as it was to eat. Defniitely not for the faint hearted nor for those that are fussy on how they eat.

Eaten mostly with hands, the knives and forks are just a by product! I loved the food and enjoyed getting into traditional Ugandan food. Well worth a visit.





We arrived at the Ndere Cultural centre thinking we were going to be watching the usual tribal dancing and it can be less entertaining than one would expect. However, we were in for a surprise. As a Dinner Show the arena was beautifully set out under the stars and the compere told the story of the dancers. Each dance was introduced and we were treated to where it originated and a little history.

He was very entertaining and we loved every story. The buffet dinner was served during a break in the show and everyone continued to eat while enjoying the entertainment. Just before the Burundi drummers came on, the compere,, called up the children in the audience to join him for some fun. And fun they had. Sorting them into girls and boys, he had them running, dancing, sleeping and playing whilst parents laughed and the rest of us smiled wishing our children and grandchildren were with us.



www.ndere.com





About Ndere

We've been putting smiles on people's faces for almost 40 years. Ndere troupe was founded by Rwangezi Stephen in 1986 as a cultural organisation for universal unity through music, dance and drama. The troupe is among over 1600 Uganda development theatre association groups entertaining and educating people through music, dance and drama. The word 'endere' means 'flute', the Ndere Troupe therefore means Flute Troupe.

The flute was chosen as a symbol of beauty as it produced such beautiful and irresistible music which can be manipulated to express a range of emotions; from sorrow to joy and from love to loneliness.

It also symbolises universal unity, all peoples of the world have a flute in their cultures. The flute is like the blood that flows in our bodies no matter our external difference. The Ndere Troupe prides itself on emphasising commonalities and celebrating the rich differences.

The Ndere Troupe is a cultural development that was founded in 1986 by Rawangyezi Stephen.



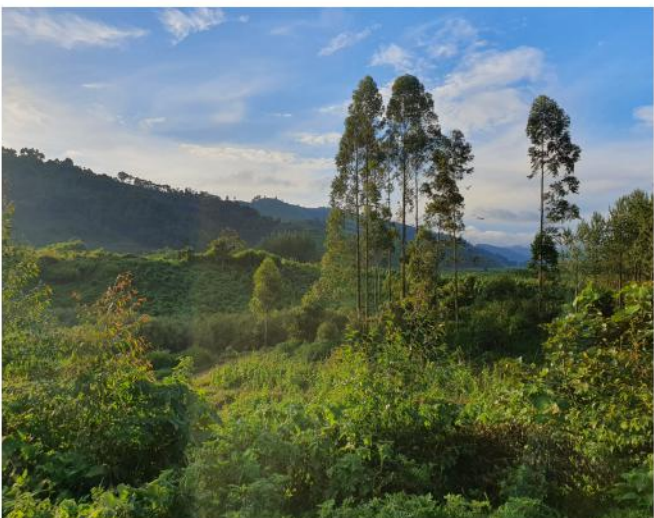


The next morning it was time to leave Kampala behind and head for the Kibale National Park. Here we would find the elusive chimpanzees in their natural environment and the road to Chimpundu lodge was interesting. Along the way I discovered the transport system used widely in Africa = The Boxer Motorcycle. Its used to transport goods, people and has more uses than a car. Despite the seemingly mishappen traffic patterns, we did not see one accident on the roads and we drove a total of 35 hours during the week. I take my hat off to everyone who gives way to each other to keep the traffic flowing. Its a mode of transport that helps the community who come from the rural vilages into the towns to either buy or sell.

The taxi's have devised an umbrella which protects the driver, the passenger/s and the goods that are being transported, from the sometimes unrelenting rain. I love how Uganda took a challenge of rain pitted roads and created a mode of transport that works for everyone. Countries that are considered first world, could take a leaf out of this book. Where there is a challenge, Africa finds a solution.



Kibale National Park



When entering the Kibale National Park, its filled with forest, primate and bird sounds. The surrounding foliage almost lends itself to the phrase, Deepest, Darkest Africa. Coming up to the beautifully carved Chimpundu Lodge gates, we were excited to see what was behind them. As we arrived the staff (Ugandan people smile a lot and its just wonderful) welcomed our group with open arms. We reached Chimpundu lodge at around 5 in the evening. The entrance was to prove the most modest part of our visit.

Behind the gates was a series of wooden Chalets and at the top of the staircase was the reception, bar and restaurant. Carved wooden staircases and walkways led to the beautifully appointed bedrooms. Each chalet had either one, two or three beds and on the four posters hung a mosquito net.





CHIMPUNDU LODGE

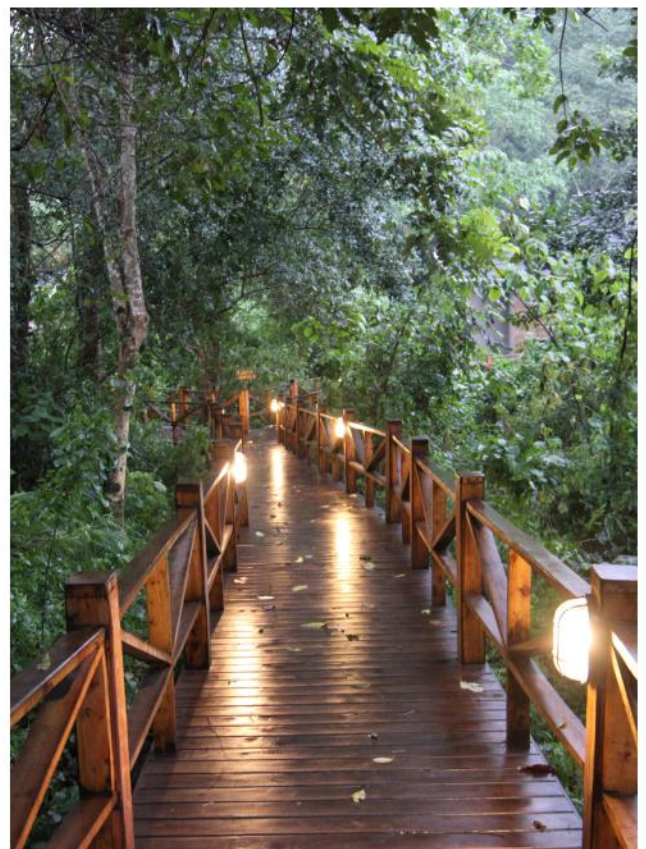
Kibale Forest

The wide verandah that wrapped itself around the chalet as it clung to the mountainside was a great place to sit and the views are spectacular. Of course we can wax lyrically about the claw bath, the walk in shower and so much more. The style of the lodge fits in with its surroundings and the wide patio allows time for thought whilst looking out for the prolific bird life that can be found throughout the property.



