

AFRICA MIDDLE EAST

## Uganda a prime destination for primate-lovers

By [Dorine Reinstein](#) / January 27, 2017

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Habituation projects enable guests to spend the entire day with Uganda's chimpanzees. *Photo Credit: Shutterstock/Sam DCruz*

The Ministry of Tourism in Uganda has declared 2017 a massive year for tourism sector development in the country.

Uganda has a violent history, with political clashes and turmoil terrorizing the country for years. However, today, Uganda is once again a safe vacation destination, as a steady rise visitor numbers attests to.

Although mountain gorillas are mostly seen as the biggest draw Uganda has to offer, over the past few years chimpanzees have been sharing the spotlight. Tracking down the habituated groups of chimps is an unforgettable experience. Chimpanzees and humans share more than 98% of their genetic code, which makes them incredibly fascinating to watch as they play, feed and rest in their natural habitat. Unlike monkeys, chimps live in extended families of up to 100 individuals but move in small groups around the forest.

Travelers can opt for short three-hour chimpanzee hikes. However, a more rewarding experience is offered by participating in tourism habituation projects and spending the entire day with the primates. These projects are aimed at getting the chimpanzees used to a human presence without influencing their natural behaviors.

On a habituation tour, travelers can accompany researchers to watch the chimps wake up and come down from their nests around 5:30 a.m. The rest of the day is spent observing and photographing the chimpanzees, which can be quite a physically challenging experience as the chimps move quickly through dense rainforest terrain. Vervet monkeys, olive baboons and red colobus monkeys are also found in these woodlands, making the forest a true primate-lover's dream.

After a long and rewarding day with the chimpanzees, travelers can stay at Sky Tree House at the [Primate Lodge Kibali](#) in the heart of the rainforest. The treehouse is situated in a gigantic tree and elevated about 30 feet above the ground overlooking an elephant meadow. Expect to be visited by black and white colobus monkeys, red-tailed monkeys, blue monkeys, forest elephants and even chimpanzee at times.

For those travelers who would like to keep the adrenaline pumping after a visit to Uganda's primates, a water-rafting experience on the Nile River, one of the world's greatest and longest rivers, is just the thing. The river pulses and rages with surprising force, making a rafting experience an adventure not soon forgotten.

Another great place to stay is the **Wildwaters Lodge**, which is situated on a private island midstream on the Nile. Thick riverine forest naturally covers the island, and each of the 10 timber-floor rooms is nestled amid the forest with views of the Nile and its rapids. This lodge is the centerpiece for a conservation initiative aimed at protecting this pristine riverine environment for future generations, in part by ensuring that the local communities benefit directly from the visitors to the lodge and the protection of these beautiful, heavily forested islands in the Nile.

Although just an imaginary line on the map, a trip to the equator is an absolute must when in Uganda. Who can resist the temptation to be able to stand with one foot in the northern hemisphere and the other foot in the southern hemisphere of the world? You will find several unique little shops and markets along this popular tourist site and will be able to take home t-shirts declaring that "I have crossed the equator."

Finish your trip by getting to know the people of Uganda. The country offers a great number of authentic cultural experiences: drumming performances and lessons, village walks, medicinal plant demonstrations, handcraft workshops and shopping. There are many locally run accommodations and restaurants that offer additional opportunities to meet the locals.

The Batwa Trail, which takes place in the dense forests at the foot of the Virunga Volcanoes, is one experience that will not be easily forgotten. When Mgahinga Gorilla National Park was established, the Batwa people were suddenly evicted from the forest and forced to abandon their low-impact, nomadic lifestyle. Now landless, they work when they can for local farmers, and the only time they are permitted to re-enter their cherished forest is as tour guides on the trail, where they invite visitors to discover the magic of their old home.

During this moving tour, the Batwa demonstrate hunting techniques, gather honey, point out medicinal plants and demonstrate how to make bamboo cups. Guests are invited to the sacred Ngarama Cave, once home to the Batwa King, where the women of the community perform a sorrowful song which echoes eerily around the depths of the dark cave and leaves guests with a striking and moving sense of the richness of this fading culture.