

# Uganda

Uganda is Africa condensed, with the best of everything the continent has to offer packed into one small but stunning destination. Uganda is home to the highest mountain range in Africa, the Rwenzoris or Mountains of the Moon. It is the source of the mighty River Nile, the world's longest river, offering the best white-water rafting in the world. It has the highest concentration of primates in the world, including the majestic mountain gorillas, one of the rarest animals on earth.

On top of all this, the scenery is so striking that it looks like a watercolour, the beautiful national parks see far fewer visitors than in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania, and the capital Kampala is safer and friendlier than most in Africa. Winston Churchill called it the 'Pearl of Africa'. He was right.

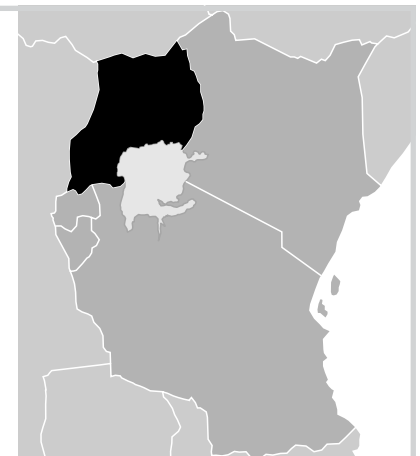
However, Idi Amin's antics and Uganda's long string of tragedies in the 1970s and '80s is etched into the Western consciousness to such an extent that some people, wrongfully, still regard the country as dangerously unstable. The reality is vastly different. Stability has returned to most parts of the country and tourists are welcomed with open arms.

Despite the trials and tribulations of the past, Ugandans have weathered the storm remarkably well. You won't meet a sullen, bitter or cowed people. Rather they are smiling and friendly, with an openness absent in other places – truly some of the finest folk in Africa.

Uganda is a captivating country with a great deal to offer, and sooner or later the mainstream masses will 'discover' its delights – make sure you get here before they do.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 236,580 sq km
- **Capital** Kampala
- **Country code** 256
- **Famous for** Idi Amin; source of the River Nile; white-water rafting
- **Languages** English, Luganda, Swahili
- **Money** Ugandan Shilling (USh);  
US\$1 = USh1807; €1 = USh2189
- **Population** 27.6 million



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bwindi Impenetrable National Park** (p523) Penetrate the Impenetrable Forest to marvel at the mountain gorillas in the wild.
- **White-water Rafting** (p495) Take on the wild waters at the source of the Nile, quite simply the best rafting in the world.
- **Murchison Falls** (p541) Check out the world's most powerful waterfall on a wildlife-watching bonanza on a boat up the Victoria Nile.
- **Kampala Nightlife** (p483) Party on with the Kampala crew, a vibrant capital brimming with bars, clubs and live music.
- **Lake Bunyoni** (p528) Chill out at the most beautiful lake in Uganda, a mythical landscape of terraced hillsides and hidden bays.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

As most of Uganda is at a fairly constant altitude, with mountains only in the extreme east (Mt Elgon), extreme west (the Rwenzori Mountains) and close to the Rwandan border, the bulk of the country enjoys the same tropical climate, with temperatures averaging about 26°C during the day and about 16°C at night. The hottest months are from December to February, when the daytime range is 27° to 29°C. It can get considerably cooler at night in the highland areas.

The rainy seasons in the south are from April to May and October to November,

### HOW MUCH?

- **Tracking mountain gorillas** US\$360
- **Meal at decent restaurant** US\$5-15
- **National park entry** US\$20
- **New Vision newspaper** US\$0.50
- **White-water rafting** US\$95

### LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** US\$1
- **Litre of bottled water** US\$0.50
- **Bell beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Plate of matoke (mashed plantains) and beans** US\$0.40

the wettest month being April. In the north the wet season is from April to October and the dry season is from November to March. During the wet seasons the average rainfall is 175mm per month. Humidity is generally low outside the wet seasons.

The best times for a visit to Uganda are January and February, and June to September, as the weather during these months is generally dry. However, travel during the wet seasons to most destinations is also possible, just a bit slower. For more details, see p622.

## HISTORY

For the story on Uganda's history in the years before independence, see p28.

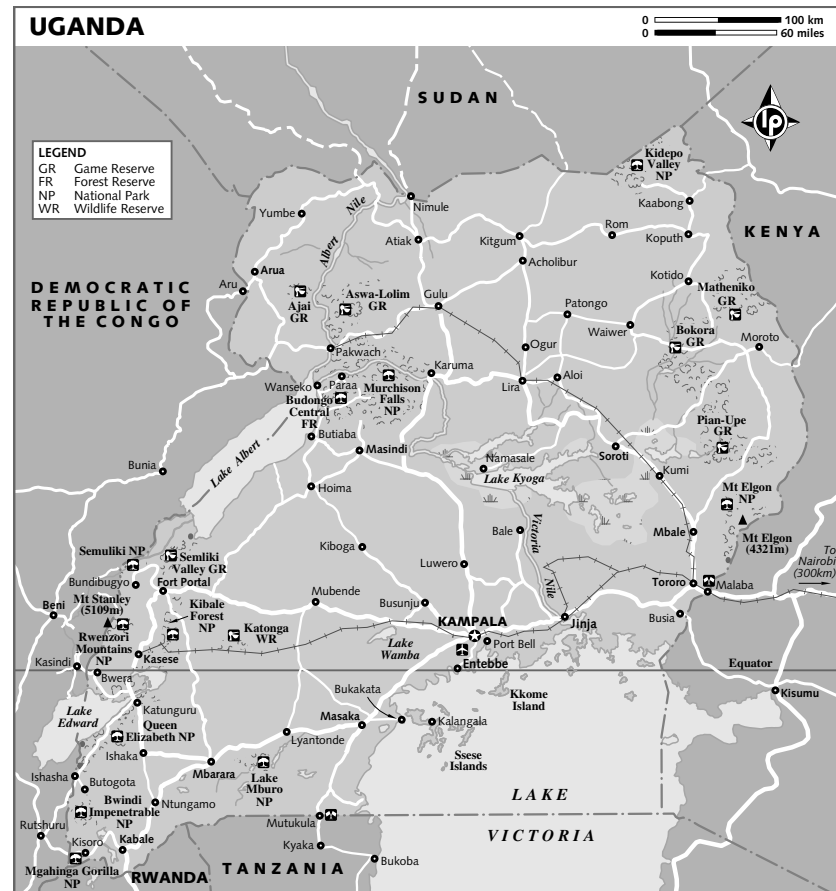
## Independence

Unlike Kenya and, to a lesser extent, Tanzania, Uganda never experienced a large influx of European colonisers and the associated expropriation of land. Instead, farmers were encouraged to grow cash crops for export through their own cooperative groups. Consequently, Ugandan nationalist organisations sprouted much later than those in neighbouring countries, and when they did, it happened along tribal lines. So exclusive were some of these that when Ugandan independence was eventually discussed, the Buganda people even considered secession.

By the mid-1950s, however, a Lango schoolteacher Dr Milton Obote managed to put together a loose coalition headed by the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), which led Uganda to independence in 1962 on the promise that the Buganda would have autonomy. The *kabaka* (king) became the new nation's president, Edward Mutesa II, and Milton Obote became Uganda's first prime minister.

It wasn't a particularly favourable time for Uganda to come to grips with independence. Civil wars were raging in neighbouring southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and Rwanda, and refugees streamed into Uganda, adding to its problems. Also, it soon became obvious that Obote had no intention of sharing power with the *kabaka*. A confrontation loomed.

Obote moved in 1966, arresting several cabinet ministers and ordering his army



chief of staff, Idi Amin, to storm the *kabaka's* palace. The raid resulted in the flight of the *kabaka* and his exile in London, where he died in 1969. Following this coup, Obote proclaimed himself president, and the Buganda monarchy was abolished, along with those of the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro and Busoga. Meanwhile, Idi Amin's star was on the rise.

## The Amin Years

Under Obote's watch, events began to spiral out of control. Obote ordered his attorney general, Godfrey Binaisa, to rewrite the constitution to consolidate virtually all powers in the presidency and then moved to nationalise foreign assets.

In 1969 a scandal broke out over US\$5 million in funds and weapons allocated to the Ministry of Defence that couldn't be accounted for. An explanation was demanded of Amin. When it wasn't forthcoming, his deputy, Colonel Okoya, and some junior officers demanded his resignation. Shortly afterwards Okoya and his wife were shot dead in their Gulu home, and rumours began to circulate about Amin's imminent arrest. It never came. Instead, when Obote left for Singapore in January 1971 to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Amin staged a coup. The British, who had probably suffered most from Obote's nationalisation program, were among the first to recognise

the new regime. Obote went into exile in Tanzania.

So began Uganda's first reign of terror. All political activities were quickly suspended and the army was empowered to shoot on sight anyone suspected of opposition to the regime. Over the next eight years an estimated 300,000 Ugandans lost their lives, often in horrific ways: bludgeoned to death with sledgehammers and iron bars, or tortured to death in prisons and police stations all over the country. Nile Mansions, next to the Conference Centre in Kampala, became particularly notorious; the screams of those who were being tortured or beaten to death there could often be heard around the clock for days on end. Prime targets of Amin's death squads were the Acholi and Lango tribes, who were decimated in waves of massacres; whole villages were wiped out. Next Amin turned on the professional classes; university professors and lecturers, doctors, cabinet ministers, lawyers, businesspeople and even military officers who might have posed a threat to Amin were dragged from their offices and shot or simply never seen again.

Also targeted was the 70,000-strong Asian community. In 1972 they were given 90 days to leave the country with virtually nothing but the clothes they wore. Amin and his cronies grabbed the billion dollar booty they were forced to leave behind, and quickly squandered it on new toys for the boys and personal excess. Amin then turned on the British, nationalising without compensation US\$500 million worth of investments in tea plantations and other industries. Again the booty was squandered.

Meanwhile the economy collapsed, industrial activity ground to a halt, hospitals and rural health clinics closed, roads cracked and became riddled with potholes, cities became garbage dumps and utilities fell apart. The prolific wildlife was machine-gunned by soldiers for meat, ivory and skins, and the tourism industry evaporated. The stream of refugees across the border became a flood.

Faced with chaos and an inflation rate that hit 1000%, Amin was forced to delegate more and more powers to the provincial governors, who became virtual warlords in their areas. Towards the end of the Amin era, the treasury was so bereft of funds that it was unable to pay the soldiers. At the same

time international condemnation of the sordid regime was strengthening daily, as news of massacres, torture and summary executions leaked out of the country.

One of the few supporters of Amin at the end of the 1970s was Colonel Gaddafi, who bailed out the Ugandan economy in the name of Islamic brotherhood – Amin had conveniently become a Muslim by this stage – and began an intensive drive to equip the Ugandan forces with sophisticated weapons.

The rot had spread too far, however, and was beyond the point where a few million dollars in Libyan largesse could help. Faced with a restless army beset with intertribal fighting, Amin looked for a diversion. He chose a war with Tanzania, ostensibly to teach that country a lesson for supporting anti-Amin dissidents. It was his last major act of insanity and in it lay his downfall.

### War with Tanzania

On 30 October 1978 the Ugandan army rolled across northwestern Tanzania virtually unopposed and annexed more than 1200 sq km of territory. Meanwhile, the air force bombed the Lake Victoria ports of Bukoba and Musoma.

Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere ordered a full-scale counterattack, but it took months to mobilise his ill-equipped and poorly trained forces. By early 1979, however, he had managed to scrape together a 50,000-strong people's militia composed mainly of illiterate youngsters from the bush. This militia joined with the many exiled Ugandan liberation groups (united only in their determination to rid Uganda of Amin). The two armies met. East Africa's supposedly best-equipped and best-trained army threw down its weapons and fled, and the Tanzanians pushed on into the heart of Uganda. Kampala fell without a fight, and by the end of April 1979 organised resistance had effectively ceased.

Idi Amin fled to Libya, where he remained until Gaddafi threw him out following a shoot-out with Libyan soldiers. Amin died in exile in Saudi Arabia in 2003.

### Post-Amin Chaos

The Tanzanian action was criticised, somewhat half-heartedly, by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), but most African

countries breathed a sigh of relief to see the madman finally brought to heel. All the same Tanzania was forced to foot the entire bill for the war, estimated at US\$500 million, a crushing blow for an already desperately poor country.

The rejoicing in Uganda was short-lived. The Tanzanian soldiers who remained in the country, supposedly to assist with reconstruction and to maintain law and order, turned on the Ugandans when their pay did not arrive. They took what they wanted from shops at gunpoint, hijacked trucks arriving from Kenya with international relief aid and slaughtered more wildlife.

Once again the country slid into chaos and gangs of armed bandits roamed the cities, killing and looting. Food supplies ran out and hospitals could no longer function. Nevertheless, thousands of exiled Ugandans began to answer the new president's call to return home and help with reconstruction.

Yusuf Lule, a modest and unambitious man, was installed as president with Nyerere's blessing, but when he began speaking out against Nyerere, he was replaced by Godfrey Binaisa, sparking riots supporting Lule in Kampala. Meanwhile, Obote bided his time in Dar es Salaam.

Binaisa quickly came under pressure to set a date for a general election and a return to civilian rule. Obote eventually returned from exile to an enthusiastic welcome in many parts of the country and swept to victory in a blatantly rigged vote. Binaisa went into exile in the USA.

It was 1981 and the honeymoon with Obote proved to be relatively short. Like Amin, Obote favoured certain tribes. Large numbers of civil servants and army and police commanders belonging to the tribes of the south were replaced with Obote supporters belonging to the tribes of the north. The State Research Bureau, a euphemism for the secret police, was re-established and the prisons began to fill once more. Obote was on course to complete the destruction that Amin had begun. More and more reports of atrocities and killings leaked out of the country. Mass graves unrelated to the Amin era were unearthed. The press was muzzled and Western journalists were expelled. It was obvious that Obote was once again attempting to achieve absolute power. Intertribal tension was on the rise, and in

mid-1985 Obote was overthrown in a coup staged by the army under the command of Tito Okello.

### The NRA Takeover

Okello was not the only opponent of Obote. Shortly after Obote became president for the second time, a guerrilla army opposed to his tribally biased government was formed in western Uganda under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni, who had lived in exile in Tanzania during Amin's reign.

A group of 27 soon swelled to a guerrilla force of about 20,000, many of them orphaned teenagers. In the early days few gave the guerrillas, known as the National Resistance Army (NRA), much of a chance. Few people outside Uganda even knew of the existence of the NRA, due to Obote's success in muzzling the press and expelling journalists.

The NRA was not a bunch of drunken thugs like the armies of both Amin and Obote had been. New recruits were indoctrinated in the bush by political commissars and taught that they had to be the servants of the people, not their oppressors. Discipline was tough. Anyone who got badly out of line was executed. Museveni was determined that the army would never again disgrace Uganda. Also, a central thrust of the NRA was to win the hearts and minds of the people, who learnt to identify totally with the persecuted Bugandans in the infamous Luwero Triangle.

By the time Obote was ousted and Okello had taken over, the NRA controlled a large slice of western Uganda and was a power to be reckoned with. Museveni wanted a clean sweep of the administration, the army and the police. He wanted corruption stamped out and those who had been involved in atrocities during the Amin and Obote regimes brought to trial. These demands were, of course, anathema to Okello, who was up to his neck in corruption and responsible for many atrocities.

The fighting continued in earnest, and by late January 1986 it was obvious that Okello's days were numbered. The surrender of 1600 government soldiers holed up in their barracks in the southern town of Mbarara, which was controlled by the NRA, brought the NRA to the outskirts of Kampala itself. With the morale of the government troops at a low ebb, the NRA launched an

all-out offensive to take the capital. Okello's troops fled, almost without a fight, though not before looting whatever remained and carting it away in commandeered buses. It was a typical parting gesture, as was the gratuitous shooting-up of many Kampala high-rise offices.

During the following weeks Okello's rabble were pursued and finally pushed north over the border into Sudan. The civil war was over, apart from a few mopping-up operations in the extreme north. The long nightmare was finally over.

### Rebuilding

Despite Museveni's Marxist leanings dating back to his political science studies in Dar es Salaam in the early 1970s, he has proved to be a pragmatist since taking control. Despite the radical stand of many of his officers on certain issues, he appointed several arch-conservatives to his cabinet and made an effort to reassure the country's influential Catholic community.

In the late 1980s peace agreements were negotiated with most of the guerrilla factions who had fought for Okello or Obote and were still active in the north and north-east. Under an amnesty offered to the rebels, as many as 40,000 had surrendered by 1988, and many were given jobs in the NRA. In the northwest of the country, almost 300,000 Ugandans returned home from Sudan.

With peace came optimism – services were restored, factories that had lain idle for years were again productive, agriculture was back online, the main roads were resurfaced, and the national parks' infrastructure was restored and revitalised. On the political front, all political parties were banned.

There was, however, still one thorn in Museveni's side: the refugee problem from neighbouring Rwanda. Western Uganda was saddled with some 250,000 refugees who had fled Rwanda's intermittent tribal conflicts, and feeding and housing them was a severe drain on Ugandan resources. On several occasions Museveni tried hard to persuade Rwanda's President Habyarimana to set up a repatriation scheme, but to no avail. It seems Museveni's patience finally snapped, and in late 1990 Rwanda was invaded by a 5000-strong guerrilla force from western Uganda, which included NRA units and weaponry.

Evidence supports the contention that Museveni knew of preparations for the invasion, though he denies it. In any event, the rebels were thrown back across the border by the Rwandan army, assisted by troops from Belgium, France and DR Congo, and the ensuing witch-hunt of Tutsi inside Rwanda added to the number of refugees inside western Uganda. But the rebels were back in force shortly afterwards and by early 1993 were in control of around one-third of Rwanda, and finally came to power following the blood bath of 1994.

### The 1990s

The stability and rebuilding that came with President Museveni's coming to power in 1986 were followed in the 1990s with economic prosperity and unprecedented growth. For much of the decade Uganda was the fastest-growing economy in Africa, becoming a favourite among investors.

One of the keys to the success of the last few years was the bold decision to invite back the Asians who had been so unceremoniously evicted under Amin. As in Kenya, the Asians had a virtual monopoly on business and commerce. Without these people the economy was going nowhere fast, and it was clear to Museveni that Uganda needed them. Not surprisingly, they were very hesitant about returning, but assurances were given and kept, and property was and is still being given back to returned Asians or their descendants.

In 1993 a new draft constitution was adopted by the National Resistance Council (NRC). One surprising recommendation in the draft was that the country should adopt a system of 'no-party' politics for at least another five years, basically extending Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) mandate for that period. However, given the potential for intertribal rivalry within a pluralist system, as history had shown, it was a sensible policy. Under the draft constitution, a Constituent Assembly was formed, and in 1994 elections for the assembly showed overwhelming support for the government.

Also in 1993 the Bugandan monarchy was restored, but with no political power. This gave rise to concern among the Buganda that the existence of their tribal kingdom in the future would be threatened. In protest against the NRM government, they joined

### THE MOVEMENT FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

On 17 March 2000 the small village of Kanunga near Rukungiri hit the headlines in what appeared to be the most serious case of mass suicide since Jonestown, when a church burned to the ground packed full of followers of the Movement for the Restoration of the 10 Commandments of God. However, as police probed deeper, it became apparent that this was no mass suicide, but mass murder. Mass graves were turned up at cult sites throughout the southwest, and a Ugandan Human Rights Commission report released in 2002 put the final death toll at around 800, including at least 340 killed in the church fire.

The movement was founded by former prostitute Cletonia Mwerinde in 1994; she and her lover Joseph Kibwetere built up a popular cult that demanded followers give up their earthly possessions and await the end of the world on 31 December 1999. Just as the 'millennium' bug came to nothing, so the cult's prediction never happened, and many followers became sceptical, demanding the return of property and money.

Former followers of the cult who fled before the fire believed Mwerinde killed Kibwetere in 1999, fearing he had AIDS. She went one step further in 2000, systematically ordering the mass killing of cult followers in subdistricts before unleashing the final apocalypse at a small church in Kanunga. Investigators believe Mwerinde perished in the fire, taking her cult with her into the history books.

Something about the Ten Commandments seems to inspire particularly deranged fervour in remote Uganda; Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have been battling for a government based on the Ten Commandments since 1986. Believing they are immune to bullets, kidnapping young children as fighters and sex slaves, and mutilating victims suggests that their grip on theology is tenuous to say the least.

forces with the two main opposition groupings, former president Obote's UPC and the Democratic Party (DP), led by Foreign Affairs minister Dr Paulo Ssemogerere. In 1994 the Constituent Assembly voted to limit the *kabaka's* role to a purely ceremonial and traditional one.

Democratic 'no-party' elections were called for May 1996. Despite strong opposition from supporters of political parties, the elections went ahead. The main candidates were Museveni and Ssemogerere, who had resigned as foreign minister in order to campaign. For all intents, it was still a party-political election, between Museveni's NRM (officially a 'movement' and not a political party), and Ssemogerere, being supported by the former DP in alliance with the immensely unpopular (among the Buganda) UPC. Museveni won a resounding victory, capturing almost 75% of the vote. The only area where Ssemogerere had any real support was in the anti-NRM north.

Museveni's election carried with it great hope for the future, as many believed Uganda's success story could only continue with a genuine endorsement at the ballot box. However, Museveni's period as a democratically elected leader has been far less com-

fortable than his leadership period prior to the elections. The reasons for this are related to events both within Uganda and beyond its borders, in the civil wars of its neighbours. At home, one corruption scandal after another has blighted the administration, and while Museveni has maintained a clean pair of hands, some big heads have rolled. Abroad, Uganda found itself mired in Africa's first great war to control the destiny of the DR Congo and managed to fall out with its long time ally, Rwanda. Despite these concerns, Museveni remained popular for the stability he brought to the lives of average Ugandans and he was re-elected head of state in 2001.

### Uganda Today

The debate about the formation of political parties has dominated the agenda in the current parliament. Museveni recently shifted his position on a return to multi-party politics, and in July 2005 a referendum was held that overwhelmingly endorsed democracy. The fact that voter turnout was tiny seemed to suggest no-one was really that interested in the issue.

An issue they definitely were interested in was Museveni's move to scrap constitutional

limits on presidential terms. Museveni himself put in place the two-term limit and promptly changed his mind as the end of his tenure drew closer. MPs were bullied and bribed into voting for the change, and the way is now open for Museveni to run again in 2006. However, this has not gone down well with donors, old friends and regional leaders. Museveni's international stock is falling faster than a dot.com crash right now, as Laura Bush and Cherie Blair snubbed him on an HIV/AIDS awareness visit to the region, Bob Geldof called for him to go and fellow East African politicians voiced their concerns about his ambitions. The latter is particularly worrying for Museveni, as traditionally African leaders are cagey about criticising each other and this could have implications for moves towards an integrated East African Community. In Uganda some people are worried he is setting himself to be president for life and draw unflattering comparisons with Robert Mugabe. But maybe everyone is underestimating President Museveni, who has, after all, pulled off many surprises in the past. Inviting the Asians back was a bold move that kickstarted the Ugandan economy – perhaps he has one more trick up his sleeve?

The other dominant domestic concern has been the ongoing war against insurgents within the country. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been fighting a war in northern Uganda for two decades now and the mindless violence shows few signs of coming to an end despite peace efforts. The LRA was supported by the Sudanese government in Khartoum until 2002, while Uganda for its part supported southern Sudanese rebels fighting against the Islamic north. The peace agreement between Sudan and Uganda was meant to end the wars, which it largely has in southern Sudan, but in northern Uganda the LRA stepped up attacks, killing villagers and brutalising children. The LRA's original aim was to establish a state based on the 10 Commandments, but given they have broken every commandment in the book, they seemed to have lost touch with their goal a long time ago. They are one of the most vicious insurgent movements on the planet, kidnapping children to use as soldiers and sex slaves, slicing off lips, noses and ears to subdue the population, and generally laying waste to vast tracts of

the north. Museveni has continually staked his reputation on ending the war through any means necessary, but this has proven beyond his reach. Peace talks have been on and off again, but peace and the LRA seem a contradiction in terms.

It is not only the LRA that has destabilised Uganda's drive for development. The threat of the Interahamwe, the remnants of the Rwandan Hutu militia responsible for the 1994 genocide (see p567 for more information), has remained very real, and exploded onto world headlines in 1999 when eight tourists were murdered in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Uganda and Rwanda invaded DR Congo in 1996 and helped Laurent Kabila drive then President Mobutu from power. Kabila soon failed to deliver on his part of the deal, which was to shore up security in Eastern Congo, and Rwanda and Uganda launched a second war to remove him from power. This turned into Africa's first cross-continental war, as neighbours piled in to pick off the country's unrivalled natural resources. Old friends Rwanda and Uganda soon became enemies and backed rival factions in the bloody civil war. Both countries were accused of shamelessly plundering DR Congo's mineral wealth and their international reputations took a tumble. Uganda finally pulled its troops out in 2002, but has yet to rebuild its former friendship with Rwanda.

Uganda is a country with much promise, but there are a number of tricky hurdles for it to overcome before it can fulfil its true potential. Firstly it needs to address the rampant corruption that continues to plague government, as this is rattling confidence among donors and the electorate, as well as choking development as earmarked funds disappear into deep pockets.

Secondly, when pluralism does return to Uganda, it is to be hoped that a new generation of politicians brought up on the no-party system will form their parties based on policy not pedigree, although the sad truth is that lines are already being drawn among tribes once again.

But real political stability is only possible if the government can bring the war with the LRA to an end within its own borders, and avoid costly and unnecessary involvement in events beyond its borders. Peace will bring the biggest dividend of all – further

development, and not just development for Kampala and the elite, but a genuine development in fields such as education and healthcare that takes the whole country forward together.

## THE CULTURE The National Psyche

Despite the years of terror and bloodshed, Ugandans are a remarkably positive and spirited people, and no-one comes away from the country without a measure of admiration and affection for the people. Education levels have traditionally been high by African standards and most Ugandans are keen debaters, discussing politics and personality in equal measure. They are opinionated and eloquent during disagreements, yet unfailingly polite and engagingly warm. The national personality, if a country can be said to have one, is in stark contrast to the brutality and bloodshed of the past.

Idi Amin, 'Big Daddy', the Last King of Scotland – call him what you will – casts a long shadow over Uganda both at home and abroad. Mention Uganda to the average person in the west and it's still sadly Idi Amin that is namechecked first. His character has become the country's caricature, although for the majority of Ugandans it is a past they would rather forget. But the tendency to favour one tribe above another was not confined to his rule and many leaders contributed to Uganda's descent into darkness. It only ended with Museveni's accession to power in 1986, when party politics were banned. A successful formula for almost two decades, it remains to be seen what the future holds now that the country has embraced full democracy once more.

The 'Big Man' school of African politics is better known to Ugandans than most, having experienced the ultimate big man in the giant shape of Idi Amin. However, there are fears in some quarters that President Museveni is venturing down that road. In July 2005 the constitution was amended to allow unlimited presidential terms and it looks like Museveni will run again in 2006. Uganda waits with baited breath, but many of the population still supports Museveni for the progress he has brought to the country and the lack of any obvious alternative.

Despite the evident progress in Uganda, it remains a country divided. Kampala and

the south have experienced peace and prosperity for two decades, but Gulu and points north have been mired in an intractable cycle of violence as the government fights against the brutal insurgency of the LRA. This has destroyed thousands of lives and livelihoods, and is holding back development throughout the country. Kampala may have found peace, but Uganda has not, and the tribal partisan politics of the past cannot be laid to rest until the north and south experience peace and prosperity together.

## Daily Life

Ugandans are a very polite and friendly people, and will often greet strangers on public transport or in rural areas. This is not just a simple 'hello' but also 'How are you?' or 'How is your family?', and the interest is genuine. Hence, in social situations it is always best to ask after the wellbeing of whomever you are introduced to, rather than just a simple hello.

Life in Uganda has been one long series of upheavals for the older generations, while the younger generations have benefited from the newfound stability. Society has changed completely in urban areas in the past couple of decades, but in the countryside it is often business as usual. Until recently polygamy was common, even among non-Muslim Ugandans, but with the relative emancipation of women in the last decade, few in urban areas would now tolerate it.

This may be in no small part due to the impact of HIV/AIDS on sexual patterns in Uganda. One of the first countries to be struck by an HIV/AIDS outbreak of epidemic proportions, Uganda acted swiftly in promoting AIDS awareness nationwide and safe sex in society. This was very effective in radically reducing infection rates throughout the country, and Uganda went from experiencing an infection rate of around 25% in the late 1980s to an infection rate of as low as 6% today. However, there seems to be a change in the air today, with abstinence taking precedence over protection and young people being encouraged to wait until they are married. All good and well in principle, but teenagers will be teenagers and anything that dilutes the message of safe sex is dabbling with danger.

And all this ties into religion. Uganda is a spiritual society, and Catholicism and

Protestantism have always been popular among the population. However, evangelical Christianity has been making inroads in recent years and many of the groups have their roots in the US, where the Christian right has flourished under the Bush presidency. Abstinence is in, abortion out and in President Museveni's wife Janet, Bush may have found a fellow traveller.

Education has been a real priority in Uganda and President Museveni has been keen to promote free primary education for all. It's a noble goal, but Uganda may lack the resources to realise it. Sure, more pupils are attending class, but often the classes are hopelessly overcrowded in the countryside and many teachers lack experience.

Beyond the upwardly mobile urban areas, agriculture remains the single most important component of the Ugandan economy. It accounts for 70% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and employs 90% of the workforce. Coffee, sugar, cotton and tea are the main export crops. Crops grown for local consumption include maize, millet, cassava, sweet potato, beans and cereals.

## Population

Uganda's estimated population of 27.6 million people is increasing at the rapid rate of close to 2.5% per annum. It is made up of a complex and diverse range of tribes. Lake Kyoga forms the northern boundary for the Bantu-speaking peoples, who dominate much of East, central and southern Africa and, in Uganda, include the Buganda (17%) and several other tribes, like the Bugosa (8%) and Bagisu. In the north are the Lango (near Lake Kyoga) and the Acholi (towards the Sudanese border), who speak Nilotic languages. To the east are the Iteso (8%) and Karamojong, who are related to the Maasai and who also speak Nilotic languages. Small numbers of pygmies live in the forests of the west.

There is a sizeable community of Asians in Uganda, who first settled here generations ago during the days of the British Empire. Expelled by Idi Amin in 1971, President Museveni invited them to return and reclaim their property, and this has driven the Ugandan economy forward.

## SPORT

The most popular sport in Uganda, as in most of Africa, is football (soccer) and it is

possible to watch occasional international games at the Nelson Mandela Stadium on the outskirts of Kampala on the road to Jinja. There is also a domestic league, with matches held most weekends at the smaller Nakivubo Stadium opposite the New Taxi Park in the centre of Kampala.

Boxing is very popular in Uganda, and Kassim Ouma is the current IBF light middle-weight champion. His is an amazing story of rags to riches, as he was once a child soldier forced to fight for the LRA. Nicknamed 'The Dream', he now lives in the US. Other famous boxers from the past include John 'The Beast' Mugabi and one Idi Amin.

Long distance running has never been as big as in Kenya and Ethiopia, but that may all be set to change with the success of Docus Inzikuru in the 3000m steeplechase at the 2005 World Championships. Inzi struck gold and the nation went wild, suggesting more youngsters will take up running in the coming years.

## RELIGION

While about two-thirds of the population is Christian, a large number of rural people still practise animism (a belief in the spirits of the natural world), and there's a small percentage who follow Islam. There were large numbers of Sikhs and Hindus in the country until Asians were expelled in 1972, and many have returned following the presidential invitation.

## ARTS Cinema

A Hollywood film crew was in town during our last visit to shoot a big screen version of *The Last King of Scotland* (see Literature, below). Starring Forrest Whitaker as the 'Big Daddy', this should help to put Uganda on the movie-making map, as all the locations are right here in the 'pearl of Africa'.

## Literature

*The Last King of Scotland* by Giles Foden (1998) is a must for every visitor planning a trip to Uganda. This bestseller chronicles the experience of Idi Amin's personal doctor, as he slowly finds himself becoming confidant to the dictator. It is based on a true story and affords the reader a number of quirky insights into life in Uganda under Idi Amin.

*The Abyssinian Chronicles* by Moses Isegawa (2001) tells the story of a young Ugandan coming of age during the turbulent years of Idi Amin and the civil war. It offers some fascinating insights into life in Uganda and the transition from a rural existence to life in the city. More than a touch autobiographical, the main character, like the author, ends up living in the Netherlands. More recently, another of his works, *Snakepit*, has been translated from Dutch to English, a piece of political intrigue telling the fictional story of the extreme ups and downs of a high-flying civil servant during the Amin years.

## Music & Dance

Uganda has a lively music scene, and travelling around by bus you will soon be familiar with all the latest local sounds. Chameleon is one of the most popular local artists, combining rap and traditional chanting in a cutting-edge combination. Several Ugandan artists have made a name for themselves on the international scene, including Geoffrey Oryema, based in Paris, who sings in English and his native language Acholi. His influences include tribal and traditional, as well as Western pop, making for an eclectic mix. For more on music in Ugandan, check out [www.musicuganda.com](http://www.musicuganda.com).

Kampala is the best place to experience live music and several local bands play at nightclubs each weekend. Best of all is the jam session at the National Theatre every Monday – see p483 for more details

The most famous dancers in the country are the Ndere Troupe. Made up from a kaleidoscope of tribes in Uganda, they perform traditional dances from every region of the country. For more on where to catch a performance of the Ndere Troup, see p484.

## ENVIRONMENT The Land

Uganda is a blizzard of greens, a lush landscape of rolling hills blanketed with fertile fields. Uganda has an area of 236,580 sq km, small by African standards, but a similar area to Britain. Lake Victoria and the Victoria Nile River, which flows through much of the country, combine to create one of the most fecund areas in Africa. The highest peak is Mt Stanley (5109m) in the Rwenzori Mountains on the border with DR Congo.

The land varies from semidesert in the northeast to the lush and fertile shores of Lake Victoria, hemmed in by the Rwenzori Mountains in the west and the beautiful, mountainous southwest.

The tropical heat is tempered by the altitude, which averages more than 1000m in much of the country.

## Wildlife

Uganda is home to more than half the world's mountain gorilla population, and viewing them in their natural environment is one of the main attractions for visitors to this country. For more information on these gentle creatures, their habitat, where to consider tracking them, and the dos and don'ts once there, see p97. Uganda is also a hotspot for other primates and has some of the cheapest chimp viewing on the continent, as well as huge troops of colobus monkeys.

Uganda is a fantastic country for bird life, with more than 1000 species recorded. It is one of the best bird-watching destinations in Africa (if not the world), and it is quite possible to see several hundred species during a two-week visit; with a keen eye, some binoculars and a field guide, of course. For bird-watchers coming to Uganda, the shoe-bill stork is one of the most sought-after birds, but there are many other rare and interesting species to be seen throughout the country.

