



Uganda: Gorillas, Shoebill and Rift Endemics

July 10-28, 2022



Mountain Gorilla

In the minds of many westerners, Uganda conjures visions of dense jungle inhabited by dangerous creatures and unwelcoming native peoples. As children, many of us spent Saturday mornings watching Tarzan and Jungle Jim battle against the dark forces of Africa. Hollywood strengthened these stereotypes with movies like African Queen and The Naked Prey that perpetuated our belief that this was indeed a forboding land visited only by the most fearless explorers. Political unrest and revolution in the 70's and 80's plagued much of central Africa including Uganda and brutal dictators like Idi Amin further solidified the western view that Uganda was not fit for travelers. However Uganda's troubled past is just that....past. Idi Amin has long been gone from the Ugandan stage and the mythology of Tarzan never existed beyond the imaginative minds of young children and Hollywood directors. In fact, Uganda has become a model of progress among East African nations and today is a safe and exciting place to visit. A network of tourist lodges nows exists and roads and other infrastructure are being rapidly improved. The economy in Uganda is strong, the political situation has stabilized and government sponsored development programs for local guides have made wildlife and birding tours in Uganda second to none in Africa. Though there are problems on the northern border with Sudan, our tour does not visit that area. In short, Uganda is a safe and friendly place with an amazing array of birds and mammals to offer the visitor. The country boasts a rich variety of habitats ranging from East African savannah to lush jungle rainforest to swampy wetlands. The tour will give participants an opportunity to see over 500 species of birds and 30 species of mammals. Some of the birds will be iconic African wildlife symbols like the strange and enigmatic Shoebill. And where else in the world would one have an opportunity to stare into the eyes of a Mountain Gorilla? We will visit all of Uganda's famous wildlife parks including Murchison Falls, Lake Victoria, Kibale and Queen Elizabeth. Transporation throughout will be in two 4X4 Safari Land Cruisers with a pop-up roof. The tour will be limited to 10 participants to ensure that everyone in the group always has a window seat. This will truly be the trip of a lifetime that will not only lengthen your life list, but also forever alter whatever stereotypical prejudices you might have toward visiting East Africa.



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Physical Requirements and Pace of the Tour

There will be quite a lot of time spent in vehicles on this tour, but our use of 4X4 Safari Land Cruisers will mitigate time spent in the vehicle and provide a comfortable traveling and viewing experience. The pop-up roof is an added bonus as it will allow better photographic opportunities than are typically available when shooting from a vehicle. Furthermore, the small group size and window seats for everyone will guarantee that wildlife viewing and birding quality will be optimized. This is especially important because in some of the parks we visit, we will be required to remain in the vehicles. Ugandan road conditions are rapidly improving, but certainly have not reached western standards and there will be some very bumpy roads that we will have to traverse during the tour. As is the case with most birding tours, the days will be long, beginning at dawn and ending when the sun sets. There will be several days that will be primarily travel days, as we move from one venue to another and the birding opportunities will be more limited, but again having a window seat for everyone will make these long drives more palatable and allow everyone to see the Ugandan countryside and village lifestyles. Though there will be a lot of walking during the tour, most of it will be done on good forest trails that are easy to moderate in terms of difficulty. Participants also should expect to face certain inconveniences along the way like some rustic accommodations, sporadic power outages and some cold water showers. However overall, the accommodations are quite good. They will be clean and run by friendly and efficient staff who will be trying their best to make your stay as pleasant as possible. Along the way we will also stay at a couple of very nice camps and lodges that will mitigate some of inconveniences. The main physical challenge of this tour will be the necessity of staying on your feet for much of a day. A willingness to grin and bear bumpy and dusty roads and a few cold showers will go a long way in increasing your enjoyment in Uganda. The most difficult component of the tour will be our hike searching for mountain gorillas. It usually involves 3-4 hours of slow walking with local guides. The trails are steep, but the local guides are experts in helping people up and down. It should be noted that there is no guarantee that we will see the gorillas although the success rate is very high. However, these are wild animals and their movements and patterns are unpredictable and change daily. However you can be assured that we will be working with knowledgeable and expert local guides and that we will do the very best that we can to locate them.



