

# Touch the Wild

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## Magical Uganda

### Shoebills, Tree Climbing Lions and the Mountain Gorilla – 13 days

#### Mabamba Swamp – Shoebills

The Mabamba Swamps west of Entebbe is one of the best and most convenient places to see the elusive Shoebill. After a few minutes in a small canoe the papyrus reeds opens up into a flat grassy wetlands where a number of Shoebill can regularly be seen. The bird is easiest seen in the morning when they stalk their main prey, the mudfish or frogs, but may be spotted all day. They may stand absolutely still for long periods awaiting the movements of their prey and then suddenly strike with speed. Although one can reach Mabamba by road we highly recommend the boat tour across Lake Victoria. Reaching Mabamba by boat, rather than by car, gives you an opportunity to see many of the birds that you may otherwise miss. Sometimes even the shoebill may elude you in the canoes only to be seen as you approach, or leave, by the bigger boat.

Birding in the Mabamba Bay wetland (a Ramsar site chosen as a wetland of international importance in 2006) offers birders a very high prospect of seeing other papyrus specialist birds like the African Jacana, Malachite Kingfisher, Saddle-billed Stork, and the Long-toed plover.

Some of the special swamp birds in Mabamba include the Papyrus Gonolek, White-winged Warbler, Blue-headed Coucal, Northern Brown-throated Weaver, and the yellow-backed weaver. Globally threatened birds such as the Papyrus Yellow Warbler and the Blue Swallow are also possible for the keen birder.

Although not common. Sitatunga Antelope can also be seen in the swamp

#### Queen Elizabeth NP

Queen Elizabeth National Park is understandably Uganda's most popular tourist destination. The park's diverse ecosystems, which include impressively vast savanna, shady, humid forests, sparkling lakes and fertile wetlands, make it the ideal habitat for big game, ten primate species including chimpanzees and over 600 species of birds. Set against the backdrop of the jagged Rwenzori Mountains, the park's magnificent landscapes include dozens of enormous craters carved dramatically into rolling green hills, panoramic views of the Kazinga Channel and the endless Ishasha plains, whose fig trees hide lions ready to pounce on herds of unsuspecting Uganda kob. As well as its outstanding wildlife attractions, Queen Elizabeth National Park has a fascinating cultural history. There are many opportunities for visitors to meet the local communities and enjoy storytelling, dance, music and more.

The wide bio-diversity of habitats means that Queen Elizabeth National Park contains the most astonishing number of species - almost 100 types of mammal and 606 different birds! The Kazinga Channel alone is said to contain the world's largest concentration of hippos, but interestingly enough not many crocodiles! Other wildlife includes warthogs, buffalo, rare aquatic sitatunga antelope, giant forest hog, beautifully horned Uganda kob, topi, waterbuck, elephant and leopard. There are no giraffe, zebra, impala or rhino.

Kyambura (or Chambura) Gorge on the north-east boundary of the park, is real Tarzan territory with thick treetop canopies and vines dangling down to the soft forest floor. The terrain comes complete with chimpanzees who crash about and chatter high up in the branches. If they don't feel like being seen, they just keep one step ahead of the out-of-breath visitors.

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The Maramagambo Forest, south of the Kasinga Channel is also home to large numbers of chimps, plus a number of other monkey species.

### QUEEN ELIZABETH SPECIALITIES:

- Sunset over the water
- Warthogs and hippos mowing the lawn at Mweya Lodge
- Boat ride on the Kasinga Channel
- Chimpanzees in Kyambura (Chambura) Gorge
- Beautifully positioned safari lodges

## Bwindi Impenetrable NP

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is located in southwestern Uganda in East Africa. The park is part of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and is situated along the Democratic Republic of Congo border next to the Virunga National Park and on the edge of the Albertine Rift. It comprises 331 square kilometres (128 sq mi) of jungle forests and contains both montane and lowland forest and is accessible only on foot. The Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site.