## National Parks & Reserves

Uganda has an excellent collection of national parks and reserves. While they may not be bursting with wildlife like in Kenya or Tanzania, they are also not bursting with visitors, which makes them an altogether more relaxing place to be. They also offer quite different experiences to those in neighbouring countries: viewing the mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, the chimps in Kibale Forest National Park or Budongo Central Forest Reserve, and the Nile's Murchison Falls are all highlights not to be missed. Uganda's community reserves are protected areas run by and for the benefit of local communities, a form of community-based ecotourism. Wildlife numbers may have declined dramatically during the years of turmoil, but the parks are in good shape and animal numbers are on the rise (see p543).

### STALKING THE SHOEBILL

For anyone with a keen interest in birds, there is no more important bird to see in Uganda than the unique shoebill stork. Also known as the whale-head stork, this peculiar-looking bird has a gigantic, broad bill that aids it in catching prey in the water. Its favoured diet is the lungfish, but it also eats amphibians and small reptiles, including baby crocodiles (assuming mum and dad aren't around!) and snakes. Shoebills are not all that common in Uganda. However, if you visit an area where they're found, there is a good chance of a sighting, as they hunt by waiting motionless around papyrus swamps and marshes.

The best places to see the shoebill stork in Uganda include: the Nabajuzzi swamp just out of Masaka on the way to Mbarara; the banks of the Victoria Nile River in Murchison Falls National Park; the shores of Lake Albert in Semliki Valley Game Reserve; and around Lake Kikorongo in Queen Elizabeth National Park. Should all else fail, try the Ugandan Wildlife Education Centre in Entebbe for a guaranteed sighting.

While the low number of visitors is a great bonus, it's also a disadvantage that the infrastructure of the parks is less developed than elsewhere in the region – the luxury lodges and tented camps common in the parks of Kenya and Tanzania are few and far between here. Also, the organised safari options, especially for budget travellers, are much more limited. Despite this many of the parks are relatively easy to visit, and the rewards are ample for those who make the effort.

**Uganda Wildlife Authority** (Map p471; UWA; ☎ 041-346287; www.uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), with its headquarters based near the Uganda Museum in Kampala, administers the national parks. It covers all of Uganda's protected areas. This is the place to make bookings to see the gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks. In addition to information on the gorillas, the office also has useful free leaflets on each of the national parks.

The UWA has its own version of the general guidelines listed on p75, these should

be observed by all visitors to the country's national parks:

- Do not camp or make campfires, except at official sites.
- Do not drive off the tracks.
- Do not disturb wildlife by sounding the car horn.
- Do not drive in the parks between 7.15pm and 6.30am.
- Do not bring dogs or other pets into the parks.
- Do not discard litter, burning cigarette ends or matches.
- Do not bring firearms or ammunition into the parks.
- Do not pick flowers or cut or destroy any vegetation.
- Do not exceed the parks' speed limit of 40km/h.

Uganda's park entry fees are fairly reasonable compared with those of its bigger neighbours. However, it is the hidden extras that quickly add up and make visiting the national parks an expensive experience. See the boxed text (opposite) for fees that apply to all national parks; for more details on specific costs in individual national parks, including for climbing and trekking, see the relevant sections in this chapter. All prices are lower for Ugandan residents and much lower again for Ugandan citizens.

Entry fees are reasonable and decrease by the day; a stay of a week or more costs as little as US\$50. For vehicles, a one-off entry payment is required. Transport hire within the parks is US\$2500 per kilometre for 4WDs. In the larger parks, rangers are available for wildlife drives and the charge is US\$5 per vehicle for a half-day trip and US\$10 for a full day.

Also available are launch trips to Murchison Falls (US\$15) and along the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park (US\$10).

### ACCESS

Access is the big headache when it comes to visiting many of Uganda's protected areas. In order to visit many of the larger parks, it really helps to have your own vehicle, both for entry into the park and then exploring the park once inside. Even the smaller parks are not always easy to reach, as transport to these remote, sparsely inhabited areas is

### NATIONAL PARK FEES

Park	Per day (US\$)	Per two days (US\$)	Per three or more days (US\$)
Bwindi Impenetrable	20	30	50
Kibale Forest	20	30	50
Kidepo Valley	20	30	50
Lake Mburo	15	25	30
Mgahinga Gorilla	20	30	50
Mt Elgon	15	25	30
Murchison Falls	20	30	50
Queen Elizabeth	20	30	50
Rwenzori Mountains	20	30	50
Semuliki	15	25	30

Vehicle	Foreign-registered (US\$)	Ugandan-registered (US\$)
motorcycle	15	5
car	20	6
minibus	50	15
4WD & pick-up	40	15
tour-company vehicle	100	10
bus & truck	200	100

Entry fees are per person and include overnight and until 6pm the following day. ISIC card holders receive a 25% discount. Group discounts are offered for 10 or more people. For details of fees for reserves, see the relevant sections in this chapter.

irregular to say the least. However, a number of the parks are simple to get to without your own transport and are easily manageable on foot once there, including Kibale Forest, Mgahinga Gorilla and Mt Elgon National Parks. Murchison Falls National Park is also now much easier to reach, as there are budget safaris available through the hostels in Kampala. Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo National Parks are hard to travel to and explore without transport, although with patience or good timing it can be done. Kidepo Valley and Bwindi Impenetrable National Parks are also tough to reach without transport, but once you're there, exploration is straightforward – Bwindi due to its size, and Kidepo Valley because much of the wildlife is concentrated around the Apoka headquarters.

In the long term it is to be hoped that the UWA wakes up to the fact that it is losing revenue by not providing transport between park headquarters and nearby towns. It would not be that difficult to operate a daily shuttle between places like Masindi and Paraa (for Murchison Falls) and Katunguru and Mweya (for Queen Elizabeth).

### Environmental Issues

With its relatively low population density and scarcity of wildlife, the latter courtesy of the decimation that occurred during the bad old days, Uganda lacks many of the environmental pressures faced by others in the region. The absence of any notable numbers of tourists in the last 20 years means that the national parks and wilderness areas are generally in good shape, and conditions are ideal for the native wildlife to re-establish itself.

Uganda is therefore ideally placed to ensure that the environment remains in good condition. Programs are already in place for the responsible management of the national parks and reserves and community tourism projects around the country are bringing the local population onboard.

One of the main environmental issues in Uganda centres on electricity supply, and on construction of the dams required to fulfil demand. The most contentious of them all is the proposed Bujagali Falls Dam, which will wipe out many of the rapids that makes Uganda one of the world's leading white-water rafting destinations.

## FOOD & DRINK

Local food is much the same as elsewhere in the region, except that in Uganda *ugali* (food staple made from maize or cassava flour) is called *posho*, and is far less popular than *matooke* (mashed plantains). Beyond cosmopolitan Kampala, you'll only have the choice of cheap local food, or more expensive Western food from the upmarket hotels and lodges. Indian food is pretty common throughout Uganda, but other international cuisines are only really found in the capital.

Most local dishes are meat-based, so vegetarians will have little else other than *posho*, *matooke* and the occasional Indian dish to choose from. For more info on local cuisine, see p41.

Soft drinks (sodas) are everywhere, the most popular being the international giants, plus regional favourites, Krest (lemon soda) and Stony (ginger beer). Like all East Africans, Ugandans love their beer, and, mercifully, they don't have a fetish for drinking the stuff warm – if a town has electricity you can be sure it will have a fridge, and this will have beer in it!

Uganda Breweries and Nile Breweries are the two local companies, and they produce some drinkable lagers. Bell is a light beer renowned for its 'Great night, good morning' advertising campaign. Nile Special, with an alcohol content of 5.6%, is substantially stronger. For the brave (or stupid), there is also Chairman's ESB, a potent brew with an alcohol content of 7.2%. You'll also find locally brewed South African Castle beer and Tusker Malt, plus local brews Pilsner and Club. Bottled beer costs USh1500 to USh2500 a bottle, depending on where you're drinking.

*Waragi* is the local millet-based alcohol and is relatively safe, although it can knock you around and give you a horrible hangover. It is a little like gin and goes down well with a splash of tonic. In its undistilled form, it is known as *kasezi bong* and would probably send you blind if you drank enough of it.

Imported wines are quite expensive and not that common beyond Kampala or the top-end accommodation options in national parks and towns around the country. Imported spirits are relatively cheaper, although, like wine, availability is somewhat restricted.

# KAMPALA

☎ 041 / pop 1.2 million

Kampala is a dynamic and engaging city, the centre of political intrigue, commercial activity and intellectual excellence in Uganda. Today's forward-looking capital is vastly different from the battered city to which it was reduced to in the 1980s. In the period since Museveni's victory, Kampala has been transformed from a looted shell to a thriving, modern place befitting the capital of the pearl of Africa – the infrastructure is rehabilitated, mobile phones are *de rigueur*, and the shops and markets are once again well stocked.

Modern buildings have sprung up all over the city and old, dilapidated ones are steadily being renovated. And it is not only the buildings that are in better shape; there is a confidence about Kampala residents today that is infectious, and the nightlife in the city is something to savour. Kampala has some excellent international restaurants, including some of the best Indian eateries on the African continent.

One of the best aspects about Kampala, though, is that it's pretty safe to walk around during the day in virtually any part of the capital. The city is green and verdant, and the people are very friendly, all adding up to a great place to spend some time.

The worst thing about Kampala is the traffic. Near gridlock descends on the city during rush hour and it can take more than an hour to break out. The valleys fill up with the belching fumes of the minibuses and some days you can chew the air.

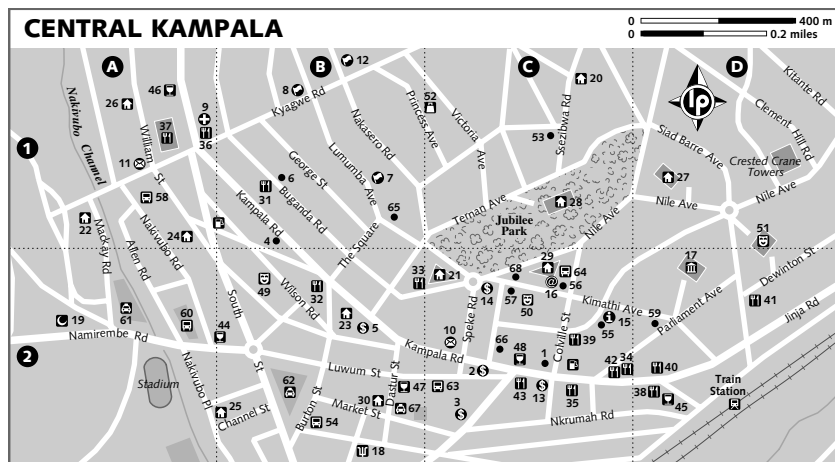
## HISTORY

The capital suffered a great deal during the years of civil strife following Idi Amin's defeat at the hands of the Tanzanian army in 1979. The turmoil only ended with the victory of Yoweri Museveni's NRA in early 1986.

Unless you've had previous experience of upheavals like these, it's hard to believe the amount of gratuitous destruction and looting that went on: office blocks and government offices had the bulk of their windows shattered; the buildings were riddled with bullets; plumbing, electrical fittings and telephone receivers were ripped from walls; buses were shot up and abandoned; and shops were looted of everything.

<b>1</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>	31 E1 Anisoc... (see 4)	<b>B</b>	31 E1 Krua Thai...	<b>31</b>	E1
		32 E1 British Embassy		32 E1 La Fontaine		
		33 F4 DK Congo Embassy		33 F4 Le Chateau		
		34 F2 Ethiopian Embassy		34 F2 Luisoni Supermarket		
		35 D2 Garden City Complex		35 D2 Mamba Point		
		36 D3 Kampala City Centre		36 D3 Pavement (Tandoori)		
		37 D1 Kampala High Commission		37 D1 Shoprite (see 29)		
		38 E1 Let's Go Travel		<b>DRINKING</b>		
		39 F2 Rwandan Embassy		37 E1 Bubbles O'Leary's		
		40 F2 Surgery		38 E1 Just Kickin'		
		41 F2 Tanzanian High Commission		<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>		
		42 D2 Uganda Wildlife Authority		39 F2 Ange Noir		
		43 E3 US Embassy		40 F2 Cineplex		
		44 C3 Volcanoes Safaris		41 F2 Club Obligato		
				42 D2 Club Silk		
		<b>2</b>		<b>SHOPPING</b>		
				11 Adventure Centre		
				14 C3 Buganda Parliament		
				15 E2 Golf Club		
				16 C4 Kabaka's Palace		
				17 F4 Kibuli Mosque		
				18 C3 Namirembe Cathedral		
				19 C3 National Mosque		
				20 B4 Rubaga Cathedral		
				21 D3 Shree Swaminarayan Mandir		
				22 E1 Uganda Museum		
				23 C3 Uganda Safari Company		
				24 C4 Ugandan National Court		
				<b>3</b>		
				25 B4 Backpackers Hostel		
				26 F4 Nim Pamba Court House		
				27 C3 Regency Kampala Hotel		
				28 C3 Banana Boat		
				29 E1 Croccodile		
				30 E1 Fez Brasserie		
				31 E1 Khana Khazana		
				32 E1 Krua Thai...		
				33 F4 La Fontaine		
				34 F2 Luisoni Supermarket		
				35 D2 Mamba Point		
				36 D3 Pavement (Tandoori)		
				37 D1 Shoprite (see 29)		
				38 E1 Bubbles O'Leary's		
				39 F2 Ange Noir		
				40 F2 Cineplex		
				41 F2 Club Obligato		
				42 D2 Club Silk		
				43 E3 Namirembe Cathedral		
				44 C3 National Mosque		
				45 B4 Rubaga Cathedral		
				46 D3 Shree Swaminarayan Mandir		
				47 E1 Uganda Museum		
				48 C3 Uganda Safari Company		
				49 C4 Ugandan National Court		
				50 B4 Backpackers Hostel		
				51 F4 Nim Pamba Court House		
				52 C3 Regency Kampala Hotel		
				53 B4 Banana Boat		
				54 E1 Croccodile		
				55 E1 Fez Brasserie		
				56 E1 Khana Khazana		





## ORIENTATION

Like Rome, Kampala is built on seven hills, although that is where the comparisons begin and end. Most visitors spend their time on just one of the hills – Nakasero, in the city centre. The top half of this hill is a type of garden city, with wide, quiet avenues lined with flowering trees, and large, detached houses behind imposing fences and hedges. Here you'll find many of the embassies, international aid organisations, top-end hotels, the high court and government buildings.

Between Nakasero and the lower part of the city is Kampala's main thoroughfare – Kampala Rd (which turns into Jinja Rd to the east and Bombo Rd to the west). On this road are the main banks, the main post office, lots of shops, and a few hotels and restaurants.

Below Kampala Rd, towards the bottom of the valley, are heaps of shops and small businesses, budget hotels, the market, Hindu temples, and the bus station and taxi parks. It's a completely different world to that on the upper side of Kampala Rd. Here there are congested streets thronging with people, battered old minibuses, impromptu street markets and pavement stalls. There are hawkers, newspaper sellers, hustlers, and one of the most mind-boggling and seemingly chaotic taxi parks you're ever likely to see.

To the east, across the golf course, is Kololo, a fairly exclusive residential area, and the popular Cooper Rd area with its restaurants and bars. To the west is Namirembe, on

top of which stands the Anglican cathedral, and nearby is the Backpackers Hostel.

South of the city centre, across the train tracks, lie Kabalagala and Tank Hill, where there are some midrange hotels, good restaurants and some of the city's wildest bars.

The biggest orientation obstacle is the frequency with which street names seem to change. Several streets in the city centre have at least two names depending on which sign you are looking at.

## Maps

The best available map of Kampala is Macmillan's *Kampala Tourist Map* (1:8500). It's not exactly bang up to date, but covers the whole city. Also useful for those just passing through is Macmillan's *Uganda Traveller's Map* (1:1,350,000), which covers the entire country and includes a useful Kampala street map inset. Both are available in bookshops in Kampala and cost about US\$8000.

## INFORMATION Bookshops

For English-language publications **Aristoc** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) is the best place in Kampala. Its shelves are filled to capacity with books and maps on Uganda, East Africa and beyond, plus novels and educational texts. Prices are pretty reasonable for imported books, so stock up here for reading material before a long road trip. There is also a second branch in the Garden City Complex.

## INFORMATION

Aristoc.....	1	C2
Barclays Bank.....	2	C2
Belgian Embassy.....	(see 65)	
Centenary Rural Development Bank.....	3	C2
Colour Chrome.....	4	B1
Crane Bank.....	5	B2
Daisy's Arcade.....	6	B1
Danish Embassy.....	7	B1
Express Uganda.....	(see 28)	
French Embassy.....	8	B1
International Medical Centre.....	9	A1
Main Post Office.....	10	C2
Nakivubo Post Office.....	11	A1
South African High Commission.....	12	B1
Speedwing Travel Bureau.....	(see 57)	
Stanbic Bank.....	13	C2
Standard Chartered Bank.....	14	C2
Uganda Tourist Board.....	15	C2
Uganda Travel Bureau.....	(see 50)	
Web City Café.....	16	C2
Western Union.....	(see 3)	

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Afri Tours & Travel.....	(see 6)	
African Pearl Safaris.....	(see 15)	
Buganda Parliament Building.....	17	D2
Hindu Temple.....	18	B2
Mosque.....	19	A2

## SLEEPING

Fang Fang Hotel.....	20	C1
Grand Imperial Hotel.....	21	C2
Havana Hotel.....	22	A1
Hotel City Square.....	23	B2

Hotel Equatoria.....	(see 37)	
Hotel Sun City.....	24	A1
L'Hotel Fiancée.....	25	B2
New Gloria Hotel.....	26	A1
Nile Hotel.....	27	D1
Sheraton Hotel.....	28	C1
Speke Hotel.....	29	C2
Tourist Hotel.....	30	B2

## EATING

1000 Cups Coffee House.....	31	B1
Antonio's.....	32	B2
Bancafe.....	33	B2
Café Pap.....	34	C2
Canaan Restaurant.....	35	C2
Chicken Inn.....	(see 42)	
Chipper's.....	36	A1
Chopsticks.....	37	A1
Debonair's.....	(see 43)	
Domino's Pizza.....	38	D2
Fang Fang.....	39	C2
Haandi.....	40	D2
Mama Mia.....	(see 29)	
Masala Chaat House.....	41	D2
Nando's.....	42	C2
Steers.....	43	C2
Tricia's Terrace.....	(see 6)	
Vasil's Bakery.....	(see 42)	

## DRINKING

Midland Guesthouse.....	44	B2
On the Rocks.....	(see 29)	
Rouge.....	45	D2
Sabrina's Pub.....	46	A1
Sax Pub.....	47	B2
Slow Boat Pub.....	48	C2

## ENTERTAINMENT

Cineplex.....	49	B2
Kampala Casino.....	50	C2
Musicians Club 1989.....	(see 51)	
National Theatre.....	51	D1

## SHOPPING

African Village.....	(see 31)	
Exposure Africa.....	(see 6)	
Ngoma Gallery.....	52	C1
Uganda Arts & Crafts Village.....	(see 51)	

## TRANSPORT

Air Burundi.....	(see 64)	
Air Tanzania.....	(see 66)	
British Airways.....	53	C1
Busscar.....	54	B2
Eagle Air.....	55	C2
Egypt Air.....	(see 33)	
Emirates.....	56	C2
Ethiopian Airlines.....	57	C2
Gulf Air.....	(see 57)	
Hertz.....	(see 39)	
Jaguar Executive Coaches.....	58	A1
Kenya Airways.....	59	D2
KLM.....	(see 59)	
Main Bus Station.....	60	A2
New Taxi Park.....	61	A2
Old Taxi Park.....	62	B2
Regional Coach.....	63	C2
Scandinavian Express.....	64	C2
SN Brussels Air.....	65	B1
South African Airways.....	66	C2
Special Hire Taxis.....	67	B2
Sudan Airways.....	(see 50)	
United Airlines.....	68	C2

## Emergency

**Police or ambulance** (☎ 999)

## Internet Access

It's hard to walk far in Kampala without tripping over an Internet café. Prices cost US\$20 to US\$40 per minute and many places offer discounts on weekends. Red Chilli Hideaway offers free Internet access to guests, which is popular. Also recommended:

**Chipper's** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) One of the cheapest places in the city, enjoy an ice cream at the same time.

**Web City Café** (Map p472; Kimathi Ave) The biggest operation in the city with 30 terminals and a fast connection.

## Medical Services

There are two well-known surgeries for medical treatment in Kampala.

**International Medical Centre** (Map p472; ☎ 041-341291, emergency ☎ 077-741291; idark@infocom.co.ug; ☎ 24hr) Housed in the Kampala Pentecostal Church building opposite Hotel Equatoria, this clinic is run by Dr Ian Clarke. It offers professional medical services, including dependable malaria smears. It operates an ambulance service in an emergency.

**Surgery** (Map p471; ☎ /fax 041-256003, emergency ☎ 075-756003; stockley@imul.com; 2 Acacia Dr;

☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun) Run by Dr Dick Stockley, resident medical expert in *The Eye* magazine, this well-respected clinic stocks self-test malaria kits for those heading into remote areas for long periods.

## Money

Kampala Rd is where most of the banks and many foreign exchange bureaus are located. The foreign exchange bureaus generally stay open longer than the banks, and offer competitive rates with no commission. Rates at the main bureaus are listed in the daily *New Vision* newspaper. Other than the foreign exchange bureaus, the best exchange rates are generally offered by **Crane Bank** (Map p472), which has a branch at Speke Hotel that is open daily until at least 8.30pm. However, for small bills, Barclays Bank offers the same rates as for large bills, which makes it the best place to change US\$20 and smaller notes.

Amex travellers cheques can be changed at **Standard Chartered Bank** (Map p472) branches in the city. The head office is opposite the

Grand Imperial Hotel. Other banks are not that keen on changing cheques, but Barclays and Crane can usually deal with smaller sums and Thomas Cook travellers cheques.

**Barclays Bank** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) For US-dollar or Ugandan-shilling credit-card cash advances, head here. It offers the equivalent of US\$700 per day, but at a hefty commission of US\$15 or US\$30,000.

**Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Map p472; 7 Entebbe Rd) Western Union money transfers are available.

**Express Uganda** (Map p472; ☎ 041-236767) At the Sheraton Hotel, this is the Amex agent.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (Map p472) Another main bank offering credit-card compatible ATMs, with a maximum daily withdrawal of US\$400,000. The ATMs aren't always reliable, so it is best to use them during business hours in case of a problem.

## National Parks Office

**Uganda Wildlife Authority** (Map p472; UWA; ☎ 041-346287; www.uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Looks after the country's national parks and protected areas. It recently moved into a flagship headquarters near the Uganda Museum.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map p471; cnr Kampala & Speke Rds; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Offers postal and telecom services. The poste restante service is well organised and as the volume of mail here is low, things don't go astray.

## Telephone & Fax

The main post office also houses the international telephone exchange, and there are public phones where you can ring and fax overseas.

Phonecards are sold in booths throughout the city, and there are MTN and UTL (mobile-phone companies that also operate card phones) cardphones all over town. Connection is pretty straightforward to most countries. There are also Simu4u booths in the city where you pay cash for calls at pretty reasonable rates.

## Tourist Information

For up-to-the-minute information on Kampala, pick up the free listings magazine *The Eye: The In & Out Guide to Uganda* from selected hotels and restaurants.

**Uganda Community Tourism Association** (Map p471; Ucuta; ☎ 041-501866; ucuta@africaonline.co.ug; Kabalagala) Heavily geared towards independent travellers, it can advise on travel arrangements to its countrywide projects.

Ucuta operates a number of community camping grounds on the periphery of Uganda's national parks. The office is quite a way out of the centre of the city up the Gaba Rd. **Uganda Tourist Board** (Map p472; UTB; ☎ 041-342196; www.visituganda.com; 15 Kimathi Ave; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) The nerve centre of tourism promotion in Uganda. Staff are quite well informed, although there's not a whole lot of printed information to take away.

## Travel Agencies

For information on tour operators offering tours and safaris in Uganda, see p95.

**Let's Go Travel** (Map p471; ☎ 041-346667; www.letsgo.com; Uganda@letsgosafaris.com; 1st fl, Garden City Complex) Part of a global empire.

**Speedwing Travel Bureau** (Map p472; ☎ 041-231052; rcm@infocm.co.ug; 1 Kimathi Ave) For airline tickets, this is a reliable stop for fair prices.

**Uganda Travel Bureau** (Map p472; UTB; ☎ 041-232555; www.utb.co.ug; Kimathi Ave) Not to be confused with the nearby tourist office, this is a private agent offering worldwide ticketing services.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Kampala is a fairly safe city as far as Africa's capitals go. Incidents can and sometimes do happen, like anywhere else in the world, so it pays not to have all your valuables on you in poorly lit areas at night. Take care late at night around the taxi parks, as pickpockets and thieves operate here. Still, there is no need to be paranoid when out and about.

Due to low-level terrorist campaigns in Kampala in the late 1990s, and current worldwide jitters about international terrorists, security at government buildings, embassies, bars and nightclubs is extremely tight. However, you get used to the searches pretty quickly and, remember, it is for your own safety.

Uganda doesn't have much of a social-security system, so begging is quite common, especially in central Kampala.

One recurrent annoyance in Kampala is that taxi drivers have a tendency to run out of petrol at the most inconvenient times. Drivers often have the bare minimum of fuel in their tank, so that if the car gets stolen it won't get far. Daft though it sounds, it is no joke, and often they miscalculate how much they have left and don't make it to the nearest garage – make sure you get into a taxi at the top of a hill!

## SCAMS

It is quite common to meet children around the city asking for sponsorship for schooling, often claiming to be refugees from Sudan or Somalia. While some cases may be genuine, locals say that many are bogus and begging on behalf of their parents. Worse still, others say that waving the paper in your face is simply a diversion for a spot of sneak theft, so keep your eyes open.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Low key is the phrase to remember here. What is on offer in Kampala is fairly limited when compared with the amazing attractions elsewhere in the country. Unless, of course, you consider a night on the town an activity, then Kampala competes with the best of them!

## Kasubi Tombs

The **Kasubi Tombs** (Sse kabaka's Tombs; Kasubi Hill; admission US\$3000; ☎ 8am-6pm), just off Masiro Rd, were first built in 1881 and are worth a look for a dose of traditional culture. There are several huge traditional reed and bark cloth buildings of the *kabakas* of the Buganda people. The group of buildings contains the tombs of Muteesa I, his son Mwanga (Sir Daudi Chwa II) and his son Edward Muteesa II, father of the current *kabaka*, Ronald Mutebi II (known also by his Bugandan name, Muwenda). Edward Muteesa II died in London in 1969, three years after being deposed by Obote. The tombs are taken care of by the Ganda clans.

The Kasubi Tombs are open year-round, including holidays. Remove your shoes before entering the main building. You can get to the tombs by minibus, either from the old taxi park in the city centre (ask for Hoima Rd) or from the junction of Bombo and Makerere Hill Rds. The minibuses to get are the ones that terminate at the market at the junction of Hoima and Masiro Rds. The tombs are a few hundred metres walk up the hill from here and are signposted.

## Uganda Museum

The **Uganda Museum** (Map p471; Kira Rd; adult/child US\$3000/1500; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) is quite run-down given that it is meant to be the showcase for the nation. It has a few good ethnological exhibits covering hunting, agriculture, war and religion, as well as

## THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT CRIME IN KAMPALA

Some of Africa's capitals are notorious for muggings and robberies, but Kampala has never been one of them. At last the reasons have been exposed and they are pretty revealing. In many African cities, thieves are dealt with through mob justice, and lynchings are not uncommon throughout the continent. However, Ugandans have opted for something a little less final and a little more humiliating – stripping thieves down to their 'Adam suits' or ripping all their clothes off in public.

Several cases of these mob strips are reported each day in Kampala's newspapers and even a few women have fallen victim to this brand of instant justice. Officially the police are trying to discourage this practice, as they feel that mob justice often fails to discriminate between the guilty and innocent.

There is a prevalent view held by most Kampala citizens that it is not only the mob who have difficulty discriminating between the guilty and innocent. Police corruption is a subject of concern for the Ugandan government. However, police chiefs downplay corruption in the force; one officer is on the record as saying that the 'police are like your buttocks, you only notice their importance when you have a boil on them'.

archaeological and natural history displays. Perhaps its most interesting feature is a collection of traditional musical instruments, but even these are falling apart. Basically, the museum is crying out for some tender, loving care. More recently some photo exhibitions have been held here and this could be a good way to reinvigorate the place. There is an US\$5000 fee for cameras and an US\$20,000 fee for video cameras, money down the drain given the paucity of exhibits.

To get here, catch a Kamjokya shared taxi from the old taxi park (US\$300).

## Buildings of the Buganda Kingdom

Kampala has always been the heartland of the Buganda kingdom, and within the capital are a number of its impressive administrative centres and royal buildings. Most

of these are located in and around Mengo and include the **kabaka's palace** (Map p471), inside a vast walled enclosure, the **Buganda parliament** (Map p471; Kabakanjagala Rd), located at the end of a ceremonial driveway leading from the palace and the **Buganda Court of Justice** (Map p471), now the location for Uganda's National Court. However, none of these are open to the public.

The **kabaka's Trail** (☎ 041-501866; www.culturalheritagetrails.com; Ucota office, Kabalagala) is a community tourism project to introduce visitors to the secret history of the Buganda people. See p487 for more details.

### Religious Buildings

There are several prominent religious buildings in Kampala that might interest some spiritually inclined travellers, including the gleaming white **Kibuli Mosque** (Map p471) dominating Kibuli Hill on the other side of the train station from Nakasero Hill; the huge, domed Roman Catholic **Rubaga Cathedral** (Map p471) on Rubaga Hill; the twin towers of the Anglican **Namirembe Cathedral** (Map p471), where the congregation is called to worship by the beating of drums; the enormous **Hindu temples** (Map p472) in the city centre; and the beautiful **Baha'i temple** way out towards Kira.

There is also a **national mosque** (Map p471) under construction in old Kampala, originally begun under Idi Amin and now being funded by Colonel Gadaffi. Idi Amin had planned a towering minaret to be visible all over the city, but the unfinished pillar had begun to lean precariously in recent years and has been rebuilt on a smaller scale.

### Other Activities

Kampala is a good base for activities beyond the city. By far the most popular is white-water rafting at the source of the Nile, near Jinja. See p495 for more details. Other popular activities on and around Lake Victoria include boating, fishing and horse riding – see p489 for more details.

### KAMPALA FOR CHILDREN

Kampala isn't exactly bursting with activities for children, but with a bit of time and effort it is possible to keep the young-uns entertained. Swimming pools are always a winner and the Speke Resort (p490) at Munyonyo has one of the best in the city. The Blue Mango

(opposite) is another good option, as parents can while away some time at its excellent restaurant and bar. Otherwise, Entebbe is worth a visit, as the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (p487) provides a comfortable home for such diverse animals as chimpanzees, rhinos and the peculiar looking shoebill stork. There are also the Entebbe Botanical Gardens (p487), with plenty of space to roam about.

Otherwise, head east to Jinja where there are the enticing options of a family float rafting trip on the Nile or quad biking for kids (see p498).

### SLEEPING

Accommodation in Kampala doesn't offer particularly impressive value for money, particularly if you want anything with a modicum of comfort and a bathroom.

### Budget

Most travellers choose to stay at Backpackers Hostel, Red Chilli Hideaway or the Blue Mango – all excellent places – as the cheap hotels are mostly near the noisy bus station and taxi parks, an area which is pretty noisy at all times of day and night.

### HOSTELS

There are a couple of great hostels in Kampala, but both fill up fast during peak season, so be sure to book ahead.

**Backpackers Hostel** (Map p471; ☎ 077-430587; www.backpackers.co.ug; Natete Rd, Lunguja; camping USh5000, dm USh7000-10,000 s/d USh14,000/25,000, d with bathroom USh35,000-45,000; 📺) The first budget hostel to open its doors in Kampala and still going strong. Set in lush gardens, it is an escape from the bustle of the city and local staff ensure a warm welcome. As well as dorm beds in various shapes and sizes, there are also attractive *bandas* (thatch-roofed huts) and some more sophisticated self-contained doubles with hot-water bathrooms. Cooking facilities are available for campers, but tasty, inexpensive set meals and snacks are readily available, including nightly specials. The bar draws a mix of travellers and expats, includes a pool table and stays open late. Broadband Internet access is available. This is also the place for reliable information on tracking the mountain gorillas in DR Congo, as this is the representative in Uganda. This popular hostel is

a 10-minute minibus ride out of the city centre, not far from the landmark Namirembe Cathedral. Take a Natete shared taxi from the new taxi park (USh500 uphill, but only USh300 return!) – just ask for 'Backpackers'. The team also runs a new beach resort on Bussi Island in Lake Victoria (see p490).

**Red Chilli Hideaway** (☎ 041-223903; www.redchillihideaway.com; camping USh6000, dm USh9000, tw from USh22,000, d with bathroom from USh35,000; 📺) An oasis in the city, Red Chilli is the hub of a growing empire that includes budget camps at Murchison Falls and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks. It is very popular with long-term guests for its wide range of rooms and it gets most of the overland truck business. It has several doubles – named after chilli varieties – and some rooms include bathroom. There are also sweet two-bedroom cottages (USh85,000) with lounge, bathroom and kitchen facilities, which are great for families. Guests can use the swimming pool at the nearby Silver Springs Hotel for USh3000. There is decent food available throughout the day and a lively bar. Equally popular is the free Internet access on offer. Check out the reliable travel information here before moving on and take a look at its bargain budget three-day Murchison Falls trips. This great spot is up in Bugolobi district, about 6km out of the city centre, off the road to Port Bell. Take a minibus from the eastern end of Kampala Rd to Bugolobi for USh500, get off opposite the Silver Springs Hotel and take the road opposite up the hill, following signs from there.

The excellent Blue Mango (right) also offers dorm beds, which include access to the swimming pool.

### HOTELS

The budget hotels are all in the busy part of the city centre near the taxi parks and domestic bus station. Some people find this part of Kampala quite intimidating, so with the great hostels around the city there are few foreigners staying here. There's a large choice these days, but all offer the same standard – choosing where to stay is more a question of a thousand shillings or a bathroom here and there.

**L'Hotel Fiancée** (Map p472; ☎ 041-236144; Channel St; s/d with bathroom USh16,000/20,000) Promising a 'concentration of elegance', this is the smartest place in this not-so-smart part of the city.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Blue Mango** (☎ 041-543481; bluemango@info.com.co.ug; Old Kira Rd; dm US\$8, s/d US\$25/35, with bathroom US\$35/45, cottages US\$55/70; 📺) Looking for the atmosphere of a lodge in the city? Look no further, as this place has lush gardens, soft lighting and a swimming pool. All rooms are attractively decorated, although the cheapest have shared bathroom. The larger cottages are perfect for families or small groups, with a lounge and kitchen facilities. Budget travellers can take advantage of the dorms, as the price includes access to the swimming pool. Book ahead, as it is pretty popular. There is also a lively restaurant and bar here, plus a sophisticated craft shop.