Ruppell's Starling



Ross's Turaco



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DAILY ITINERARY

July 10-11, Days 1-2, Flights to Entebbe from the U.S.

Our tour begins today with departures from the United States on international flights to Entebbe (airport code EBB). People will need to schedule their flights in order to be in Entebbe by July 11. Upon arrival you will be transferred to our hotel and depending upon your arrival time, we may spend a few hours at the Entebbe Botanical Gardens to do some initial birding. Due to the lengthy trans-Atlantic flights and the significant time change, participants are strongly encouraged to come to Entebbe at least one day early. We can help with any additional hotel bookings and pre-trip activities for early arrivals. Night in Entebbe.

July 12, Day 3, Mabamba Swamp and Transfer to Lake Mburo

We begin this morning a few miles from Entebbe at Mabamba Swamp where we will have our best chances to see the unique and enigmatic Shoebill. We will travel in canoes through the reed-lined channels hoping for a close encounter with this rare and amazing bird. Other birds here will include Hamerkop, Hadada Ibis, Palm-nut Vulture, African Marsh-Harrier, Black Crake, African Jacana, Black-headed Heron, White-browed Coucal, African Pied Wagtail, African Pied-Hornbill, Little Bee-eater, Winding Cisticola and much more. By late morning we will begin the drive to Lake Mburo NP where we will spend the next 2 nights. It will be about a 4.5 hour drive to reach our lodge in the park. If possible we will make a few short stops to break up the drive, but this afternoon will largely be spent traveling. Night at Lake Mburo National Park.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L921939?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Mabamba Swamp



White-browed Robin-Chat



Shoebill



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 13, Day 4, Lake Mburo

Lake Mburo is a wonderful park with a bird list of 579 species! It contains a very diverse array of habitats including marshes, open water lakes, dry grasslands and scattered woodlands. In addition to its birds, it is home to a nice collection of mammals including Impala, Vervet Monkey, Oribi and Olive Baboon. The birding here is fabulous and we will have chances to see things like Lizard Buzzard, Coqui Francolin, Crested Barbet, Bearded and Nubian woodpeckers, Meyer's Parrot, Black-headed Gonolek, Lesser Striped Swallow, Arrow-marked Babbler, Ross's Turaco, Mosque and Rufous-chested swallows, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Lilac-breasted Roller, Chinspot Batis, Violet-backed Starling, and Fan-tailed Widowbird. Night at Lake Mburo National Park.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L922787?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Lake Mburo National Park

July 14-15, Days 5-6, Lake Mburo and Transfer to Bwindi-Impenetrable Forest

After a final morning of birding and animal viewing in Lake Mburo NP, we will begin the 5.5 hour drive to The Bwindi-Impenetrable Forest, one of Africa's iconic wildlife parks. The Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to approximately half of the world population of 1,000 Mountain Gorillas. This vast reserve offers some of the most productive montane forest birding in Africa and supports 23 of Uganda's 24 Albertine Rift endemic bird species. This part of Uganda was once a vast and extensive forest, but today has been reduced to an island in a sea of human settlement and development. Because it supports such a unique component of plants and animals it is considered of vital importance in African conservation efforts. Ruhija is a high elevation camp and thus the birds we will look for here will be somewhat different than what we will find at lower elevations in Bwindi. Because of the many unique species possible here, we will take much of the day slowly working our way up to the camp making frequent stops to search for specialties like Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Willcox's and Dwarf honeyguides, Black-billed Turaco, White-headed Woodhoopoe, Gray-throated Barbet, African Broadbill, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Black-throated Wattle-eye, African Paradise-Flycatcher, Green Crombec, Buff-throated Apalis, Shelley's Greenbul, Purple-headed Starling and Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat. On the second day we will attempt to cover as many of trails around the lodge as possible with a focus on the Albertine Rift endemics. Nights at Ruhija.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S63132684> Bwindi-Impenetrable Forest

July 16-18, Days 7-9, Buhoma and the Mountain Gorilla Search

From Ruhija we will make our way down the mountain eventually arriving at Buhoma where we will spend the next three nights. The birding around Buhoma is much easier than at Ruhija due to the lower elevation and relatively flat trails. We can also expect a very different set of birds here that will include exciting species like Black Bee-eater, Bat-tailed Trogon, African Broadbill, Sooty Flycatcher, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Black-billed Weaver, Narrow-tailed Starling, Magpie Mannikin, White-browed Crombec and many, many more that I will not continue to list here lest your heads begin to spin.



