

COWABUNGA FLY-CAMP
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Safaris since 1974.

Attention!

The following itinerary is meant to help your safari planning. Since 1974, we at Cowabunga Safaris have done many, many kinds and variations of safaris to Uganda.

This is only one kind of safari. Do you want something more upscale? Do you want something more rustic and participatory? If you have a different safari in mind, wish to stay longer, or want to travel to other parts of the continent, tell us. We can make it happen.

UGANDA: "UNDER-DISCOVERED AFRICA"

Mountain Gorilla and Chimp Treks

Forest and Wetland Walks

Boat-trips, Game-Drives and Canvas Camps

Length: 14 days from the USA; 11 days in Africa

Accommodations: 2 nights in hotels; 2 nights in luxury chalets; 7 nights in luxury tented camps. All accommodations have private, hot-water showers and en suite toilets. All the places Cowabunga stays are in breathtaking surroundings in or near renowned wildlife areas. Pictures of accommodations are available on request.

Luxury Tented Camps: An additional explanation... Our luxury tented camps are not the same as the camps you might find on a weekend camping trip in the USA. The tents are large - they are big enough to walk into and stand in -- with comfortable twin beds complete with linen and duvets. All tents are bug-proof with mesh windows, have

nightstands next to the beds, and, has been mentioned, possess en suite bathroom facilities.

Fitness Level: A reasonable level of fitness is needed to fully enjoy this safari. Gorilla and chimp treks can be quite demanding in their own right, never mind the fact that, in some instances, we might be at elevations above 6,000 feet. Please see the "Treks and Walks" section below, as well as "The Personal Gorilla Trekking Account" for more details.

Group size: Cowabunga keeps groups small, to better share Africa. Unless otherwise stated, this type of safari will have no more than 10 Safarists. A custom-designed itinerary might have fewer still.

Food: You should NOT go on this type of safari to lose weight! All meals cater to western preferences, are first-class, and excellently prepared. Chefs make exquisite cuisine using a wide array of meats, pastas, and fresh vegetables and fruits grown in the area. Desserts are delectable and overwhelming - so much so, we encourage all Safarists to practice the Cowabunga mantra: to "Eat dessert first, because life is so uncertain.")

Water: Treated drinking water is provided in some of the places we stay. Everywhere bottled water is available for purchase.

Stay Longer: Experiencing all Africa has to offer is a once-in-a-lifetime privilege for most. Accordingly, some Safarists like to stay longer. We at Cowabunga Safaris understand! If, after this safari, you wish to safari in Kenya, travel to Zanzibar, or to continue on to other parts of the continent, we can help. In fact, given our love of the continent, you can bet we'll beg to join you!

Detailed Briefings: Cowabunga provides in-depth written briefings for all Safarists after they sign-on for any safari. Furthermore, when possible, Cowabunga conducts face-to-face briefings approximately three months before departure. For those who can't make the face-to-face briefings, a detailed transcript of questions and answers is sent to them. Gary, Brian and Nancy always stand ready to brief Safarists at a moment's notice via fax, phone, e-mail or in-person.

-- THE ADVENTURE --

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Uganda today is one of Africa's best-kept secrets. Here, in a country roughly the size of Great Britain, one finds a rich tapestry of traditions and cultures encompassing 45-plus languages, and topography ranging from semi-arid savannah, to lush rainforest, to snow-capped mountains sitting astride the equator. In terms of wildlife, Uganda has species found elsewhere in East Africa, like impala and plains zebra, along with those found nowhere else, like the Ugandan kob, an antelope. But it is Uganda's wealth of birdlife (nearly 600 different species have been recorded in the country) and abundance of primates (12 different species) which provides unique appeal. In fact, Uganda offers intrepid visitors the rare privilege of viewing in the wild *both* chimpanzees, fast becoming endangered, and the already highly-endangered mountain gorilla. Still, this country, dubbed by Winston Churchill "The Pearl of Africa," remains largely under-discovered as a Safari destination.