Rooms are bright and clean, plus free tea is available on request.

**Midland Guesthouse** (Map p472; ☎ 041-340264; 2 Nakivubo Rd; s/d USh12,000/17,000) Looming large over the bustling bus station, this place is perhaps noisier than most, but does offer good-value rooms. It promises service with a personal touch, but there is an element of wishful thinking here – a lethargic touch is more the reality.

**Hotel Sun City** (Map p472; ☎ 041-345542; William St; s USh12,000, s/d with bathroom USh18,000/25,000) Moving closer to the city centre, but still in the chaotic part of Kampala, the Sun City is a good compromise between the bustle of the taxi parks and the higher prices of Kampala Rd. Staff are friendly, the rooms are a reasonable size and the bathrooms have hot water.

### Midrange

**Tourist Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-251471; www.touristhotel.net; Dastur St; s US\$25-30, d US\$35-40) This stands head and shoulders above the city-centre competition, as it offers high standards at midrange prices, making it exceptional value. It overlooks the lively Nakasero Market and has executive style rooms, with key card, safety deposit box, spotless bathroom, TV and telephone. Breakfast is an extra US\$5. This is definitely the best place in the city for those who want a little more comfort, but don't want to break the bank.

**Namirembe Guest House** (Map p471; ☎ 041-273778; www.namirembe-guesthouse.com; Willis Rd; s USh35,000-55,000, d USh60,000-75,000) This place is

church run and promises 'a million dollar view', and does indeed offer some of the best city scapes in Kampala. Set in spacious grounds in a quiet suburb, there are several buildings housing a variety of meticulously clean rooms. Breakfast is included.

**Regency Kampala Hotel** (Map p471; ☎ 041-272095; Namirembe Rd; s/d US\$95,000/125,000) This large business hotel offers top-end comfort at mid-range prices. It is a touch sterile, but that might appeal after a stint in the bush.

**New Gloria Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-257790; fax 041-269616; William St; s/d/tr US\$25,000/40,000/50,000) A small place with an intimate atmosphere, the self-contained rooms are reasonably good value for the city centre.

**Hotel City Square** (Map p472; ☎ 041-256257; fax 041-251440; 42 Kampala Rd; s/d US\$35,000/45,000) Sitting in a strategic position on Kampala Rd, the hotel looks pretty drab from the exterior, but the rooms aren't bad, with a bathroom, TV and telephone. Rates include breakfast.

**Havana Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-343532; hotel havana@hotmail.com; 28 Mackay St; s/d US\$40/45, with air-con US\$50/55; 🍷) Catering primarily to local business travellers, this offers a slice of real Kampala, overlooking the busy new taxi park. Rooms include all the obvious trimmings, although the furnishings are clearly from another era. Rates include breakfast.

**Fang Fang Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-235828; fax fangfang@africaonline.co.ug; Ssezibwa Rd; s/d with breakfast US\$55/75) Just below the Sheraton Hotel, this place is good value when compared with certain top-end hotels, where prices double for the same type of room. Rooms are modern, clean and well appointed. There is also a good Chinese restaurant here, part of the Fang Fang chain.

**Hotel Diplomate** (☎ 041-510343; s/d US\$50/65, cottages US\$65/75, ste US\$75/90) If it's views that you're after, this place offers them from its imperious location on the summit of Tank Hill. The hotel has a fair choice of rooms, and the suites are a worthwhile investment for the huge sunken baths and smarter trimmings. Rates include breakfast and taxes. Forget about staying here unless you have your own transport, as it's a fair distance from minibuses routes.

**Hotel International** (☎ 041-510200; Tank Hill Rd; s/d US\$90,000/100,000; 🍷) Located in the Tank Hill area, this modern business hotel offers some of the largest standard rooms in the city. Like the Diplomate, there are some seriously big

views from the back of this hotel, and facilities include a swimming pool.

### Top End

Although most of the accommodation in this price bracket is quoted in hard currency (US dollars), payment in local currency is always possible. Most of the prices quoted exclude value-added tax (VAT) of 17%, unless otherwise stated.

**Speke Hotel** (Map p471; ☎ 041-259221; www.spekehotel.com; Nile Ave; s/d US\$95/100; 🍷) One of Kampala's oldest hotels, this characterful address was recently given a major facelift to add creature comforts to age and grace. All rooms now have air-con, wooden floors, satellite TV and minibar. With a central location, this is definitely the hotel of choice for those looking to spend a hundred bucks. The terrace bar is a popular meeting place, there's a good Italian restaurant (Mama Mia) and heaving On the Rocks bar is right next door. The luxurious Speke Resort is run by the same owners – see page p490.

**Emin Pasha Hotel** (Map p471; ☎ 041-236977; www.eminpasha.net; 27 Aki Bua Rd; s/d from US\$220/250; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Kampala's first boutique hotel is beautifully housed in an elegant old colonial property that has been thoughtfully restored. The 20 rooms are the best in the city, blending atmosphere and luxury, and more expensive suites feature such touches as claw-foot bathtubs. The expansive grounds include a swimming pool, and attached is the respected Fez Brasserie.

**Sheraton Kampala Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-420000; www.sheraton.com; Ternan Ave; s/d US\$265/290; 🍷 🍷) Looming large over the capital, this concrete behemoth was long considered the best hotel in Kampala. Rooms were undergoing much needed renovations at the time of writing, as they were ageing badly, but the prices still seem absurdly high compared to Sheratons in other parts of the world. Facilities include tennis and squash courts, several restaurants and bars, and a shopping precinct. Rates include breakfast and service, but not tax – that adds up to US\$300 or more, ouch!

**Grand Imperial Hotel** (Map p472; ☎ 041-250681; imperialhotels@utlonline.co.ug; 6 Nile Ave; s/d US\$140/160; 🍷 🍷) One of the extended family of Imperial hotels in and around Kampala, this is smaller and more intimate than the Sheraton, and has good facilities, including

a small swimming pool, bars, a café and restaurants.

**Nile Hotel** (Map p472; Nile Ave) One of the best-known properties in Kampala, this hotel is currently undergoing a massive renovation by the Soneva chain and will open its five-star doors during the lifetime of this book.

### EATING

Kampala is packed with quality restaurants, ensuring no-one goes hungry. Some of the cheapest places to eat in Kampala are the ubiquitous takeaways that dot the city centre. It is impossible to recommend any in particular as they are fairly standard outfits, offering dishes such as chicken, meat, sausages, fish and chips, as well as samosas and chapatis. Prices are the same whether you eat in or takeaway, and cost about US\$1000 to US\$3000 for a meal. Look out for the takeaway signs sticking out of buildings all over the city, but be aware that grease is a consistent ingredient at every establishment.

Many of the markets around the city have local food stalls that are even cheaper than takeaways. For US\$1000, they usually offer a heaped plate of *matoke*, potatoes, groundnut sauce, beans, greens, and meat or fish.

It is worth noting that quite a lot of the better restaurants in Kampala are closed on Sunday or Monday, so check in advance to avoid disappointment.

### Ugandan

**Canaan Restaurant** (Map p472; Kampala Rd; mains US\$4000-8000) Just off Kampala Rd, the outdoor terrace here is popular for people-watching during the busy lunch hour in the city centre. Local businessmen and officials fill the tables, and drinking is just as popular as dining. The menu is limited, but if you need a quick steak or a roast chicken, it can deliver.

**Half London** (Gaba Rd; meals US\$5000-15,000) A Kampala institution that now houses a small branch of the famous Carnivore from Nairobi. Both the space and menu are tiny when compared to those in Kenya, but this is the place to try bush meat if you must. Service is slow to the point of non-existent, however. The outdoor bar is one of the places to check out in the evening. For more details, see p483.

**Kampala Casino** (Map p472; Kimathi Ave) Head here on Thursday evening to sample the Ugandan

buffet, which is pretty good value for such a fancy place. There's live music while you eat, but you need to be reasonably smartly dressed to get in here.

### Chinese & Thai

Chinese restaurants are surprisingly prolific in Kampala, but some are better than others. All are open daily.

**Fang Fang** (Map p472; ☎ 041-344806; Colville St; mains US\$5000-10,000) The consensus in the city is that this is the best Chinese restaurant and the sheer numbers that pack the place each night attest to the quality of the food. Located in an anonymous office block, the interior is typical of a Chinese restaurant anywhere, but there's a large outdoor terrace for breezy nights. There's a full selection of Chinese classics, and specialties include fried crispy prawns with ginger and garlic.

**Chopsticks** (Map p472; ☎ 041-250781; Hotel Equatoria, William St; mains around US\$7000) It's more of a multinational menu here with Chinese dishes the main star, ably supported by a cast of Thai and Vietnamese favourites for good measure. Look out for promotional menus at lunchtime, including four courses for US\$10,000.

**Krua Thai** (Map p471; ☎ 041-234852; Windsor Cres; meals US\$10,000) If you are after the taste of Thailand, Krua Thai is an authentic family-run restaurant up in the popular Kololo area of the city. The menu includes all the familiar greatest hits, including *pad Thai*, *laab* and *tôm yam kung*, as well as some regional specialties. Those used to dining in Thailand might want to ask staff to up the chilli count, as they tone down the spices on most dishes.

### Continental

**Blue Mango** (Kira Rd; meals US\$6000-15,000) For a good selection of grub from all over the globe, head to the suburban sanctuary that is the Blue Mango. Big bush furniture, cushions to sink in and flowing African drapes provide the backdrop for a very relaxed meal. The menu includes cheaper bar meals, such as pies with mash and crisp salads, and a more sophisticated range of meat, poultry and fish with a regional accent. On Friday it fills up with the post-work crowd.

**Fez Brasserie** (Map p471; ☎ 041-236977; mains US\$10,000-20,000) Set in the grounds of Kampala's first boutique hotel, the Emin Pasha,

this restaurant has quickly won over the discerning local crowd thanks to a fusion menu that includes flavours from five continents. Highlights from the ever-evolving menu include the signature aubergine tower with goats cheese, roast peppers and pesto, Moroccan lamb and Cuban spatchcock poussin... impressive stuff! Vegetarians are also well represented.

**Crocodile** (Map p471; ☎ 041-254593; Cooper Rd; ☹ Tue-Sun) A very popular café-bar up in the lively Kisiminti district, the Crocodile has a tempting range of salads, pasta dishes and sophisticated snacks. It gets very busy on Sunday, as the healthy flavours are good for a hangover.

**La Fontaine** (Map p471; ☎ 077-4061976; Bukoto St; mains USh6000-12,000) La Fontaine is a popular café-restaurant in this area. There is a filling lunchtime buffet for USh8000, a great range of salads, including spicy Thai or blue cheese, and a good juice selection.

**Le Petit Bistro** (Gaba Rd; steaks from USh8000) Like much of Africa, steak is very popular in Uganda and this simple little restaurant cooks up some of the best meat in the city. Prices are pretty low and a selection of sauces is available. That's the good news. The bad news is that it can take as long as two hours for food to arrive, so be patient and let the drinks flow.

**Le Chateau** (Map p471; Gaba Rd; meals around USh20,000) Popular for serious steaks, Le Chateau is home to the Quality Cuts butchery, guaranteeing top meat. This place is absurdly fashionable among well-to-do Ugandans. The extensive menu favours French cuisine, and includes frogs' legs and snails, so if you are looking to indulge, this is a good place to do it.

## Ethiopian

**Fasika** (☎ 041-268571; Gaba Rd; dishes USh5000-7000) Right opposite the crazy Capital Pub in Kabalagala, Fasika is the leading Ethiopian restaurant in Kampala. The menu is a good introduction to Ethiopian eats and includes a tasty Ethiopian answer to a thali (mixed curry selection, including rice and pappadams), with a little bit of everything served on *injera* (unleavened bread).

**Ethiopian Village** (Muyenga Rd; mains USh7000) An Ethiopian eatery in the same part of town as Fasika, there is a large, lush garden here for al fresco dining.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Haandi** (Map p472; ☎ 041-346283; www.haandi-restaurants.com; 7 Kampala Rd; curries from USh7000) It is time for London to concede: Kampala is the capital of fine Indian dining and Haandi is the hub. This restaurant is pure class, the presentation and service impeccable, and the menu includes the best of North Indian frontier cuisine. This is not the place to limit yourself to a chicken *tikka masala*. Experiment a little with the *tilapia* (Nile perch) curries or the *murg-e-kahsa*. Eat and drink well from about USh20,000 per person.

## Indian

**Masala Chaat House** (Map p472; ☎ 041-255710; 3 Dewinton Rd; mains USh3000-7000) The sheer number of Indians eating here should tell you something about the authentic flavours and affordable prices at this local institution. Located opposite the National Theatre, it serves cheap vegetarian thalis and has stacks more to keep vegetarians smiling for the night. Meat and fish dishes are also available, as well as a wide selection of tasty *masala dosas* (a large savoury crepe stuffed with a delicious filling of potatoes cooked with onions and curry leaves) and other southern Indian delights.

**City Bar & Grill** (Kampala Rd; dishes USh5000-10,000) Housed in a classic Art Deco building, this is a popular stop for lunch, serving excellent tandoori dishes. A small subcontinental selection is available, as well as Western meals, such as steaks. Check out the full-sized snooker table, which sorts out the men from the boys.

**Pavement Tandoori** (Map p471; ☎ 041-344994; Cooper Rd; mains USh5000-10,000) This place is right in the middle of the action on the popular Cooper Rd strip. The Indian food here is delicious and elegantly presented. Try the vegetarian sizzler for an introduction to Indian starters.

**Khana Khazana** (Map p471; ☎ 041-233049; 20 Acacia Dr; mains USh10,000-20,000) Regarded by some expat residents as the classiest Indian restaurant in Kampala, this is housed in a residential villa near the golf course. It is the most expensive option in the city, but this doesn't dissuade the discerning crowd. It has recently spread its wings to Kigali, Rwanda.

## Italian

**Mamba Point** (Map p471; ☎ 077-243225; www.mamba-point.com; 22 Aki Bua Rd; mains USh15,000-30,000; ☹ Mon-Sat) For the best in Italian dining, make for Mamba Point, where the pasta is home-made and the menu as close to the homeland as you might hope to find in Africa. Save space for the exquisite desserts, which include lime syllabub and chocolate truffle torte.

**Caffé Roma** (☎ 077-501847; Tank Hill Parade; pizzas USh10,000, pasta from USh8000; ☹ Tue-Sun) If you are thinking of a night in Kabalagala, why not kick off with an affordable Italian meal at this place up on Tank Hill. Pizza comes with all the favourite toppings and there is a good choice of popular pasta dishes.

There is also a long-running Italian restaurant in the Speke Hotel called Mama Mia and the small pizzas (from USh8000) are just about enough for a meal. There is also a genuine gelato bar here for ice-cream lovers.

## Quick Eats

Fast food is popular among Kampalans and several regional chains have set up shop in the past few years.

**Antonio's** (Map p472; Kampala Rd; mains USh3000) This is a pretty good greasy spoon café, serving Indian, Mexican and Ugandan favourites at lightning speed. Curries and burritos are cheap, and portions are large.

**Dominó's Pizza** (Map p472; ☎ 041-251513; 2 Kampala Rd) Believe it or not, this isn't actually part of the vast international empire, but a local place that has managed to hang on to the name. Still the pizza is just as good as its internationally famous namesake.

**Nando's** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) and **Chicken Inn** (Map p472; Kampala Rd), both in the same building, turn out chicken in every size and shape at reasonable prices (USh4000 to USh8000) – Nando's offers the slightly more flavoursome spicy option.

Further west on Kampala Rd, **Steers** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) is a South African burger joint that does pretty much the same sort of things as chain burger joints the world over. Plus there is a branch of **Debonair's** (Map p472; Kampala Rd; pizza from USh6000) in the same complex.

## Cafés

As Kampala continues to develop, something of a café culture is emerging.

**1000 Cups Coffee House** (Map p472; 18 Buganda Rd; ☹ 8am-9pm) For a coffee kick from Brazil to Vietnam and everything in between, caffeine cravers should head here. 'A cup for every nation' is its motto and it doesn't neglect the homebrews from Uganda. There is also a menu of light bites, such as salads and sandwiches, and sweet pastries. It's a good place to hang out and catch up with the rest of the world, as there is a large selection of international newspapers and magazines.

**Café Pap** (Map p472; 13 Parliament Ave) A stylish café on bustling Parliament Ave, this might be the place to meet some movers and shakers. Uganda coffees are promoted here from the slopes of Elgon, the Rwenzoris and the Virungas, but there is also an excellent menu of sandwiches, paninis and full breakfasts.

**Vasili's Bakery** (Map p472; Kampala Rd) This is a bakery to remember, serving perhaps the best range of pies and cakes in the city, a top spot for breakfast or afternoon tea. Chelsea buns, apple crumble and other old-world favourites are plentiful here.

**Tricia's Terrace** (Map p472; Daisy's Arcade, Buganda Rd; light meals USh3500-7500) A combination of a café and restaurant, this popular little lunch spot specialises in delicious, inexpensive sandwiches. Fillings include chicken, bacon and avocado. The hot toasties are also a hit.

**Bancafé** (Map p472; Grand Imperial Hotel Arcade) An old favourite that remains popular thanks to a good selection of freshly ground coffee, fresh juices and fruit shakes, and some tasty cakes. Sandwiches and salads cost about USh5000, making it a popular stop for a light lunch.

**Gallery Cafe** (Masaka Rd; dishes from USh5000) A tranquil bolthole from the hustle and bustle of the city centre. It is 2km along Masaka Rd, not far from Natete. The gallery itself is well worth a look (p484); sit back on the front veranda and enjoy a tasty lunch from the small eclectic menu.

## Ice-Cream Parlours

Ice cream is very popular in Kampala and there are several parlours spread across the city. The best ice cream in Kampala is found at **Le Chateau** (Map p471; Gaba Rd), but the location is inconvenient for a casual treat.

In the city centre, Mama Mia at Speke Hotel has very good gelato, with some deliciously rich flavours from amaretto to zabaglione.

Chipper's is very popular, and it has a couple of branches, one on Kampala Rd and another in Kabalagala. It has scoop and whip ice cream, and sundaes.

### Self-Catering

**Luisun Supermarket** (Map p471; 11 Bombo Rd) This Italian delicatessen is stuffed to the ceiling with cheeses, salamis, and home-made cakes and biscuits. It also has a range of wines and some little luxuries, like stuffed olives. It now operates a small deli-café in the middle of the shop, including full meals like lasagne and grilled chicken, as well as the obvious antipasto treats.

**Shoprite** (Map p471; clock tower roundabout) A sort of South African Tesco, this huge supermarket is overflowing with products. There is a fresh bakery, as well as the best range of imports in the city. There is a second branch in the new Lugogo Mall on Jinja Rd.

### DRINKING

Nightlife in Kampala is something to relish these days, with a host of decent bars and clubs throughout the city. There is generally something happening in the city on most nights of the week, although Friday and Saturday are definitely the big nights out. However, Kampalans are a trendy, fickle bunch and places that are in today are gone tomorrow – it pays to ask around on arrival.

Kampala's bars are up there with the best in the region. Most places are open at least from 7pm until midnight and many of the popular places are open much later. Usually only nightclubs have cover charges.

All of the most popular places to stay have bars: Red Chili is pretty busy and attracts a few regular expats, as well as travellers; the lively Backpackers has a leafy garden and a popular pool table; and Blue Mango is the place to be on weekends, when the bar steps it up a gear. The Speke Hotel has a popular terrace bar out the front, and some punters like the pub feel of the Lion Bar at the Sheraton Hotel.

The following places are listed starting in the city centre and fanning out into the suburbs.

**Midland Guesthouse** (2 Nakivubo Rd) Overlooking the bus station, trek all the way to the rooftop bar for some incredible views of the madness below during evening rush hour.

Cheap beers and huge crowds during televised Premiership matches.

**Slow Boat Pub** (Map p472; ☎ 041-255647; Kampala Rd) At the heart of the city, this is much more of a local drinkers' bar than the location might suggest. It's a good place to hang out for an afternoon session with a few beers and watch Kampala life go by.

**Sax Pub** (Map p472; Luwum St) Forget the name, there is no jazz here, but plenty of action. It started out pretty sane with a good mix of African and Western tunes, but lately things have become pretty wild with working girls and an 'anything goes' atmosphere.

**On the Rocks** (Map p472; Speke Hotel) One of the definitive stops on the Kampala nightshift, this cool place has a covered bar and a huge outdoor area, absolutely heaving with people from about 9pm. The complex includes a couple of small dance floors and drinks are a fair deal, given it is part of the Speke Hotel. Prostitutes hang out here in numbers and pickpocketing is not unheard of on a busy night.

**Rouge** (Map p472; 2 Kampala Rd; ☎ Tue-Sat) Kampala's first lounge club, the über-hip Rouge wouldn't be out of place in a Euro-capital. Cocktail hour continues into the evening and sooner or later dancing takes over from drinking. Tuesday is jazz, Wednesday is salsa and Friday hip hop.

**Just Kickin'** (Map p471; Cooper Rd) This is the top sports bar in Kampala that helped make Kisimenti the kickin' place it is today. Big rugby and football matches draw the faithful, but it's a busy bar any time. A sign above the front door reads: 'No hookers. Props and locks welcome.' Well, that's the idea, anyway. Good bar food in case you get the munchies.

**Bubbles O'Learys** (Map p471; ☎ 031-263815; 30 Windsor Cres) Kampala's contribution to the growing legion of Irish pubs, this is one of the more authentic. The bar and all the furnishings were shipped in from an old Irish pub back home on the emerald isle. This is now the 'in' place to be on Friday, for the next five minutes at least, and draws a fun crowd. Live music on Wednesday, DJs on weekends, but there is a cheeky cover charge of USh5000 on big nights.

**Al's Bar** (Gaba Rd) A legend in Kampala, this is the most famous bar in Uganda, although notorious might be a better word! This is the one place in Kampala that you can be

guaranteed to find some people propping up the bar into the wee hours of the morning. It gets very busy on weekends, and attracts a regular crowd of expats, Ugandans and a fair number of prostitutes, meaning half the customers or more. There are two pool tables, but you might need to stay all night to get a game. Drinks are reasonable, and it is not uncommon for this bar to be open 24 hours. It's just down the road from the Half London (right). Special-hire taxis between here and the city centre cost anything from USh4000 to USh8000, depending on your negotiating skills and how drunk you are by the time you leave.

**Capital Pub** (☎ 041-269676; Muyenga Rd) An infamous imbibing institution in Kabalagala, this is cut from the same cloth as Al's. Check out the elaborate eaved roof at the back, with nearly a dozen pool tables, making getting a game that much easier. This place is always busy and has more than its fair share of pushy prostitutes from all over the region, but most of them troop off to Al's by the early hours.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife in Uganda may be fairly low-key, but Kampala, the rocking capital, is thankfully the exception to the rule. Here there are nightclubs and discos, some of which have live music. Many of them rage on well into the night and one or two are open virtually 24/7.

### Nightclubs

Several of the bars have a nightclub feel to them in the early hours of the morning and on weekends there is pretty much guaranteed to be dancing at Just Kickin', On the Rocks and Al's Bar (opposite).

There are a couple of discos out in the industrial area of the city, just off Jinja Rd, east of the two main roundabouts. Both play a lot of swing and house, and locals dance until late into the night. Charges rise as the weekend comes around and both places have more-expensive VIP areas upstairs, but there is not a whole lot of point upgrading.

**Ange Noir** (Map p471; admission USh2000-10,000; ☎ 9pm-5am) The 'black angel' is pronounced locally as 'Angenoa', a pretty fair rendition of the French, and is the most popular club for dancing. Everyone knows it, but it's not signposted on the main road.

**Club Silk** (Map p471; admission USh2000-10,000; ☎ 9pm-5am) In the same street as Ange Noir, this is an identikit club that is also heaving with locals. The floor décor is luminous and hideous, so try not to be feeling nauseous heading in here.

**Volts** (Entebbe Rd; admission various) Located a little way out of the city on the Entebbe Rd, this is a major league club with a serious sound system. Themed nights include Caribbean tunes and '60s flashbacks. Look out for the searching spotlights scoping the sky.

### Live Music

To be sure of catching live music while in Kampala, check out Friday's listings page in the *New Vision* newspaper, as there is usually something going down over the weekend.

**Musicians Club 1989** (Map p472; admission free; ☎ 7-10pm Mon) Kampala musicians get together every Monday at the National Theatre for informal jam sessions and live performances. This is a must if you are in the city, as the place fills up with Ugandans letting off steam after a Monday back at work and the drinks flow. On the second and last Monday of the month, the whole event shifts outside the theatre and becomes a mini-festival, complete with beer tents and a serious sound system. A great night out.

**Half London** (Gaba Rd) A landmark on the popular Gaba Rd strip, this is one of the most famous addresses in Kampala for live music from Thursday to Saturday. The music is a great introduction to the best the region has to offer and this place is always heaving at the hinges. It's partially open-air at the back, the crowd is mixed, the bar is friendly and boisterous, and everyone drinks until they dance. Get here early on the weekend if you want a table. Minibuses run here (USh500) until about 10.30pm from the old taxi park (just ask for the Half London or Kabalagala); later in the evening, find a special-hire taxi.

**Club Obligato** (Old Port Bell Rd) A top local joint for Ugandan music, the popular Afrigo Band plays here every weekend and is well worth catching. Warm up here to some live music before hitting one of the nearby nightclubs.

**Sabrina's Pub** (Map p472; Bombo Rd) Though little more than a local bar from the front, peek through the double doors at the back and it transforms into a huge gig venue. Live bands perform on the large stage out the back most weekends, including the famous

Stone Band on Friday, whipping the crowd into a dancing frenzy.

### Traditional Dance

If you're interested in traditional dance and music, try to catch a performance of the Ndere Troupe. It's composed of members of the many ethnic groups in Uganda and has gained international acclaim on world tours. The troupe has a new base in Ntinda, the **Ndere Centre** (☎ 041-288123; www.ndere.com; Kisaasi Rd), out beyond the Blue Mango, which includes an auditorium, a restaurant-bar and even some accommodation. Performances take place every Sunday at 6pm and cost just USh3000. It also promotes a comedy night (USh2000) every Friday at 7pm. Those with a serious interest in African dance could stay here. 'You stay in this guesthouse, you are sure to become a philosopher', it promises.

### Cinemas

The leading cinema group in Uganda is **Cineplex** (Map p472; Wilsons Rd), with two locations, the original on Wilson Rd and a new one in the Garden City Complex (right). The newer one screens new Hollywood releases and charges USh11,000 evenings and weekends, while the original screens slightly more dated features.

### Casinos

**Kampala Casino** (Map p472; Kimathi Ave; ☎ 2pm-late) In addition to the usual range of gaming tables, the casino has a good buffet (p479), live music, and free beer if you're playing the tables. No shorts or scruffy gear are allowed here. It is pretty busy most nights, and minimum stakes are low by international standards.

### SHOPPING

While Uganda lacks the shop 'till you drop' opportunities found in other African countries, such as Kenya and South Africa, it does have a few interesting crafts to look out for and a lot of pieces imported from DR Congo. The best items produced in Uganda include woven baskets and bags, bark-cloth paintings and batik, plus some woodcarvings and soapstone figures. Kampala has the best selection of things to buy in Uganda, although with a fledgling tourism industry, there isn't a huge range of shops selling crafts.

**Uganda Arts & Crafts Village** (Map p472; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Hidden away behind the National Theatre, this 'village' has a number of stalls selling handicrafts, such as caneware, woodcarvings and small trinkets from around the country, all at quite reasonable prices if you bargain.

**Exposure Africa** (Map p472; 13 Buganda Rd) Next door to Daisy's Arcade, this is the biggest craft market in Kampala, with about 30 stalls offering crafts from Uganda and beyond. Prices vary wildly between stalls, so shop around and don't forget your bargaining hat. Much of the merchandise comes from neighbouring Kenya, despite what the sellers claim.

**Uganda Crafts** (Map p471; Bombo Rd) A non-profit shop selling a wide variety of crafts, including goods made from leather, wood and cane, plus there's a likeable little open-air café.

**Gallery Cafe** (Masaka Rd) Out of the city along the Masaka Rd near Natete, this is a good source of contemporary crafts (ceramics, fabrics, sculpture) and paintings. To get here by public transport, take a Natete shared taxi from the old taxi park, and get off just after it passes the large Uganda Railways locomotives workshop on the left; the gallery is on the right.

**Banana Boat** (Map p471; Cooper Rd) An expanding empire, this sophisticated craft shop now has three branches. The original has a few local items, but many of the smart pieces come from all over Africa, including cards, batik, jewellery, clothing and carvings. There is a similar branch in the Garden City Complex, plus a branch with an emphasis on homes and interiors in the newer Lugogo Mall.

**Nommo Gallery** (Map p472; 4 Victoria Ave) When it comes to aesthetic art of the collectable sort, this gallery, higher on the hill above the Sheraton Hotel, is the best-known place in Kampala and doubles as a free museum for browsers.

There are gift shops at many of the guesthouses and hotels around Kampala, and the prices rise incrementally with the room rates! Blue Mango has something similar to Banana Boat, stocking items mostly from further south in Africa.

Apart from the lively local markets (opposite), the best places for shopping are the two big shopping centres in the city. **Garden City Complex** (Map p471; Yusuf Lule Rd) has several floors

of shops, including a supermarket, bookshop and department store, plus a cinema, bowling alley and food court. The newer **Lugogo Mall** (Jinja Rd) includes a Barclays Bank, a large Shoprite supermarket and Game, a huge DIY and household shop from South Africa.

### Markets

The busiest market in Kampala is Owino Market, which sprawls around the Nakivubo Stadium, near the taxi parks. Here you can find all sorts of goods for sale, but it is most popular with travellers for its wide range of second-hand clothes from Europe, Asia and the USA. Bargain hard, as they tend to raise the prices when *mzungus* (white people) are sniffing around.

Nakasero Market is Kampala's most famous market and is just below Kampala Rd. It is divided into two areas, one partially covered, where produce is sold, and another located in an attractive old building, where hardware, clothes and even a few tourist items are on sale.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

For contact details of the international airlines flying in and out of Entebbe International Airport, see p554.

There are two small domestic airlines in Uganda that mainly cater to government officials and NGOs, as they don't really serve any obvious tourist destinations:

**Eagle Uganda** (Map p472; ☎ 041-344292; 11 Portal Ave) Flights to Arua, Gulu, Kitgum, Kotido, Moroto and Moyo.

**United Airlines** (Map p472; ☎ 041-344292; 11 Portal Ave) Not to be confused with the famous American airline, this local outfit has flights to Adjumani, Arua and Gulu.

### Boat

There used to be ferries to the Ssese Islands twice a week from Kampala's Port Bell, but these have been suspended. However, there is talk of a new ferry early in the lifetime of this book. The best way to the islands now is from Masaka, although you can still catch fishing boats from Kasenyi (near Entebbe). Unfortunately, these are small, leave in the afternoon (so travel in the dark) and are none too safe. For more details, see p538.

### MWANZA (TANZANIA)

There are no longer passenger ferries connecting Tanzania and Uganda, but it is

possible to board a Tanzania or Uganda Railways cargo ferry with a little planning. Shared taxis to Port Bell leave from the old taxi park in Kampala. See p556 for more details.

### Bus

For buses within Uganda, the **main bus station** (Map p472; cnr Allen Rd & Luwum St) is below Kampala Rd. It's a busy place, with daily buses to every main town in the country. Most leave very early in the morning, so make inquiries the day before and get there early for a decent seat. There are lots of different companies operating different routes, but all are well marked. It's usually necessary to bargain the fare down a bit on the popular tourist routes, as there is some overcharging.

To Butogota (for Bwindi Impenetrable National Park), there is one departure at 6.30am daily with Silverline (USh18,000, 10 hours). There are daily buses to Kabale (many bus lines; USh12,000 to USh15,000, six hours) via Masaka and Mbarara; to Kasese (USh12,000, eight hours); to Masindi (USh9000, three hours); and to Fort Portal (USh10,000, four hours). For further details, see the Getting There & Away entries under each town.

### EMS POST BUS

These buses depart at 8am daily, except Sunday, from the **main post office** (Map p472; ☎ 041-236436; 35 Kampala Rd) for Kabale (USh11,000) via Mbarara; Fort Portal (USh10,000, 10 hours); Kasese (USh11,000, eight hours); Hoima (USh8000, five hours) via Masindi; and Soroti (USh10,000, seven hours) via Tororo and Mbale.

These buses are a safe way to travel. Bookings are not possible, so rock up in Kampala between 7am and 7.30am to be sure of a seat. From originating provincial towns to Kampala, they depart from the post offices a little earlier (about 6.30am).

### INTERNATIONAL BUSES

There are daily buses to Nairobi in Kenya with the following lines: **Akamba** (Map p471; ☎ 041-250412; 28 Dewinton St), located on the eastern edge of the city centre; **Busscar** (Map p472; ☎ 041-233030; 8 Burton St), which is just on the hill above the new taxi park; **Scandinavian Express** (Map p472; ☎ 078-260409; 8 Colville St); just below the Speke Hotel; and **Regional Coach**

(Map p472; ☎ 041-256862; 4 Luwum St), just below Kampala Rd. Akamba and Scandinavian Express buses also continue to Arusha and Dar es Salaam.

For Kigali (Rwanda), there are daily services with the following companies: **Jaguar Executive Coaches** (Map p472; ☎ 041-251855; 26 Nakivubo Rd), near the main bus station; **Gaso Bus** (☎ 041-572917; Bus Park, Kampala), in the bus station; and Regional Coach.

See p554 for details and prices of international services.

### Minibus & Taxi

Kampala has two taxi parks for minibuses. Although at first appearance these places seem chaotic, and at second appearance absolutely anarchic, there is in fact a significant degree of organisation, and minibuses for a particular destination always leave from the same place within each park. Both parks serve destinations within Kampala and around the country. The old taxi park (Map p472), on the triangle formed by Burton, Luwum and South Sts, is the bigger of the two and serves all parts of the city and country to the east; the new taxi park (Map p472) services destinations west and north.

As with buses, there are shared taxis travelling to all major parts of the country, including Jinja (US\$4000, one hour), Mbale (US\$10,000, three hours), Malaba (US\$9000, two hours), Masindi (US\$9000, three hours), Fort Portal (US\$12,000, six hours), Kabale (US\$15,000, six hours), Masaka (US\$5000, two hours) and Mbarara (US\$9000, four hours). However, for all but the shortest journeys, you are better off taking a bus, as they stop less frequently and are safer due to their size.