The deep forests surrounding the lodge is great for birding and so many different species could be found whether on the verandah in the room or at the various places around the lodge such as the bar patio.

The swimming pool is heated to allow for the rainy seasons which are from November to December and March through to June in Uganda.





Dinner was waiting when we arrived and a buffet style dinner left us satisfied and full, requiring the walk to the room. Traditional style together with healthy options and Uganda has the best butter avocado's on the planet! These were no exception.



We also found a spa, pool and games room which would rival any international hotel. Its distance to the Primate Park which houses the Chimpanzees is approximately 2 km.



The bar and restaurant staff were close by at all times and the Reception Manager, Tracy, made sure that our stay was memorable on all fronts. Nothing was too much trouble.





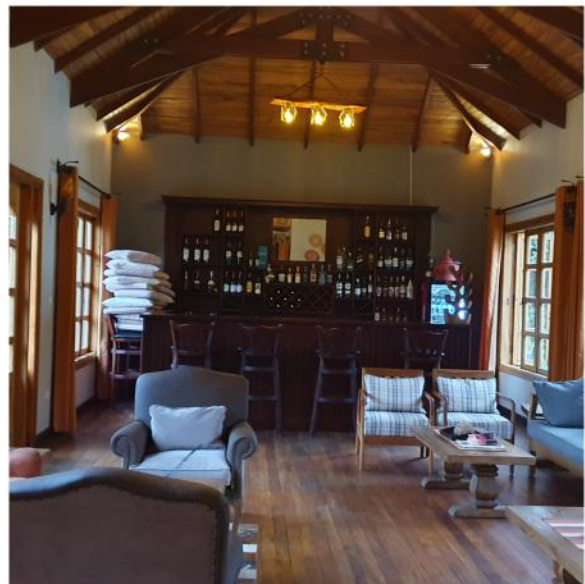
An early wake up call on day 4 and off to breakfast where our hot and cold breakfast buffet was fresh and piping hot. Home made pastries and fresh fruit from their organic garden make it all the more special with those wide Ugandan smiles we had gotten to know so well.

Below you can find the podcast, TV (available to download through our on demand option) and Youtube interview with the Lodge Manager, Turyatempa Gad. Click on the options below to watch, listen or just enjoy!

Turyatempa Gad

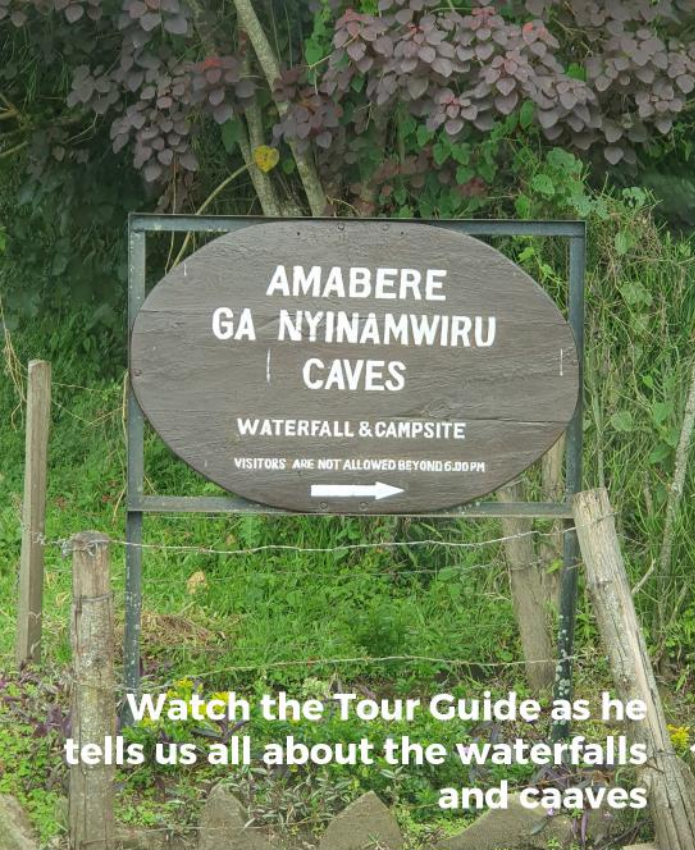
CHIMPUNDU LODGE
Kibale Forest

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Watch the Tour Guide as he tells us all about the waterfalls and caaves



Our first stop was the Amabere Ga Nyinamwiru waterfall walk and cave. Albeit a short version of a cave, our guide was so excited about his knowledge of stalactites and stalagmites that he had the biggest cave in the world in his care. He was animated in his explanation of the mud surrounded cave areas and we loved him for it.



Very muddy and some of the team weren't quite sure exactly how rough the terrain would be especially after the rains and had not prepared properly with shoes especially. But they were prepared for us and brought out the gum boots. They expect international visitors to think that mud is the same the world over but its not in a rain forest. Slip Sliding away as Simon and Garfunkle once said

Walking sticks offered by the local community definitely helped to stop sliding into the thick mud.

A beautiful waterfall and well worth the visit. There was a short walk up the crater but being too steep for some of us we stayed behind and had a chat to a local Belgian man who was building a house on the hill. He told us he had decided that Uganda was the country he wanted to build his retirement home and his neighbours were all foreigners. The village nearby could have electricity but didn't want to invite noise pollution into their lives. How simple can life get. He said labourers were hard workers and it was easy to get building material from nearby Fort Portal.



It was then back to the lodge for lunch at Chimpudu Lodge and as usual full of flavour and local produce.