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 16-18, Days 7-9, Buhoma and the Mountain Gorilla Search (cont)

One of the days at Buhoma will be spent trekking up the mountain trails with the hope of seeing a family of mountain gorillas. Access to the gorillas is restricted and depending upon the current situation, it is possible that we may have to split into 2 separate groups and go to two different gorilla families. The gorilla hikes typically begin shortly after breakfast and hikers don't return until mid to late afternoon. The trails are steep and challenging, but we will be accompanied by local guides and porters who will carry food and water and provide helping hands and physical support when necessary. Sometimes groups are able to locate the gorillas just an hour or two into the hike; one other days it sometimes takes much longer and there is always the possibility they will not be found at all on a given day, however this is unusual and gorillas are seen by the vast majority of groups that visit Buhoma. Seeing a family of these endangered animals at close range is an experience that you will never forget; it is truly one of nature's greatest and most memorable encounters. This is a strenuous hike and involves some off trail walking through potentially dense brush. Given the difficult nature of the excursion it will be optional and alternative birding opportunities will be arranged for anyone choosing not to participate. Nights at Buhoma.

July 19-20, Day 10-11, Queen Elizabeth National Park

After breakfast we will drive about 4 hours to Queen Elizabeth National Park where we will spend the next 2 nights. We should arrive in time for lunch and afterward we can walk in the gardens surrounding the lodge where a new suite of birds will be available. Queen Elizabeth NP boasts an interesting variety of habitats with an extensive bird list. It is also a great place for large mammals and here we should begin to see some of Africa's iconic big game including Lions, Elephant, Buffalo and Warthog. Possible birds will include Eastern Plantain-eater, Crested Francolin, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Dideric Cuckoo, Square-tailed Nightjar, African Crake, Senegal and Crowned



Handsome Francolin



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 19-20, Day 10-11, Queen Elizabeth National Park (cont)

lapwings, Rüppell's Griffon, Black-chested Snake-Eagle, Woodland and Striped kingfishers, Gray Kestrel, Rufous-naped Lark, Flappet Lark, Red-faced Cisticola, Black-lored Babbler, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, African Thrush, White-browed Robin-Chat, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Holub's Golden-Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Bronze Mannikin etc. On the second afternoon we will take a boat trip on the famous Kazinga Channel that connects Lake Edward and Lake George. This will be a chance to get close to hippos and crocodiles as well as birds like Goliath Heron, Pink-backed Pelican, Little Bittern, Black Crane, Water Thick-knee, Kittlitz's and White-fronted plovers, Black-headed Heron and much more. Nights in Queen Elizabeth NP.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1045164?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Queen Elizabeth NP

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1294565?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Queen Elizabeth NP-Ishasha

July 21-22, Days 12-13, Queen Elizabeth & Transfer to Kibale Forest NP

After a final morning in Queen Elizabeth NP we will drive about 2.5 hours to Kibale Forest NP, another of Uganda's birding and wildlife gems and our base for the next two nights. Kibale is best known for its primates and it is possible to see nine species during a visit including Chimpanzees, which sometimes are seen right at the lodge! However to maximize our encounter with these primates that are so closely related to humans, we will spend an afternoon hiking in the forest with a local guide to guarantee a close and intimate experience. The social interactions of chimpanzees are fascinating and fun to observe and this will certainly prove to be another memorable part of the tour. Birds are also prolific here and exciting possibilities will include Gray Parrot, Long-tailed Cuckoo, Gray-throated Barbet, Black-billed and Great Blue turacos, Speckled Tinkerbird, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher, Honeyguide Greenbul, Marabou Stork, Narina Trogon and Velvet-mantled Drongo among countless others. Some of the possible primates we