This "Under-discovered Africa" Safari encompasses an impressive array of activities, sights, and experiences. We will spend two days trekking for mountain gorillas in the Bwindi "Impenetrable Forest," a haven of only 199 square miles, but one that protects about 320 of the world's 600 or so remaining mountain gorillas. In two different parts of Uganda, the Kibale Forest and Chambura Gorge, we will search for colonies of chimpanzees. We will walk in the Maramagambo Forest, around the Bigodi Wetland, and on the acacia- and kopje-dotted savannah near Lake Mburo. We will navigate the waters of the Kazinga Channel, which ultimately help feed the Nile. We will cross the equator, yet still be in the shadow of the glacier-filled peaks and valleys of the Ruwenzori Mountains, better known as the "Mountains of the Moon." We will conduct game-drives, usually during the day, but will have the rare opportunity (in East Africa) to do them at night as well. Along the way, we will stay in a hotel on the shores of Lake Victoria, in chalets overlooking a crater lake inside Queen Elizabeth Park, and in tented camps in forests and on savannah. This is an itinerary of dramatic contrasts, and one which highlights the many cultural and natural treasures of Uganda.

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TREKS AND WALKS

Treks and walks are similar in that, first, visitors set the pace, and second, all are led by a fully-qualified naturalist/guide trained in the flora, fauna, and lore of the area. However, treks and walks differ in two key ways: distances covered, and conditions under which those distances are covered.

On a gorilla or chimp *trek*, for example, we might cover only a couple of miles, mostly on previously-made (yet nonpermanent) trails, and this might take us only a couple of hours. Alternatively, we might cover many miles, having to push through dense vegetation all the while, and this could take all day. In brief, we go to where the gorillas and chimps are. While the gorilla groups and chimp colonies we will be viewing are habituated to human observation, they are still wild, and therefore, free to roam. As a result, it is they who ultimately determine where we, the privileged guests in their home, have to go, and subsequently, what type of terrain we have to negotiate to get to them. In contrast, a *walk* usually entails traversing a set distance over an established trail -- though what might be discovered or observed is no less spontaneous.

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AN ADVENTURE AND EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

(A personal gorilla-trekking account)

by Brian Hesse

At last, the long-anticipated day had arrived: the day of my gorilla trek. It began at about 7:30 a.m., when our group of five climbed into a Toyota Landcruiser and we drove to the Bwindi "Impenetrable Forest" Park entrance, less than three miles from our camp. By 8:30 we were registered for our gorilla trek. It was then that we were introduced to Richard, our naturalist/guide, and our three trackers and two armed game-scouts. After shaking hands, we again climbed into the vehicle and drove, this time for about fifteen minutes. Stopping at a trail head, we eagerly piled out, adjusted our day packs, and immediately started up into the hills. While the morning was misty and damp, my anticipation was great, my mood buoyant. By 9:45 the sun had started to burn off the morning's mist. It was humid. I started to sweat as we walked ever higher. We had been told that we would cover about 2,500 vertical feet over an approximate mile-and-a-half stretch (our starting elevation having been at about 5,000 feet) -- this would get us just to the Bwindi Park boundary, to the very edge of the mountain gorillas' domain, which, incidentally, I could now see: carefully cleared fields and ordered rows gave way suddenly and most dramatically to a solid wall of green over fifty feet high. The Impenetrable Forest.

Once in the forest, the trackers immediately got to work looking for tell-tale signs and spoor as to where the gorillas had been, and where they had gone. Soon, they hacked their way off in one direction while Richard spoke in-depth about the forest's flora and fauna. We had only to wait maybe five minutes before a voice came over Richard's walkie-talkie. It was the trackers. The gorillas were near but on the move.

For an hour we pushed our way through the forest. I alternately lifted my legs high to avoid tangling vines, and then stooped low under arching branches. The ground was a thick sponge of moist, fallen leaves. We clambered up a steep incline, then down the other side, and up yet another incline. This gorilla trekking was work. And it was only 11 a.m. Conceivably, we could be doing this all day. Yet all thoughts as to how fatiguing a full day of gorilla trekking could be immediately vanished when I saw them. The gorillas.