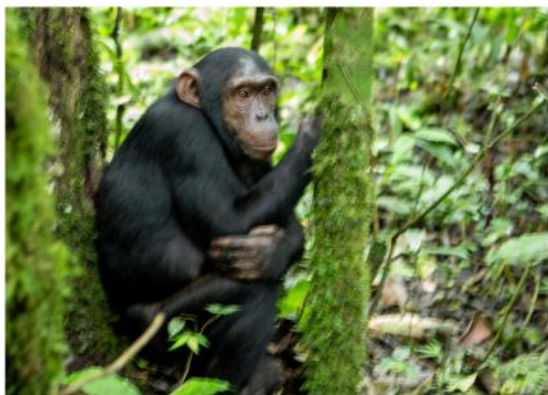


Kibale National Park



At 2pm we headed off to the Primate Park. The rules are simple... wear a mask so as not to infect the Chimpanzees with human diseases such as colds etc, stay only an hour to give them time to play and not have humans stare at them all day.. and dont try to mimick their sounds as you could offend them without knowing it. The guides were all knowledgeable and carried firearms so as to scare them in case of an attack not to hurt them. You need to carry a raincoat in case of rain and sure enough The rain came down as we entered the tropical forest.

There are no walkways. It's purely forest floor and branches and leaves. You walk in single file as the rangers try to detect a family of chimps. And all too soon there they were. Sheltering from the rain under some branches.



The stillness of the forest is broken by the breaking of the fallen branches that are found on the forest floor.

There are no walkways. It's purely forest floor and branches and leaves. You walk in single file as the rangers try to detect a family of chimps. And all too soon there they were. Sheltering from the rain under some branches.

An awesome sight. Marred by visitors trying to put themselves in photos by doing a selfie..seriously? There should be a law against it. Here are these wild animals in their home and we should be hushed in their presence. Only cameras should be allowed in that forest. That way it eliminates to some degree the blind idiocy of some humans. The experience of being in the forest in the rain was unforgettable as we waited for people to leave. We could watch quietly as they looked back at us and you wonder what could they be thinking.

Their nest was far above us in the trees and they made their way up like Tarzan would have. The guides and their smiles are truly a wonderful group of people and I once again applaud them for being so welcoming and caring both about the animals and visitors alike.



Kibale's most popular activity is the Kanyanchu Primate Walk. Thirteen species can be sought, and a good variety of diurnal monkeys invariably encountered, but the stars of this trail are the chimpanzees. Kanyanchu's chimps have been tracked since 1993 and the chances of locating them are excellent. Guided walks start at 8am and 2pm and last an average of three hours, depending on various factors.

The perennially popular primate walk provides the chance to observe chimpanzees in their natural habitat. Kanyanchu's groups are accustomed to human presence – some have been observed for over 25 years – and the chance of locating them is over 90%. Walks leave Kanyanchu Visitor Centre at 08.00, 11.00 and 14.00 and last between 2-5 hours. Early arrival to allow for registration and briefing is recommended. Contact time with chimpanzees is limited to one hour; group size is limited to six visitors; participants must be aged 16 or over. Advance booking is essential.

This biologically diverse region also provides shelter to a further 120 mammals, including several primate species such as baboons and chimpanzees, as well as elephants and antelopes. There are around 370 species of birds hosted in this forest, including 23 Albertine Rift endemics. The Nahan's francolin, cassin's spinetail, blue headed bee-eater and low-land masked apalis.

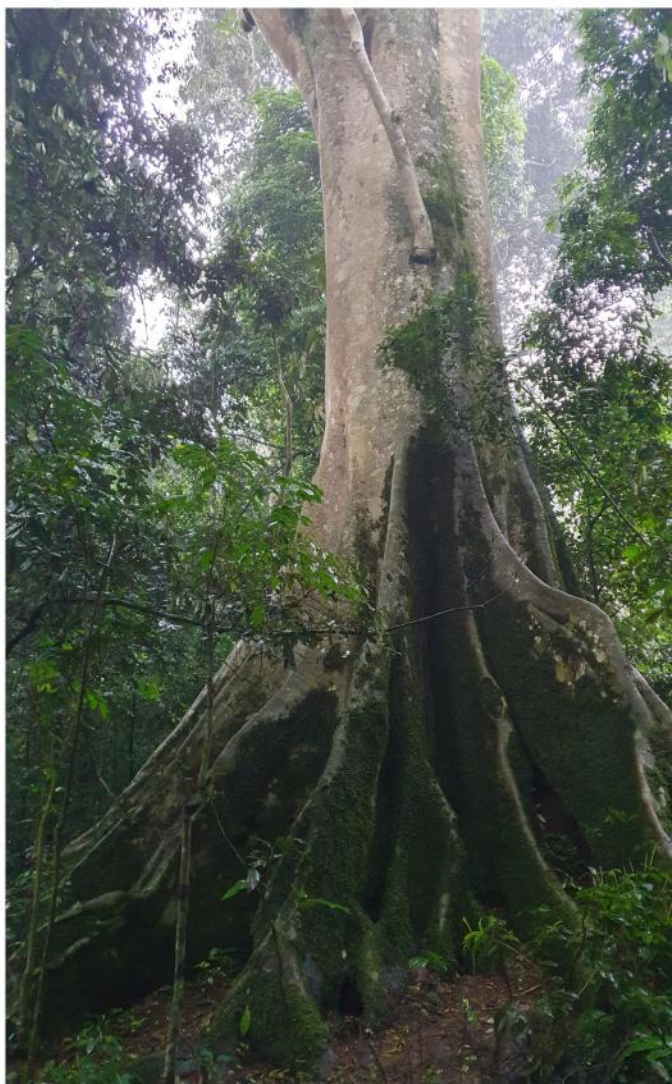


Most prominent among Kibale's primates is the chimpanzee population surge of about 1,500 individuals, divided into at least a dozen different communities, four of which are habituated to humans. The Kanyantale community has been subject to daily tourist tracking since 1993.