Brown-hooded Kingfisher



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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 21-22, Days 12-13, QE National Park and Transfer to Kibale Forest (cont)

could see include Blue Monkey, Copper-tailed Monkey, L'Hoests's Monkey, Black-and-white Colobus and Gray-cheeked Mangabey. With names like that they must be exotic primates indeed! Kibale is one of Uganda's loveliest tropical rainforests and the multitude of birds available as well as the diversity of primates will make for a very memorable stay. The forests at Kibale are also home to one of Africa's most difficult birds: The Green-breasted Pitta. Like most pittas it is a shy and secretive ground dweller that tantalizes would be viewers with loud vocalizations seemingly just a few feet away, but always managing to stay hidden from view. Nevertheless we will have several chances to see one during our forays into the forest at Kibale. Nights at Kibale NP.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1045166?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Kibale Forest NP

July 23, Day 14, Transfer to Masindi

After some morning birding, much of the remainder of today will be a travel day as it is nearly a 4-hour drive to Masindi in northwestern Uganda, where we will base for two nights. Birding opportunities on the drive are somewhat limited as we will pass through mostly degraded habitats that have been converted to agriculture. In order to arrive in Masindi in time for some late afternoon birding, we will plan for an early departure and carry a packed lunch. However whatever time we end up with today will be limited and our major efforts to find the area's birds will be on the following day. Night in Masindi.

White-tailed Blue Flycatcher





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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 24, Day 15, Budongo Forest and the Royal Mile

We will depart early this morning and drive about an hour to one of Uganda's most famous birding sites: the Royal Mile in Budongo Forest. We will have a full day here to explore the various trails including a well worn but quiet road that transects one of the area's lushest forests. This road is known as the Royal Mile and many of the area's forest specialties can be seen here including Nahan's Francolin, Crowned Hawk-Eagle, Sabine's Spinetail, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Plain and Red-tailed Greenbuls, Yellow Longbill, Green Hylia, Jameson's Wattle-eye, Green and Little sunbirds, Yellow-mantled Weaver, Red-headed Malimbe, Golden-crowned Woodpecker, Purple-headed Starling, Red-capped Robin-Chat, Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush, Lemon-bellied Crombec and White-thighed Hornbill. It will be a day packed with many new birds in a lovely forest venue. Night in Masindi.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1326093?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Budongo Forest Royal Mile





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DAILY ITINERARY (cont)