### Train

All passenger trains ceased operating about a decade ago, which is probably a blessing in disguise, as they were painfully slow and very uncomfortable.

### GETTING AROUND

Traffic jams are now a major headache in Kampala, so no matter where you are going in the city, plan ahead if you need to get somewhere at an appointed time. Rush hour is particularly bad, usually from 7.30am to 9.30am and about 5pm to 7pm. The easiest

way to avoid the traffic troubles is to use a *boda-boda* (motorbike taxis), although some of the drivers can be quite reckless.

### To/From the Airport

The international airport is at Entebbe, 41km from Kampala. A special-hire taxi from Kampala to Entebbe airport costs about US\$35,000 or US\$20. A cheaper option is to take a minibus between Kampala (from the old taxi park) and Entebbe town (US\$1500), then catch another shared taxi from there to the airport (US\$1000 per person or US\$5000 for the vehicle, 3km). Several of the upmarket hotels offer an airport pick-up service.

### Boda-bodas

These motorbike taxis are now the fastest way to get around Kampala, as they can weave in and out of the traffic jams. It's not necessarily the safest way to travel and best avoided at night, but during the day two wheels can save a lot of time.

### Minibus

The ubiquitous white minibus taxis leave from the two taxi parks and fan out all over the city. They are cheap and leave every few minutes to most destinations in the city. To find the minibus taxi you want, simply ask around at the taxi parks – people are generally very helpful. However, with Kampala's traffic problems, it can be quicker to flag one down on Kampala Rd, as they don't need to navigate the nightmare tailbacks around the taxi parks.

### Special-Hire Taxi

Actually in Kampala itself, there are plenty of 'special-hire' taxis, mostly marked with black-and-white checks. Good places to find them in the city centre are outside the taxi parks, around Nakasero Market and at the upper end of Colville St. At night though, they will usually find you, as they wait in great numbers outside popular bars and clubs.

A standard short-distance fare is around US\$3000 to US\$5000. Negotiate a price for longer distances, including waiting time if that's what you want. Charges are a little higher at night, although what you end up paying depends on how much you have drunk.

## AROUND KAMPALA

### KABAKA'S TRAIL

The **Kabaka's Trail** (☎ 041-501866; www.culturalheritagetrails.com; Ucoota office, Kabalagala) is a community tourism project to introduce visitors to the secret history of the Buganda people. Six **sites** (admission each US\$3000) around Kampala make up the trail, including several tombs, a prison and a waterfall.

The **Naggalabi Buddo Coronation Site**, a short distance off the road to Masaka, is where the Buganda kings are crowned, including the current *kabaka* Ronald Mutebi II. There are several huts similar to those at Kasubi Tombs, as well as a natural throne from a tree root. This is the most accessible of all the sites, as minibuses (US\$1500) run here from the new taxi park in Kampala – ask for Naggalabi Buddo stage.

**Ssezibwa Falls** is a popular beauty spot with locals, just off the road to Jinja. Take a Lugazi-bound minibus from either taxi park in Kampala as far as Kayanja (US\$2000, 45 minutes) and then negotiate for a *boda-boda* to the falls (about US\$1000).

Other sites on the trail include **Katereke Prison**, a prison ditch where royal prisoners were starved during the upheavals of 1888–89; the **Wamala Tombs**, which are the resting place of early Bugandan kings and predate the more famous Kasubi Tombs; the nearby **Tomb of Nnamasole Kanyange**; and the **Tomb of Nnamasole Baagalayaze**, where there is a local cultural centre with traditional performances.

### ENTEBBE

☎ 041

Located on the shores of Lake Victoria, Entebbe is an attractive, verdant town that was once the capital of Uganda during the early years of the British protectorate. With the traffic troubles and overcrowding now dogging Kampala, there might be a case for once again moving the political capital back to its lakeside origins. It is home to the Botanical Gardens, which offer a nice escape from the hustle and bustle of life in Kampala, and the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre, which provides a home for rare animals rescued from traffickers and poachers. It is also the location of Uganda's international airport, making Entebbe

a convenient place to spend a night when arriving late or departing early by plane.

### Information

There are several kiosks to exchange cash at Entebbe airport, but rates are a little lower than in Kampala. The major hotels can also change cash, but usually at poor rates.

The post office has international telephone and fax services, and there are also cardphones and a small post office at the airport.

**Stanbic Bank** (Kampala Rd) Best bank in town, it can change cash and travellers cheques.

**Surfing Corner** (Kampala Rd; per hr US\$2000) Offers sluggish Internet access.

### Sights & Activities

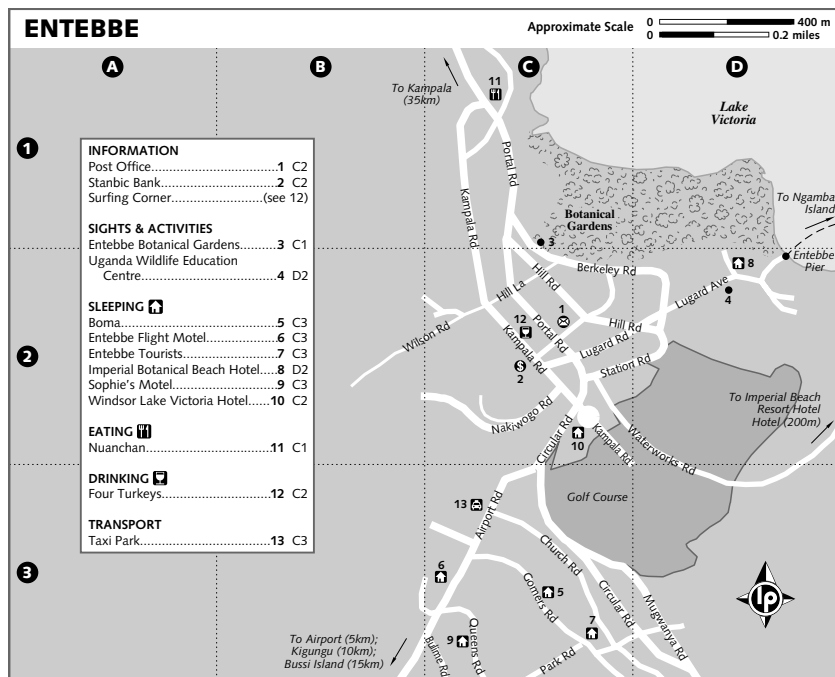
#### UGANDA WILDLIFE EDUCATION CENTRE

The **Uganda Wildlife Education Centre** (☎ 041-320520; www.ugandawildlifecentre.com; Lugard Ave; adult/child US\$10,000/5000; ☎ 9am–6.30pm), just below the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel, is a world-class animal refuge, which has benefited from much international assistance in recent years. This is not a zoo and none of the animals here are exhibits: all are recovered from poachers and traffickers. Star attractions include the first rhinos in Uganda since the war, lions, chimpanzees and shoebill storks. This is probably the easiest place to get good photos of wildlife in Uganda, especially the often elusive shoebill stork. A visit is a must if you are in Entebbe.

#### ENTEBBE BOTANICAL GARDENS

Worth a wander if you have some time to spare are the **Entebbe Botanical Gardens** (admission per person US\$1000, per car/camera/video camera US\$1000/2000/5000; ☎ 9am–7pm). Laid out in 1898 by A Whyte, the first curator, they're along the lake shore between the sailing club and the centre of Entebbe. Locals claim that some of the Johnny Weismuller *Tarzan* films were made here, although there aren't any chimps like Cheeta today. Even if you're not particularly enthusiastic about botany, there are some interesting, unusual trees and shrubs, and the gardens are fairly well maintained. There is quite a variety of bird species found in the gardens, some monkeys and, for arachnophiles, there is a spider walk, with plenty of big spiders clinging to their webs.





## Sleeping

Several flights leave Entebbe ludicrously early and it can save an hour or two in the morning if you stay out here.

**Entebbe Tourists** (☎ 041-320432; franktourists@hotmail.com; Gomers Rd; camping USh5000, dm USh8000, s/d USh13,000/15,000, with bathroom USh25,000) Bringing budget accommodation to central Entebbe, this friendly place is signposted from the airport road just after the Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel. Rooms are spacious, shared facilities are kept clean and the helpful owners can suggest things to do around town.

**Entebbe Flight Motel** (☎ 041-320812; flimotel@utonline.co.ug; Airport Rd; s/d USh40,000/50,000) Pretty much the closest hotel to the airport, this is the best all-round deal among the midrange places in town, as rooms include satellite TV and bathroom. It is just beyond the Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel, and rates include breakfast.

**Sophie's Motel** (☎ 041-320885; Queens Rd; smotel@afriaconline.co.ug; s/d with bathroom USh60,000/80,000, cottages USh100,000/120,000) Signposted from the road to the airport, all the rooms are named after African countries. The cottages are

virtual suites complete with TV and fridge. Readers say the owners are very friendly, making the stay more akin to a sojourn with family. Rates include a free airport shuttle.

**Boma** (☎ 077-467929; thebomaentebbe@infocom.co.ug; Gomers Rd; s/d US\$75/100) Entebbe's answer to the upmarket B&B, this little luxurious guesthouse has just six rooms. Prices are on the high side, but the atmosphere is intimate. Breakfast is included and meals are also served.

**Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel** (☎ 041-320800; reservations@ibbhotel.com; s/d US\$153/177, incl tax; 📞) Sitting on the shores of Lake Victoria, this hotel hosted President Bill Clinton back in 1998. If you are feeling flush, you can check into his presidential suite for just US\$413. Facilities include a swimming pool and several restaurants. Rates include breakfast.

**Imperial Resort Beach Hotel** (☎ 041-320244; www.imperialhotels.co.ug; Mpigi Close; s/d from US\$150/180; 📞 📺 📺) Under the same ownership as the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel, you'll find this offers the smartest rooms in town, but what's with the crazy blue colour? Ugly and there's an ugly 17% tax on top.

**Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel** (☎ 041-320645; windsor@imul.com; s/d from US\$133/170; 📞) This hotel has long played on history as a selling point, but history is catching up with it every day. Atmospheric enough, but it needs a major facelift to justify these prices, as the décor is from another era. The bar and restaurants are popular with nonguests, who can also use the pool for USh5000.

## Eating & Drinking

When it comes to food in Entebbe, quite a few people end up eating at their hotel. The Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel has a massive selection of menus, encompassing Chinese, Indian, Italian and fast food. Most dishes cost USh6000 to USh10,000, and they can be ordered poolside.

Take a deep breath... there's a Lao restaurant in Entebbe. No, not Thai, but Lao.

**Nuanchan** (☎ 071-980018; 2 Kintu Rd; dishes USh5000-8000) Run by two sisters from Laos living in Entebbe, the small menu is very authentic and includes some spicy salads, *tôm yam* soup and fried pork. Sadly, no Beer Lao, though.

**Four Turkeys** (Kampala Rd) The leading bar in town, although don't expect the nightlife to rock like Kampala in this small town. There's good bar food, and always a few local expats propping up the bar.

Just behind Four Turkeys is Legends, a local nightclub where the action continues towards the weekend.

## Getting There & Away

Minibuses run between Entebbe and Kampala (USh1500) throughout the day from the new taxi park in Kampala or the Entebbe roundabout.

## Getting Around

To get to the airport from Entebbe, either take a shared taxi (USh1000 per person) or charter the entire car for USh5000.

## LAKE VICTORIA

### Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary

There is a chimpanzee sanctuary located on Ngamba Island in Lake Victoria, nicknamed 'Chimp Island', which is now a popular day trip for tourists staying in Kampala. Relocated here in 1998, the original group of 19 has swelled to around 40 chimps. They can be viewed at very close range during feeding times (11am and 2.30pm). The chimps are free to wander about their forested home, and visitor fees are ploughed back into this and other chimpanzee conservation projects.

There is also now a **luxury tented camp** on the island, which allows for a more intimate chimp encounter for those with the time

## HIJACKING ENTEBBE'S REPUTATION

Entebbe would probably be one of the world's more obscure airports were it not for an infamous hijack that took place in June 1976. A planeload of Israelis was hijacked in a combined operation involving Palestinian and German terrorists, and the pilot was forced to land at Entebbe. After releasing all non-Israeli hostages, the terrorists demanded the release of prisoners held in Israeli jails, and money, in return for the remaining captives.

Idi Amin offered his services as mediator between the hijackers and the Israeli government, but was manipulating things behind the scenes. His sympathies for the Arab cause were widely publicised and he had already expelled Israeli military advisers from the country some years earlier. This made him a less-than-ideal mediator and the Israelis decided to apply their own solution to the problem.

They launched a surprise raid, with help from German and Kenyan authorities. Israeli paratroopers landed a plane on the runway, pulling out of the hold in a presidential Mercedes to dupe the hijackers into believing it was Idi Amin returning from negotiations. Almost all the hostages were freed and the hijackers shot dead in a clinical operation. This caused much embarrassment to Idi Amin, as he had been flouncing about attempting to engineer his own peculiar settlement. In retaliation, he broke off relations with Kenya, signalling the death knell of the already weakened East African Community. One of the Israeli hostages, Dora Bloch, who had been taken to hospital after choking on her food, was never seen again, presumably killed in retaliation for Amin's humiliation.

The old airport building is no longer used, as a newer airport has since been built.

and money. It costs US\$280 per person per night, including boat transfers, accommodation, meals and experiencing two chimp feedings.

The island is 23km from Entebbe. Trips out to visit the chimpanzees have to be arranged in advance with tour companies in Kampala (see p95). **Wild Frontiers** (☎ 041-321479, 077-502155; www.wildfrontiers.co.ug), based in Entebbe, is the official booking agent and offers transfers by speedboat. It costs US\$260 for the boat for up to four people and US\$65 per person for additional passengers, and takes about one hour. These prices include admission to the chimp sanctuary.

### Fishing Trips

Several safari companies offer fishing trips on Lake Victoria, including **The Uganda Safari Company** (☎ 041-251182; www.safariuganda.com) and **Wild Frontiers**. The quarry is the gigantic Nile perch, specimens of which often come in at more than 100kg. Prices for an all-day trip, including lunch, start at about US\$100 per person for a small group and rise as numbers drop.

### Speke Resort & Country Club

The huge **Speke Resort** (☎ 078-227111; www.speke-resort.com; admission Sat & Sun USh2000; s/d from US\$120/140) at Munyonyo marina, beyond Kabalagala, offers something for everyone, including tennis courts, an Olympic-size swimming pool (admission USh10,000), a modern gym, and a restaurant and bar complex.

The **Speke Equestrian Centre** offers horse riding around Lake Victoria and has a variety of rides from just one hour (USh22,500) to the whole day (USh60,000, minimum five).

### Bussi Island

**Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 077-430587; www.backpackers.co.ug; camping USh6000, dm USh10,000 bandas USh25,000-50,000) has developed a new island retreat out on Bussi, about 10km from Entebbe in Lake Victoria. The lush camping ground includes a private beach, and it is a short walk to the equator for those who like to have a foot in both hemispheres. It costs USh4000 by boat from Kigungu, a short minibus ride from Entebbe (USh1000). Contact Backpackers for more information and keep an eye out for future full-moon parties.

### MABIRA FOREST RESERVE

This large, attractive **forest reserve** (admission 1/2 days USh6000/10,000) is one of the more convenient places to see some of Uganda's myriad birds – it is home to more than 300 species. Monkeys are also easily spotted, but the bigger animals that may be present, such as leopards, are rarely seen. There is a well-established trail system here that offers access to pristine forest and bird life.

There is an attractive community **camp site** (camping USh3000, s/d bandas USh10,000/15,000, bandas for 3 or more people USh20,000) here and *bandas* have been tarted up recently. The staff can also prepare food (from USh3000). It is a great place to escape the traffic and noise of Kampala, and mountain bikes are available for hire (USh8000).

To get here just jump on a minibus traveling between Kampala and Jinja and get off when you see the signpost for the reserve. It lies about 20km west of Jinja.

### MPANGA FOREST RESERVE

About 37km southwest of Kampala on the road to Masaka, **Mpanga Forest Reserve** (admission USh3000) is another little getaway if the rigours, or nightlife, of the capital become too much. This is a young forest, little more than 50 years old, as it was used as a tropical research institute, but the sheer size of the trees attest to the progress that can be made with well-managed reforestation programs.

This reserve is well known for its many butterflies (181 species) and birds (141 species), and a number of clearly marked paths have been cut out of the thick undergrowth to enable closer viewing. There are also red-tailed monkeys around.

There is a small inexpensive **camp site** (camping per night USh3000, bandas per night USh10,000) here. Food is usually available, but take some supplies just in case.

To get here, take a minibus from the new taxi park in Kampala to Mpigi for USh3000 and then a *boda-boda* on to Mpanga for USh1000. Alternatively, take a bus or minibus heading to Masaka (USh5000) and ask to get off at Mpanga.

### THE EQUATOR

Uganda is one of only 10 countries in the world through which the equator passes, and this has led to the usual monument and souvenir shops that spring up in des-

tinuations from Ecuador to Indonesia. The equator crosses the Kampala to Masaka road at a point 78km south of the capital. There are two cement circles marking the line and it isn't such a bad spot for a photo opportunity, although it is altogether more convenient for those with transport.

One place that makes the equator a more worthwhile stop is the excellent **Equation Café** (www.aidchild.org), a great little café-restaurant that also sells high-quality handicrafts. Run by Aidchild to fund its activities to assist HIV/AIDS orphans, the art gallery here is 1st class, 'possibly the best shop on the planet' according to actress Emma Thompson. Iced coffee and a muffin sets you up for the journey southwest.

To get here from Kampala, jump on a Masaka bus and minibus and hope to pay USh3500, although it is likely you will be charged the full Masaka fare (USh5000).

## EASTERN UGANDA

Eastern Uganda is as good as a must on any visit to the 'Pearl of Africa' thanks to an intoxicating blend of adrenaline adventures. White-water rafting at the source of the Nile River leads the way, but quad biking, kayaking and bungee jumping are a pretty popular second around Jinja, East Africa's answer to Vic Falls. Further east is the massif of Mt Elgon, an extinct volcano that offers some of the most affordable trekking in the region, while nearby Sipi Falls is stunning, a beautiful spot to soak up the scenery and a great place to recover from the rigours of a trek.

Jinja is the largest town in the east, where the mighty Nile begins its epic journey north. As well as the daring diversions here, there are also more sedate activities, such as a round of golf or chilling out on a river island resort. Other towns in the region pale in comparison, but Mbale has a certain charm and fine views of Mt Elgon, while Moroto is a must for those attempting an overland assault on Kidepo Valley National Park.

For those with a taste for wild Africa, the overland journey to Kidepo is textbook rough, passing right through the heartland of the Karamojong people, a tough tribe of cattle herders who have managed to resist control from outsiders, black and white, for

centuries now. However, this is not a journey that should be undertaken lightly – see the boxed text, p507, for more details.

The roads in eastern Uganda are generally pretty good, but the main road from Jinja to the Kenyan border had more holes than a Swiss cheese at the time of writing. Most towns are well connected by regular buses and minibuses, but heading north of Moroto pickings are slim and the roads deteriorate rapidly.

### JINJA

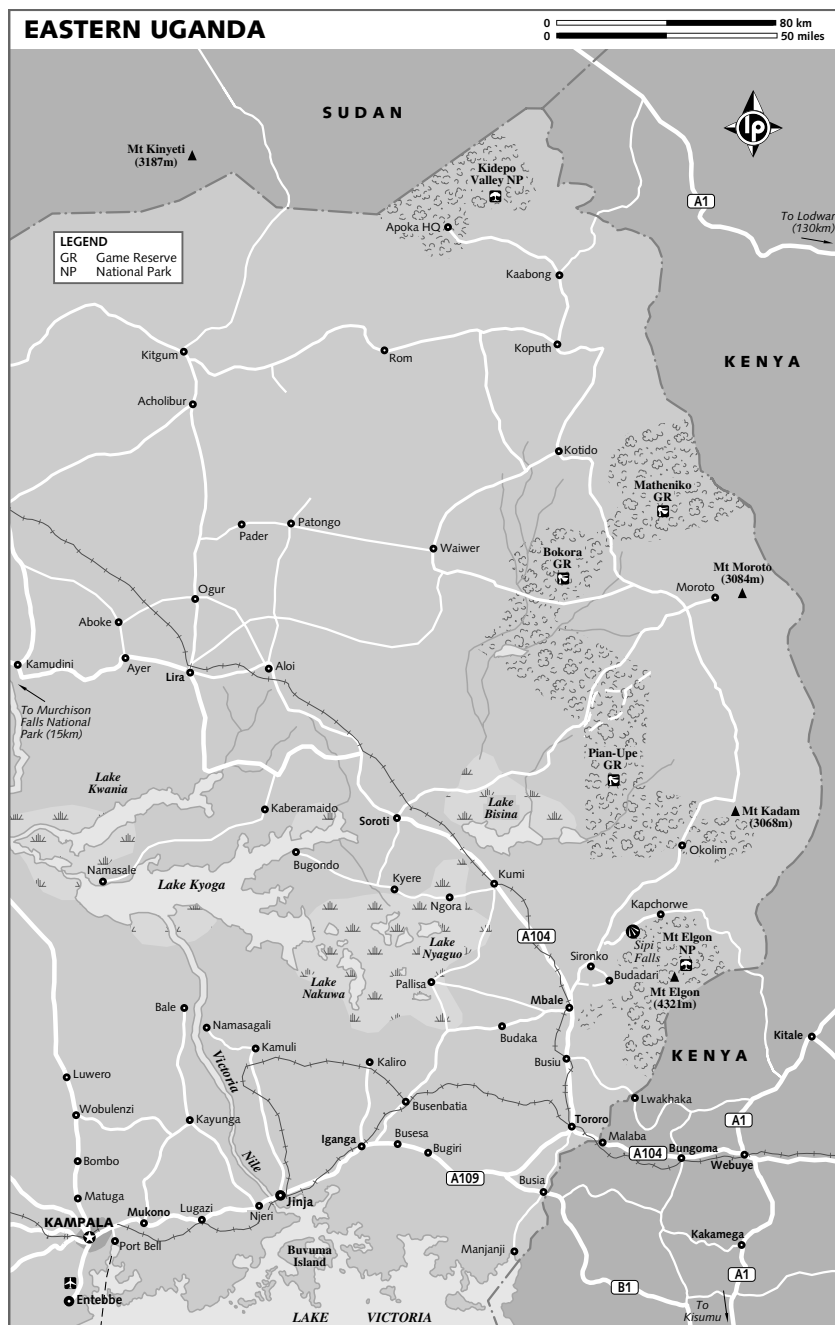
☎ 043

Jinja has some of the world's best white-water rafting on the doorstep, and is emerging as the adrenaline centre of East Africa, picking up punters as fast as Zimbabwe is losing them.

The town has a lush location on the shores of Lake Victoria and is the major market centre for eastern Uganda. It is a buzzing little place with much Indian-influenced architecture, reflecting the days when the town had a huge Asian community. Many Asians have returned to reclaim their businesses and properties, having been forced to leave during the Amin years, and with their return the town is once again flourishing. Check out the spacious mansions overlooking the lake along Nile Cres, opposite the town's golf course, for an insight into how wealthy this town once must have been. Jinja didn't suffer as badly as many other centres during the last civil war and does not wear the same cloak of dereliction. According to local residents, Okello's retreating troops were told in no uncertain terms that they weren't welcome.

The town itself may be short on big hitters, but nearby Bujagali Falls has them in abundance, and visitors can chose from white-water rafting, kayaking, quad biking or bungee jumping. The source of the Nile is also a sight to behold if you consider how far the water has to travel on its huge journey to the Mediterranean through Sudan and Egypt.

Coming from Kampala, the Owen Falls Dam forms a spectacular gateway to the town: as you coast across the top, look down on the raging river below. The dam supplies Uganda with the bulk of its electricity, or doesn't supply it with much electricity, depending on which way you look at it.



## Orientation

Jinja is seriously spread out, so getting your bearings away from the centre can take time. The centre of town is built on a simple grid, with Main St at its heart, home to the post office, plus most of the banks, shops and cafés. All roads that cross Main St have an east and west side, like in New York, indicated in this section as 'E' and 'W'. The taxi park and bus station are a few blocks east of the northern end of Main St. The town centre is easily negotiable on foot, but use a *boda-boda* if venturing to the riverfront area of town.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

Email and Internet services are available in Jinja at several places along Main St.

**Indigo** (61 Main St; per min USh40) Cheap online access and one of the fastest connections in town.

**Source Café** (20 Main St; per min USh50) A popular place to get online, the Source is also a cracking little coffee shop (p496).

### MONEY

There are several banks that change cash and travellers cheques, plus a few foreign exchange bureaus along Main St that stay open later than the banks. Note that the white-water rafting companies accept credit cards, but charge a commission (US\$5 or 7%).

**Crane Bank** (☎ 043-122060; 40 Lubas Rd) This place can deal with small amounts of travellers cheques and cash.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (☎ 043-122661; Main St) Probably the most useful bank, it offers currency exchange, travellers-cheque encashment and has an ATM for international credit cards.

### POST

**Main post office** (cnr Main St & Bell Ave)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

There is no government-run tourist office in Jinja, so the best place to pick up tourist information is through **Nile River Explorers Backpackers** (☎ 043-120236; rafting@starcom.co.ug; 41 Wilson Ave) or the adventure companies out at Bujagali Falls. The handy noticeboards are packed with flyers and information covering Jinja and Uganda beyond.

### Sights & Activities

#### SOURCE OF THE NILE

The **source of the Nile** (admission per person/car/motorcycle USh2000/1200/500) is promoted as one

of Jinja's premier drawcards and tourists are bussed in from Kampala to marvel at the start of this mighty river. In reality there is not a whole lot to see. Before the building of the Ripon Falls Dam, this was the site of the Ripon Falls, where the Nile, known locally as Omugga Kiyara, thundered out of Lake Victoria on its long journey to the Mediterranean. The falls were blown away to ensure a steady flow of water for the dam, but it's just about possible to make out where they were from the turbulence in the river.

Bell Breweries now sponsors the area, so everything has been painted yellow and red in keeping with the corporate image. It is pretty garish, but at least you can get a cold drink under the shade of some trees. There is a large plaque covering the 'discovery' of the source by John Speke, although many Africans contend that their ancestors knew this was the Nile's source long before the white man found out about it. For more on the story of the search for the source of the Nile and the contending claims in Burundi and Rwanda, see the boxed text 'The Search for the Source' (p613).

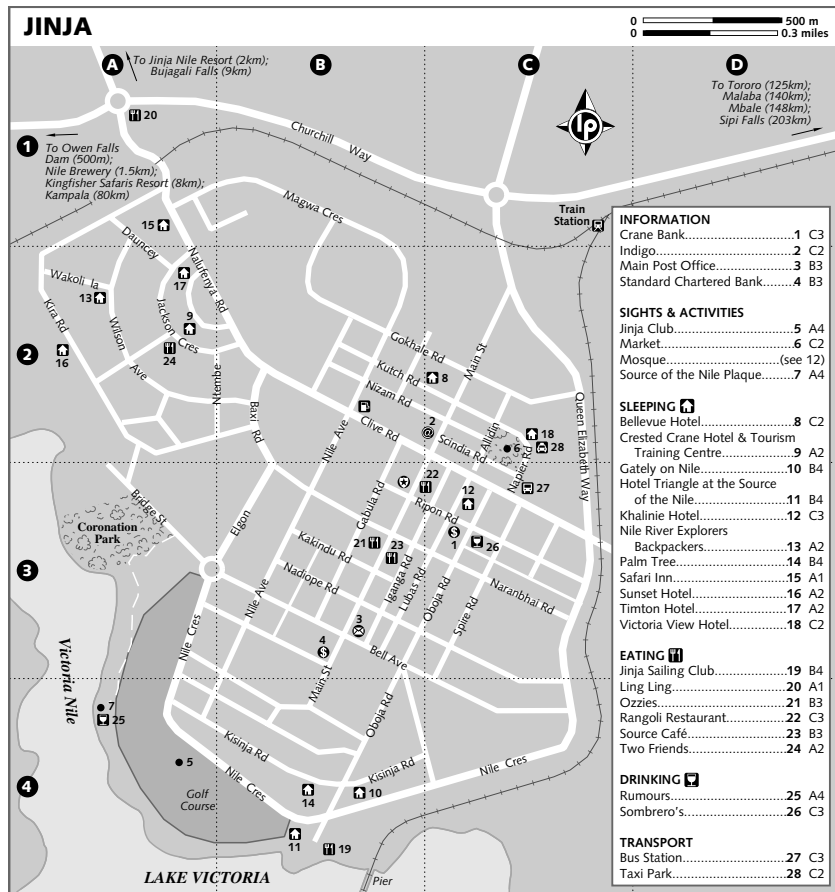
It is possible to organise boat rides on the river from here. Locals will charge around USh10,000 or contact Rumours bar for something more organised (p497).

### GANDHI'S SHRINE

Near the source of the Nile plaque is a small **memorial garden** commemorating Mahatma Gandhi, the centrepiece of which is a bronze bust donated by the Indian Government. This area is becoming quite a pilgrimage site for Ugandan Indians, as this is one of the places where Gandhi's ashes were scattered. So Gandhi was rafting the Nile long before the Adrift team came to town.

### NILE BREWERY

For those consuming copious amounts of Nile Special in Kampala, this alternative 'source of the Nile' makes a lively day out, and includes the obligatory complimentary beer. Free guided tours can sometimes be arranged in advance by calling ☎ 033-210009. There is a small souvenir shop where you can buy T-shirts, bottle openers and the like. It is certainly a more original brewery visit than the one to the Heineken brewery in Amsterdam.



## JINJA CLUB

Part of **Jinja Golf Club**, the club offers the only public swimming pool (US\$5000 a day) in Jinja, tennis and squash (US\$3000), and a nine-hole golf course (US\$10,000 per round). There is also a bar and a small restaurant with reasonably priced meals. Golfers need to pay an extra US\$15,000 for the clubs, unless you are crazy enough to be lugging your own around Uganda!

## Sleeping BUDGET

For campers or those wanting a peaceful spot with breathtaking scenery, there are some great options out at Bujagali Falls (p498).

**Nile River Explorers Backpackers** (☎ 043-120236; rafting@starcom.co.ug; 41 Wilson Ave; camping US\$3, dm/d US\$5/20) Jinja's original budget crash pad and is still going strong. The most popular place in town, it has a buzzing bar, free pool and satellite TV, as well as wholesome information on attractions across Uganda. Things can really kick off if a truck or two pass through, but that's nothing compared to the sister camping ground out at Bujagali. Credit cards are accepted for raft bookings, so you can lump your accommodation in with this if you are short of cash. It also has some successful community projects up and running – see p498. Next door is Kilombera, producing handwoven Ugandan cotton throws and wraps

**Victoria View Hotel** (☎ 043-122319; 36 Kutch Rd E; r US\$10,000) Dix points when it comes to imagination on the name, as it's miles from the lake. Still, it's a good budget option, as the 25 self-contained rooms are a fair deal. It is conveniently located near the taxi park for an early escape.

**Khalinie Hotel** (☎ 071-865874; 46 Lubas Rd; s/d with bathroom US\$10,000/15,000) If hot water is a must but cash a concern, this hotel is reasonably good value, although lacking anything in the way of soul. Still, it's not as if Jinja is the home of soul after all. It's also not the nicest part of town.

**Bellevue Hotel** (☎ 043-120328; 4 Kutch Rd W; s US\$10,000-25,000, d US\$15,000-30,000) Long popular with NGOs, thanks to a combination of clean rooms and value for money, the

cheaper rooms involve sharing a bathroom with neighbours, but hot water is available throughout.

There are plenty more cheapies spread across Jinja, but many of these cater solely for students studying here.

## MIDRANGE

**Timton Hotel** (☎ 043-120278; 15 Jackson Cres; camping US\$3000; s/d/ste US\$20,000/30,000/50,000) The long-running Timton is a friendly little family house set in spacious and well-tended grounds. Its motto is 'a home away from home', the suites include a TV and all rates include breakfast. It also has a verdant garden, where tents can be pitched cheaply.

**Safari Inn** (3 Nalufenyia Rd) This is the Annesworth Hotel reborn. It was under renovation

## WHITE-WATER RAFTING AT THE SOURCE OF THE NILE

The source of the Nile is one of the most spectacular white-water rafting destinations in the world and for many visitors to Uganda a rafting trip is the highlight of their visit. There are now four companies offering exhilaration without compromise. The two most popular players are the pioneers **Adrift** (The Adventure Centre; ☎ 041-252720, 077-454206; www.surfthesource.com; 7 Kira Rd) based in Kampala (in the Uganda Wildlife Authority compound) and popular **Nile River Explorers** (NRE; ☎ 041-120236; www.raffafrica.com), with an office at Explorers Backpackers in Jinja and its campsite at Bujagali Falls. The other two operators include **Equator Rafts** (☎ 041-123712; rafting@utonline.co.ug), based at Speke Camp, Bujagali Falls, and the newcomer **Nalubale Rafting** (☎ 078-638938; www.nalubalerafting.com). Depending on who you talk to, you might hear good or bad stories about any of them, but ultimately, you'll have a blast with all the operators. Prices for a full day on the water currently cost US\$95, but competition sometimes drives them a little lower.

All the companies take on the Big Four, all monster Grade Five rapids, including **Itanda** (The Bad Place), but there is always a safety boat on hand if you decide the rapids are just too big for you. All of them also include a host of incentives to lure you over, including meals and beers. They also offer DVDs and videos of your big day out if you think that no-one will believe you were brave enough back home. All operators accept credit cards, and you can also book trips through guesthouses and hotels in Kampala. They can all pick up punters from the popular hostels and hotels in Kampala, and drop off in the evening for those not staying in Jinja.

Adrift also offers a popular family float trip over two days, which gives younger children a taste of river action and gives the adults a chance to try their hand at river boarding (below). It also offers two- or three-day combinations for the full Nile experience and a rafting-bungee combo if you really want to push your buttons.

NRE offers the longest day ride (30km) on the river, as it puts in further upstream than the competition. The team also offers a second day of rafting at just US\$40 for repeat offenders. NRE also operates the most popular camping ground in town above Bujagali Falls; see later in this section for details.

Other river activities are also growing in popularity, including river boarding for the brave-hearted – taking on the mighty waters of the Nile armed only with a boogie board, and kayaking courses to learn how to tame the raging river with a paddle. Check out **Kayak the Nile** (www.kayakthenile.com) for more on professional kayaking courses from three to five days, as well as tandem kayaking trips and sunset paddles. All in all, the Nile looks set to compete with the Zambezi for the title of Africa's favourite river for frolics in the coming years.

## GANDHI IN UGANDA?

It comes as something of a surprise to find a statue commemorating Mahatma Gandhi (or more precisely, the scattering of his ashes) at a Hindu temple near Jinja.