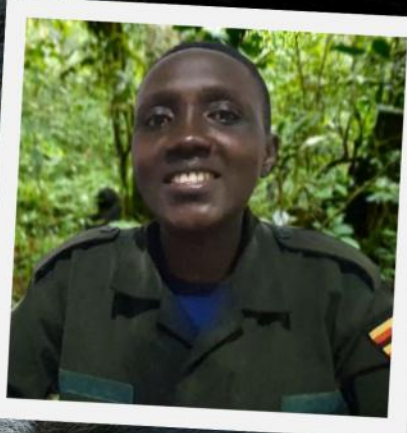
I struggled a bit in the mud and even though Ken had lent me his walking stick, the uneven ground with nature's speed humps of fallen branches, was still a hurdle I battled to overcome. One of the guides held onto me for dear life and promised me that as long as he was there, he would not let me go. However once we reached the roadway, he was unable to save me from sliding down the muddy embankment. But it was all worth it. I just wish we could have stayed longer but we were part of a big group and it's not fair to the animals to remain.

I took what I could get, and left my footprints behind while they left their imprint on my heart.



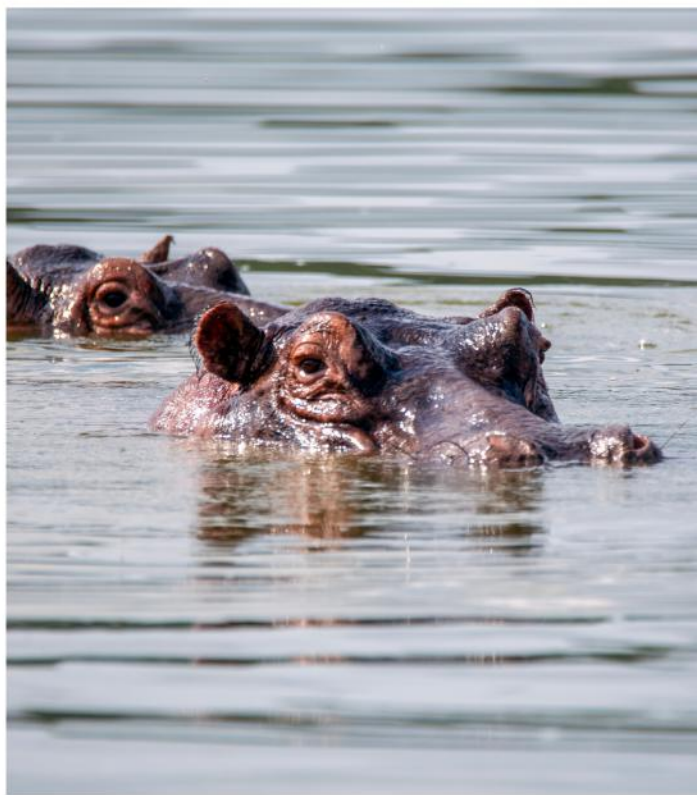


Geniene Preston,
Author



Prossie, Ranger Guide
Kibale National Park
Primate Park, Uganda





Today was another travel day and we left at sparrows. We reached the Queen Elizabeth national park at around 9 for our boat cruise across the Edward Lake. We also crossed the equator which made for an interesting moment in time.

Our guide was extremely knowledgeable about the birds we spotted and the banks were filled with so many species of both birds and animals. We saw elephant, hippo, warthog, crocodile and of course a proliferation of birds that Ken Lovell didn't know where to point his camera.

The animals came down to soak in the water as the tropical heat here means that the midday sun beats down together with the humidity. But the cruise boat had enough shaded seats for us to enjoy the cruise. We drifted past the fishermen who were getting their nets ready and clean for the afternoons fishing. Talapia fish is the most commonly found in the area.

As we drove back to the gate we came across a mom elephant who did not look happy that we had crossed her path. But we passed safely as daddy elephant came wondering over to see what the fuss was all about.



Where Is Queen Elizabeth National Park Located?

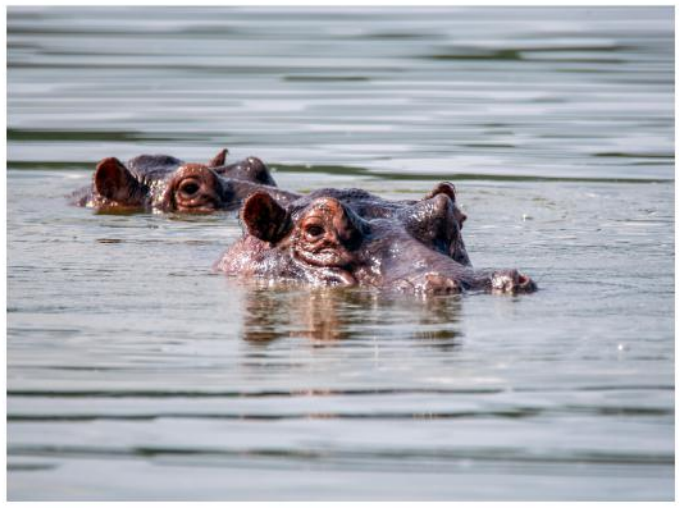
One would wonder where Queen Elizabeth National Park is Located. Well, it is found in the western part of Uganda laying between Lakes Gorge and Albert with the Kazinga Channel crossing through its 700 sq mile land area. The park was named after the Queen of England in 1954 following her visit.

Wildlife

The park is home to 618 bird species which is the 6th highest diversity in the world and the highest in Africa making it a perfect destination for Uganda Birding Safaris, in addition to 10 primate species like chimpanzees and 95 mammals including big game.

Attractions

Tree Climbing Lions: with just two populations of these unique lions in the whole world, explore the southern Ishasha sector to track these lions commonly seen up in the fig and acacia trees



Yellow-billed Egret



The Kazinga Channel: this natural water channel connects Lakes Albert and Gorge and is home to a large number of hippos, Nile Crocodiles, elephants and hippos which can easily be seen on the thrilling Kazinga Boat Ride Kasenyi Plains: these plains are popularly visited by tourists on a Uganda Wildlife Safari as they are home to a very large number of antelopes, the Uganda Kobs, lions and several large predators Kalinzu Forest: this is offers very rewarding chimpanzee tracking experiences and it is located on the southeastern corner of the park



The Kyambura Gorge: this verdant forested 100 meter deep valley with peculiar is home to a large number of primates and popular for Chimpanzee tracking tours in Uganda. Mweya Peninsular: this is a stretch of land that protrudes into Lake Edwards is commonly visited during game drives as it offers perfect game views while exploring the various game tracks. Lake Katwe Salt Works: within the alkaline Lake Katwe, salt mining works have been ongoing for several years since that is the main economic activity in the area.