The forest is one of the richest ecosystems in Africa, and the diversity of species is a feature of the park. The park provides habitat for some 120 species of mammals, 348 species of birds, 220 species of butterflies, 27 species of frogs, chameleons, geckos and many endangered species. Floristically Bwindi is amongst the most diverse forests in East Africa, with more than 1,000 flowering plant species including 163 species of trees and 104 species of ferns. The northern (low altitude) sector is rich in species of the Guineo-Congolian flora. These include two species internationally recognised as endangered, the brown mahogany and *Brazeia longipedicellata*.

The park is a sanctuary for colobus monkeys, chimpanzees and many birds (such as hornbills and turacos). It is perhaps most notable for the 400 Bwindi gorillas, just under half of the world's population of the critically endangered mountain gorillas. There are four habituated mountain gorilla groups open to tourism: Mubare; Habinyanja; Rushegura near Buhoma; and the Nkuringo group at Nkuringo.

## Mountain Gorillas

The park is inhabited by a population of about 400 individual mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*), known as the Bwindi population, which makes up almost half of all the mountain gorillas in the world. The rest of the worldwide mountain gorilla population is in the nearby Virunga National Park. The current total population estimate in Africa is at around 880 gorillas.

The 4 groups available to trek are:

The Mubare group with 16 gorillas and 1 silverback, The Habinyanja group which has about 23 gorillas with 2 silver backs, The Rushegura group with 9 gorillas and 1 silver back. The latest of all the gorilla groups in is the Nkuringo group which has about 20 gorillas and 2 silver backs.

Only 8 people per group are permitted to track the gorillas at any one time.

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Research on the Bwindi population lags behind that of the Virunga National Park population, but some preliminary research on the Bwindi gorilla population has been carried out by Craig Stanford. This research has shown that the Bwindi gorilla's diet is markedly higher in fruit than that of the Virunga population, and that the Bwindi gorillas, even silverbacks, are more likely to climb trees to feed on foliage, fruits, and epiphytes. In some months, Bwindi gorilla diet is very similar to that of Bwindi chimpanzees. It was also found that Bwindi gorillas travel further per day than Virunga gorillas, particularly on days when feeding primarily on fruit than when they are feeding on fibrous foods. Additionally, Bwindi gorillas are much more likely to build their nests in trees, nearly always in *alchornea floribunda* (locally, "Echizogwa"), a small understory tree.

Mountain gorillas are an endangered species. Disease and habitat loss are the greatest threat to the gorillas. Poaching is also a threat. There are no mountain gorillas in captivity. In the 1960s and 1970s, mountain gorillas were captured in order to begin a population of them in captive facilities. No baby gorillas survived in captivity, and no mountain gorillas are known of that are currently in captivity.

## Itinerary

### Day1: Arrival day

Arrive at Entebbe international airport; you will be met by one of our friendly staff who will transfer you to a Lake Victoria hotel in Entebbe. Relax in the luxurious surroundings, sample great food or enjoy a drink on the terrace overlooking Lake Victoria. There is also a gym and pool for the more active.

Dinner and overnight at Laico Lake Victoria Hotel (or equivalent).

### Day2: Tour to Mabamba for Shoebill Watching.

After breakfast, drive to the ferry and cross the lake to Buwaya. Drive to Mabamba swamp and search for Shoebill stork, African Jacana and other birds. Shoebill sightings although not guaranteed are very likely here and you have a reasonable chance of capturing great images of these birds at close quarters. Drive back to the hotel and arrive in time for a late lunch. Dinner and overnight at Laico Lake Victoria Hotel (or equivalent)

### Day3: Drive to Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Drive from Entebbe in a South-West direction, have a stopover at the Equator for photos. After, continue driving to reach Mbarara town for lunch. After lunch, drive to Queen Elizabeth NP and arrive in time for boat launch along Kazinga Channel. African Skimmers, Fish Eagles, Goliath Herons and several kingfisher species are some of the birding highlights from the boat. Buffalo, Elephant and Hippo are regularly seen along the river banks.

Dinner and overnight at Mweya Safari lodge (or equivalent).

### Day4: Game drive and afternoon Chimp tracking

Wake up for morning breakfast and go for game drive to look out for animals like Elephants, Lions, Hyenas, Leopards, Buffaloes, Ugandan Kobs, Waterbuck and much more including a variety of bird species. After game drive, stop for a picnic lunch. Relax here before going for Chimpanzee tracking in Kyambura gorge.