It seems that on Gandhi's death in 1948, his ashes were divided up and sent to many locations around the world to be scattered, and some ended up in the Nile River in Uganda. There were also some that ended up in a bank vault in India and were only released in 1997 following a lengthy custody dispute.

when we were in town, but things looked very promising, with fully renovated rooms, spacious grounds and a restaurant-bar.

**Two Friends** (☎ 077-984821; 6 Jackson Cres; r USh40,000-80,000) Jinja's popular pizzeria has added some rooms in an adjoining house. The new pad boasts some plush décor, but the cheaper rooms with shared bathroom are a little on the expensive side given you might have to wander the corridors at night.

**Crested Crane Hotel & Tourism Training Centre** (☎ 043-121954; http://source.co.ug; 4 Hannington Sq; s/d/executive ste USh45,000/50,000/100,000) A Ministry of Tourism property, as the name suggests, the government uses it to train staff in the tourism industry. Before you start cringing, fear not; trainees are not let loose in the hotel itself. Rooms are well appointed and executive suites are large; breakfast is included.

**Sunset Hotel** (☎ 043-120115; www.sunsethotel.uganda.com; Kira Rd; r USh75,000-150,000; 🍷) Rooms come in various shapes and sizes, the price increasing with the number of gadgets thrown in. Shelling out on the top-whack rooms brings a Jacuzzi, not necessarily something you'd expect in Jinja. Rates include breakfast. It overlooks the Nile, making its bar a top spot for a sundowner.

**Hotel Triangle at the Source of the Nile** (☎ 043-122099; s/d/ste USh50,000/60,000/70,000) Occupying a commanding ridge above Lake Victoria, it has a great location, but unfortunately the building itself is pretty unattractive, with no thought given to traditional design. When it comes to the smart rooms, in practice, ground-floor rooms are USh50,000, while those upstairs with a better view cost USh60,000.

## TOP END

**Gately on Nile** (☎ 043-122400; www.gately-on-nile.com; 34 Kisinja Rd; s/d US\$60/86) Set in a grand old colonial house with sumptuous grounds, this is the leading choice in Jinja. It offers a selection of thoughtfully decorated rooms, some with fine views, and boasts communal areas that have a great atmosphere for relaxing. New bungalows have been added in the garden and include Balinese-style open bathrooms. Rates include breakfast, and its restaurant (opposite) is one of the best in town.

**Palm Tree** (☎ 077-500400; palmtreejinja@yahoo.com; 24 Kisinja Rd; s/d USh95,000/100,000) Just down the road from Gately in a former presidential lodge that may have housed Amin, Obote and Museveni over the years, Palm Tree offers a small selection of smart rooms with panoramas across the gardens. There is also a restaurant and bar downstairs, and breakfast is included.

**Jinja Nile Resort** (☎ 043-122190; www.madahotels.com; s/d/tr from US\$80/100/120; 🍷 🍷) The biggest resort in the Jinja area, this popular conference venue has a swimming pool, gym and tennis courts. Located a short way off the road to Bujagali Falls, it offers fine views of the Nile for those willing to pay an extra US\$20. Look out for weekend specials when there is no conference business in town.

**Kingfisher Safaris Resort** (☎ 077-510197; www.kingfishersafaris.com; s/d from €35/50, f from €60; 🍷 🍷) Clearly visible from the source of the Nile, this traditionally designed resort is about a 9km drive from Jinja. The thatched *bandas* are comfortably kitted out and there is an impressive swimming pool set among the green gardens.

## Eating

The cuisine scene in Jinja has really started to move in the last few years, with some fine restaurants at the top-end hotels and a great new option out at Bujagali Falls (p498).

**Source Café** (☎ 043-120911; 20 Main St; mains USh1500-4500) Hit the Source for a fair selection of light bites, salads, brownies and pastries. This is the place for a coffee fix, as it has several speciality varieties.

**Rangoli Restaurant** (42 Main St; mains USh2000-5000) Still probably the most popular Indian restaurant in town, although there's not a whole lot of competition. There is a pretty good selection of subcontinental standards, including large thalis at USh5000 with meat

or USh4000 for vegetarian. Guaranteed to keep the hunger at bay.

**Ozzies** (Main St; mains USh2500-6000) A deservedly popular hole-in-the-wall type of place that turns out an impressive range of Western favourites, like full English breakfasts and burgers, pizza and pasta dishes, all at reasonable prices.

**Gately on Nile** (☎ 043-122400; 34 Kisinja Rd; mains USh5000-15,000) The restaurant at Jinja's popular boutique hotel is a must for lovers of fine food. The fusion menu blends the best of local produce and international flair, and includes memorable moments like chunky pork chops in a sherry and garlic marinade.

**Two Friends** (☎ 077-984821; 6 Jackson Cres; pizza USh7500-12,000) Tucked away on the quiet crescent between Explorers Backpackers and the Crested Crane, this is the number one name for Italian food in Jinja. Higher prices than Kampala don't deter the regulars, and the menu also includes some steaks and Indian dishes. A lovely garden setting rounds things off.

**Ling Ling** (Kampala Roundabout; mains USh5000-10,000) Formerly Fang Fang, this place has one of the weirdest locations for any Chinese restaurant – in the forecourt of a petrol station – but don't let that distract from the food. The best Chinese beyond Kampala, tuck into a good spread with drinks for around USh15,000.

**Jinja Sailing Club** (Nile Cres) This was long one of the best spots in town to sip a cold drink and watch the sun go down across the lake. However, it was closed at the time of writing, although it seems inevitable that an institution will rise from the ashes one day soon.

## Drinking & Entertainment

There is not a lot of entertainment in Jinja, but for those arriving from Nairobi, it might be considered entertaining enough just being able to walk the streets at night without the fear of being mugged.

Explorers Backpackers is always a popular drinking hole thanks to the travellers and overland trucks regularly passing through, although the real action seems to go on out at Bujagali Falls these days.

The best thing about bars in Jinja is that most of them are very close together. For those who like a beer or two, Main St offers a suitable strip for a bar crawl, as every other shopfront seems to be a bar by night.

**Sombrero's** (Spire Rd) If you are already tanked up and feeling cheesy, head to the leading club in town, although if you have seen the places it is leading, that isn't quite the commendation it sounds. Local expats hit it once in a while and it's a more Ugandan experience than life at the camping grounds.

**Rumours** (☎ 077-984821; source of the Nile) A popular local spot for a beer, but a little out the way for most tourists. It has perhaps the best location of any bar in Jinja and is prime sunset territory. It is built entirely from wood and has a series of walkways running along the edge of the river. To get here take a *boda-boda* to the source of the Nile plaque and head upriver a short way. It is quite a descent to the riverbank from the side of the road, so watch out on a dark, wet night after a few ales.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

Uganda Railways ferries operate between Jinja and Mwanza in Tanzania, but they don't take passengers. If you want to get to Mwanza by ferry, it is necessary to take a Uganda or Tanzania Railways cargo ferry from Port Bell. See p556 for details.

### BUS

The road between Jinja and Kampala is 80km of solid tarmac, so the trip takes anything from one to two hours by minibus or bus, depending on the traffic in or out of the capital. Minibuses from Kampala (USh4000) leave from the new taxi park. Coasters (small buses) are slightly cheaper at USh3500 and possibly slightly safer because of their size, but take longer to fill up with passengers.

There are minibuses from Jinja to the Kenyan border at either Malaba (USh7000, two hours) or Busia (USh6000, 1½ hours). Those heading to Mbale (two hours) for Sipi Falls or Mt Elgon need USh6000 handy.

## Getting Around

The centre of Jinja is compact enough to wander about on foot. However, if you are heading to the source of the Nile, the Owen Falls Dam or the Nile Brewery, you might be advised to take a *boda-boda*. These cost USh500 to USh1500, depending on your negotiating skills.

## AROUND JINJA

### Bujagali Falls

More a series of large rapids than a conventional waterfall, **Bujagali Falls** (admission US\$2000) remains one of Uganda's outstanding natural beauty spots, and is very popular with locals on weekends. This is one of East Africa's more laid-back locations and it is well worth setting some time aside to chill for a few days. A lot of travellers end up staying out here before or after a rafting trip, as there are two popular camping grounds here. During our last visit, a deal was signed for a multi-million dollar resort to be built here, so things may change very fast and don't be too disappointed if there is some serious construction going on in the area. There is also the chance that the controversial Bujagali Falls Dam will finally go ahead, having been suspended several times due to corruption. One way or the other, change is coming, but there will still be adrenaline and adventure in large doses.

Ugandans take a peculiar delight in watching local men throw themselves into the top of the falls with nothing more than a plastic jerry can, sealed with an avocado, to keep them alive. Each to their own and all that, but this is a seriously dangerous practice. Should they lose their grip, they are dead. Surely this is taking risking one's life to make a living to extremes, and it should not be encouraged by tourists. Save your US\$5000 for something else, or give the guys US\$5000 not to chuck themselves in, as they likely have families to look after. However, a couple of guys are real pros at this art and have formed the **Bujagali Swimmers**, mastering a safe route through the turbulent waters.

## ACTIVITIES

### Quad Biking

Quad biking along the beautiful banks of the Victoria Nile is a real blast thanks to **All Terrain Adventures** (☎ 077-377185; www.traveluganda.co.ug/ata; Bujagali Falls). It now has more than a dozen quads and after a little spin on the practice circuit, it is time to explore the paths and trails that criss-cross the nearby countryside. This is huge fun if you've never tried this sort of thing before, and those with experience will love some of the longer trips. There are several spins available, starting with a one-hour short-haul safari at US\$60,000, right up to a trailblazer that

takes half a day (US\$120,000). Another popular option includes the twilight cruiser with a meal in a local home, and plans are afoot to develop quad-biking safaris through Lake Mburo National Park. Rafting and quad-biking specials are also available. Contributions are made to local communities in the area, ensuring a wild welcome on the way.

### Bungee Jumping

Nile High Bungee is Uganda's only bungee jump, a 44m plunge into the Nile River. Set close to the riverbank, it looks scary from above but is very safe. Look at the arrow on the roof and pull out your finest swan dive. Contact the **Adventure Centre** (☎ 041 252720; www.surfthesource.com; Kira Rd, Kampala) for bookings and information, or drop in on the Nile High Camp (see opposite), Adrift's base near the Jinja Nile Resort.

### Nile Flyer

Under development during our visit, the Nile Flyer is your chance to fly across the River Nile supported by a steel wire. Sort of like hang gliding with a guaranteed safe landing, this will be another way to get up close and personal with the mighty Nile. Ask around in Bujagali, Jinja or Kampala for more details.

### Community Projects

There are plenty of projects to support the local communities around Bujagali Falls. **Soft Power Education** (www.softpowereducation.com) has a popular volunteer program to assist local schools in the area and people can sign up for a few days or a few months. The results are evident for all to see, with school buildings in better shape and education standards improving. NRE also offers **community walks** to help fund community activities, costing US\$5 per person. These sort of initiatives are a great thing to get involved in for travellers, particularly when you bear in mind that the cost of rafting is equivalent to about three or four months' salary for the average Ugandan.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Nile River Explorers Campsite** (☎ 043-120236; camping US\$3, dm US\$5, bandas US\$15) The most popular place to stay in the Jinja area, always packed to the gunnels with overland trucks and backpackers. Thoughtful terracing means some brilliant views for those in *bandas* and

tents, while the showers look out over the river, which can make a scrub up a whole lot more interesting than usual. The restaurant and bar are packed to the rafters come the evening, so pitch your tent far enough away if you plan a quiet one. If not, just join the party.

**Nile Porch** (☎ 043-120236; www.nileporch.com; s/d/tr US\$54/84/108) Under the same ownership as NRE Campsite, but a world away in style and standards, the Nile Porch brings the lodge experience to Bujagali. The luxurious tents are superbly set on a cliff above the river, and include hot-water bathrooms and elegant furnishings. There is a swimming pool for guests and some family units available for those travelling in numbers. A great place, and great value when compared with what's on offer in the national parks around East Africa.

**Black Lantern** (☎ 078-321541; www.nileporch.com; mains US\$5000-15,000) Bujagali's premier dining destination, this is the restaurant at the Nile Porch. Set under a traditional thatched roof, the extensive menu includes several stops around the world, including Western, Indian, Chinese and Italian. Spare ribs are a speciality and the portions are enormous. Vegetarians, quiver not at the mention of ribs; there are several non-meat options as well.

**Speke Camp Site** (☎ 077-379566; camping US\$2, banda dm US\$5, d bandas US\$15) Boasting the best location of any camping ground in Uganda, Speke is right next to the falls themselves. The site offers camping and *bandas*, but may not be around much longer if the planned mega-resort goes ahead. There is also a popular restaurant and bar here, a good spot to take in a beer at the end of the day.

**Eden Rock Resort** (☎ 077-501222; www.edenrocknile.com; camping US\$3, r US\$27,000) Eden Rock Resort played host to Prince William when he came rafting in Uganda a few years ago, although it's unlikely his grandmother would have approved of the rooms. It offers basic *bandas* with bathrooms, set amid impressive gardens. It is a good choice for campers who are turned off by the sight of too many trucks at NRE Campsite. There is a nice central bar and restaurant, with the only satellite TV link in the area, plus there is a weird right-angle pool table to confuse the hustlers.

**ATA Café** (☎ 077-377185) Drop in on this friendly little café, part of the quad-biking set up, for good company and cheap eats.

The menu is small, but includes plenty of Western favourites and the best-value all-day breakfast in Uganda.

**Nile High Camp** (☎ 077-237438; NileHigh@surfthesource.com; Kimaka Rd; camping US\$2, dm US\$5; r per person from US\$20) Not exactly Bujagali but just off the road back towards Jinja, Nile High is Adrift's base for rafting and bungee jumping. The pretty camp includes solid dorms, large open camping grounds and a couple of new bungalows with big river views. Best of all will be the new restaurant and bar under construction with a bird's-eye view of the bungee.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bujagali Falls is about 9km from Jinja. To get here, head northwest out of town and go straight ahead at the Kampala roundabout. Follow this sometimes smooth, sometimes bumpy road and turn left at the large signpost pointing to the falls. Minibuses head out this way (US\$500, 20 minutes) on weekends, while by *boda-boda* it costs about US\$3000 and to charter a special taxi US\$8000 or so.

### Hairy Lemon

Yes, it's kind of unique to give a camp its own entry, but then **Hairy Lemon** (☎ 075-893086; lemonthenile@yahoo.com; dm US\$30,000, s/d furnished tents US\$60,000/80,000, all full board) is a unique kind of place and pretty much in the middle of nowhere. But that's the idea, it's a getaway, a retreat, an isolated island for relaxation and reflection. Facilities include hot showers, and three hearty meals are served a day, including veggie options. Volleyball, swimming and bird-watching are all possible, and just down the river is Nile Special, a world-class hole for those with their own kayak and plenty of experience. As space is limited, it's absolutely essential to book ahead, and telephoning is more reliable than email. To get here, take a minibus from Njeru taxi stand opposite the Nile Brewery in Jinja to Nazigo (US\$1500). From Nazigo, take a *boda-boda* (US\$2000) to the Hairy Lemon. Bang on the wheel hub and a boat will come across to welcome you.

### TORORO

☎ 045

There's not a lot to lure visitors to Tororo and most travellers prefer to base themselves in Jinja or Mbale. Located in the far

east of Uganda, not far from the border with Kenya, the town has not aged particularly well during the long years of trouble. Two large Hindu temples suggest it had a substantial Asian community in the years before Amin, and Asian interests are once again controlling its celebrated cement factory. Today the only redeeming feature is the intriguing, forest-covered volcanic plug that rises up abruptly from the plain at the back of the town. The views from the top are definitely worth the climb up should you happen to find yourself stuck in the area.

## Information

**Stanbic Bank** (cnr Busia Rd & Uhuru Dr) is the best bet for exchanging cash or travellers cheques. The post office offers international telephone and fax services.

## Sleeping & Eating

There is no shortage of fleapits in Tororo, but cutting to the chase, the following option is better than the rest.

**Deluxe Guesthouse** (☎ 045-44986; 10 Market St; s/d USh8000/15,000) The doubles come with their own bathroom and are a better bet than the pokey singles downstairs.

**Crystal Hotel** (☎ 045-45180; 22 Bazaar St; s/d USh20,000/25,000) Moving up a gear, this is the most comfortable hotel in the centre of town. It has clean enough twin-bedded rooms with mosquito net and hot-water bathrooms. There's a restaurant downstairs that is popular with locals for its hearty fare, as well as a bar.

**Rock Classic Hotel** (☎ 045-45069; info@rockclassic.com; 70 Malaba Rd; s/d USh45,000/50,000; 📶) A venerable hangover from the British era in Uganda, this hotel was recently given a full facelift and is now pretty plush for this part of Uganda. Located on the outskirts of town on the road to Malaba, rooms have TV and hot-water bathrooms. Camping is also available for just USh5000, a top deal if you happen to get stuck here and want to cool off in the pool.

## Getting There & Away

Minibuses run to Kampala (USh10,000, three to four hours), Jinja (USh6000, two hours), Mbale (USh3000, one hour) and Malaba on the Kenyan border (USh1500, 30 minutes).

## MBALE

☎ 045

When it comes to location, Mbale has a striking setting at the base of Mt Elgon and the city is the logical base for an assault on the mountain from the Ugandan side. A bustling provincial city, it is one of the nicer places in which to spend some time. It's also a good starting point for a trip to Sipi Falls, the country's most beautiful waterfall, 55km to the northeast.

## Information

There are several banks along Republic St, including Stanbic Bank and Centenary Rural Development Bank. The post office has international telephone and fax services, but it has some competition from MTN, which has phone booths across the city.

**Serve Supermarket** (5 Cathedral Ave; per min USh50) A reliable Internet connection located upstairs in a local supermarket.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (☎ 045-35141; 37 Republic St) The best bank for travellers, as it changes major currencies, travellers cheques and has an ATM for credit-card withdrawals.

**Uganda Wildlife Authority office** (UWA; ☎ 045-33720; www.uwa.or.ug; 19 Masaba Rd; 🕒 8am-5pm) For information on climbing Mt Elgon, visit this office on the way to the Mt Elgon Hotel (not to be confused with the Mt Elgon View Hotel!). The staff can help organise a trek. For details on climbing Mt Elgon, see p503.

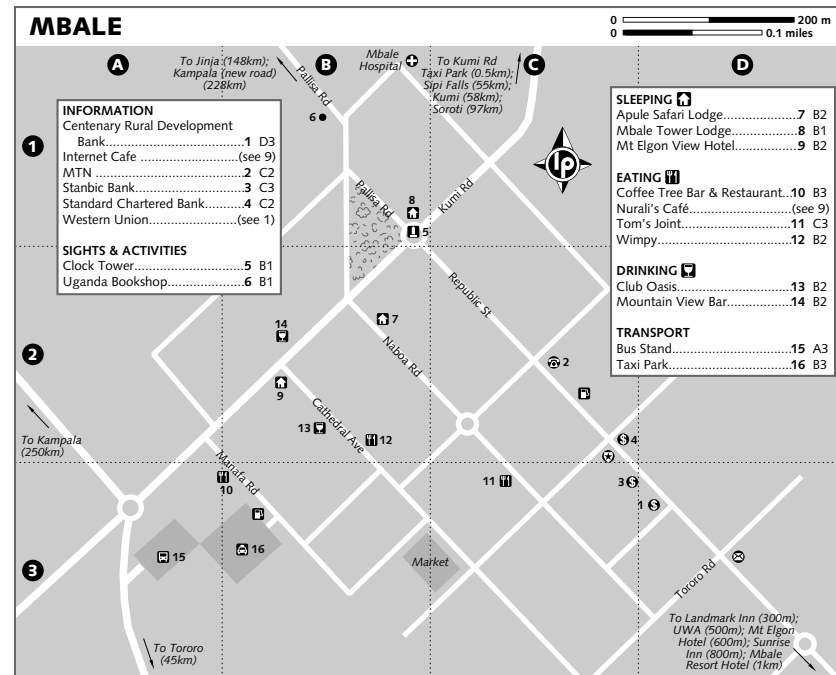
## Sleeping

### BUDGET

Budget options below the USh10,000 mark are eminently missable, but there are a couple of good places for those prepared to spend USh15,000 or so.

**Mt Elgon View Hotel** (☎ 045-34668; 1 Cathedral Ave; s/d USh12,000/15,000, d with bathroom USh25,000) This hotel has been around for an eternity, but remains the most popular place at this price. Not to be confused with the more expensive Mt Elgon Hotel, on a clear day you might just get a view of the base of the looming mountain. Double rooms are better value than the cubicles that pass as singles, but all are well looked after. There is a lively little bar and pool table on the 1st floor, while downstairs is the excellent Nurali's Café (p502).

**Mbale Tower Lodge** (☎ 045-34620; 1 Pallisa Rd; s/d USh6000/10,000) When it comes to the cheapest of the cheap, this pad has a good location



overlooking the central clock tower. Rates vary depending on the bed size and access to hot water. Check out the philosophical musings on the wall behind reception.

**Apule Safari Lodge** (☎ 077-502421; 5 Naboa Rd; s USh8000, s/d with bathroom USh12,000/14,000) This little courtyard lodge offers what it claims is 'executive accommodation', although it is doubtful that many corporations would rate it as such. Each room is named after one of Uganda's many lakes.

**Salem Mbale** (☎ 077-505595; camping USh2000, dm USh4000, r USh15,000-25,000) Those with their own wheels might like to make for Salem Mbale. It is some distance out of town, but all proceeds from the guesthouse go towards local projects, such as childcare and a health centre in Nakaloke district. Rooms are set in attractive *bandas*, and meals and refreshments are available. To get here, take a minibus to Nakaloke (USh500) and then a *boda-boda* to the guesthouse for about USh500.

## MIDRANGE

**Mt Elgon Hotel** (☎ 045-33454; 30 Masaba Rd; s USh45,000-75,000, d 55,000-85,000; 📶) Recently given a much

needed makeover, this colonial-era stalwart is once again one of the better addresses in Mbale. The rooms are large and spacious with satellite TV, and more expensive options include air-con. It's in a quiet part of the city, surrounded by its own verdant grounds, and now includes a little crazy golf course out the front. The bar is a lively gathering place for guests, local aid workers and government officials. Rates include breakfast and tax.

**Sunrise Inn** (☎ 045-33090; r USh40,000-60,000) Even further out of the city than the Mt Elgon Hotel, off Masaba Rd, this place is perennially full thanks to its good reputation. Rooms are very well kept and include satellite TV and a telephone. Bookings advised.

**Landmark Inn** (☎ 045-33880; r USh30,000) Set in a grand old house with expansive gardens, this is Mbale's answer to the budget boutique hotel. The huge rooms have high ceilings and large bathrooms that might pass as a single room in some Kampala crash pads. There is an excellent Indian restaurant downstairs, which competes with Nurali's Café for the title of best food in the city.

**Mbale Resort Hotel** (☎ 045-33920; www.mbale.resort.org; 50 Bungokho Rd; r USh50,000-100,000; 🏠) This is the top bill in Mbale, a smart resort, with a pool and swim-up bar, a gym, and a sauna and steam bath. Rooms are well-appointed throughout and have satellite TV and IDD telephone.

## Eating

Indian restaurants offer the best dining in Mbale, closely followed by the big hotels, as the local places are overwhelmingly of the greasy spoon variety.

**Nurali's Café** (1 Cathedral Ave; mains USh3000-7000) Kicking off with a cracker, Nurali's (located beneath the Mt Elgon View Hotel) is a fine Indian restaurant that dishes out delicious curries, some Ugandan greatest hits, a bit of Italian and a smattering of Chinese. Try the fish tikka or something from the tandoori grill. Its bar is the closest thing to a proper pub in Mbale and screens football matches. Competition in the curry stakes comes from the Landmark Inn (see p501).

**Tom's Joint** (Naboa Rd; mains USh1000-4000) This blink-and-you'll-miss it spot has long been popular with young volunteers posted in Mbale. Food and drink are cheap, and the owners are mighty cheerful.

**Wimpy** (Cathedral Ave; mains USh2000-4000) Check out the kitsch advertising posters from decades gone by for a flashback to English burger bars of old. The menu is not exactly authentic Wimpy cuisine, but most consider this a blessing in disguise. Bargain burgers, plus omelettes and Ugandan staples.

**Coffee Tree Bar & Restaurant** (Manafa Rd; meals from USh2000) This local canteen is a busy spot for breakfast and lunch. The open-air terrace bar overlooking the street is a potential place for a cold beer or two on a quiet afternoon.

For something more international in accent, consider the restaurants at Mt Elgon Hotel, Sunrise Inn and Mbale Resort Hotel. The menus won't set the pulse racing, but they have a lot more to offer than local eateries in town. Plan to spend USh5000 to USh10,000 for a filling feed.

## Drinking & Entertainment

There are a few lively local bars around town, including the upstairs **Mountain View Bar** (Kumi Rd), but it can get a bit too lively some nights with local drunks hassling you left, right and centre. Definitely not

the place for a woman travelling alone to relax in, as it is where *waragi* (millet-based alcohol) rules with the local guys.

For the discerning drinker, the hotel bars at the Mbale Resort Hotel or the Mt Elgon Hotel serve a full range of drinks, including wine and spirits, or the aforementioned Nurali's Café.

**Club Oasis** (Cathedral Ave; admission USh1000; ☎ Wed-Sun) Mbale's local nightspot, with themed music nights ranging from reggae and ragga to *bhangra* (rhythmic Punjabi music). It draws a steady crowd of locals looking to shoot pool, drink and dance.

## Getting There & Away

There are frequent minibuses to Tororo (USh3000, one hour), Kampala (USh10,000, three hours) and Jinja (USh6000, two hours), as well as to Soroti (USh4500, 1½ hours). The taxi park off Manafa Rd is small, but fairly chaotic – just ask around and someone will help. Next to it is the bus stand, where there are buses to Jinja and Kampala, and the occasional one to Soroti (prices are similar to minibus prices). Destinations are posted in the front window.

For Sipi Falls (USh4000, one hour) and Budadari (USh3000, one hour), head to the Kumi Rd taxi park. Services are less frequent to these smaller places.

## Getting Around

For travel around Mbale, there are plenty of bicycle *boda-bodas*. The fare to the Mt Elgon Hotel or the Uganda Wildlife Authority office should be USh300, but USh500 is more likely *mzungu* price.

## MT ELGON NATIONAL PARK

Mt Elgon has become a popular destination for budget trekking, at least budget when compared with the cost of climbing the Rwenzori Mountains or Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Established in 1993, it is one of the most recently created of Uganda's national parks and encompasses the upper regions of Mt Elgon to the Kenyan border (see p413 for information on trekking Mt Elgon from across the border).

The mountain is said to have one of the largest surface areas of any extinct volcano in the world, and is peppered with cliffs, caves, gorges and waterfalls. Wagagai is the highest peak (4321m). The views from the higher

reaches across the wide plains are among the most spectacular in Uganda. The upper slopes are clothed in tropical montane forest, while above this a vast tract of alpine moorland extends over the caldera, a collapsed crater covering some 40 sq km at the top of the mountain.

## Trekking on Mt Elgon

Tourism on Mt Elgon remains relatively underdeveloped, so visitors need to be resourceful, patient, self-sufficient and not expect well-worn paths, such as those found on Mt Kenya and Mt Kilimanjaro. However, it is also possible to hike for days without seeing another tourist, an impossible dream on Mt Kilimanjaro.

Bring camping and cooking equipment, food, appropriate clothing and a guide. For indulgences, such as chocolate or biscuits, Mbale is best for shopping, but for simple staples it is best to buy from locals at Budadari with assistance from the guides. For those without a tent or sleeping bag, they can be rented from the Forest Exploration Centre near Sipi. Don't attempt to trek without a guide, as it is illegal and could end in tears – Elgon is a big mountain. One more thing to bear in mind is that not everyone has the same level of fitness, so groups of travellers getting together for a trek might want to do a short walk around Sipi Falls to see if they are running at the same speed. It's not much fun to be halfway up the mountain and realise that everyone wants to go at a different pace.

Some readers have complained about the amount of rubbish left at each camp site. Please take all rubbish with you in order to leave this mountain in its natural state for future visitors.

The best time to climb the mountain is from June to August or December to March, but the seasons are unpredictable and it can rain at any time.

Trekking on Mt Elgon costs US\$30 per person per day (half this price for those under 18 years of age). The cost includes park entry fees, camping and ranger-guide fees. It does not include porters, who charge USh8000 per day. These prices cover food for the guide and porters as well, but not tips, which are very welcome.

The **Uganda Wildlife Authority office** (Mt Elgon National Park Office; ☎ 045-33170; www.uwa.or.ug; 19

## WARNING: TREKKING MT ELGON

Mt Elgon is a big, wild mountain. Even the established trekking routes are sometimes hard to follow, especially on the peaks and higher slopes, where rain, hail and thick mists are not uncommon, even in the dry season. Temperatures drop below freezing most nights. Guides may not be familiar with every part of the mountain, so if you're leave the established trails you should know how to use your compass or GPS, and have good gear and at least one day's extra food. Even for a day walk, take adequate clothing. This might sound a bit over the top, but Mt Elgon is exhilarating precisely because it can be serious, and you can only enjoy it fully if you're properly equipped.

Altitude sickness can also be a problem on the higher parts of Mt Elgon. It is advisable not to drive straight up to one of the trail heads and start walking immediately, as this does not allow time to acclimatise.

Masaba Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm) in Mbale can help with information about trekking on the mountain, as can the visitor centres at Budadari, Kapkwata and the Forest Exploration Centre, all open in theory from 9am to 5pm daily. It is possible to pay park fees at these offices, as well as arrange guides and porters, and find information on accommodation and routes. Mt Elgon Guides and Porters Association has been organising training for both guides and porters.

## ROUTES

### Sasa Trail

So far, there are three established camp sites along the Sasa trail, the most popular and fastest route to the summit. It requires a minimum of three days to do this trek, and five in order to reach Jackson's Summit, Wagagai and Suam Gorge.

From Budadari, which is considered the trail head, a road leads to Bugitimwa, then it's about three hours' walk to the forest. Almost as soon as you enter the forest, you reach Mudangi Cliffs, which are scaled via 'ladders' (piles of branches). From the top, the trail is well defined and less steep. About a 30-minute walk up this path is bamboo forest and a further 30 minutes across the



other side of the Sasa River brings you to the first camp site. Getting across the river involves boulder-hopping or wading knee-deep through fast-flowing water, depending on the season.

The camp site is marked by a well-used fireplace, and there are enclosed toilets and a rubbish pit. If it's still early in the day when you get here, you have the option of continuing another two hours further up the trail to stay at the next camp site, some 300m to the left of the trail near the Environmental Task Force Hut.

The next part of the trail goes up to the top of the forest and into the heath land, where there's another possible camp site close to a small cave (about three hours' walk beyond the first camp site). The moorland is studded with giant senecio (groundsel) and you'll often see duikers bounding through the long grass and lammergeier vultures overhead.

A further three hours' walk brings you to a split in the path just before the caldera. The left fork leads directly into the caldera and the hot springs at the head of the Suam Gorge. The right fork leads to Jackson's Summit via Jackson's Pool. The latter path crosses a permanent stream, and there is a possible camp site if you wish to stay up here.

Jackson's Summit and Wagagai can be reached in a minimum of 14½ hours, allowing for a comfortable return to the second camp site in good light. The return journey from the second camp site back to the road can be done in five to six hours.

For those planning to continue into Kenya without backtracking to Malaba or Busia, UWA offers cross-border treks in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service, with a handover at the hot springs. Check with UWA for more details.

### Other Trails

As well as the popular Sasa trail, there are two more trails up to the caldera. The **Piswā trail** runs from Kapkwata in the north, while the newer **Sipi trail** runs from near Sipi Falls and is growing in popularity. It is possible to combine two different routes going up and down for maximum variety. Ascending via the Sasa trail and descending on the Sipi trail makes sense, as you could chill out at Sipi for a day or two.

### Day Hikes

There are three short trails for hiking around the Forest Exploration Centre near Sipi, all offering an insight into Mt Elgon's flora for those that cannot spare the time for a full trek. The **Bamboo Loop** takes in some huge bamboo, as well as offering a view of Elgon's summits on a clear day, few and far between, unfortunately. The **Chebonet Falls Loop** passes a scenic waterfall, while the **Ridge Loop** offers some good views above and below. There is also a longer 11km walk to the huge **Tutum Cave**. Day walks currently cost US\$30.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Rose's Last Chance** (camping per tent USh5000, r USh7000) Located near the trail head in Budadari, this is a popular place to stay before or after scaling the heights. It is a fun and friendly place that brings guests closer to the local scene – testing local brews is a favourite activity. Watch out for the graphic photos of male circumcision ceremonies on the walls. It also serves tasty, filling meals and rates include a local breakfast.

**Forest Exploration Centre** (camping USh7500, dm USh11,000, cottage s/d USh20,000/30,000) Those using the Sipi trail have the choice of staying at Sipi Falls without a park fee, or being right at the trail head at this centre in Kapkwai, located about 1½ hours from Sipi on foot. The cottages here are really tasty and food and drink is available here. Contact the UWA office in Mbale for bookings.

**Kapkwata Guesthouse** (r USh11,000) Not many people opt for the Piswa trail, but there is some basic accommodation here before or after a trek.

### Getting There & Away

There are regular, if infrequent, taxis to Budadari from Mbale (US\$3000, one hour). There is no regular transport to the Forest Exploration Centre (p504), but minibuses between Sipi and Kapchorwe pass the signposted turn-off, from where it is a 6km walk to the centre. See the Sipi Falls entry following for details on getting from Mbale to Sipi. Between Mbale and Kampala there are frequent minibuses (US\$10,000, three hours).

### SIPI FALLS

Sipi Falls is a stunner, arguably the most beautiful waterfall in all of Uganda, and it is now much more accessible thanks to one

of the best roads in the country linking it to Mbale. The falls are about 55km north of Mbale, in the foothills of Mt Elgon and not far from the town of Kapchorwe. Not only are the falls spectacular, so too are the views of Mt Elgon above them, and the wide plains of eastern and northern Uganda disappearing into the distance below. There are three levels of falls, but the two upper levels are fairly small compared with the main drop. It is well worth spending a night or two in this peaceful and pretty place.

### Activities

There are some excellent walks on a network of well-maintained local trails, and beautiful scenery in every direction. It is easy enough just to ramble off on your own, but all the lodges and camp sites in the area offer guided walks from US\$2 to US\$4 per person or the local equivalent. These include short walks around the falls area and longer walks up to the tree line at the base of Mt Elgon. There are also forest walking trails from the nearby Forest Exploration Centre (opposite).

**Rob's Rolling Rock** (☎ 077-800705) is a local outfit offering climbing and abseiling around Sipi Falls, with a variety of climbs for beginners and the experienced. The falls provide an outstanding backdrop for abseiling. It is possible to abseil all three falls in one day, but the iconic final drop is the real deal.