Consequently a large number of tourists visit here to learn and observe the traditional method of salt mining The Katwe Explosion Crater Lakes: these lakes found in the northern part are found on the highest elevation of the park. from here tourists enjoy sweeping views of the Rwenzori Mountain ranges, the western rift valley escarpments and lakes George and Edward.



Ken Lovell's

Quelea Weaver

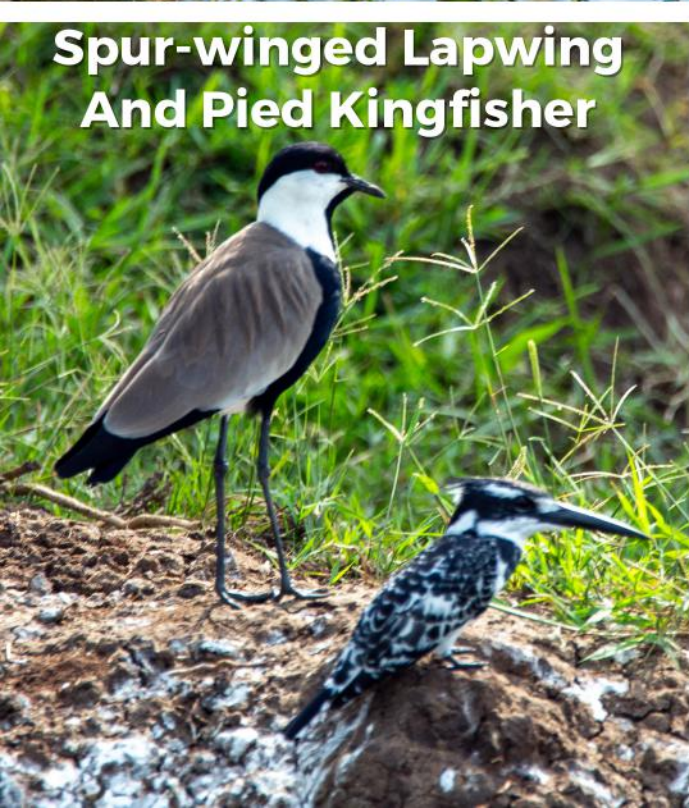
BIRDS OF UGANDA



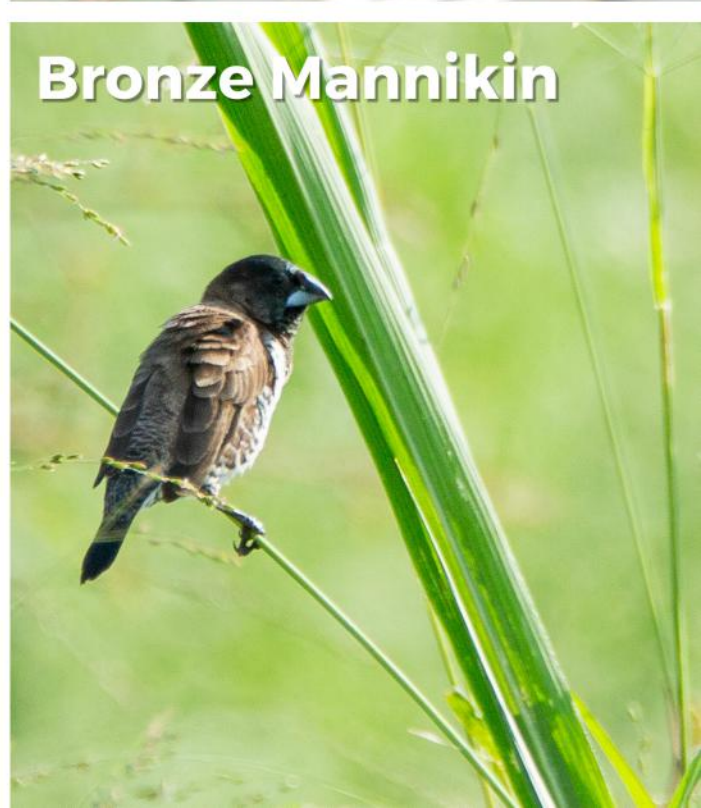
Black Headed Weaver



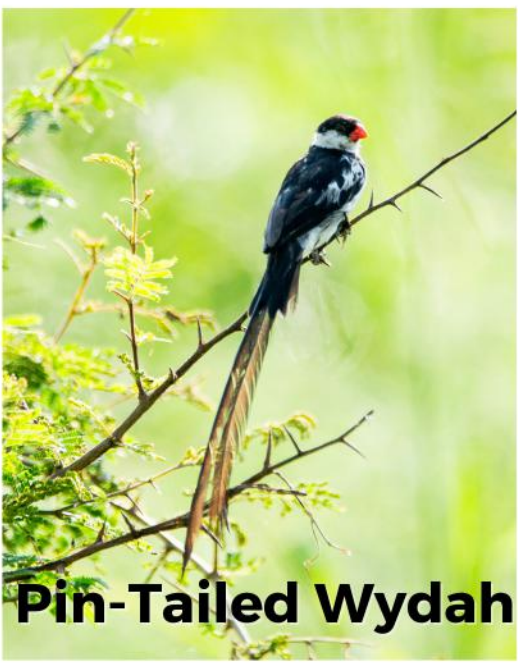
African Pied Wagtail



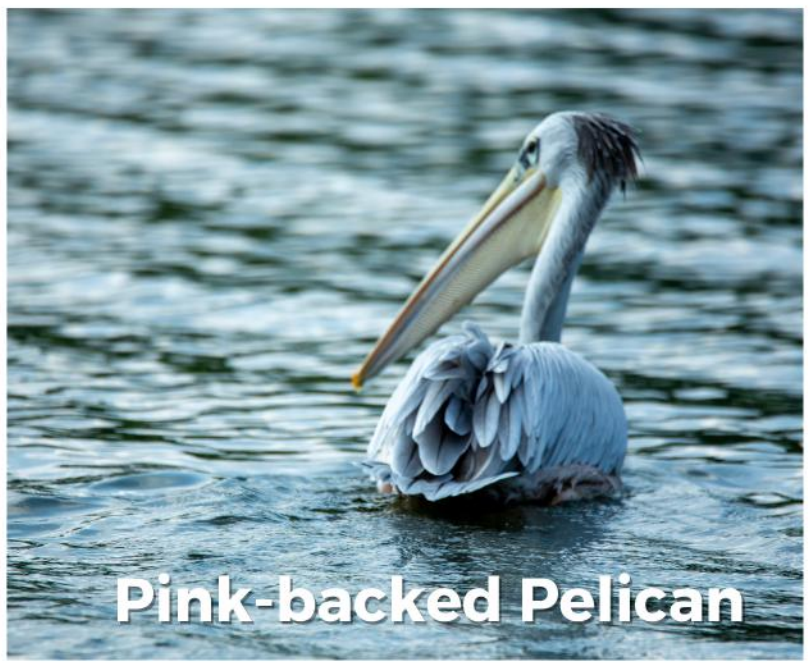
Spur-winged Lapwing
And Pied Kingfisher



Bronze Mannikin



Pin-tailed Wydah



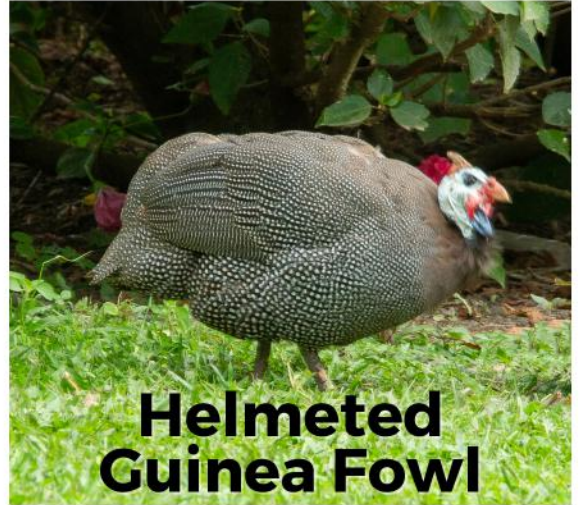
Pink-backed Pelican



Grey-headed Gull and Egyptian Geese



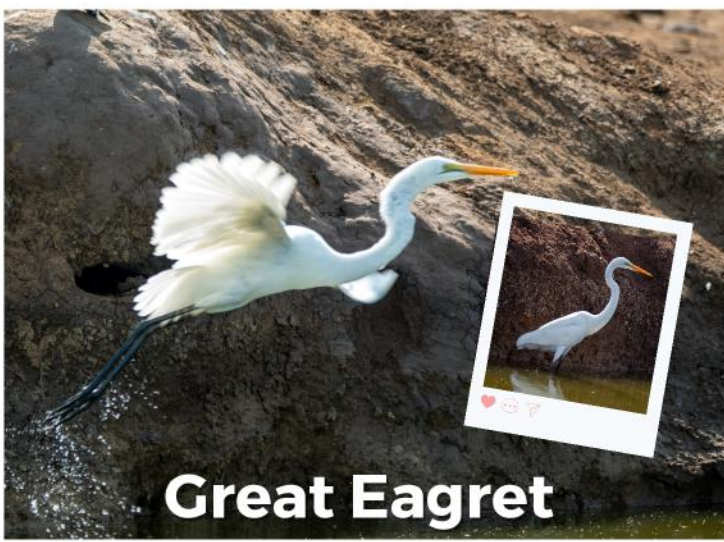
Meves Starling



Helmeted Guinea Fowl