Dinner and overnight at Mweya Safari lodge.

### Day5: Game drive and optional afternoon boat Cruise.

Wake up for morning breakfast and after go for a second game drive to look out for animals we may have missed on the first game drive. After game drive, drive to the lodge for lunch. Relax here after lunch or go for a second

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optional (additional charge) afternoon Boat Cruise. This is an excellent opportunity to capture images of any birds that may have been missed on the first boat trip, especially the African Skimmers.

Dinner and overnight at Mweya Safari lodge

### Day6: Game drive through Ishasha Sector.

After breakfast, drive to Ishasha sector, the southern part of the park and go for a game drive in search of the tree climbing lions and various other species of animals and birds that we may not have seen. After a full morning, drive back to the lodge for lunch. There is the option to go for the evening game drive in the Kasenyi area. We will especially look out for carnivores as they become more active in the early evening .

Dinner and overnight at Mweya Safari lodge.

### Day7: Queen Elizabeth NP - Bwindi NP

After breakfast, drive through Ishasha to Bwindi Impenetrable national park for gorilla trekking. We will have lunch en route. Arrive mid afternoon and relax at the lodge.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs lodge (or equivalent).

### Day8: Gorilla trekking day.

Wake up for any early morning breakfast before going for briefing from the ranger guides. Remember to carry packed lunch and bottled water with you. Depending on where you find the gorillas in the forest, trekking can be estimated between 2-9hrs and the trekking success with experienced guides is at 99%. There are 3-4 separate gorilla groups available to trek dependent on location, and over the 4 days, if possible (dependent on permit demand) we will try to trek all of the available groups.

After trekking, go back to the lodge and relax.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs.

### Day9: Repeat Gorilla trekking.

Wake up for any early morning breakfast before you go for briefing about gorilla trekking. Remember to carry packed lunch and bottled water with you. There are porters who can help to carry your luggage at for a small additional fee.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs lodge.

### Day10: Relaxing Day:

After 2 potentially tough gorilla treks you take the day off to simply spend relaxing at the lodge. The lodge gardens are beautiful and many different birds can be seen in the grounds, there is the opportunity to have a massage, download images, sit out on the balcony enjoying a drink. The lodge overlooks the valley and the mountains where you may have spent the previous 2 days trekking. It is possible to occasionally see the gorillas walking along the hillside from the lodge. They have even been known to visit the lodge gardens and the river that flows past.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs lodge.

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## Day11: Gorilla trekking.

Wake up for any early morning breakfast before you go for briefing about gorilla trekking. Remember to carry packed lunch and bottled water with you.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs lodge.

## Day12: Repeat Gorilla trekking.

Wake up for any early morning breakfast before you go for briefing about gorilla trekking. Remember to carry packed lunch and bottled water with you.

Dinner and overnight at Mahogany Springs lodge.

## Day13: Drive back to Entebbe.

After a very early breakfast we drive back to Entebbe passing through Mbarara town for lunch and at the Equator for shopping. Arrive in Entebbe in the late afternoon (at about 6pm) for your flight back home. Dependent on flight times it is possible to add an extra night in Entebbe at an additional charge.

## Prices Available on Request.

### Price includes:

Transport by 4x4 vehicle throughout the whole trip.

Accommodation and meals as per itinerary

All park entrance fees and government taxes.

One Boat cruise along Kazinga channel. (Queen Elizabeth)

Mabamba Shoe Bill Boat Trip.

Bottled water throughout the trip.

Four (4) Gorilla permits and One (1) chimp tracking permit per person.

### Not Included:

International flights

Any alcoholic drinks

Any tips or donations – tips usually given to rangers, trackers and porters for gorilla treks.

Any optional trips as detailed above. All optional trips can be arranged through your guide or the accommodation.

Personal insurance

Laundry and other services of personal nature.

**To book a place we require an agreed deposit paid at time of booking. The balance is paid 2 months before departure. Monthly no interest payment scheme available on request.**

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