Ruhandeza, the dominant silverback male of "Mubare Group," was straight ahead, no more than twenty feet away. He was sitting, one huge forearm on each leg with one sizable hand folded over the other in his lap. Relaxed and accepting, his massive head was turned to the right, his magnanimous eyes fixed. He was looking at three females and two infants, maybe a year old, about thirty feet away and contentedly munching on leaves. I kneeled and snapped a series of pictures. Beside me, Richard did a series of low grunts -- sounds of reassurance -- as he intently punched coordinates into his hand-held GPS system. Ruhandeza shifted. He rolled and boosted his immense weight onto almost human-like feet and powerful closed fists. Sunlight poked through the dense forest canopy and reflected off his silver back. It was like light hitting a mirror. He moved closer, to within fifteen feet. Richard kneeled beside me; he had put away the GPS system and was now writing on a note-pad. Again, Ruhandeza sat. He looked around, up, then directly at me before reaching for a nearby tree. In an impressive show of strength and dexterity, he stripped bark from the trunk in one clean motion. He studied it closely, then put it in his mouth and emitted a series of deep grunts as he looked toward the females and babies. "He's checking on his group," Richard whispered.

All told, in addition to Ruhandeza, we saw six adult females, five infants, and two juvenile males. At one point, one of the adult females passed so nonchalantly close that I could not focus my camera's 200 mm lens. After an hour, Richard motioned that it was time to go. I quietly eased backward. The foliage closed in and the gorillas evaporated from view. While the time had gone all too quickly, I did not feel cheated. In fact, I felt just the opposite. I had been granted an

incredible, privileged hour, one that, in contrast to some memories, might never fade in its intensity.

By 1:30 we were back at Bwindi Tented Camp, our adrenaline combined with the relative ease of going down hill having enabled us to make good time. By 2:30 I was showered and sitting comfortably on my tent's verandah. It was a surreal feeling. I found it remarkable that in little more than half a day I had had an adventure of a lifetime -- the gorilla trek itself -- *and* an experience of a lifetime -- actually sitting in close proximity, in the wild, to a group of mountain gorillas, one of the most endangered but gentle and dignified animals in the world. In an impromptu gesture meant to be a toast as well as a personal thanks of sorts, I grabbed a water bottle from the table beside me and held it high, my gaze fixed intently on the distant mountains.

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Day 1 EN ROUTE

Our Safari begins! We have an evening flight from the USA on Northwest/KLM. (D)

Day 2 ENTEBBE, UGANDA

A morning arrival in Amsterdam where we connect on to our flight to Africa. Tonight, our first night in Africa, we stay at the Lake Victoria Hotel. (B/L/S)

Day 3 LAKE VICTORIA HOTEL

The day is ours to enjoy at leisure on the shores of Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa and the third-largest lake in the world. We can visit Entebbe's Botanical Gardens, the Wildlife Center, or opt to relax by the Lake Victoria Hotel pool. The ambitious might want to try a day-long fishing trip (inquire at hotel reception) in the hopes of catching a giant Nile Perch. B/L/D

Day 4 KIBALE TENTED CAMP

Today we drive to Kibale Forest National Park, stopping for a picnic lunch en route. In the course of a few hours we go from the placid shores of Lake Victoria, through the busy suburbs of modern Kampala, the capital, across lush, cultivated areas, and eventually to the town of Mubende. It is here that the tarmac ends and "Safari Africa" begins. Though in close proximity to villages, different primates, including the black-and-white colobus, are frequently seen from the road. For the next two nights we are under canvas at Kibale Tented Camp. B/L/D

Day 5 KIBALE FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Today is a day of active exploration. In the morning we look for one of several colonies of chimps in the Kibale Forest, which also boasts eleven other species of primates, 325 species of birds, over 144 species of butterflies, and mammals like duiker, and even elephant. In the afternoon we undertake a walk of the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, also known as the "Home of the Great Blue Turacos." At different points we will pass near or through tea, coffee, and maize fields, and might even see locals harvesting papyrus in the wetlands (used locally to make necessary items like mats and baskets, as well as crafts). Brian has had impressive bird and primate sightings in the Kibale Forest area, including

having seen eight different species of primates in one day, and five different species of primates in the course of one walk! B/L/D

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AFRICA UNDER CANVAS

Kibale, Bwindi, and Lake Mburo Tented Camps

Reminiscent of how Teddy Roosevelt, Robert Ruark, Ernest Hemingway and the like went on Safari, for the most of this Safari we too are "under canvas." Our tents, however, provide extraordinary comfort, if not luxury.