### Sleeping & Eating

There is a good range of tasteful camp sites to suit all budgets in Sipi, including two small camp sites catering to independent travellers, as well as a couple of more upmarket lodges.

**Crow's Nest** (☎ 077-800705; thecrownets@yahoo.com; camping USh6000, dm USh12,000, cabins USh30,000) Sitting in splendid isolation on a cliff opposite Sipi Falls, this camp site offers breathtaking views of the main drop. It was set up by Peace Corps volunteers and the cabins are Scandinavian in style, including doubles with expansive terrace views. There is a small restaurant and bar with inexpensive food (mains USh2000 to USh5000), including pancakes and French toast for breakfast, chunky sandwiches for lunch, and pasta dishes or curries for dinner. Yes, someone really did make a mess of the email address: crowsnets, not nest!

**Moses' Camp Site** (camping USh4000, bandas per person USh10,000) A smaller operation, this has a spectacular location to the side of the falls and offers unhindered views of the lowlands below. The *bandas* are very basic, but the staff are always friendly and the children from the nearby primary school will treat you like an Oscar winner every time you walk by. Drinks are available, but meals need to be ordered in advance.

**Lacam Lodge** (☎ 075-292554; www.lacamlodge.co.uk; camping USh25,000, rooms per person USh20,000-35,000) This new lodge is now the closest to Sipi Falls, with a great view of the main drop. Accommodation is full board, including breakfast, lunch and a slap-up dinner. The more expensive options are large *bandas*, and there are several smaller rooms with shared bathroom.

**Sipi Falls Rest Camp** (☎ 041-346464; www.volcanoes safaris.com; s/d US\$135/200) Run by Volcanoes Safaris and set very close to the falls, this is an upscale resort offering accommodation in well-appointed *bandas* with private bathroom. The old house here was used as a residence by the last British governor of Uganda, and it certainly has an authentic colonial feel to it. Prices cover full board, including a three-course dinner. Nonguests can eat here for USh10,000 for set meals and the bar is open to all.

### Getting There & Away

Minibuses run between Mbale and Sipi Falls daily (US\$4000, one hour). Arrive at Mbale's Kumi Rd taxi park early or it may take some time for the minibus to fill up. Minibuses returning to Mbale from Kapchorwe often come through Sipi Falls, so it may be necessary to do a two-stage journey to get out, first by truck to Kamu for USh500 and then by minibus to Mbale for USh3000, sneakily saving USh500 in the process. Those travelling in a group should consider hiring a taxi if it is late in the day. The road is one of the best in Uganda, constructed by a Bosnian company with experience of Balkan mountain roads, so it comes complete with safety railings and drainage channels.

### SOROTI

Grotty Soroti! It has such a ring to it, but it's actually not that grotty, just rather dull. Few travellers make it here, unless they get stuck on the overland route to Kidepo Valley

National Park. Like Tororo to the southeast, it has a curious volcanic plug poking skywards on the edge of town, from which there are probably fine views of the surrounding countryside, but climbing it is prohibited due to a military presence in the area.

Most of the cheaper places are on the same strip on Solot Ave in the centre of town. The best of the bunch is currently the **Silent Night Inn** (☎ 077-610205; small/large tw with bathroom USh15,000/25,000), with clean enough rooms and water that actually works in the private bathroom, not a dead cert in the other cheapies.

For something a bit more sophisticated, try the **Soroti Hotel** (☎ 077-301154; s/d with bathroom USh40,000/60,000), an attractive place set among verdant gardens, with considerably smarter rooms than the central establishments. Rates include breakfast.

When it comes to eating, Soroti doesn't inspire, but there are a few cheap local joints on the main strip, Solot Ave.

### Getting There & Away

Minibuses run between Mbale and Soroti (USh5000, two hours) on a good, sealed road. From Kampala, there are direct buses departing daily (after 7am) for USh12,000. The EMS Post Bus also makes a daily run from the capital, but stops at a whole host of places along the way; see p485 for details.

For those feeling adventurous or with their own transport, there is also a dirt road west to Lira and beyond to Murchison Falls National Park, but this route is definitely not recommended at the time of writing due to security problems in the north.

Buses also travel the dirt road northeast to Moroto (USh8000, four hours), but check the latest security situation before setting off, as ambushes can and do happen.

### MOROTO

The final frontier in many ways, Moroto is a small district capital and the gateway to the wilds of Karamojaland to the north. Many of the inhabitants of the town are Karamojong, but this is not obvious as they have forsaken traditional tribal dress, or rather lack of it, and now dress as other Ugandans.

Be aware that the town suffers from chronic water shortages and electricity is available only between the hours of 7pm and 11pm. If you are heading north on the overland route to Kidepo Valley National

Park, this is the last real centre for supplies, so stock up.

When it comes to accommodation, the choice is between the cheap and basic **Guluna Lodge** (r USh5000), with plain rooms that have a fan and mosquito net, or the more expensive **Moroto Hotel** (r USh30,000), a relic from the days of the British protectorate. Rates would be understandable if things like water and electricity were reliable, but it may get a facelift during the lifetime of this book. The restaurant is arguably the best place to eat in town, however.

### Getting There & Away

Flights to Moroto are available with **Eagle Air** (☎ 078-810499 in Moroto), but at US\$110 one way they are more likely to appeal to government workers and NGOs than tourists.

Most locals advise that travelling by bus is safest and that private vehicles run the remote risk of being ambushed. The most convenient way to get to Moroto from Kampala is by direct bus, but many prefer to break the journey in somewhere like Mbale. Gateway runs daily services from the bus station in Kampala (USh18,000, 11 hours) departing at about 6am.

The direct road between Mbale and Moroto is beautiful, but is considered unsafe due to infrequent ambushes – always go via Soroti, as it is both safer and faster (see the boxed text, opposite).

### MOROTO TO KIDEPO VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

For those hardy souls heading overland to Kidepo Valley National Park, the next stop on the journey north from Moroto is **Kotido**, a 'wild east' town, where the Karamojong dress in traditional clothes, and AK-47s are as common as walking sticks and blankets. A daily bus leaves Moroto for Kotido at 5pm (1½ hours). This bus starts out in Kampala at about 6am, so gluttons for punishing bus rides could actually go straight through to Kotido in one day to save time. In Kotido, **Airport Lodge** (r USh7000) is basic, but a secure place to stay.

The next leg of the journey sees you bidding goodbye to civilisation, although some would say that happened on leaving Kampala. From Kotido, there are daily pick-ups leaving early in the morning for **Kaabong** (USh5000, 1½ hours) along a pretty bad

road. There is also a daily bus – the one that serves Kampala to Kotido continues to Kaabong in the morning. Should you get stuck in Kaabong you could stay at **Karamojong Lodge**.

The final leg of the journey involves chartering a vehicle from Kaabong to the Kidepo Valley National Park headquarters at **Apoka**, or jumping on an irregular pick-up to **Karenga** and getting off at the Apoka fork, just 2km from the headquarters. Chartering a vehicle is expensive, probably around USh40,000 or so depending on your bargaining skills, so if you have the time (which you obviously do if you have come this far by public transport already!), catch the pick-up to Karenga.

Doing the journey in reverse is a little easier, as the rangers at Kidepo know when the pick-ups between Karenga and Kaabong are passing by.

However, it must once again be stressed that this is not a journey to be undertaken lightly and it is of paramount importance to check security every step of the way. For those with the budget, renting a 4WD and a local driver would be the way to go.

### KIDEPO VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

This lost valley in the extreme northeast of the country, along the border with Sudan, is considered by many to offer the most stunning scenery of any protected area in Uganda. Surrounded by mountains, the **Kidepo Valley National Park** (entry per one/two/three or more days US\$20/35/50) covers 1440 sq km and is notable for a number of animals that are found nowhere else in Uganda, including cheetahs, ostriches and bat-eared foxes. There are also large concentrations of elephants, zebras, buffaloes and bushbucks, and a healthy number of predators, including lions, leopards and hyenas.

It is also a good bird-watching destination, with a number of endemic birds of prey, including the pygmy falcon and secretary bird. Game drives are available here using a park vehicle, but it costs a hefty USh2500 per kilometre, expensive if you have come overland on a budget.

A place worth looking out for, although you'll have no chance of finding a bed these days, is **Grand Katurum Lodge**, constructed during Idi Amin's regime. It never really saw any guests, as his domestic policies

### WARNING: SECURITY AROUND KARAMOJALAND

Pay attention to developments in Karamojaland in the northeast, as groups of local cattle herders, the Karamojong, have been known to ambush highway travellers. There is often fighting among the Karamojong themselves, and to make matters more complicated, large numbers of Turkana tribesmen from Kenya often cross the border looking to steal cattle – this attracts the attention of the Ugandan army. Sometimes it becomes too dangerous to travel to Moroto by road from Soroti because of fighting between the Karamojong, the Turkana and the Ugandan army. Check the latest security conditions with reliable sources in Kampala before setting out, and check local security conditions at every town or village along the way, because trouble is often not far away in Karamojaland.

were not exactly consistent with tourism growth. However, it occupies a fantastic location, built into a huge rock bluff that overlooks the Narus Valley and Mt Lotuke in Sudan.

**Apoka Headquarters** (s/d USh15,000/25,000) offers basic *bandas* with shared bathrooms, which are the only option for independent travellers. The old Apoka Rest Camp is undergoing rebirth as a luxury lodge owned by **The Uganda Safari Company** (TUSC; ☎ 041-251182; www.safariuganda.com), and if Semliki Lodge is anything to go by, it will be a fantastic place to stay for those with the budget. Once open, likely by the time you are reading this, it will be promoted as part of a package, including flights and other safari destinations around Uganda. It will also offer a full restaurant and bar, the only place to eat in the park. Overland travellers should come with their own provisions, but park staff can help with the cooking.

This is an unstable region and caution should be taken when travelling overland here – see the boxed text, above. For those short on time and with money to spend, it is possible to fly by charter plane from Kampala. TUSC will offer its own flights once the lodge opens or try **KAFTC** (☎ 077-706105; barnsey@imul.com), which has charter services out of Entebbe.

## SOUTHWESTERN UGANDA

If Uganda is the 'pearl of Africa', then southwestern Uganda is the mother of pearl, a hauntingly beautiful region of fecund landscapes and towering mountains. The majority of Uganda's big hitters are found in the southwest, home to the most striking scenery in the country, almost half the world's remaining population of mountain gorillas, the greatest variety of primates found in one location, and Africa's highest mountain range, the Rwenzoris.

Not enough? Don't worry, it also has several of the country's most celebrated national parks, including Kibale Forest, Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo, Uganda's chill-out capitals in the shape of Lake Bunyoni and the Ssesse Islands, and the breathtaking Virunga volcanoes that form the border with Rwanda and DR Congo.

Plan on spending the lion's share of your time here, as even though the only lions you will see are in the Queen Elizabeth National Park or Semliki Valley Game Reserve, the chimpanzees, gorillas, elephants, leopards, antelopes, hippos, zebras and other large mammals should keep things ticking along in the meantime. To say nothing of the bird life, which combines the best of Uganda with a host of Albertine rift endemics.

Transport and infrastructure are in pretty good shape, with good roads linking the major towns of the region and decent enough dirt roads away from the trail. Buses and minibuses link most destinations, but start to dry up around some of the national parks, such as Bwindi Impenetrable, Lake Mburo and Queen Elizabeth. However, Kibale Forest and Semliki National Parks are pretty straightforward. For those with their own wheels, life's a breeze.

### FORT PORTAL

☎ 0493

There may be no fort, but it is definitely a portal to places that offer sublime scenery, abundant nature and genuine adventures. Explore the beautiful crater lakes in the area, track the chimps in Kibale Forest National Park and drop into the Semliki Valley, with its wildlife, hot springs and Pygmy villages.

The town of Fort Portal is lush and livable, and one of the nicer urban centres in Uganda. Located at the northeastern end of the Rwenzori Mountains, it is the heartland of a verdant tea-growing area and the provincial headquarters for Kabarole District. With so much to experience in the surrounding areas, the town is little more than a base from which to explore; this area of Uganda is well worth an indulgence, so set aside a week to make the most of it.

### Information

The post office has international cardphone services, but more central is the MTN booth, which has several cardphones.

**Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Rukidi III St) Represents Western Union if you need money in a hurry.

**Kabarole Tours** (☎ 0493-22183; ktours@infocom.co.ug; ☎ 8am-6pm) Signposted behind the Esso petrol station, this is a reliable local tour agency and information bureau covering all of the area's places of interest. The staff are friendly and helpful, although tour prices are high for just one or two people, so gather a group to share the cost. It offers departures to the Semliki, Kibale Forest and Queen Elizabeth National Parks, plus affordable mini-treks into the foothills of the Rwenzoris.

**Rafria Info-Services** (Kyeabambe Rd; per min USh50) The best Internet connection in town.

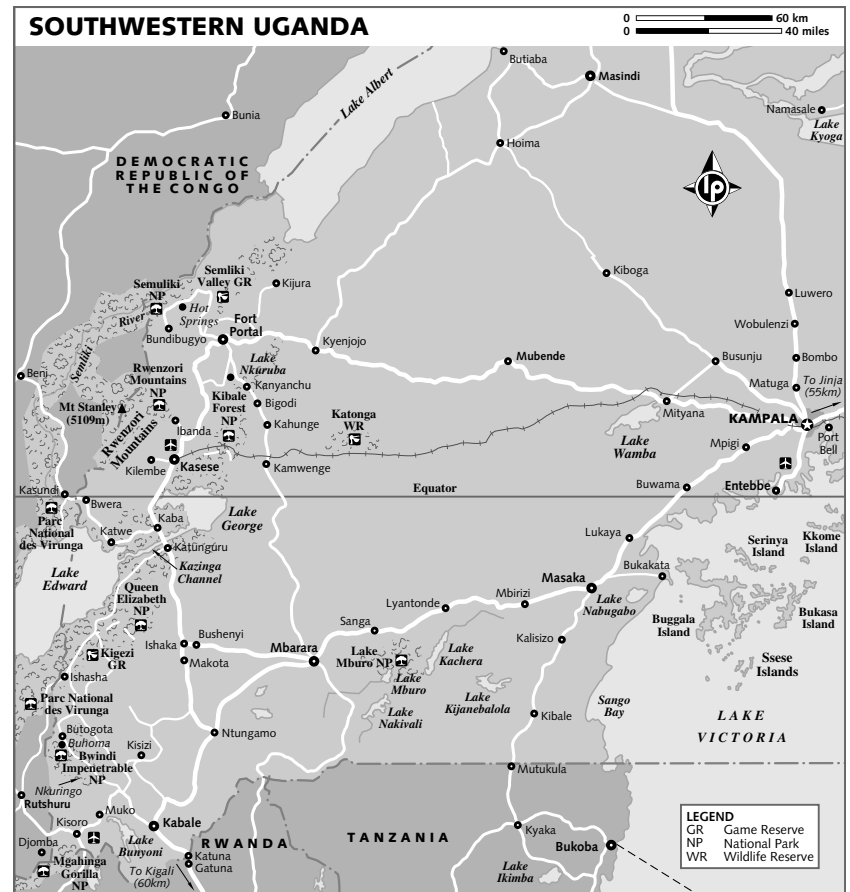
**Stanbic Bank** (Lugard Rd) This is the place to exchange cash; exchanging travellers cheques was being trialled during our visit.

### Sleeping

Most people are only passing through Fort Portal for one night, heading to the crater lakes or nearby national parks where there is a more interesting range of accommodation.

**Rwenzori Travellers Inn** (☎ 077-500273; Kyeabambe Rd; s/d with bathroom USh25,000/35,000) A modern hotel in the centre of town, business has been so brisk that it is already expanding. Rooms are clean and include hot-water bathrooms, plus some fancier options may be unveiled in the new wing. Downstairs is one of the best restaurants in town and a lively local bar. Everything you need under one roof...

**Ruwenzori View Guest House** (☎ 0493-22102; ruwview@africaonline.co.ug; s/d with bathroom USh42,000/55,000) A blissful little guesthouse on the outskirts of town, this is the most atmospheric place to stay in town. Run by an Anglo-Dutch couple, it feels refreshingly rural and offers great views of the moun-



tains. There are also some cheaper rooms available with shared bathroom, costing USh30,000/40,000 a single/double. Rates include a hearty breakfast, and home-cooked meals are served around the family table. As homey as it gets!

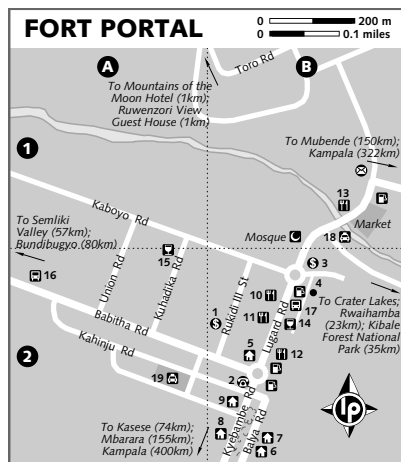
**Continental Hotel** (☎ 077-484842; Lugard Rd; s/d USh8000/10,000, d with bathroom USh20,000) It is not ageing as gracefully as some, but it remains the best choice among the cheaper places. It offers clean rooms around a courtyard and has a small restaurant downstairs, where films are shown nightly.

**Wooden Hotel** (☎ 0493-22034; 4 Kyeabambe Rd; s/d USh7000/12,000, with bathroom USh10,000/15,000) Opposite the string of cheapies, this place must be as old as the town. The rooms are

pretty scruffy, but that is to be expected at these prices. Downstairs is a bar and restaurant with décor that could have been inspired by a visit to a New Orleans brothel. Light sleepers should steer clear, as it has a bangin' all-night disco from Wednesday to Saturday.

**Mountains of the Moon Hotel** (☎ 077-801383) Around for many a year, this hotel was undergoing a much-needed renovation during our visit, so could be the best in town once it reopens.

If money is more important than comfort, there's a whole string of cheapies along Balya Rd. They are all much of a muchness, with few redeeming features but their price. Places include the **Economic Lodge**



(s/d USh3000/6000), stating the obvious, and the slightly smarter **New Linda Lodge** (☎ 0493-22937; s/d USh5500/8000).

## Eating

As well as the good homecooked food at Ruwenzori View Guest House and the tempting menu at Rwenzori Travellers Inn, there are several good local restaurants in town.

**The Gardens** (☎ 0493-22925; Lugard Rd; meals USh3000-6000) Hidden away next to the Pepsi factory on the way to the post office, this deserves its reputation as one of the better restaurants in town. It has a lively menu with some good Indian staples, including a filling vegetable curry, and all of the *mochomo* (barbecued meat) you could ever imagine, and some you perhaps couldn't. There is also an African buffet at lunchtime, which is a good introduction to Ugandan food if you haven't tried it, but probably best avoided if you are already *matokeed* out!

**African Village Bar & Restaurant** (Lugard Rd) A bit of a local hole-in-the-wall, this is the place to try some African staples, such as meat or fish with all the usual sides of *matoke*, Irish potatoes or rice.

For those needing to buy their own provisions for some serious trekking, there are a couple of supermarkets in town, both on Lugard St. Andrew Brothers Stores is the best, with a good range of products for a provincial place, while Midtown Supermarket is also worth a peek.

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## Drinking & Entertainment

There are not many places to go for a drink in Fort Portal, when compared with life out at the lakes. The liveliest local bar is **Don's Plaza** (8 Lugard Rd), which draws a drinking crowd into the night and screens big football matches.

Otherwise it is disco fever all the way. The Wooden Hotel has a basement disco (Wednesday to Saturday nights) that rocks until dawn, literally. Bad news if you happen to be staying there. It can get pretty raucous, what with all the local drunks and prostitutes. Try not to think about fire safety while you are there or you could get very paranoid.

**Heartbeat** (Kuhadika Rd; entry USh2500) Kicking off with 'ladies night' (best pronounced 'led-dies' in a sultry voice) on Wednesday, this is the main 'club' in town. Friday and Saturday are the other nights, and you can't miss the place thanks to its monstrous strobes lighting up the sky above town.

## Getting There & Away

There are daily EMS Post Bus services connecting Fort Portal and Kampala; one direct and the other via Kasese and Mbarara. For details of these services, see p485.

**Kalita Transport** (☎ 077-590067; 14 Lugard Rd) runs buses to Kampala (USh10,000, four hours). It offers seven services a day between 7am and 3pm, with pick-ups at the bus stand or the office.

From the bus stand at the western end of Babitha Rd, there's also a daily bus to Kabale (USh13,000, via Kasese, six hours) at about 6am.

The **taxi park** (Kahinju Rd) is near the junction with Lugard Rd. As elsewhere, there's no schedule, so just hang around until the taxis are full, but there are regular-ish departures to Hoima (USh12,000, five hours), Kasese (USh5000, two hours) and Kampala (USh12,000, five hours).

Local minibuses or shared taxis (pick-ups) to Kamwenge (for Kibale Forest National Park; USh2000, 45 minutes) and Rwaihamba (for Lake Nkuruba; USh2000, 45 minutes) leave from the intersection near where the main road crosses the river. There's not a lot of traffic, but usually a few shared taxis daily. Monday and Thursday are market days in Rwaihamba, so there are plenty then.

## AROUND FORT PORTAL

### Kibale Forest National Park

Kibale is a lush tropical forest, believed to have the highest density of primates in the world, including an estimated 600 chimpanzees. Set at an altitude of 1200m, this 560-sq-km **national park** (admission 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50), 35km southeast of Fort Portal, is home to several species of colobus monkeys, such as the rare red and the Angolan; larger mammals, such as bushbucks, sitatungas, duikers, civets and buffaloes; and Uganda's largest concentration of forest elephants.

The stars of the show, however, are the **chimpanzees**, five groups of which have been habituated to human contact. Nevertheless, there is only an 85% chance of seeing them on any particular day, though you'll almost certainly hear them as they scamper off into the bush on your approach. If you want to be sure of sighting them, plan on spending a couple of days here. However, with yet another hike in price for the chimp visit, it is now considerably cheaper to view chimps in and around Murchison Falls National Park, see p545 for more details. US\$50 here and less than US\$7 there, do the maths!

The park visitor centre is at Kanyanchu, signposted on the left from Fort Portal about

6km before the village of Bigodi. Reception closes daily at 6pm sharp.

## ACTIVITIES

At the visitor centre, it is possible to arrange guided walks along well-marked tracks (3km to 5km return) in search of the chimps. There are daily walks from 8am to 11am (the best time to go) and from 3pm to 6pm, costing US\$50 per person on top of park entry fees. The price includes a guide, but a tip is generally expected. The group size is limited to six people but any number of groups can set off, as long as they go in different directions. Even if you don't see the chimps, you will see colobus monkeys and the incredible number of butterflies and birds that live in this lush forest. For the ultimate primate encounter, the park also offers the chimpanzee habituation experience, which allows visitors to spend from de-nesting in the morning through to bedtime with the chimps – US\$220 for one day, US\$700 for four days.

Other walks through the forest are also offered daily. Forest hikes cost just US\$5/10 for a half/full day, while hikes geared towards those with a particular interest in the more than 300 species of birds in the park cost the same. Night hikes (US\$10) are also possible, to view the species of nocturnal primates that live in the forest. Longer walks of several days can be arranged on demand.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Safari Lodge** (camping USh6000, bandas USh8000 per person) This popular budget digs is located in Nkingo village, about 6km from Kanyanchu towards Bigodi village. Facilities are basic, but the welcome is warm, and all rates include breakfast. However, take care of valuables, as the rooms aren't that secure. Host Charles cooks excellent, tasty meals with a bit of notice – look out for chicken in red wine sauce, followed by his famous pineapple pie.

**John Tinka's Homestay** (☎ 077-886865; USh30,000) Homestays are a new community tourism activity in Uganda and John Tinka knows more about community tourism than most, having established the Kabaka's Trail around Kampala (see p487). Stay with his family in Bigodi village for the genuine Uganda experience. Rates include all meals.

**Mantana Safaris** (☎ 041-321552; mantana@africaonline.co.ug; s/d with full board US\$137/220) A luxury tented camp near Kibale Forest National

Park, signposted about 1km beyond Bigodi village. Service is exemplary, the welcome is friendly and it is a very comfortable place to stay for those with the budget. There are always plenty of colobus monkeys cavorting in the trees around the camp.

There are more accommodation options nearby in the crater lakes region (see right).

There is a good choice of accommodation at Kanyanchu, including camping for USh10,000 per person; single/double *bandas* for USh20,000/30,000; a sort of studio *banda* at USh60,000; and a sky tree house for USh40,000. The downside is you have to pay the national park fee as long as you stay here. The *bandas* are some of the smartest to be found in Uganda's national parks and are well looked after, although running water can be a problem. The elevated studio *banda* is a different option for families or small groups, while the sky house is very basic, but makes up for it with great views over an elephant drinking hole. However, be warned, the sky house is about 500m from the other accommodation down a forested track – not that simple at night. The popular canteen here is run by a Bigodi women's group and tasty, cheap meals are available daily, although it is best to give some notice. All proceeds go to the local community. There is also a small shop with some basic supplies.

Over at the newer Sebitoli area, camping costs USh5000 per person and *bandas* are available for USh10,000/15,000 per single/double.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The dirt road between Fort Portal and Kibale Forest National Park is in good condition, apart from a couple of rough patches. Minibuses to Kamwenge from Fort Portal pass the park visitor centre (USh3000, 45 minutes) and continue to Bigodi (USh4000, one hour). However, drivers may try to charge USh1000 for a backpack if it takes up a lot of space, as they like to play sardines on this route. Alternatively, charter a special-hire taxi, although this is going to take some negotiation to get a good price; think around USh15,000 or so.

#### Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary

The **Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary** (☎ 077-886865), established to protect the **Magombe Swamp**, is a haven for birds, with 137 species, plus

butterflies and a number of primates. The guided walks through this sanctuary have been developed with the aim of assisting community-development projects in the Kibale area, so the project deserves support. Many of the guides have a good knowledge of bird life in the sanctuary, and are also adept at spotting colobus monkeys and the beautiful blue touraco from a distance. It is often easier to spot colobus monkeys here than in Kibale Forest National Park, as the vegetation is more open. Three-hour guided walks (USh10,000) depart from the visitor centre on demand. The best time to go is early morning or late afternoon.

Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary is just off the road between Fort Portal and Kamwenge, about 6km southeast of Kanyanchu. For transport details, see left.

#### The Crater Lakes

The landscape south of Fort Portal is dotted with picturesque crater lakes, all of which offer great **walking** and exploration opportunities. There are several accommodation options throughout the area, although further south they dry up fast. Most of the lodges and guesthouses can help out with suggestions for walks and activities in the area, and it is increasingly popular for visitors to stay in the lakes area before continuing on foot to Kibale Forest National Park and Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary.

Walking is not the only activity available. **Cycling** is also a rewarding option, as the roads wind their way around these beautiful lakes. The lakes are believed to be bilharzia-free, but that doesn't mean they're hippo and crocodile-free – check with locals before plunging into the water.

Also in this area is **Mahoma Waterfall**, small but attractive and a great spot for a natural power-shower.

#### LAKE NKURUBA

Probably the winner among the many contenders for title of most beautiful crater lake, this is one of the only lakes still surrounded entirely by dense tropical forest. Located about 20km south of Fort Portal, there are good **walking** opportunities from the camp site here, including a one-hour trek to Lake Nyabikere, from where you can continue to Rweteera and Kibale Forest National Park or Bigodi.

One of the best-known community projects in Uganda, everyone who stays at **Lake Nkuruba Community Camp Site** (☎ 077-814327; camping USh5000, dm USh10,000, lakeside cottage USh25,000; meals USh3000-6000) loves the place. Facilities are basic, but the team here is very friendly and the setting is perfect for a few days of relaxation. There are two areas in which to camp, one at the lake shore, with the other higher up the hillside with views of the surrounding landscape. The *bandas* are clean and comfortable, but function as dorms unless you pay for all the beds. There is also a more sophisticated lakeside cottage that offers more privacy. Bicycles are available for hire to explore the area at USh5000 per day. Filling meals are available (order in advance) and bread is also baked here. Limited supplies are also available in the village of Rwaihamba, a short distance away.

Shared taxis from Fort Portal to Kasenda or Rwaihamba pass Lake Nkuruba (USh2000), which is signposted on the left just before Rwaihamba. At least three vehicles a day do the trip, and on Monday and Thursday (market days in Rwaihamba) there's plenty of traffic.

#### LAKE NYINAMBUGA

This lake is located south of Lake Nkuruba and is another beautiful body of water ringed by forest. The luxurious **Ndali Lodge** (☎ 077-221309; www.ndali.co.uk; s/d US\$180/250) is stunningly situated on a ridge above the lake, and offers accommodation in elegant cottages set around an attractive central restaurant. The views are breathtaking, with the Mountains of the Moon looming on the horizon, making it a great place for incurable romantics. Rates include full board and discounts are sometimes available in the low season.

#### LAKE NYABIKERE

Yet another beautiful and tranquil spot, this lake lies just off the road to Kibale Forest National Park, about 15km northwest of Kanyanchu visitor centre or 21km from Fort Portal. Dugout canoes are available from CVK Resort for exploring the lake.

A long running resort, **CVK Resort** (☎ 077-792274; ruooka@forest.mak.ac.ug; camping US\$3, s/d *bandas* US\$15/30, s/d US\$25/50) offers a bewildering choice of sleeping options at various prices depending on facilities. *Bandas* include the cheaper partly furnished option for US\$6.

The rooms are a little ambitiously priced compared with what is on offer in Fort Portal, but they do have a better view. Like the other crater lake resorts, it is a good base for walking in the area, and community-related activities are also promoted here. There is also a restaurant (mains USh2000 to USh15,000) that serves tasty meals.

#### Semliki Valley

The Semliki Valley is a cracking natural corridor forming a link between the heights of East Africa and the vast steaming jungles of central Africa. The views on the descent into the valley from Fort Portal are breathtaking, sweeping across the rainforest and savanna of the Semliki Valley and into DR Congo.

The main attractions located in the valley are **Semuliki National Park** (admission 1/2/3 or more days US\$15/25/30), with its hot springs, near Sempaya, and the **Batwa Pygmy villages** near Ntandi, a few kilometres before Bundibugyo. Semuliki National Park is a continuation of the huge Ituri Forest in DR Congo and includes some excellent bird-watching for central African species at their eastern limits, such as the Congo serpent eagle, although sightings are harder than in other parks due to the dense vegetation. There are also several primate species and some small mammals that are found nowhere else in East Africa. Another attraction at the park is the **hot springs**, although this is not Bogoria National Park (Kenya), and it's worlds away from the geysers of Rotorua (New Zealand) and Iceland. There is a walking trail around the springs and other trails through the forest.

The Pygmy villagers are seriously commercialised – their culture for sale – and all in all many find it a depressing proposition. Much of a visit will be spent with the villagers trying to find ways to help you part with your shillings. That said, they have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands by a government that generally views them with disdain, so they have little choice but to cash in on their culture. In some ways it is only this commercialisation process that ensures the survival of the pygmies as a distinct ethnic group within Uganda. The Batwa have always been at the bottom of the social pile and with much of their natural territory already turned over to forested national parks, such as Bwindi Impenetrable and

Mgahinga Gorilla, they have found it very hard to adapt to modern life. Ironically, it is tourism that has allowed them a way to be proud of their identity and culture, and make a bit of money from it at the same time. Either way, visits can end up taking on a 'human safari' feel, which is pretty unfortunate for everyone involved.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Semuliki National Park headquarters** (camping US\$10,000) At Ntandi, this has a basic camp site for those with tents, but you need to be fairly self-sufficient.

**Mpora Rural Family** (☎ 0493-22636; mmorence@yahoo.com; banda per person US\$10) It is also possible to stay with this family near the Kichwamba Technical College, on the road to Bundibugyo. Morence Mpora has long been offering accommodation in an effort to help finance the orphanage he runs. The rate for the *banda*, including three meals a day, is very good value. Minibus drivers can drop you off at the technical college.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are regular shared taxis and pick-ups between Fort Portal and Bundibugyo, which are a cheap way to go if you don't mind staying a night or two out of town. To get to the park headquarters from Fort Portal costs about US\$3500 and to Bundibugyo US\$5000. Hitching isn't easy, as there is not all that much traffic. If you are travelling in a small group, it might be best to charter a special-hire taxi or minibus, although don't forget to bargain.

#### Semliki Valley Game Reserve

Often referred to on older maps as Toro Game Reserve, the **Semliki Valley Game Reserve** (admission per person one/two/three days US\$15/25/30) was once one of the best-stocked wildlife parks in Africa. It was the first gazetted game reserve in Uganda and by the 1960s was one of the most popular parks in East Africa. However, the years of civil war took their toll and after the war with Tanzania, the Tanzanian soldiers went home with truckloads of dead bush-meat. Now wildlife is slowly starting to recover and there are plans to reintroduce some lost species. Currently you can expect to encounter kobs, bushbucks, buffaloes, elephants and colobus monkeys. A number of lions have also recently returned

to the reserve, most likely refugees from the conflict in the DR Congo, and leopards are sighted quite regularly. For bird-watchers, there is a range of species found within the park, including the elusive shoebill stork on the shores of Lake Albert. A **chimpanzee habituation project** has been under way in the reserve for almost a decade now, offering yet another activity for visitors.

Wildlife drives, chimp tracking and boat excursions on Lake Albert can be arranged through Semliki Safari Lodge. The wildlife drives include the daunting option of a foot safari through a dense forest of bamboo, where you may encounter buffaloes or elephants. Visibility is no more than about five metres, so the chances of a charge or stand-off are very real.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**Semliki Safari Lodge** (The Uganda Safari Company; ☎ 041-251182; www.safariuganda.com; s/d with full board US\$198/298; 🍴) A decade on from its birth, this luxurious lodge is still one of the finest properties in Uganda. Luxury tents are set under thatched *bandas*, and have Persian carpets, four-poster beds and bathrooms with reliable hot water. The lounge and dining room feature a huge eaved roof, with plush furnishings, Congolese crafts and plenty of room to relax. There is also a small swimming pool for cooling off.

**Campsite** (per person US\$10,000) There is now a small UWA campsite near Ntoroko on the shores of Lake Albert, but bring your own supplies.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most visitors arrive at Semliki Safari Lodge by light aircraft from Kampala as part of an all-inclusive package. However, it is possible to get here by road from Fort Portal, a bumpy journey taking about two hours. First take the road for Bundibugyo and then fork right at Karagutu, 30km down the valley. Another 25km of rough track brings you to the lodge. It can just about be done in a regular car, but not in the wet season. Independent travellers will have a hard time getting here and are probably best off chartering a vehicle from Fort Portal.

#### Katonga Wildlife Reserve

This small **wildlife reserve** (admission US\$10) is home to the very elusive Sitatunga antelope,

which is known for its curious webbed feet. Few visitors make it here, as it isn't particularly close to other major attractions. Much of the park is swampland and a canoe trip (US\$15,000) is possible for exploring the wetlands. There is a very basic **camp site** (per person US\$5000), but no *bandas*. Getting here involves taking a bus as far as Kyegegwa on the road between Fort Portal and Kampala, and then picking up a minibus heading south on the reasonable gravel road to Katonga.

