

Safari in Uganda – August 2006

By Coen Jeukens & Eline Weijers

Where to go this year? The recurring holiday question is swaying us from one continent to the other. Actually it is the Gorilla that draws our attention, but upon further investigation, Uganda has so much more to offer.

Great Lakes Safaris has been very instrumental and helpful in unlocking the possibilities of Uganda and to define a tailor made safari catering to our interests. We like intense experience at a slower pace, love to walk and have contact with the local people. Great Lakes Safaris suggested us a mixed itinerary with game drives, boat rides, foot safaris, community walks and lodging in the same place for at least 2 nights.



About half a day outside Kampala we entered Lake Mburo National Park. Upon entering the park were surprised to see so many animals – waterbuck, impala, warthog, topi, zebra and buffalo – not knowing that the next morning we would walk amongst them on foot!

Late afternoon we boarded a boat to see animal life from the lake. Again an abundance of life – hippopotamus, crocodile, fish eagle, goliath heron, king fisher and of course the aforementioned mammals coming for a nip.



Not far beyond Mbarara town we leave the tarmac road and experience "maram" alias the dirt road - destination Bwindi Impenetrable Forrest Nation Park, home of the Gentle Giant. We purchased our Gorilla permit half a year in advance, so we were very curious how it would be. 3 Groups of maximum 8 tourist each set out to separate locations in the forest. In our case we first drove for one hour,

than walked for one hour along the fields and then we "fought" our way through the jungle for two hours before we "Please put down your bag and grab your camera". A few more steps and there lay the large Silverback with a juvenile playing alongside. The reward of a strenuous walk is seeing the gorillas in THEIR home. The sounds, the movement, the size of the trees, the foliage, cracking branches ... and 8



camera's clicking. The hour with the gorillas passes quickly and the anticipation of half a year comes to an end. If possible, we would go again tomorrow.

Back at the guesthouse our diner is waiting. The menu is set, all guests eat at the same time ... and share their gorilla experience. The absence of electricity is more than compensated by the atmosphere of the petrol lamps. The only difficulty of this power-issue is that it requires some "planning" to recharge your batteries.

After the gorilla highlight we travel to Lake Bunyonyi for some relaxation before we head on to Queen Elizabeth National Park.

The landscape changes into savanna. The temperature rises and the humidity drops. The long yellowish grass is hiding the smaller animals, but we can clearly see the hyena scanning the plains. Plop, suddenly the head of a lioness checks out the hyena. Both of them go their own way, the antelopes keep their eyes fixed on every movement.



In case you missed the chimpanzee in the Kyambura river gorge, you will definitely see them in Kibale National Park. Chimps are more noisy and active than gorillas. Being amongst them is special and joyful. Especially when the different groups in the forest "call" each other and trigger reactions. And since we humans are 98.7% chimp, you will experience the reaction yourselves.

Last stop on our safari was Murchison Falls National Park. It is far from everything, but as largest park it will add something different. In our case we saw a group of crocodiles munching on a dead hippopotamus. A herd of hippos saw the scene, chased away the crocs and held a kind of memorial. Soon thereafter the crocs came back ... and life on the Nile returned to "normal".



Throughout the safari we were in capable hands of driver/ guide Gerald. Apart from the driving, lodging and logistics, he gave us a background on the country, the wildlife and his view on a future for Uganda.

With the memories and about 2000 pictures we've had a great holiday.
Greetings, Coen and Eline (the Netherlands)