At the three tented camps we stay at (at Kibale, Bwindi, and Lake Mburo), our accommodations are in are full-size, stand-up sleeping tents that feature large interiors with en suite facilities. In each there is plenty of room for twin beds, a dressing table, and chairs. The floors are sewn in, windows are covered with screen mesh, and a shade canopy extends over the "front porch." Excellent cuisine and cold drinks are enjoyed at the center of each camp in an open reed and thatch structure with "Out of Africa" style furniture. Typically it is at this center-point where we gather around an open-fire, under a star-filled sky, in order to shake off an evening's chill and to recount the day's adventures.

While the intimacy, comfort, quality, and service of Kibale, Bwindi, and Lake Mburo Tented Camps is uniformly superb, the character of each is strikingly different. For example, at Kibale (with a mere seven tents), we overlook a wetland, and a wetland walk can be done right from camp. At Bwindi (also with seven tents), we have a view of the mountains into which we trek to find the gorillas. At Lake Mburo (with ten tents), we look across an acacia-dotted valley toward massive kopje rocks in the distance. Furthermore, at each camp -- or more specifically, right *in* each camp -- we can find numerous species of trees, plants, and flowers, countless species of birds, and frequently several species of primates.

Being "under canvas" is the best way to Safari. We *feel* the cycles of the bush and hear its sounds, giving a complete connection with nature.

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Day 6 JACANA CHALETS

We cross the equator today on our way into Queen Elizabeth National Park. Still, we are in the shadows of the largest glaciated area on the African continent: the Ruwenzoris, more-aptly known as "The Mountains of the Moon," with snow- and ice-covered peaks rising over 16,500 feet. The mountains serve as a dramatic backdrop for an impressive range of habitats in Queen Elizabeth Park, which includes savannah, tropical forest, rivers, swamps, lakes, and a zone of scenic volcanic craters. Tonight we stay in chalets overlooking one such scenic crater lake -- but not before taking a launch out on the Kazinga Channel, which connects Lakes Edward and George. We are sure to see many, many hippo, Cape buffalo, and possibly elephant in and along the Channel, as well as birds in the thousands. The waterbuck in Queen Elizabeth Park are some of the largest in Africa, Brian claims, and the cape buffalo have a reddish color, possibly an indication of inter-breeding with the red

forest buffalo of the Congo. Today will be our first chance to see the Ugandan kob, a species of antelope found nowhere else on the continent. B/L/D

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JACANA SAFARI LODGE

Jacana Safari Lodge, situated in the Maramagambo Forest inside Queen Elizabeth Park, has 8 spacious chalets. Each chalet possesses its own unique decor, and each has a screen-enclosed deck with magnificent views of the Nyamusingire Crater Lake. At the two-level bar/dining area, we can enjoy sundowners and dinner from an elevated position, or from water-level. Jacana has a pool and sauna, and a pontoon boat is available to take guests out on the lake.

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JACANA SYMPHONY

by Brian Hesse

A person doesn't always need a radio, band, or orchestra to hear fantastic music. One night at Jacana Lodge, I had spent the better part of an hour on my chalet deck feverishly trying to chronicle the day's events in my journal: the leopard sighting on the game-drive that morning, the black-and-white colobus monkey sightings right outside camp, the walk in the Maramagambo Forest... So intense had I been about the task at hand that virtually nothing else had permeated my consciousness. But finally, I was forced to put down my pen as the day drew to a close and the light grew dim. I kicked up my feet. I clasped my hands and put them behind my head. I breathed in contentedly and closed my eyes. I relaxed. Only then did I recognize how melodic my surroundings were. Just below, at the lake's edge, water lapped in rhythmic fashion. In the trees above, the wind whispered through branches and leaves. In the north, thunder faintly rumbled. From the south, from the distant forest across the lake, a chorus of chimp calls resonated. All around swirled the various-pitched calls of birds and frogs. These singular sounds peaked and troughed, waxed and waned, but blended beautifully. It was a symphony of the most emotive and natural kind.

