

DESTINATIONS

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BEST

NATIONAL PARKS IN WESTERN UGANDA

Gorilla tracking is a treat, but western Uganda has more going for it than silverback sightings, writes **Meera Dattani**



BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NATIONAL PARK

Under the dense forest cover of Bwindi Impenetrable are Uganda's most prized residents: mountain gorillas. With permits at \$600 (rising to \$700 from July 1, 2020), it's significantly cheaper than neighbouring Rwanda (\$1,500), though in both cases, revenues are designed to fund conservation. Treks vary, depending on where the habituated gorilla groups are on the day, and porters are recommended. Bwindi was also home to the forest-dwelling Batwa pygmy tribe, evicted from the park in the 1990s, and a handful of operators offer meaningful cultural experiences.

QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK

The section between Lake Edward and Lake George offers wildlife sightings by the bucketload. Antelope (Ugandan kob) gather in their hundreds, hippos snort and splash their way along the beautiful waterway of the Kazinga Channel – best seen on a boat safari – and in the southern Ishasha section, lucky visitors might spot tree-climbing lions. Kyambura Gorge is also excellent for chimpanzee tracking, and UWA (Uganda Wildlife Authority) offers lion-tracking drives.



RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the Rwenzori Mountains, called the 'Mountains of the moon' by ancient Greek astronomer Ptolemy. One of the Nile's highest sources – Mount Stanley stands at 5,109m – it's Uganda's top hiking destination, with options ranging from day treks to multi-day expeditions, and sightings of forest birds, monkeys and horned chameleons. Guides and porters are from the local Bakonjo community. There are a few well-run village experiences, and a tour of the Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation is recommended.

MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK

Uganda's largest national park is best known for the eponymous Murchison Falls. Here the usually-wide Nile is squeezed, plunging through a seven-metre gap before crashing down some 43m. Land and boat safaris are equally rewarding, and for birders, the elusive shoebill is the star attraction. The park falls into the wider Murchison Falls Conservation Area, which includes Bugungu and Karuma wildlife reserves, best known for the 80 habituated chimps that call Kaniyo Pabidi Forest home. Find out more at visituganda.com.



KIBALE FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Chimpanzee tracking is the reason to head towards the town of Fort Portal, past the tea plantations and into Kibale Forest, home to abundant birdlife and 13 primate species, including red colobus monkeys, black-and-white colobus and Uganda mangabey. Chimp tracking is the highlight though; as with gorilla tracking, visitors who want more than an hour in the presence of one of man's closest relatives should consider the longer habituation experiences.



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