Grey-crowned Crane



Great Egret



Fish Eagle



**Blue-Cheeked
Bee-Eater**



Squacco Heron



African Jacana



**White-breasted
Cormorant**



**Southern Grey-
headed Sparrow**



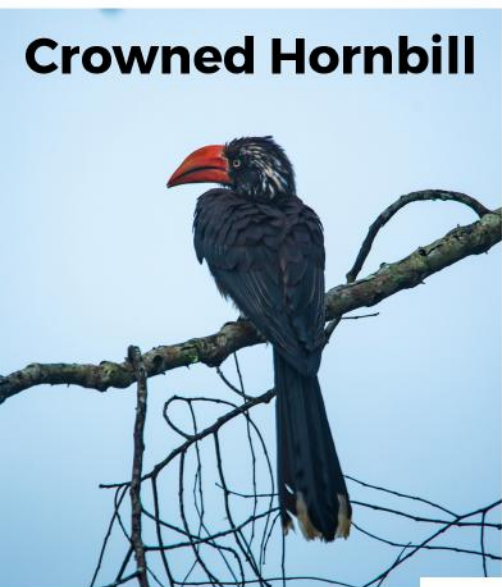
Fish Eagle in Flight



Cinnamon-chested bee-eater



Double toothed barbet



Crowned Hornbill



Splendid Starling



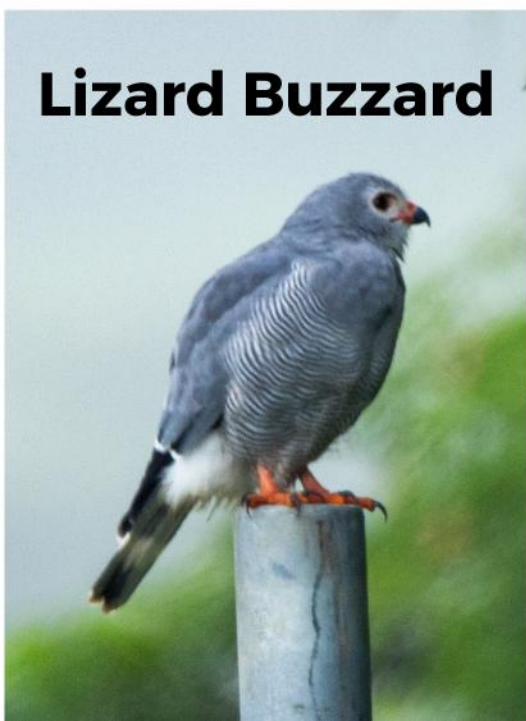
Long crested eagle



White browed robin chat



Broad billed roller



Lizard Buzzard



Pied kingfisher



Tawny-flanked Prinia

A further 7 hours after leaving Queen Elizabeth National Park took us to Bawindi Impenetrable forest to the beautiful Gorilla Heights Lodge. The scenery along the way was breathtaking and we saw the mountain range that separates the Congo from Uganda. The last 30km was a road that should not be taken in the dark as its a rural road that has taken a beating by the rain.