#### KASESE

☎ 0483

Kasese is a boom-and-bust town that tasted glory during the copper years and more recently had a short-lived renaissance thanks to cobalt, but generally seems to have passed its use-by-date. It is the base from which to organise an assault on the Rwenzori Mountains, but there's absolutely no other reason to visit – it's a small, hot, dusty, quiet town in a relatively infertile and lightly populated area, and it wears an air of permanent torpor. However, it was once crucial to the economy because of the nearby copper mines at Kilembe, though these are long closed. As if that wasn't bad enough, even the train line to Kampala is no longer operating. Thankfully for the town, the Rwenzori Mountains have reopened, otherwise tourism would go the way of the minerals here – into history.

#### Information

There are several cardphones around town for international calls, but for faxes try the post office.

**Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Portal Rd) Represents Western Union for those that suddenly decide they must conquer the mountains but lack the hefty US\$567 required.

**Reroc Internet** (Rwenzori Rd; per min US\$100) Offer slow Internet connection.

**Rwenzori Mountaineering Services** (RMS; ☎ 0483-44936/078-325431; rwnzorims@yahoo.co.uk; PO Box 33, Kasese) Has an information and booking office (open daily) located beneath the Saad Hotel. This is the place to make arrangements for trekking or climbing the Rwenzori Mountains (p516).

**Rwenzori Mountains National Park Office** (Rwenzori Rd) Offers information on climbing the mountains. Most punters pay their fees in advance at the UWA headquarters in Kampala, but it is possible to pay here for those making the decision at short notice.

**Stanbic Bank** (Rwenzori Rd) The best place to change cash and travellers cheques, if it still changes the latter.

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Mariana Hotel** (☎ 077-493414; 17 Stanley St; s/d with bathroom US\$17,500/35,000) When it comes to clean and comfortable midrange hotels, the Mariana is the pick of the pack. Set on a popular hotel strip, the well-tended rooms include a bathroom and a balcony. Downstairs is a lively little bar and basic restaurant.

**Saad Hotel** (☎ 0483-44139; Rwenzori Rd; r in old/new wing US\$17,000/27,000; 🍴) Once the most popular place to stay in town, the rooms are in need of a little tender loving care these days. Still, they remain pretty good value, as the old doubles come with bathroom, and the 'newer' ones with carpets and air-con for good measure. Downstairs is a reasonable restaurant, but no alcohol is served, shocking if you have just spent seven days in the mountains.

**Ataco Holiday Inn** (Stanley St; s/d US\$7000/11,000) No, don't get excited, it's definitely not part of the famous international chain, though it does have the smartest of the cheap rooms in town for those on a budget.

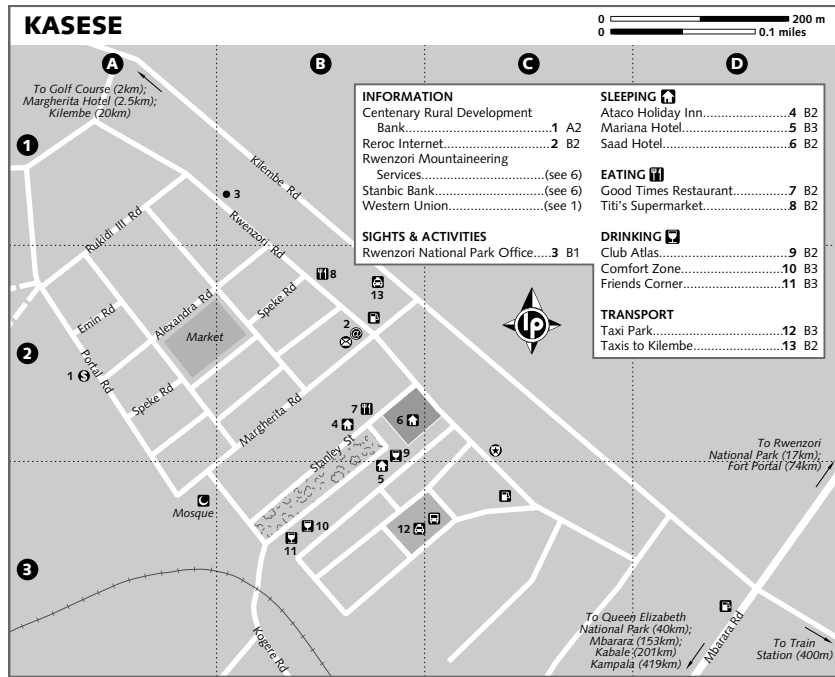
**Margherita Hotel** (☎ 0483-44015; reco@swiftuganda.com; s/d from US\$40/50) This is the fanciest hotel in town, the only problem being that it is not really in town, but 3km out on the road up to Kilembe. All the rooms are now very smart, making it a popular choice with those who have already shelled out a lot for their trek. The hotel has a delightful setting looking out towards the Rwenzoris on one side and the golf course on the other, surrounded by flowering trees. The restaurant (mains around US\$7000) serves decent grub, and rates include breakfast.

**Good Times Restaurant** (Stanley St; meals US\$1000-2000) Pretty much opposite the Saad Hotel, this local joint knocks together huge portions of cheap Ugandan standards and is great value for a filling feed.

**Titi's Supermarket** (Rwenzori Rd) Currently the best-stocked supermarket in Kasese, this is a useful port of call for those heading up the Rwenzori Mountains, although it's hardly up to Shoprite's standards in Kampala.

#### Drinking & Entertainment

If you are bored to tears by day, impressions change by night. Kasese draws people in from surrounding villages as far away as



the DR Congo. Wednesday night is ladies' night in town, while it really gets going on the weekend.

The best bars in town are on Stanley St. Always busy Comfort Zone has some pool tables, although you might get hustled. Next door, Friends Corner screens big football games and has a lively crowd.

**Club Atlas** (Stanley St; admission USh2000; ☑ Wed & Fri) The most happening place in town – perhaps a bit too happening if you happen to be staying in the nearby Saad Hotel. Entry is free for women on Wednesday and it rocks on until dawn.

### Getting There & Away

The EMS Post Bus runs from Kampala to Kasese daily, via Mbarara. For more information, see p485.

There are daily buses in both directions between Kasese and Kampala via Mbarara (USh12,000, about seven hours).

There's also a daily bus in both directions between Fort Portal and Kabale via Kasese and Mbarara. It starts from Fort Portal at 6am, arriving in Kasese at about 8am. It

then continues on to Kabale (about five hours). The fare from Kasese to Kabale is USh10,000.

There are frequent minibuses to Fort Portal (USh3000, one hour) and Mbarara (USh6000, two hours).

Getting to Queen Elizabeth National Park is straightforward. Catch a Mbarara minibus and ask for the national park entrance, which is signposted on the left just before the village of Katunguru. From here hitch into the park, although you may have to wait a while for a lift.

### RWENZORI MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The legendary, mist-covered Rwenzori Mountains on Uganda's western border with the DR Congo were once as popular with travellers as Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya, but they are definitely a more demanding climb. Closed during much of the 1990s, they have been open since 2001 and are again luring trekkers to the challenge. They have a well-deserved reputation for being very wet at times. This was best summed up

by a comment on the wall of Bujuku hut: 'Jesus came here to learn how to walk on water. After five days, anyone could do it'. Take warm, waterproof clothing.

The mountain range, which is not volcanic, stretches for about 100km. At its centre are several mountains that are permanently snow- and glacier-covered: Mt Speke (Vittorio Emanuele is its highest peak at 4890m); Mt Baker (Edward is its highest peak at 4843m); Mt Gessi (Iolanda, 4715m); Mt Emin (4791m); and Mt Luigi di Savoia (4627m). The three highest peaks in the range are Margherita (5109m), Alexandria (5083m) and Albert (5087m), all on Mt Stanley.

### Information

Seven days is the standard for a trek through the range, but climbers need to add a day or two to reach the peaks. It can be done in six days at a push. The best times to trek are from late December to the end of February, and from mid-June to mid-August, when there's less rain. Even at these times, the higher reaches are often enveloped in mist, though this generally clears for a short time each day. October is considered the wettest month.

Walking trails and huts are in pretty good shape thanks to significant USAID help in the 1990s. The huts have essentials, such as kitchens, walls and roofs, and there's a wooden pathway over the bog and bridges over the larger rivers. All this has been done to lessen the impact of walkers on the fragile environment.

Some mountaineering experience is really required to reach one of the main summits. The routes to the peaks on Mts Stanley and Baker all cross snow and glaciers, and require the use of ice-axes, ropes and crampons, plus a competent guide. In the right conditions, the summit of Mt Speke is an easier proposition, but it still requires some mountain experience.

Be aware of the dangers of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). In extreme cases it can be fatal. See p647 for more information.

### BOOKS & MAPS

Before attempting a trek in the Rwenzori Mountains, it is strongly recommended that you seek out a copy of *Rwenzori – Map & Guide* by Andrew Wielochowski. This is an

excellent large-scale contour map of the mountains, with all the main trails, huts and camp sites marked (as well as other features).

On the reverse side of the map are detailed descriptions of the various possible treks, as well as sections on history, flora and fauna, weather and climate, necessary equipment and advice in the event of an accident. However, do bear in mind that the practical information is very dated.

Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* is useful for those requiring detailed practical information on trekking in the Rwenzori Mountains.

For a sublime souvenir once you have conquered the peaks, check out the coffee-table book, *Uganda Rwenzori* by David Pluth, also available in recommended Kampala bookshops.

### FOOD & EQUIPMENT

Prepare for the Rwenzori Mountains trek in Kasese, where there is a reasonable selection of food, as well as equipment for rent from **Rwenzori Mountaineering Services** (RMS; ☎ 0483-44936/078-325431; rwenzorims@yahoo.co.uk). The RMS office organises guides and porters, hires equipment (see the table, p518) and arranges transport to the trail head at Ibanda/Nyakalengija, off the Kasese–Fort Portal road. RMS also controls all the facilities on the mountain, as guides and porters are compulsory for anything other than a short day walk. However, bookings should be made through the **UWA head office** (☎ 0483-346287; www.uwa.or.ug) in Kampala.

As far as food supplies are concerned, be warned that the variety of food available in Kasese is limited. If there's anything you particularly want to eat on the trek or you have any special requirements, bring these items with you; don't assume they can be bought in Kasese. Bring a camp cooker of some description, as fires are banned in the park. Kerosene and methylated spirits are readily available in Kasese.

No special equipment is required for a trek if you don't go onto the ice or snow, but bring clothing that is warm and waterproof, and a decent pair of walking boots. Sneakers or trainers are definitely not recommended – your feet will get soaked walking through the bogs, making you cold and miserable all day.

A waterproof jacket is an essential item, as it's almost impossible to stay dry in these mountains. Waterproof trousers (or at least a waterproof covering) are also advisable. Your extra clothing, sleeping bag and perishable food should be wrapped in strong plastic bags to protect them from the elements. A small day pack is useful if porters are going to be carrying the bulk of your equipment.

Since night temperatures often drop below zero, you'll need a good sleeping bag, an insulating sleeping mat and suitable warm clothing. This should include a warm hat (up to 30% of body heat is lost through your head).

Don't forget insect repellent, maximum-protection sunscreen, sunglasses, a torch (flashlight), water bottle, first-aid kit, cutlery and a cup.

#### EQUIPMENT HIRE

The RMS has the following equipment for hire in Kasese:

Item	Cost per trek (USh)
climbing boots	15,000
closed-cell mat	5000
crampons	15,000
gaiters	5000
harness	20,000
ice-axe	15,000
raincoat	5000
rope	20,000
rubber boots	5000
sleeping bag	20,000

#### GUIDES, PORTERS & FEES

Since the park reopened, fees just keep on rising, surprising given visitor numbers haven't returned to their old levels yet. It now costs US\$567 for a seven-day trek, including park entrance, rescue fees, guides, porters, accommodation, heating fuel and VAT. Extra days for climbing the peaks attract extra charges as follows: US\$20 for park entrance per day, US\$5 per porter per stage, US\$7 per guide per stage and US\$15 for accommodation per night. The US\$567 fee includes two porters per person, who can carry a total of 25kg, additional porters cost US\$35. This price does not include transport to/from the trail head (US\$10,000 return).



Ascending the peaks costs extra and assumes an additional two days in the mountains. Charges cost US\$692 for Margherita to US\$656 for Speke.

Those extending their trip for extra days should also note that guides' and porters' fees are per stage not per day. The stages are: Ibanda/Nyakalengija to Nyabitaba; Nyabitaba to John Mate; John Mate to Bujuku; Bujuku to Kitandara (or to Irene Lakes, Speke Peak or Margherita); Elena Hut to Margherita; Kitandara to Guy Yeoman (or to Baker or Lugigi); Guy Yeoman to Nyabitaba; and Nyabitaba to Ibanda/Nyakalengija. Walk two stages in the day, pay for two stages that day.

Remember that to have a good trip, it is best to befriend the guides and porters. These people are drawn from the Bakonjo, a hardy but friendly mountain people, most of whom have Biblical names. They'll be staying in rock shelters overnight while you stay in the huts, so be generous with small handouts and give a decent tip at the end of the journey. See the Kilimanjaro entry (p176) for tipping suggestions.

#### Routes

Ibanda or Nyakalengija is the starting point for a trek in the Rwenzori Mountains. There are two basic trails up the mountain starting from here that pass between the peaks of Mt Baker and Mt Stanley. They both have the same approach as far as Nyabitaba Hut on the first day. After that you can go either clockwise or anticlockwise between the peaks. There are quite a few other minor trails, both up the mountain and across the top to Mutwanga in the DR Congo – the border essentially crosses the peaks, although crossing the frontier this way is illegal.

The following description applies to the clockwise route (the anticlockwise route is the reverse).

#### STAGE 1

Nyakalengija to Nyabitaba Hut (2650m), the first stage, is a fairly easy walk taking four to five hours.

#### STAGE 2

From Nyabitaba Hut, take either the old route to Guy Yeoman Hut (3450m, five to six hours) or the new safer route (seven hours). Along the new route, there is also the choice of staying at Kuruguta Hut/camp site (2940m). The route passes through tropical vegetation, over two minor streams, across the Mahoma River and finally up the side of a steep valley to the ridge on which the hut is situated.

#### STAGE 3

From Guy Yeoman Hut, the route passes through a bog to the Kabamba rock shelter (3450m) and waterfall, then via the Bujongolo rock shelter and the Freshfield Pass (4215m) to the Kitandara Hut (3990m). This takes about seven hours. The hut is picturesquely situated on the shore of the lake of the same name.

#### STAGE 4

This is the most interesting part of the trek. After leaving the twin Kitandara lakes, the trail climbs over boulders at the foot of Mt Baker on the one side and the glaciers of Savoia and Elena on the other. From here it crosses Scott Elliot Pass (4372m) and continues down to Bujuku Hut (3900m). The walk takes about four hours. If you are scaling the heights of Mt Stanley, on the other

#### BUDGET TREKKING

If US\$567 sounds a bit of a strain on the budget, there are a couple of other options for cheaper treks in the Rwenzoris. First up is to stay at the Ruboni Community Campsite (p520), which offers nature walks and hill climbs at just US\$10,000, and doesn't involve a national park entry fee. The second option is to book a Rwenzoris trek through Kabarole Tours (p508) in Fort Portal, which offers a two-day, one-night trek from Fort Portal to Bundibugyo, passing through the lower mountains of the Rwenzoris along an old tribal mountain trail. It costs about US\$100,000 per person depending on numbers, including transport, park entrance, meals and overnight camping.

hand, you will continue climbing to Elena Hut (4547m), in which case both you and your guide and porters will need appropriate equipment to deal with ice and snow.

#### STAGE 5

Assuming you don't scale Mt Stanley, the trek from Bujuku Hut to John Mate Hut (3350m) is all downhill. The walk takes about five hours. En route you pass Bigo Hut (3400m), where you have the option of taking a difficult track north leading to Mt Gessi, Mt Emin and Lac de la Lune via a series of bogs. There are also three bogs between Bujuku Hut and John Mate Hut, but it's here you'll come across stands of giant heather, groundsel and bamboo. Should you decide to spend the night at Bigo Hut, it sleeps up to 12 people and there is room for tents.

#### STAGE 6

From John Mate Hut, it's downhill again along a rough track to Nyabitaba (about five hours).

#### STAGE 7

The final stage is the return to Nyakalengija (about four to five hours) and onward travel to Kasese.

#### Organised Treks

If it's time rather than money that is limited, safari companies in Kampala can make all the bookings in advance of your arrival. **Adrift**



(The Adventure Centre; ☎ 041-252720, 077-454206; www.surfthesource.com; Kira Rd) is now organising climbing trips in the Rwenzoris to add mountaineering to its stable of adrenaline activities.

## Sleeping

**Ruboni Community Campsite** (camping USh10,000, cottages USh30,000) For a cheaper taste of the Rwenzoris, this community-run place near the Nyakalengija park entrance offers a couple of comfortable cottages and camping facilities. It has an attractive setting outside the park boundary, so there are no park fees to pay. There is also now a restaurant (mains USh2000 to USh5000) here serving local food and international snacks. Contact **Ucota** (☎ 041-501866; www.ucota.or.ug) in Kampala for more details.

**Tour Holiday Inn Ibanda** (☎ 0483-44068; s/d USh15,000/25,000) The only accommodation in central Ibanda, this little lodge has basic but comfortable rooms, plus meals are available.

## Getting There & Away

The easiest way to access the Rwenzoris is to catch a minibus (USh1500) from Kasese to the park headquarters at Ibanda. From here you can walk to the park entrance or take a *boda-boda* (USh1500) to Ruboni Community Campsite. It is possible to charter a special-hire taxi from Kasese (about USh20,000) or organise a vehicle with RMS.

## QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK

Covering almost 2000 sq km, and bordered to the north by the Rwenzori Mountains and to the west by Lake Edward, this **national park** (admission per person per 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50, local/foreign cars USh10,000/US\$20, local/foreign 4WDs USh20,000/US\$40) is one of the most popular in Uganda.

Queen Elizabeth National Park was once a magnificent place to visit, with its great herds of elephants, buffaloes, kobs, waterbucks, hippos and topis. However, like Murchison Falls National Park, most of the wildlife was wiped out by the retreating troops of Amin and Okello and by the Tanzanian army, which occupied the country after Amin's demise. They all did their ivory-grabbing, trophy-hunting best. Thankfully, the animal numbers are recovering, although there is still far less wildlife in the park compared with parks in Tanzania and Kenya. The park has the highest

number of mammal species in Uganda and various antelopes are here in large numbers, as well as buffaloes, hippos, elephants, leopards and lions. It is also popular with bird-watchers, as it provides a habitat for more than 600 species. The park is well worth a visit to take the boat trip on the Kazinga Channel, with its huge numbers of hippos. In the east, Kyambura (Chambura) Gorge is a beautiful scar of green running through the savanna, a little Eden brimming with chimpanzees and other primates.

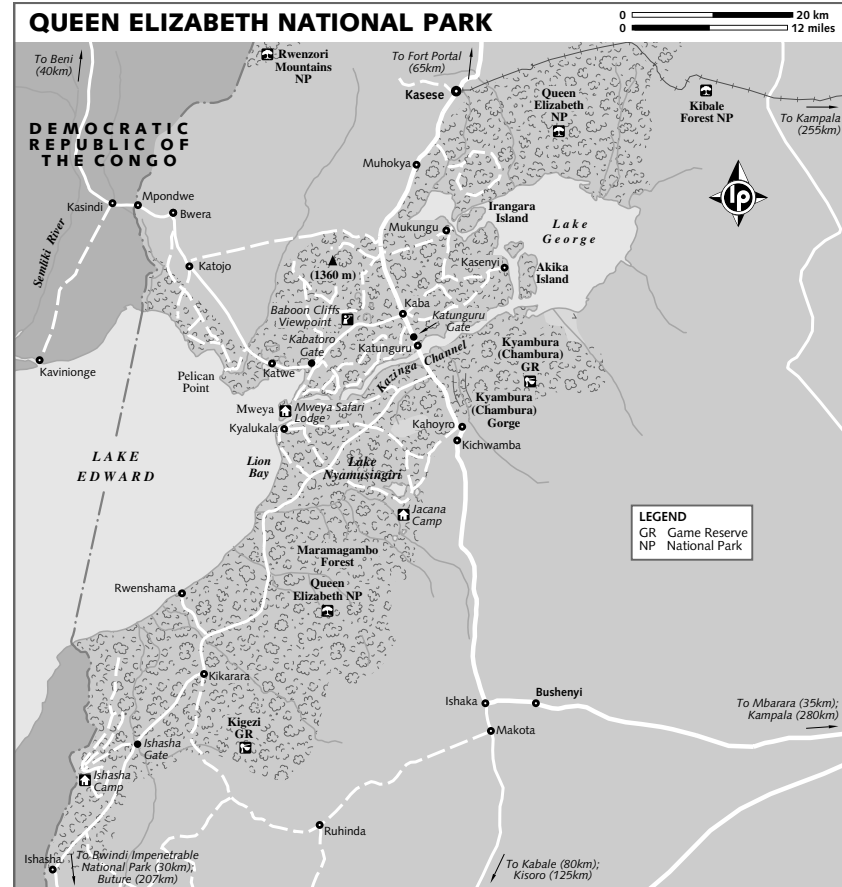
## Information

The main Katunguru gate is on the Mbarara to Kasese road near the small village of Katunguru, where the road crosses the Kazinga Channel. From here it's 24km along a track that follows the channel to Mweya in the northwest of the park, where most of the tourism activity, including a luxury lodge and other budget accommodation, is based. A much less visited area is that around Ishasha, in the southern part of the park on the border with the DR Congo. The lions in this area are famous for their habit of climbing trees, and the setting is superb, although check on the latest security before visiting, due to its proximity to an unstable region of the DR Congo. Some of the tracks in this more remote section of the park can become impassable during the wet season. However, in the dry season it offers a convenient way to combine a visit to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park with Queen Elizabeth National Park. The Maramagambo Forest in the southeastern section of the park includes a small tourism centre, camp site and upmarket lodge.

## Activities

### KAZINGA CHANNEL LAUNCH TRIP

Almost every visitor takes a launch trip up the Kazinga Channel to see the thousands of hippos and the pelicans. With a little luck, it is also possible to catch sight of one of the elephant herds and very occasionally see a lion or a leopard. The two-hour trip costs US\$10 per person or US\$150 minimum for the whole boat if numbers are low. There are trips at 9am (the best time), 11am, 3pm and 5pm. The 3pm trip is US\$10 per person even if numbers are low. Bookings can be made at Mweya Safari Lodge (p522), and the trips leave from just below the lodge.



## KYAMBURA (CHAMBURA) GORGE WALKING SAFARI

In the eastern corner of the park is the beautiful Kyambura (Chambura) Gorge, and walking safaris can be arranged at the small ranger post here. The gorge is home to a variety of primates, including chimpanzees, and these are often visible on the walking safaris, which last from three to five hours and cost US\$30 per person; children under 15 years are not permitted. Bookings can be made at Mweya Safari Lodge or you can just show up.

## WILDLIFE DRIVES

There is a small network of trails around Mweya Safari Lodge and Katunguru gate that usually reveal waterbucks, kobs, elephants

and occasional leopards. North of the road to Katwe there are some stunning craters within the park. **Baboon Cliffs** is a viewpoint that gives excellent views over the surrounding area. Kasenyi, in the northeast of the park, offers the best chance of spotting lions, although for the tree-climbers, it's a long haul south to Ishasha. Over in **Kyambura (Chambura) Game Reserve** there are some salt lakes, which attract flamingos in huge numbers. Vehicle hire is USh2500 per kilometre and ranger-guides cost US\$5/10 per half/full day – money well spent, as predators can be hard to find.

## FOREST WALKS

In the southeastern section of the park, guided forest walks are available in the

**Maramagambo Forest** – great if you enjoy bird-watching – for US\$5/10 per half/full day.

Walks can also be arranged in **Kalinzu Forest**, which is a cheaper option as it lies outside the national park boundary. It contains numerous bird species (381 at the last count), several types of primates, including the rare L'Hoest monkey, and many varieties of butterfly. Guided walks here cost US\$5000/6000 during the day/night.

## Sleeping & Eating

### MWEYA

The majority of places to stay are on the Mweya Peninsula close to Mweya Safari Lodge.

**Mweya Safari Lodge** (lodge ☎ 0483-44266, bookings ☎ 039 260260; www.mweyalodge.com; s/d with full board US\$99/180; 🍴) This sophisticated safari lodge has a stunning setting on the raised peninsula of Mweya, with excellent views over Lake Edward to the west and along the Kazinga Channel to the east. It is something of a lodge and hotel combined, making it perfect for a break from bush showers in the middle of a safari, as all rooms have full bathrooms and extras, such as TV and minibar. Sitting on the terrace with a cold drink at sunset is perfect and the swimming pool has an enviable setting. For a memorable meal, à la carte dining is available at the classy restaurant here (meals US\$8000 to US\$15,000). Even for non-guests, it's a must for a sundowner and a full spread one night. Book ahead during peak season and weekends, as the lodge gets very busy. Watch out for the mongooses that scamper around; at night hippos linger on the lawns, so watch where you're walking!

**Students' Camp** (dm US\$10,000, camping US\$10,000) The cheapest beds are here, but it is very basic and the chances are that it will be full of Ugandan schoolchildren on educational visits. Campers should be vigilant at night, as hippos wander through here.

**Ecology Institute** (dm US\$15,000, r per person US\$20,000) This is the more reliable option for actually finding a cheap bed. The rooms are spartan but cleanly kept and include access to shared bathrooms. Said shared bathrooms are sometimes subject to insect infestation at night, however, so take sandals on a toilet run.

**Tembo Canteen** (meals US\$2500-5000) Located at the Students' Camp, this is where the safari drivers hang out. It serves decent meals, but

it is best to order in advance as service can be slow. There are also basic food supplies available in the nearby shop.

### ISHASHA

**Ishasha Camp** (camping US\$10,000, banda s/d US\$10,000/15,000) In the remote southern area of the park there are basic *bandas* here, as well as camp sites. Access is pretty tough without your own wheels.

### MARAMAGAMBO FOREST

**Camp site** (camping US\$10,000) Set right at the foot of the Kichwamba Escarpment, but is a bit out of the way to draw independent travellers.

**Jacana Camp** (s/d with full board US\$87/150; 🍴) A furnished tented camp, quite luxurious if a little rustic, offering striking views over Lake Nyamusingiri. Facilities include a swimming pool and sauna. This is a charming spot to stay for those on an upmarket safari. It's operated by **Inns of Uganda** (☎ 041-258273; www.innsouganda.com).

### KALINZU FOREST

**Kalinzu Forest Reserve** (admission for 1/2 days US\$6000/9000; camping per night US\$2500, 2 nights US\$4000) Camping is possible here. The entry fee is a lot cheaper than the charge for Queen Elizabeth National Park; and community projects in villages around the reserve receive 40% of the entry fees. To get here, turn off the Kasese road at Butare village and after 10km you come to the Kalinzu ecotourism site. In the wet season you will need a 4WD to get here.

## Getting There & Away

Any vehicle travelling between Mbarara and Kasese passes through Katunguru. There are regular minibuses from Katunguru to Kasese (US\$3000, one hour) and Mbarara (US\$5000, two hours). Hitching out of the park from Mweya is easy – just stand by the barrier at Mweya Safari Lodge. Better still, try to make arrangements the night before at the lodge. Hitching into the park can be much harder, although weekends are not too bad. If traffic is thin, it may be necessary to charter a vehicle from Katunguru for about US\$20,000 plus the vehicle entry fee.

For Maramagambo Forest, get off the bus or shared taxi at the village of Ndekye, south of Katunguru, from where a 10km

path leads through small villages to Maramagambo (also known locally as Nyamusingiri, after the lake here). Ask locals for directions.

The road from Katunguru to the village of Ishasha cuts through the park and passes Ishasha gate. Although it is not necessary to pay any park entry fees to travel this road, you'll be fined US\$100,000 if you're caught venturing off it and into the park. From Ishasha, you can head south for Butogota and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park; it takes around five hours to drive from Bwindi to Mweya in the dry season.

Both Mweya Safari Lodge and Jacana Camp offer inclusive three-day safaris with transport, accommodation and meals, which work out to be good value.

## BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NATIONAL PARK

Also known as the Impenetrable Forest, **Bwindi** (admission per 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50) is one of Uganda's most recently created national parks. It is in the southwest of the country, very close to the DR Congo border. The park, which covers 331 sq km, encompasses one of the last remaining habitats of the mountain gorilla, and is where almost half – an estimated 330 individuals – of the surviving mountain gorillas in the world live. However, more recently experts have decided the Bwindi gorillas may be a distinct subspecies, different from the mountain gorillas of the Virungas. Bwindi was the main place in East Africa for seeing the mountain gorillas during Rwanda's troubled years, but these days Parc National des Volcans, and even Parc National des Virungas in DR Congo, are also drawing visitors in numbers again.

Bwindi hit the headlines in March 1999 when the kidnap and subsequent murder of eight tourists tarnished Uganda's image. In light of this dreadful incident, gorilla bookings nose dived and security was upgraded significantly. There is now a large, invisible army presence down here and it is considered safe to visit. However, given what once took place here, it doesn't hurt to check in Kampala for the latest security situation at Bwindi.

A major conservation effort has been going on here for a number of years to protect the gorillas' habitat. As a result, encroachment

on the montane forest by cultivators has been stopped, poaching has ceased and the gorilla families have been gradually habituated to human contact.

Gorillas are not the only animals to have benefited from this project. The park contains about 20 forest elephants, at least 10 species of primate (including chimpanzees, colobus monkeys and baboons), duikers, bushbucks and the rare giant forest hog, as well as a host of bird and insect species. It is one of the richest areas in Africa for flora and fauna.

For bird-watchers it is one of the most exciting destinations in the country, with more than 300 species of bird. These include 23 of the 24 Albertine rift endemics and several endangered species, including the African green broadbill, but it might not be easy to spot many birds because of the density of their habitat.

The park headquarters is at Buhoma on the northern edge of the park. The gorilla visits start from here and this is where all the accommodation is located. There is also a new sector at Nkuringo in the south of the park. Be aware that this area is rainforest, and not surprisingly it rains a hell of a lot – be prepared.

There are no vehicle charges here, as vehicles are not allowed to proceed beyond park headquarters.

For more on Bwindi, pick up a copy of *Mgahinga Gorilla National Park & Bwindi Impenetrable National Park*, available from UWA headquarters in Kampala.

## Activities

### GORILLA TRACKING

There are now four habituated groups of gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park: three groups are located within walking distance of Buhoma, while the newest Nkuringo group are located in the south of the park, accessible only from Kisoro. At the time of research, the Mubare group has 10 individuals, the Habinyanja group 18 individuals and the Rushegura group 10 individuals. Eight tourists per day can visit each family, which adds up to a total of 24 permits per day available at Bwindi. The Nkuringo group numbers 19 individuals and a further eight permits are available here. However, the chances are an upmarket lodge will be opening at Nkuringo early in the lifetime of

this book and it will be given the bulk of the permits, leaving only standby permits for independent travellers.

The bad news is that demand generally far exceeds supply for most of the year. The big safari companies often book blocks of permits months in advance, meaning that for the individual visitor it can be difficult to get a confirmed place. All bookings must be made through the **UWA office** (☎ 041-346287; www.uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd) in Kampala, although staff will often tell you that there are no vacancies for days at a time. Be persistent, call around at backpacker places in Kampala and Jinja, where cancellations are often advertised, or, if necessary, turn up at the park and see if there are any no-shows.

Gorilla-trekking permits cost US\$360, including the park entry fee, payable in US dollars cash only. The trips leave at 8.30am daily, but aim to report to park headquarters by 8am. Note that children under 15 years old are not permitted to trek to the gorillas, and anyone with a cold or other illness is likewise excluded. Do not try to feign good health if you are unwell, as you could be endangering these rare creatures' lives. A full refund is given to anyone who withdraws due to ill health.

Once you finally join a tracking group, the chances of finding the gorillas are excellent. The terrain in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is mountainous and heavily forested; if the gorillas are a fair distance from Buhoma, it can be quite a challenge reaching them. On a lucky day it might be less than one hour to reach them, but if you are unlucky, it could take four hours or more. Make sure you are in good enough shape. The time you actually spend with the gorillas once you find them is limited to one hour, and not a minute more. It is pretty dark in the forest of Bwindi, so photo opportunities are limited without fast film.

For more information on the mountain gorillas, their habitat, where to see them and responsible tracking, see p100. It is essential to check out this section for a compare and contrast, and where to track the gorillas... Uganda, Rwanda or the DR Congo.

#### FOREST WALKS

The park headquarters at Buhoma is in a beautiful setting, and there are several walks in the area that are well worth the time.

Most take pretty much half a day, but there is a short loop just outside the park for those who want a taste but don't have much time. For the walks inside the park, the cost is US\$5/10 for a half/full day (in addition to the park entry fee) and a ranger accompanies all walkers.

The **Waterfall trail** includes, surprise, surprise, a 33m waterfall on the Munyaga River. It's a fairly strenuous walk that takes about three hours return.

The **Muzabijiro Loop trail** gives excellent views south to the Virunga volcanoes and the western Rift Valley in the DR Congo, weather permitting. It also takes about three hours.

The **Buhoma village tourist walk** is very popular, and includes a section of relic forest and a look at the local lifestyle. Proceeds from this walk are ploughed back into the community to improve lives. There are also several community handicraft projects already underway in the village – check out the small shops for a souvenir wooden gorilla.

#### Sleeping & Eating BUHOMA

Given that there are only 24 gorilla permits per day available, there are a whole lot of lodges competing for business. Most of the upmarket lodges cater to guests on safari and several almost exclusively work with their own clients. There are a couple of tiny hotels scattered throughout Buhoma village, but these are primarily catering for local drivers on safari with their clients.

**Buhoma Community Rest Camp** (camping US\$3, bandas per person US\$10) Enjoying a beautiful setting right next to park headquarters, this is by far the most popular budget deal at Bwindi. All profits go towards funding community-development projects. *Bandas* come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and represent good value. Hot water is available by the bucket – good news on a cool day. There is also a small canteen and bar here.

**Gorilla View Rest Camp** (camping USh5000, dm USh10,000, banda s/d USh12,000/15,000) Quite literally opposite the community camp, this *banda* operation is pretty much the same sort of deal, but without the feelgood factor of channelling the proceeds into community development.