July 25-27, Days 16-18, Murchison Falls National Park

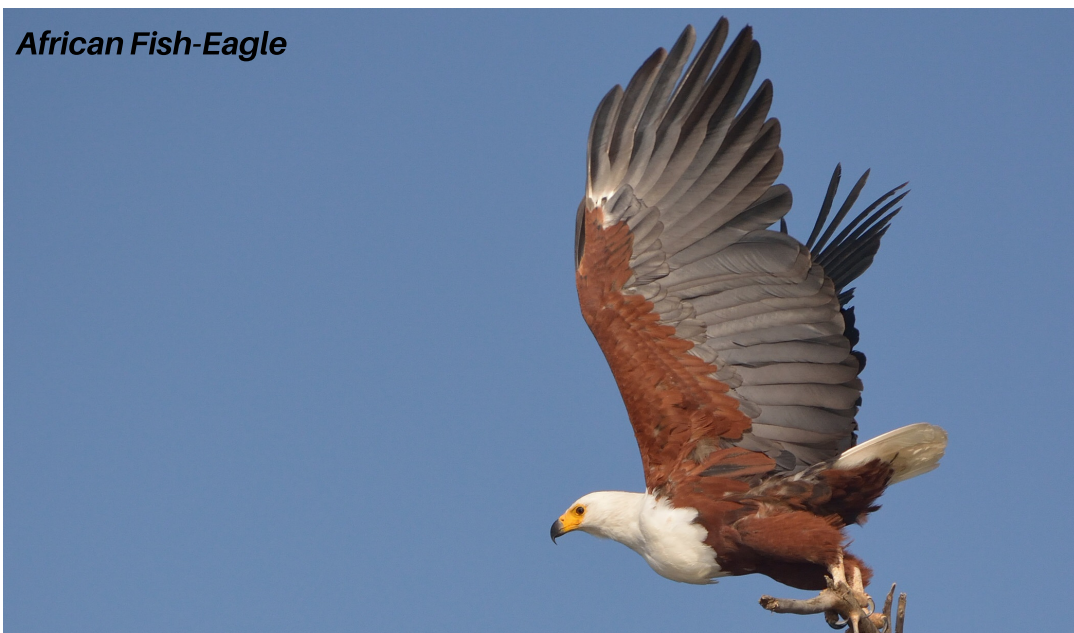
Our next destination will be Murchison Falls National Park where we will spend three nights. It is only about a 90-minute drive to the park from Masindi, so we will have nearly three full days to explore various portions of the reserve. As we drive from Masindi we will cross the Butiaba Escarpment and enter an area of tropical savanna woodland. A few special birds can be found near the escarpment including Mocking Cliff-Chat, Black-billed Barbet and White-rumped Seedeater. Murchison Falls is named for a spectacular cascade formed where the Nile River rushes through a narrow gorge. The quiet river below the falls is ripe with wildlife including exciting animals like hippos, buffalo and crocodiles. In fact large mammals abound throughout the park and we are sure to lengthen our mammal list here. Lions, leopards, giraffes and elephants and many species of antelope roam the park and our outings here will be special. During our time here we will combine game drives to various parts of the park with one or two boat trips along the Nile River. Birds are abundant here and we will have chances to see many more new species including Dark-chanting Goshawk, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Rock Pratincole, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle, Black-winged Red Bishop, Giant Kingfisher, White-headed Sawwing, Sooty Chat, Blue Malkoha, Spur-winged Goose, Black-billed Wood-Dove, Brown-chested Lapwing and Red-throated Bee-eater. Nights in Murchison Falls National Park.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1045170?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec> Murchison Falls NP

July 28, Day 19, Return to Entebbe for Flights Home

After breakfast and some final birding we will leave Murchison Falls NP and begin the return drive to Entebbe. We will plan to arrive by mid-afternoon to give everyone a chance to reorganize their belongings before heading to the airport for evening flights home. The tour ends tonight at the Entebbe airport.

African Fish-Eagle





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Tour information

Cost

The price for this tour is \$10,300 from Entebbe and includes 17 nights lodging (Day 2 through Day 18, all ground transport in Uganda in 4x4 Land Cruisers, guide service throughout the tour, park entrance fees, boat trips as mentioned in the itinerary, gorilla and chimpanzee tracking permits, airport transfers in Entebbe and all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 3 through lunch on Day 19. It does not include round trip airfare between Entebbe and your originating city, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, gratuities or items of a personal nature. A single supplement of \$1100 will be charged if you choose to room alone or if you do not have a roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Note that single rooms may not be available at some smaller camps.

Tour Registration

A deposit of \$2000 and a completed registration form will be required to secure a place on this tour. Checks should be made payable to Otus asio Tours and mailed to Jan Hansen at 900 Hillsborough Road in Chapel Hill NC 27516

Tour Size

The maximum number of participants on this tour will be 10 in order to guarantee that everyone in the group will have a window seat at all times.

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$750 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date and after final payment is received the refunded amount will be limited to the amount that can be recouped from merchants and booking agents. This could be as little as 25% of the tour price. **Trip insurance is strongly recommended to protect you in the event that you have to cancel.**

Travel Insurance

To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. We recommend Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance which is designed for all types of travelers. Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available. They offer medical evacuation, trip cancellation and various other coverage options. Visit their website at ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com or call 1-415-481-0600.