Nestling in the mountains close to the Gorilla briefing centre is the beautiful Gorilla Heights Lodge. The GM and his staff were waiting to greet us as we arrived and a hot dinner was most welcome. Chalets all have beautiful views across the Valley and each room is different. My "villa" has a kitchen, dining room, the biggest bedroom looking out over the valley through huge imposing doors and windows and the bath tub on the balcony.

The lodge is perched on the mountainside for the guests to enjoy the views and its only a 5 minute drive to the Gorilla centre. Dinner was all carte and I enjoyed steak and potatoes that melted at every fork full. Soon it was time to tuck in and listen to the sounds of the Ugandan nightlife. A lullaby that everyone should hear at least once in their lifetime.

I have been blessed to have had this moment to enjoy Uganda, it's people and everything East Africa could offer.





DAY 6



Whew what a day. A day filled with so many experiences it's hard to put into words. How do I begin? We woke early to clear skies and the best view in the world. The excitement and anticipation of seeing the worlds greatest primates buzzed around at breakfast and everyone was on time.

The road to Gorilla lodge is beautiful and absolutely well worth the arrival. As its very high in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and very close to the Gorilla experience, its to be expected to be a bit bumpy but that is part of being in Africa. And the arrival makes it all worth it. Celstine Masiga is the GM and was on hand to greet the group together with the smiling staff (everyone smiles in Uganda) and warm hot towels and a fabulous dinner prepared by a seasoned Chef of many years.





Our chalets were breathtaking and the view across the valley is something that you can consider unforgettable. I never closed my doors because it meant I could not see the sun rise or sun set. Its very close (2km) to the Gorilla experience and it means that after your vertical climb to see these incredible animals, you can return early enough to enjoy your chalet and all it has to offer. From the outside bath to the kingsize bed which has a hotwater bottle to warm those toes, from the large spacious bathroom and shower to the well appointed kitchen (I was booked into a villa), I didn't want to go home. The restaurant and lounge area is beautifully decorated and easy to have your meals and spend time on the spacious balcony bar.



In the dry months, there are sundowners on a hill nearby and an unforgettable moment. There are a million stars at night that can be seen from the Lodge. Not only do they work together with the community but they support them too. Buying local vegetables, supplying water from their 1 million litre tank to families near by, Most of the crafts sold in the craft shop in the lodge, are from the locals and those that are not made locally - they give 20% to the community. They use solar for sustainability and 90% of the staff is local. They have also been involved in the rehoming of the pygmy tribe called the Batour to ensure their survival. So when you book into this amazing lodge, you support an entire community. You can also fly into the local airport and there is a transfer that will collect you and return you to the airport. Definitely a lodge to return to on every possible occasion



We left for the Gorilla Briefing centre and the local community of women dances out on a show for us which made us all smile. These women are amongst the hardest workers in Africa as they spend their days toiling in rain or shine in the terraces of the local mountains making sure there is food on the table and supplying the local lodges with fresh fruit and vegetables which must be back breaking. Yet here they were smiling and dancing and having the best time.



My hiking boots were ready and Ken made sure we each had a porter to carry our bags with gloves, water and raincoat (even though I think he carried me mostly). We set off to find the trail which would take us to see the Gorillas. What a walk. Before leaving home Ken suggested I walk a bit to get fit but I said I didn't need to! Was I wrong! Anyone planning to do this walk needs to be relatively fit let me tell you! It's not for the faint hearted or the couch potatoes or those who perch in front of computers all day (hmmmm wonder who that could be!). A walk up and down the mountain on the muddy slippery roadway eaten away by the heavy rains meant a 2 to 3 km distance before finding the pathway which would take us to the Gorillas.

We veered off the main road onto a mountain pathway no bigger than my shoe. And we went down the mountain. The roadway disappeared from sight and my poor porter and the group porter were both on hand to keep this hapless soul from falling. The others were nimble and found it not too difficult.

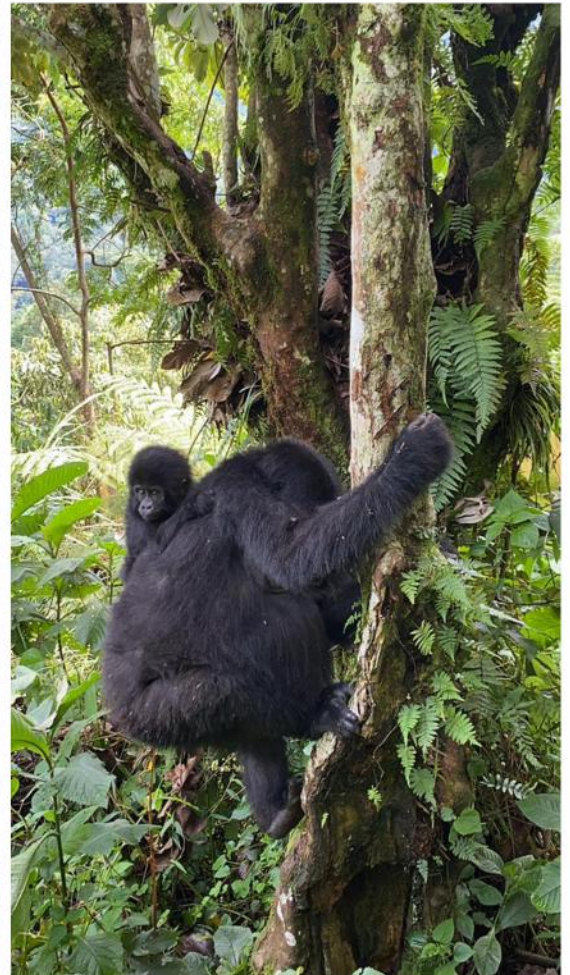


Gloves provided some protection from the thorns on the trees but not all. The high altitude made my breathing difficult and so as not to keep the group back, I took a decision to stop and make my way back up the mountain leaving Ken and the rest of the group to continue.