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Day 7 QUEEN ELIZABETH PARK

This morning we trek for chimps in the magnificent Chambura Gorge. The sheer-sided, forest-filled gorge seems almost like a geological afterthought in comparison to the expansive euphorbia-dotted grasslands from which it is carved. Near the gorge rim we might see crested guinea fowl, and at the bottom we are likely to hear, and see, hippo. In fact, in our descent and ascent, we will be on the very trails hippos often use at night to get to and from their grazing areas on the surrounding savannah! After a much-deserved lunch and rest back at Jacana, we can go on an afternoon game-drive. If all goes as Brian has planned, the day will end just as it began: with chimps -- or more specifically, with their calls, which frequently echo from the surrounding forest. B/L/D

Day 8 BWINDI TENTED CAMP

After breakfast, we walk in the Maramagambo Forest of Queen Elizabeth Park. Our route will take us past two natural spectacles: bat caves, where Egyptian fruit bats shelter in the thousands, and a brilliant turquoise spring-fed pool called Kameranjojo, which in the local Kinyankorie language means "swallowed an elephant" (as is the case with many local names in Uganda, Kameranjojo has an interesting legend behind it; be sure to ask Brian). After the walk, the rest of the day is an extended game-drive. We traverse much of the southern half of Queen Elizabeth Park, an area famous for tree-climbing lions, stopping to eat a picnic lunch at a spot of our choosing. In this part of the park are large herds of kob and topi, and giant forest hogs are sometimes seen. Our destination for the evening is Bwindi Tented Camp -- from where, over the next two days, we will stage our treks to search for the highly-endangered mountain gorilla. B/L/D

Days 9 & 10 THE IMPENETRABLE FOREST

Bwindi Tented Camp is on the periphery of the famous "Impenetrable Forest," home to an estimated 320 or so mountain gorillas, or nearly half of the world's remaining wild population. Only two Bwindi gorilla family-groups are habituated to close human observation by tourists (in groups of no more than six visitors). We hope to spend time with both groups, trekking, observing, and photographing each on alternate days. While much of our attention will be on the gorillas, it is impossible to ignore Bwindi's rich diversity: 7 species of primates, 350-plus species of birds, 202 species of butterflies, and over 200 species of trees have been recorded in the area. Assuming time and energy permit, we have the option of doing additional forest walks, visiting a nearby tea factory, or taking a casual stroll through neighboring villages. B/L/D

Day 11 LAKE MBURO TENTED CAMP

The drive today takes us out of the domain of the mountain gorilla and into the heart of Uganda's Ankole district (known for its herds of distinctive "Texas-longhorn-like" cattle of the same name) to Lake Mburo National Park. Along the way, we pass through numerous villages. If it is a market day, we will see people carting all kinds of wares -- kids with 60-pound stalks of bananas on the backs of bicycles, women with containers of vegetables balanced on their heads, men with bags of rice and charcoal piled high in trucks. We will also pass through the relatively larger, and bustling, population centers of Rukungiri and Mbarara. The day's hectic yet colorful scenes only accentuate our serene surroundings once we reach Lake Mburo Camp. B/L/D

Day 12 LAKE MBURO PARK

The terrain of Lake Mburo is comprised overwhelmingly of savannah, acacia woodland, kopje rocks, and of course, the lake from which the park takes its name. Animals found here include plains zebra, impala, eland, bushbuck, klipspringer, reedbuck, porcupine, and crocodile. Our activities can include game-drives or -walks, or simply admiring the view from camp (we look out over a valley, which normally has impala and a resident, but rarely seen, leopard). As an added bonus, we could do a night game-drive; Lake Mburo is one of

the few parks in all of East Africa where this is allowed, and it affords a whole new perspective in terms of animal sightings, cycles, and behavior. B/L/D

Day 13 **KAMPALA**

Today we drive to thriving, modern Kampala where we stop for lunch, and for last-minute gift and souvenir shopping at a city market. We then carry on to Entebbe and the Lake Victoria Hotel where day-rooms are available. Tonight we meet for a Farewell Dinner before departing for Entebbe International Airport and our flight to Amsterdam. B/D

Day 14 **HOME**

After a morning arrival in Amsterdam, we connect on to the USA and home. [B/L/S]



Safaris since 1974.