Documents

To enter Uganda you will need a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date and a visa. **All visa (E-Visa) applications must be completed via the Government of Uganda's website: visas.immigration.go.ug.** Under the new application process, you must apply online for your visa at least two weeks prior to travel. The cost at the time of publication is \$50 USD. A current certificate for Yellow Fever Vaccination is required in order to obtain your visa for entry into Uganda, and you may be asked to show your YFV certificate upon arrival at the airport.



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Tour information (cont)

Trip Difficulty

This tour will not be especially physically demanding, but people should be in reasonably good physical health to participate. The most difficult part of the tour will be the gorilla tracking hike. This will involve several hours of walking on steep tracks. Depending upon the location of the gorillas it may be necessary to leave the trail to see them and this will require traveling on potentially difficult terrain through forest understory. There may be a few other hikes that involve steep trails, but most of the walking will be done on well maintained level trails or roads. The most demanding part of the trip will be the necessity of staying on your feet for long periods of time as we will be birding for much of the day. The drives between venues will be long (3-6 hours), but we will travel in a 4x4 Land Cruiser and everyone will have a window seat at all times.

Clothing

As is the case with all tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is recommended. Quick dry, lightweight field pants and long-sleeved shirts are best. Clothing that can be rinsed out and hung to dry in your rooms is helpful in limiting the size of your luggage. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. **DARK-COLORED OR EARTH TONE CLOTHING IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED, AS WHITE AND OTHER BRIGHT COLORS FRIGHTEN THE BIRDS.** You will need a lightweight and comfortable pair of hiking shoes since we will spend a good bit of time on foot. Waterproof boots will not be necessary as we will be visiting during the dry season. Rain is not likely at this season, but a rain jacket or a poncho are always a good idea just in case. Most of the hotels we will use are not heated. Though it will be warm in most places the evening temperatures can sometimes be chilly, especially at Bwindi-Impenetrable Forest, so bring something warm to sleep in. Shorts will be appropriate on some days, but for some of the hikes you will need long pants. Remember that space in our vehicle will be limited so trying to minimize the size of your luggage as much as possible is important.

Climate

The temperatures will be warm to hot (80-90 F) during the day and pleasantly warm to cool (60-65F) at night. At a few places it may be even cooler in the evening with temperatures possibly falling to the low 50's. Misty and foggy weather at some of the higher elevations, particularly in Bwindi-Impenetrable Forest may make it feel much cooler.

Currency

The currency used in Uganda is the Uganda Shilling (USh). The current exchange rate is 3675 USh to 1 USD. Currency can be obtained upon arrival at the airport banks and at some of our hotels and lodges. MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, while American Express has limited acceptance. ATMs are difficult to find in Uganda so you should bring enough cash to see you through the tour.

Please note that U.S. currency notes need to be in mint condition and printed after 2006, otherwise they are difficult to exchange, so be sure to bring newly printed bills.



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Tour information (cont)

Health

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. **A current certificate for Yellow Fever Vaccination is required for entry into Uganda.** As standard travel precautions you should be up to date with tetanus shots and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B. It is strongly recommended that you follow a program for malaria prophylaxis. There have been some recent changes in recommendations for malaria prophylaxis. Mefloquine (Lariam) is recommended for chloroquine-resistant malaria as well as the newer Malarone which has fewer side effects. Both are available by prescription only and may not be suitable for those using cardio-vascular medication. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

Field Guides

Recommended field guides for the tour are:

Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa by Stevenson and Fanshawe published in 2002 and
The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals by Jonathon Kingdon published in 1999

Other Trip Essentials

Other important items will be sunglasses, sunscreen, lip balm, toilet paper and an alarm clock. You should also bring a refillable water bottle so that you don't have to purchase and dispose of plastic bottles everyday. A day pack in which to carry things you will need during our birding excursions is always a good idea.

Miscellaneous

There is no departure tax due at the airport. This fee is included in the cost of your air ticket.

Electricity: 240 volts with British square 3-pin plug sockets

Language: English is the official language of Uganda. Swahili is also spoken.

Time: 8 hours ahead of EST.

Information

For further information please contact Jan Hansen at otusasiotours@gmail.com or at 919-259-9423.