I made it back to the roadway with a guard and the porter who stuck by me helping me every step of the way. Amazing people these Ugandan people.

Our transport vehicle met me halfway to bring me back to the lodge where a warm shower and a bot water bottle awaited me. I will have to go home, get fit and start again! Both groups had incredible experiences with the Gorillas and managed to make it back despite the torrential rain. The photos of the Gorillas tell the story ...

I may have missed the highlight of our trip but for me the highlight has been Uganda as a country. Meeting the people and sharing their culture, hopes and dreams and if anything, although they have a hard life in the villages, their smiles and warmth should be a lesson to people around the world.



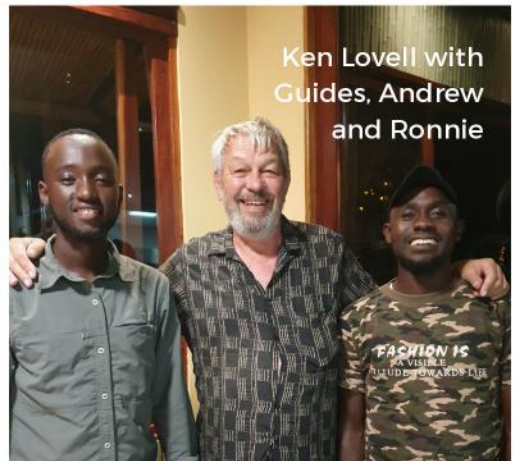


Day 7 and our final day of travelling before heading back to Johannesburg. A long drive back to Kampala but filled with beautiful scenery and I didn't mind the drive. I watched the fish sellers on the side of the road selling Nile Perch from Victoria Lake, I saw motorcyclists with passengers and goods and the mountainous farms on which everyone makes a living. I loved that for every tree that is cut down, the villagers have to plant another 20. I saw how the villagers walked up a path with no effort that I struggled to climb.

I knew the time had to come to say goodbye to my fellow travellers and to our wonderful driver guides, Ronnie and Andrew. How do you get to leave them behind without leaving a piece of our heart behind too? We had dinner together and after an early night at the beautiful Sheraton Kampala, it was an early start on Saturday to catch our flight with Uganda Air back to Johannesburg.



From left, Bernabab Tesfaye Babena Ethiopia, Ken Lovell SA, Fitsum Gezahegne Ethiopia, Anthony Ochieng Uganda and myself Geniene Preston

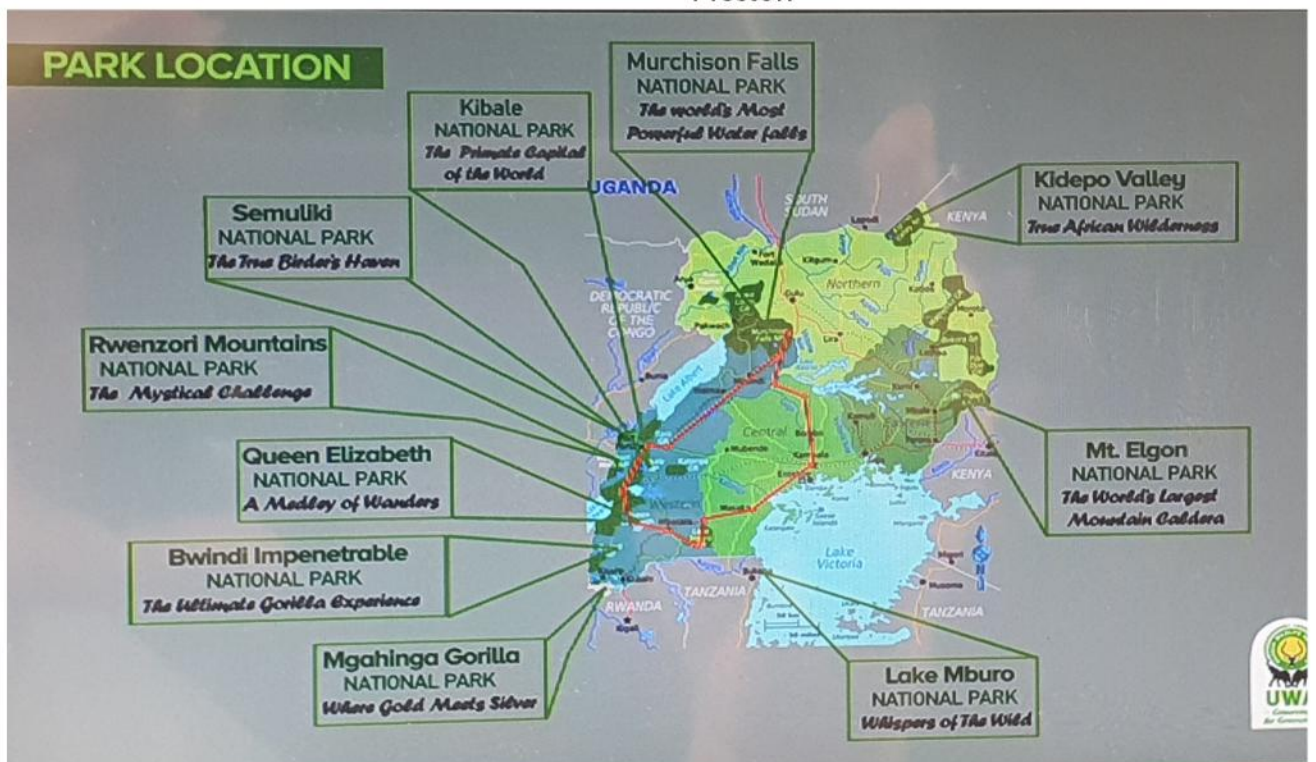


Ken Lovell with Guides, Andrew and Ronnie

Amb. Taiwo and Kehinde OGUNTOYE, Nigeria with Ken Lovell



Ken Lovell, Charles Ajunwa, Nigeria, Geniene Preston





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THANK YOU