**Buhoma Homestead** (s/d with full board US\$100/170) Another spot located inside the park

boundary, this private set-up has recently been taken over by **Wild Frontiers** (www.wildfrontiers.co.ug) in Kampala. Being brutally honest, these prices are pretty poor value compared with what is on offer elsewhere in Uganda, but then this is Bwindi and the gorilla permits aren't cheap either. Upgrade to the next level if you can afford it.

**Volcanoes Safaris** (☎ 041-346464; www.volcanoesafaris.com; s/d with full board US\$240/360) For a dramatic setting this camp is hard to beat, situated opposite the wall of green that is the Impenetrable Forest. The old tents have been replaced by luxury *bandas*, although not necessarily luxurious enough to justify the hefty price tag. The restaurant has a good menu and the staff are very welcoming.

**Mantana African Safaris** (☎ 041-321552; mantana@africaonline.co.ug; s/d with full board US\$110/180) A little way out from the main concentration of camps, Mantana runs a small, luxury tented camp. The tents are about as good as it gets for camping, including hot water and electricity, and very atmospheric at night with the soundtrack of the forest nearby.

**Gorilla Forest Camp** (☎ 041-340290; gfcamp@africaonline.co.ug; s/d with full board US\$260/416) Run by the bespoke travel company Abercrombie & Kent, this is the ultimate jungle camp, offering opulent tents complete with grand beds, luxury bathrooms and forest views. It really is spectacular, but at these prices most of us will be taking a peek rather than enjoying the sleep.

Most visitors at Bwindi tend to eat meals where they are staying. Most of the fancier places are with full board, so this is no surprise. At the budget end, there are a couple of local spots knocking together cheap food, but they are nothing special.

#### BUTOGOTA

This is where the direct bus from Kampala terminates, so some travellers get stuck in Butogota on the way to Bwindi, although there is absolutely no reason to stay here if it can be avoided.

**Butogota Travellers Inn** (s/d USh20,000/30,000) The prices are a little ambitious for what is essentially a spit and sawdust kind of show... perhaps it has been inspired by some of the places at Bwindi.

**Pineapple Lodge** (s/d USh6000/8000) Although it's more basic, at least it has a basic understanding of room pricing.

#### Getting There & Away

Butogota is the nearest village to Buhoma and is the closest place to the park with public transport links. Without transport it's too far from the park to use as a base for gorilla trekking, but some travellers spend a night here en route from Kabale or Kampala before walking or hitching the 17km to Buhoma the next day, and visiting the gorillas the day after. It's a lot of time to squander given that pick-ups (USh20,000) or motorcycles (USh10,000) can be chartered to Bwindi.

There is a direct Silverline bus daily in each direction between Kampala and Butogota, which goes via Kisizi. It leaves Kampala pretty early (6.30am), arriving in Butogota around dark; the fare is USh18,000. Slightly faster, but slightly more complicated is to take a bus to Kihihi (USh16,000) and change there for a pick-up to Butogota (USh2000).

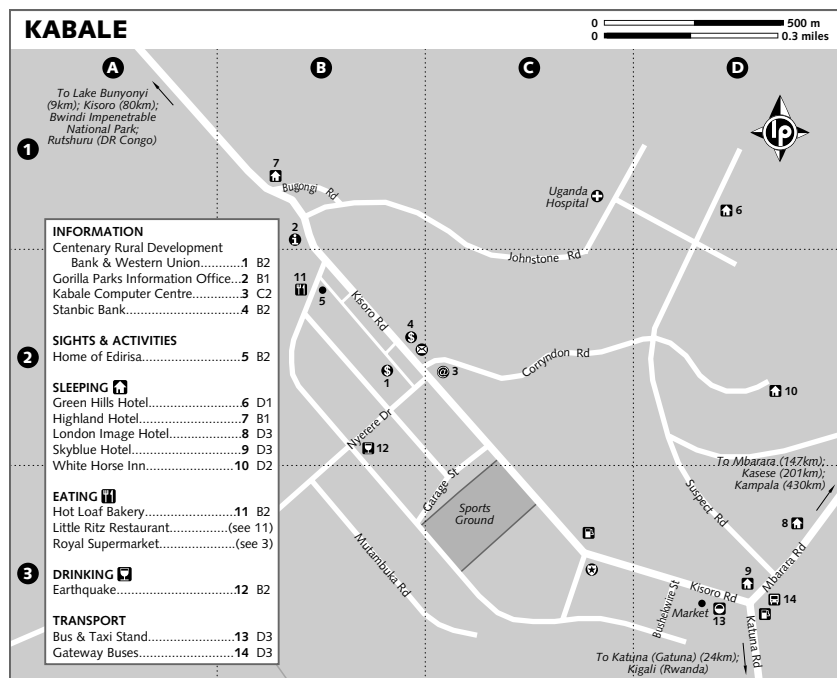
The other alternative is the irregular pick-ups and shared taxis that connect Kabale and Butogota (USh9000), but this is hardly straightforward. There are plenty available on Tuesday and Friday, but other days are a nightmare. If there is nothing from Kabale to Butogota, take a Kihihi shared taxi as far as Kanyantorogo, through which the bus from Kampala passes. If all else fails or you are in a group, charter a vehicle from Kabale – USh100,000 is quoted by locals in the know, but they are unlikely to take tourists for much under US\$70, as they know how much a gorilla permit costs!

By private vehicle the better route is via Kabale, as you stay on the bitumen a lot longer. The turn-off to Bwindi/Buhoma is signposted off the road to Kisoro, and the trip from Kabale takes three to four hours. It's a very scenic road through mountainous rainforest.

#### KABALE

☎ 0486

Kabale is the biggest town in Kigezi district, dubbed the 'Switzerland of Africa' by tourist brochures and travellers alike, although there weren't many volcanoes in the Alps at last count. The 'New Zealand of Africa' could be closer to the mark. Whatever the comparisons, this southwestern corner of Uganda is undeniably beautiful, with its intensively cultivated and terraced hills, forests and lakes. There are breathtaking views of the Virunga chain of volcanoes from the



summits of precarious passes, such as the Kanaba Gap, about 60km from Kabale on the road to Kisoro. There are also tea-growing estates all the way from Kabale to the Rwandan border at Katuna (Gatuna).

While Kabale itself is nothing to write home about, it is a handy base from which to explore some superb hiking country, as the area is honeycombed with tracks and paths, trading centres and farms. It is also the gateway to Lake Bunyoni, the number one spot for serious rest and relaxation in southwest Uganda. It's a good staging post for trips to the gorillas at Bwindi Impenetrable and, possibly, Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks.

Kabale is Uganda's highest town at about 2000m and can get pretty cool at night, so keep some warm clothes handy. Water pressure in town is intermittent at best, so you may want to check that water is likely to come out of the pipes before you strip off under a shower on a cold evening!

## Information

For the fuller flavour of Kabale, pick up a copy of the *Lake Bunyoni & Kabale In Your*

*Pocket* guide (USh1000), available at the Home of Edirisa (opposite).

Getting cash in Kabale has traditionally been a bit of a mess. Most foreign exchange bureaus and banks offer terrible rates compared with Kampala, about 15% or so lower. The best place to change travellers cheques is currently **Royal Supermarket** (Kisoro Rd), but coming with cash from Kampala is the safest bet.

The post office has international phone and fax services, and connections are reasonably reliable. There are also MTN card-phones spread throughout town.

**Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Kisoro Rd) The place to arrange a Western Union transfer.

**Global Internet Café** (Kisoro Rd; per min USh50) The leading local spot for Internet access.

**Gorilla Parks Information Office** (Kisoro Rd) The UWA maintains this office in Kabale, but as the staff cannot actually book gorilla trips here and are not in direct contact with either Bwindi Impenetrable or Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks, there's very little they can do. They are, however, in contact with the UWA head office in Kampala and know how many permits are already booked for each day, and are usually informed about cancellations.

**Stanbic Bank** (Kisoro Rd) Check here to see if decent exchange rates are available for travellers cheques now... it was going live during our visit.

## Sights

**Home of Edirisa** (☎ 077-558558; www.edirisa.org; admission USh3000; ☎ 9am-11pm) Kabale's first and only museum, the main attraction here is a replica traditional homestead of the Bakiga tribe. Displays introduce visitors to the life and times of the Bakiga people, as museum founder Festo Karwemera is a Bakiga elder. There is also accommodation, food, a gift shop and Internet access, making it a lively little centre in Kabale.

## Sleeping BUDGET

There is a good range of budget accommodation in Kabale and several of the best places are slap-bang on top of each other near the taxi park.

**Skyblue Hotel** (☎ 0486-22154; Mbarara Rd; s/d USh8000/12,000) Part of a growing nationwide chain, service is slick here. All the rooms are named after the planets – if you are suffering with bad guts you might need to think about Uranus. Rooms are super clean with towel and soap provided and bucket hot water on request. There are also a few self-contained doubles available at USh20,000.

**Home of Edirisa** (☎ 077-558558; www.edirisa.org; dm USh3000, s/d USh5000/15,000) Experience the novelty of staying in a museum, plus it's free entry for guests! The dorms are cheaper than camping anywhere else in Uganda, while the bigger rooms are a good investment, as they include a bathroom. Facilities include a book exchange, and great shakes and coffees in the little café. Book ahead to avoid disappointment.

## MIDRANGE

**Highland Hotel** (☎ 0486-22175; highland@imul.com; Kisoro Rd; s/d USh15,000/30,000) It's the perfect name given the rugged hills that surround the town, but they are no longer the perfect rooms, as they are showing their age these days. However, rates sort of reflect this and include breakfast. The staff are also pretty helpful, and the attached restaurant is one of the more reliable in town.

**London Image Hotel** (☎ 078-320488; 31 Mbarara Rd; s/d USh15,000/20,000, with bathroom USh25,000/30,000) Not the London image that is the

Dorchester or the Savoy, but then you'd hardly expect that in little old Kabale. But the rooms are a good size and the price is right. The friendly old matriarch runs a tight ship.

## TOP END

**White Horse Inn** (☎ 0486-26010; fax 23717; Corryndon Rd; s/d/ste USh68,000/85,000/140,000) Tucked away near the golf course on the hill overlooking the town, this is Kabale's most famous address. It's an attractive place with verdant gardens, but its design definitely owes something to another era, including the furnishings, which could come straight out of a '70s porn flick. The hotel has a popular bar and restaurant, and rates include breakfast.

**Green Hills Hotel** (☎ 0486-24442; fax 24443; Suspect Rd; s/d 40,000/60,000; ☎) Across the other side of the golf course, Green Hills is clearly better value than the White Horse, thanks to its modern rooms, swimming pool, and new sauna and steam bath. Book ahead, as it often fills up with conference guests.

## Eating

Among the aforementioned sleeping options, the Home of Edirisa has a good menu of Western-style snacks at exceedingly low prices, while the Skyblue Hotel does filling breakfasts and has a pretty good choice of meals for the provinces. The restaurant at the Highland Hotel has an open fire that could prove tempting on a cold night.

**Hot Loaf Bakery** (cakes from USh500) Kabale's main bakery, the Hot Loaf has great cakes, and also offers fresh bread, pizza and tasty samosas. Definitely a useful place to pick up some snacks for a long road journey to Bwindi or Kisoro.

**Little Ritz Restaurant** (meals USh3000-6000) Located directly above the Hot Loaf Bakery, this is the leading restaurant in town, offering an eclectic menu of Western, Indian and African dishes. Start the day with its 'BEST' breakfast – baked beans, egg, sausages and tomatoes. The attached bar screens major football matches.

**Royal Supermarket** (Kisoro Rd) Anyone planning to do a bit of self-catering at Bwindi or Lake Bunyoni should hit the Royal, the best-stocked supermarket in town.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Kabale and bars don't exactly go together and most visitors drink at one of the hotels.

**Earthquake** (Nyerere Dr) Kabale isn't the dance capital of Africa, but it is home to the local disco that could just make the earth move under your feet. It only really rocks on the weekend, when it goes on into the small hours, and attracts a healthy provincial crowd of drunkards and hookers.

### Getting There & Away

The EMS Post Bus operates daily, except Sunday, between Kabale and Kampala. For details, see p485.

There are numerous daily buses to Kampala, which take about six hours and cost US\$12,000 to US\$15,000 depending on the company. For Fort Portal, there's a daily bus via Mbarara and Kasese (US\$12,000, about eight hours), but it leaves at the alarming hour of 4am.

Minibuses travel regularly between Kabale and Kisoro (US\$7000, up to three hours). There are scheduled departures to Kisoro at 10am and 4pm. Otherwise, they go when full, and 'full' means exactly that! Most of them are dangerously overloaded, but the ride, over a very dusty road, is absolutely magnificent, offering superb views.

For all the difficult details on getting from Kabale to Bwindi, see p525.

For details about travel to Lake Bunyoni, see opposite.

There are also direct minibuses (US\$1000, 30 minutes) and shared taxis (US\$15,000) to the Rwandan border at Katuna (Gatuna) from near the Shell petrol station on the Katuna road. See p555 for details on getting to Kigali from Kabale or Kampala.

## AROUND KABALE

### Lake Bunyoni

A magical place, Lake Bunyoni's beguiling beauty defies description. Undoubtedly the most lovely lake in the country, Bunyoni has caught up with the Sese Islands as the place for travellers to chill out on a long trip through Uganda, although chill might be the operative word, as the water temperature is quite cool. It is a large and irregularly shaped lake dotted with islands, and the surrounding hillsides are intensively cultivated like parts of Nepal. The area is ideal for activities, such as canoeing, cycling or hiking. Mark Bunyoni down as a must if you are travelling through southwestern Uganda.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There are endless opportunities for activities in the Lake Bunyoni region. Many of the villagers, and several of the guesthouses and camp sites, have boats and it isn't difficult to arrange a trip on the lake. **Canoeing** is a popular activity and dugouts can be rented from most of the camps. Charges are pretty reasonable, but practise for a while before heading off on an ambitious trip around the islands, as many tourists end up going round and round in circles, doing what's known locally as the *mzungu* corkscrew.

There are endless walking opportunities in the area and for those who want a challenge, you can boat across the lake before trekking down to Kisoro. **Guided walks** are also popular and these can usually be arranged through camps here. However, if you want an easygoing amble along the shores of the lake, it is straightforward enough to find your own way.

**Mountain bikes** (per day US\$10,000) can be hired from Bunyoni Overland Camp and are a great way to get along the lake shore, although getting to Kabale would require a king of the mountains, Tour de France style effort.

**Kyevu market** is held every Wednesday and Saturday, drawing villagers from all over the region. It is a long way from all the camps around the lake, and involves a three-hour trip by dugout. However, most of the camps should be able to arrange an oarsman to help out, or secure a motorboat for rent. The people out here are pretty shy, so be sensitive with a camera. There are also a number of Batwa villages in this part of the region and if you can link up with a friendly guide at the market, you might be able to arrange a visit to a Batwa community.

Nearer to the camps is **Punishment Island**, located midway between Bushara and Njuyera Islands; so named because it was once the place where unmarried pregnant women were dumped to die. Tragically, most of them did die trying to swim for shore, because they usually didn't have the stamina to make it. It is easy to spot – it has just one small tree in the centre.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Lake Bunyoni is one of Uganda's most popular destinations for whiling away the days, and there is a good choice of resorts and

camp, both on land or the nearby islands. Most places also have restaurants and bars offering food and drink.

### Mainland

**Bunyoni Overland Camp** (☎ 0486-23741; highland@imul.com; camping US\$6000, furnished tent s/d US\$20,000/30,000, s/d US\$25,000/35,000, s/d cottage US\$30,000/50,000) One of the most attractive camps in Uganda, the wide range of accommodation, sculpted gardens and lakeside setting ensure this place is extremely popular with travellers and overland companies. Wannabe campers with no tent can rent one for US\$8000, while the fixed double tents come fully furnished. Stepping up the style, there are some homey little cottages with attached bathroom. For those relying on shared facilities, the camp boasts some of the best toilets in Uganda and regular hot water. There is a small swimming pier, and kayaks and mountain bikes are available for rent to explore the area. There is a lively restaurant and bar, too, although meals often take more than one hour to arrive if it is busy... order well in advance!

**Crater Bay Cottages** (☎ 0486-22801; camping US\$2000, banda US\$30,000) Located just around a small bay from Bunyoni Overland Camp, this place looks set to soar in popularity thanks to bargain camping and smart self-contained *bandas*. Built on a series of terraces, the *bandas* have lake views and there are several garden pavilions for relaxing, as well as a swimming pier on the lake shore.

**Bamboo House** (☎ 0486-26255; bandas US\$5000) If cash is more important than comfort, the cheapest rooms around the lake are found here. Choose from small circular *bandas* or rather dingy singles. It's away from the water's edge, however.

**Karibuni Camp** (camping US\$3000, r US\$15,000) When it comes to gardens, this little camp is up there with the best of them, but unfortunately the facilities lack the same flourish. New rooms were under construction, but there is currently no restaurant. Could be good for campers who want to get away from it all.

### Islands

**Byoona Amagara** (☎ 075-652788; www.lakebunyoni.net; all rates per person, camping US\$3000, dm US\$6000, r US\$8000, geodome US\$11,000, cabin US\$14,000) Billing itself a backpacker's paradise, it is hard to disagree given its blissful hillside setting on

Itambira island. There is a unique choice of rooms, all at very reasonable prices, and all proceeds go towards supporting community projects in the fields of education and agriculture. Everyone has access to solar-powered showers and a good selection of inexpensive meals are available. To get here, take the Lake Bunyoni secondary school boat (US\$7500, 12 minutes) or a dugout (US\$2500, 50 minutes) from the Rutinda market pier.

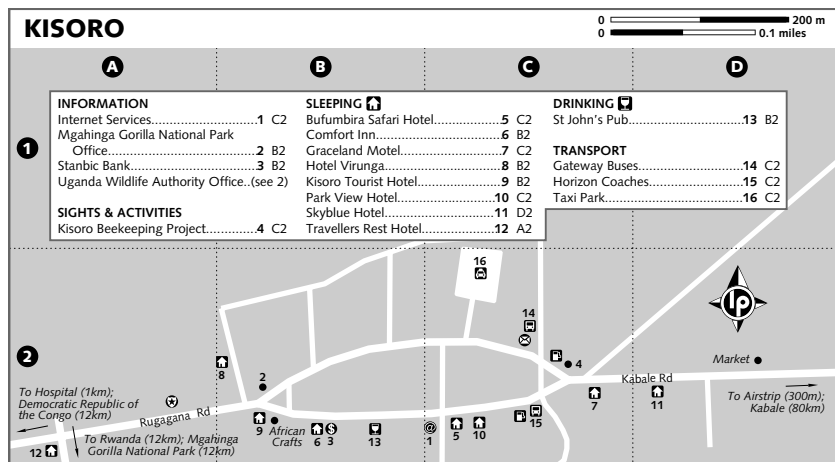
**Bushara Island Camp** (☎ 077-464585; bushara.island@africaonline.co.ug; camping US\$2500, furnished tents US\$13-20, cottages US\$20-36) This private island camp is run by the Church of Uganda and offers the choice of secluded safari tents or comfortable cottages with bathrooms. Self-sufficient campers can hang out here for less than US\$2 a night. There is a well-regarded restaurant serving pizza, crayfish dishes and tasty desserts, like caramelised bananas and crepes. There's also a snack bar, picnic area, outdoor barbecue and volleyball court, plus sailing and windsurfing. A motorboat transfer from Rutinda costs US\$10,000 or just US\$2000 by dugout.

**Nature's Prime Island** (☎ 077-423215; natures.primeisland@yahoo.co.uk; cabins per person US\$37, tents per person US\$32, both full board) Formerly Far Out Camp, Nature's Prime occupies a lovely little island just across the bay from Bunyoni Overland Camp. The cabins are Scandinavian-style and have lakeviews, while the tents are set on raised platforms. The bar-restaurant is a fine place to relax over a beer with great views across the lake.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Lake Bunyoni, there are minibuses (US\$1000, 30 minutes) travelling on Monday and Friday only when there is a market at Rutinda. Otherwise, there is the choice of chartering a special hire (US\$10,000) or taking a *boda-boda* (US\$4000). Finally, for those on a really tight budget, there is the option of hitching or walking the 9km from Kabale.

Coming from Kabale, take the access road for Bunyoni about 1km out of town on the Kisoro road, signposted on the left. If you're walking, you can take a shortcut by heading straight uphill alongside the stream just past the small dams, but it is a long way with a backpack.



## KISORO

Kisoro, the gateway to Mghanga Gorilla National Park, is at the extreme southwestern tip of the country on the Ugandan side of the Virungas. As a town it has absolutely nothing to recommend it; the main draw for travellers is as a base from which to visit the gorillas of Mghanga to the south or the gorillas at Djomba in Parc National des Virungas just over the border in DR Congo, now things are up and running there again. However, on a clear day, the views of the Virunga chain of volcanoes from this dusty little town are fantastic.

### Information

Try **Stanbic Bank** (Rugagana Rd) if you need to exchange cash or travellers cheques, but there is no guarantee these services will be available. Call Stanbic in Kampala to double-check rather than take the risk. Anyone crossing into DR Congo to view the mountain gorillas at Djomba or Bukima should bear in mind that the Congolese will only accept cash payment in US dollars.

The post office offers limited telephone services, but MTN has cardphones here for reliable international connections.

**Internet Services** (Rugagana Rd; per min USh100) The only Internet connection in town.

**Mghanga Gorilla National Park office** (☎ 0486-30098; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-5pm) On the main road in the centre of town, inquire here about the possibility of a gorilla visit at Mghanga. Staff can also arrange transport out to the park. However, it is important to pay for the

gorilla permit in advance in Kampala, that is assuming the gorillas ever return to the Ugandan side.

### Sights & Activities

As well as seeing the nearby gorillas, there is a good range of activities available in the Kisoro area, including **trekking** the volcanoes in Mghanga Gorilla National Park and **cave exploration** near the park (p532).

Another interesting option is to take a **snake safari** to Lake Mutanda. Trips to see the large pythons at the lake cost about US\$20, including transport. Other activities include **bird watching**, **canoeing** and a visit to a **pygmy village**. Local guide **Joseph Kwihaj** (☎ 078-497730; kwihaj@yahoo.co.uk) has a whole range of cheap local tours available. Track him down at his little shop **African Crafts** (Rugagana Rd).

Those with a sweet tooth might like to call in at the **Kisoro Beekeeping Project**, a local cooperative producing natural honey with the love and care of a whisky distiller or vineyard owner. There are several types of honey on sale and the staff can demonstrate the process of preparing the honey.

### Sleeping

**Travellers Rest Hotel** (☎ 0486-30123; postmaster@gorillatours.com; s/d with bathroom US\$35/45) This is a hotel with a history. Originally set up by the so-called father of gorilla tourism, Walter Baumgartel, Dian Fossey stayed here as her home away from home. As well as smart little standard rooms with elegant décor and hot water on tap, there are a couple of suites

(US\$50) with room to spread out. The restaurant has the best food in town, and rates include breakfast.

**Kisoro Tourist Hotel** (☎ 0486-30135; s/d with bathroom USh60,000/90,000) Lacking the charm and history of Travellers Rest, this modern hotel is more about function than form. The smart rooms include satellite TV and the bathrooms have hot water. There is a restaurant and bar downstairs, complete with open fire. Rates include breakfast.

**Hotel Virunga** (☎ 0486-30109; camping US\$3, s/d USh8000/15,000, d with bathroom USh30,000) This place has really taken off with overland trucks now that DR Congo is open for gorilla tracking once more. The camping area is organised and attractive and the simple rooms are sensibly priced. Out front is a buzzing little restaurant that rocks on as a bar on busy nights and movies play nightly in a side room.

**Graceland Motel** (☎ 077-837963; s/d USh20,000/25,000) There are no signs of Elvis at this graceland, but for those busting for a bathroom they are the best value in town. It also has larger doubles at USh35,000, and all rates include breakfast.

**Skyblue Hotel** (☎ 0486-30076; s/d USh8000/12,000) Anyone that has seen the sister hotel in Kabale knows what to expect. Clean rooms, exemplary service and shared facilities are the main ingredients. Speaking of ingredients, the restaurant has range of meals.

On the cheap, cheap, cheap front, Bufumbira Safari Hotel, Comfort Inn and Park View Hotel are all on the same stretch, and all offer identikit singles/doubles at USh3000/6000. These are no-frills set-ups, with just a couple of beds in each room and shared bathrooms.

For two places at Mghanga Gorilla National Park that offer superb views of the volcanoes, check out p532.

### Eating & Drinking

There is not a great deal of choice in town, so most visitors usually end up eating at the hotel or guesthouse in which they are staying. The best menu is found at **Travellers Rest** (meals USh4000-6000), which also has a well-stocked bar and fireplace, while Hotel Virunga and Skyblue Hotel offer an enticing combination of discount dining with some international touches.

If you are looking for nightlife in Kisoro, you might well be looking a long time. How-

ever, **St John's Pub** (Rugagana Rd) is a reasonable little spot in the middle of town, with a pool table, darts and a selection of cheap drinks, or check out the aforementioned Hotel Virunga if you see some overland trucks in town. This will be the place to get the lowdown on DR Congo over a couple of cold beers.

### Getting There & Away

Horizon Coaches and Gateway have several buses a day to Kampala (USh18,000, nine hours) departing between about 4.30am and 9am.

Between Kabale and Kisoro there are frequent daily minibuses, which depart when full and cost USh7000 (see p528 for more details). These take from two to three hours depending on the season. There are also two scheduled departures at 7am and 1pm. Coming from Kabale, these minibuses continue on a further 12km to the DR Congo border at Bunagana (USh1000).

For details on how to get to Mghanga Gorilla National Park, see p533.

The Rwandan border south of Kisoro at Cyanika is open, but the road is in poor shape on the Ugandan side. Minibuses (USh1500, 30 minutes) make the run infrequently. On the Rwandan side, it is in excellent condition, so takes about 1½ hours, including paperwork, to travel between Kisoro and Ruhengeri. See p555 for the full story on the routes into Rwanda.

### LAKE MUTANDA

This is a beautiful lake set against the towering backdrop of the Virunga volcanoes. It lies 14km north of Kisoro and is a nice area for walking. Large pythons nest in the lake region and you can observe them at close quarters if you wish, although bearing in mind their girth, you may want to keep a sensible distance (see opposite for more details).

### MGHANGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK

Although it may be the smallest of Uganda's national parks at just 34 sq km, **Mghanga Gorilla National Park** (admission per 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50) punches above its weight and is perhaps the most visually stunning of all the protected areas. Tucked away in the far southwestern corner of the country, the tropical rainforest cloaking the volcanoes

### MOUNTAIN GORILLAS IN THE DR CONGO

For the inside story on visiting the mountain gorillas in DR Congo, sometimes the only place where it is possible to pick up a permit in the region, see p563.

provides a refuge for the rare mountain gorilla. The park is contiguous with the Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda, and the Parc National des Virungas in DR Congo. Together, the three parks form the Virunga Conservation Area, which covers 420 sq km, and is home to an estimated half of the world's mountain gorilla population of about 700 animals – or all of them if you go along with the classification of those in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park as a new subspecies.

As in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, it is possible to track gorillas here, but it is less convenient as the gorillas have a tendency to duck across the mountains into Rwanda or DR Congo. At the time of writing the gorillas had been absent for the best part of a year, raising questions as to whether or not they will ever return. If not, perhaps Mgahinga Gorilla National Park will need to consider a name change. Even if the gorillas eventually return, fewer people visit the gorillas here, instead opting for the more reliable choices of Bwindi, Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda or Parc National des Virungas in DR Congo.

At Mgahinga, there was just one group of gorillas habituated to visitors, with 11 individuals, including two silverbacks. It takes longer to find the gorillas here than at Bwindi, but the going is not as hard as in the Impenetrable Forest.

Three volcanoes loom large over the park headquarters: Muhavura, Gahinga and Sabinyo. Muhavura has a crater lake at its summit and is the highest point in the park, at 4127m.

The park headquarters is about 12km from Kisoro at Ntebeko Camp.

### Activities

#### GORILLA TRACKING

When the gorillas are based on the Uganda side, eight people can visit per day, departing from park headquarters at 8am. Reser-

vations for the trips must be made at the **UWA head office** (☎ 041-346287; www.uwa.or.ug) in Kampala and the cost is US\$360, including park fees, a ranger-guide and armed guards (all of whom will expect a tip of around US\$5000 to US\$10,000). Try to check in at the booking office in Kisoro (near Hotel Virunga) by 5pm on the day before your trip just to confirm your arrival. It is generally much easier to get a confirmed booking at Mgahinga than at Bwindi, as tour companies don't book blocks of permits here. For more information on the mountain gorillas and a summary of the various tracking options in Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo, see p100.

#### GOLDEN MONKEY TRACKING

If the gorillas continue to hang out in Rwanda, then golden monkeys will have to take up the challenge to lure tourists to Mgahinga. These are beautiful creatures and are quite playful. It costs US\$20 to track golden monkeys here, but don't forget to throw in the US\$20 park fee on top.

#### TREKKING

Any one of the volcanoes in the park (Mt Muhavura at 4127m, Mt Sabinyo at 3669m or Mt Gahinga at 3474m) can be climbed for US\$40 per person, including a ranger-guide; the climbs take between four and six hours each. You'll see stunning vistas across to the neighbouring volcanoes. There is also the popular option of a border walk, which takes trekkers to the frontier with Rwanda and DR Congo for that experience of jumping back and forth between three countries. There's also a 13km nature trail (US\$5/10 per half/full day), which offers the chance to spot some of the more than 100 species of birds found in the park, including the Rwenzori touraco and the scarlet-tufted malachite sunbird.

#### CAVING

**Garama Cave** is about 2km from park headquarters (outside the park boundary) and visits have been whacked up to a rather off-putting US\$25 per person. The cave is approximately 3km long and takes about four hours to explore. Bring a torch (flashlight).

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Red Chilli Gorilla Camp** (camping US\$3000, dm US\$6000, bandas US\$20,000) Formerly the Mgahinga Com-

munity Camp, this excellent place is now part of the great little Red Chilli empire. With choice views of the Virunga volcanoes, this camp is right next to the main park gate. Cheap camping is available for those with their own tents and beds in the *bandas* are good value given the views. Food and drink are also available, following the Red Chilli recipe from Kampala.

**Mt Gahinga Rest Camp** (s/d US\$240/360) This upmarket camp has upped its standards and prices in the last few years, in line with its improved camp in Bwindi and the stunning new property near Ruhengeri in Rwanda. Accommodation is in smart stone *bandas*, but it may struggle to find business given the gorilla action is all in Bwindi or Rwanda right now. The camp, located just outside the park, is operated by **Volcanoes Safaris** (☎ 041-346464; www.volcanoessafaris.com).

The only other options are 12km away in Kisoro (see p530 for details).

#### Getting There & Away

There is no scheduled transport along the rough 12km track between Kisoro and park headquarters; without your own vehicle you can walk (about three hours) or try and hitch, although traffic is light. The most straightforward way to get out to the park is to arrange a local pick-up from Kisoro, costing US\$20,000 (US\$30,000 in the wet season), or ask at the UWA office about occasional lifts with national parks' vehicles for around US\$10,000.

### MBARARA

☎ 0485

Mbarara, the main town between Masaka and Kabale, is really a transit town and few tourists end up spending more than one night here. Mbarara suffered a great deal during the war to oust Idi Amin but now bears few scars of those times. It's a very spread-out place, but pleasant enough, with a good range of hotels and eateries.

#### Information

The post office has international telephone and fax services.

**Centenary Rural Development Bank** (High St)

Western Union money transfers are available here.

**Source Internet Café** (High St; per min US\$100) Linked to the Source Café in Jinja, this is a reliable place to check email.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (☎ 0485-20088; 24 High St) The most useful one-stop shop for all money needs; has a credit card-compatible ATM, and can change cash and travellers cheques in most major currencies.

#### Sleeping

##### BUDGET

There isn't quite the range of cheap, basic guesthouses you find in other provincial towns, although this may be good news for some people.

**Mayoba Inn** (☎ 0485-21161; 1 High St; s/d US\$7500/9000, with bathroom US\$12,000/14,000) Sporting a central location, this friendly hotel might just about merit half a star for effort. Downstairs, the hotel has its own bar and restaurant.

**Hotel Plaza** (☎ 077-482159; 35 Mbaguta St; s/d US\$5000/8000) Current holder of the cheapest hotel in town trophy, the Plaza offers eight simple (read bare bones) rooms with shared bathroom, but is a little rough around the edges.

##### MIDRANGE

**Pelikan Hotel** (☎ 0485-21100; fax 21704; Bananuka Dr; r US\$10,000, s/d with bathroom US\$15,000/25,000, ste US\$60,000) The long-running Pelikan is a quiet place on a back street near the centre of town. Room prices rise and fall depending on little extras, like TV, but the expensive rooms are unimpressive value compared with top-end places in town. Credit cards are accepted, however, which might be handy in a fix.

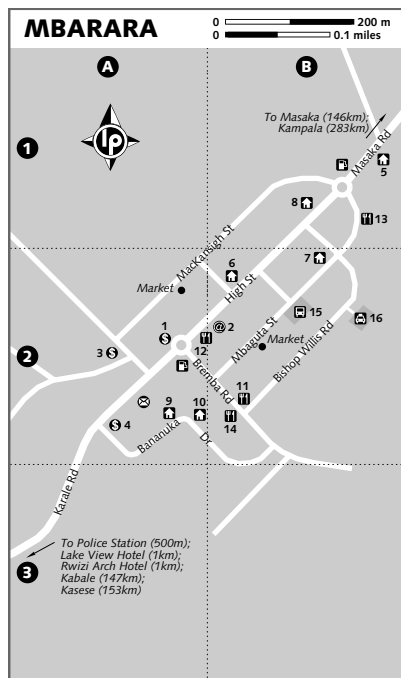
**Oxford Inn** (☎ 077-683097; Bananuka Dr; s/tw US\$35,000/45,000) Just along from the Pelikan, this is a more sophisticated little hostelry, where all rooms have satellite TV and bathrooms with hot water. There is a small restaurant and bar downstairs.

##### TOP END

**Lake View Hotel** (☎ 0485-21398; lvh@infocom.co.ug; s/d US\$60,000/75,000, ste US\$130,000; ☎) Long the place to be in Mbarara, it has had to wake up to the reality of competition in the past few years. Located on the outskirts of town off the road to Kasese, this modern hotel sits in front of a tiny lake and has 70 bedrooms, all with bathroom, hot water, satellite TV and telephone. Flash facilities include a swimming pool, sauna, bar and restaurant.

Speaking of the competition, it comes from three directions.

**Classic Hotel** (☎/fax 0485-20609; 57 High St; s/d US\$40,000/50,000) For those wanting to be right



INFORMATION	
Centenary Rural Development Bank.....	1 A2
Source Internet Café.....	2 B2
Stanbic Bank.....	3 A2
Standard Chartered Bank.....	4 A2
Western Union.....	(see 1)
SLEEPING	
Agip Motel.....	5 B1
Classic Hotel.....	6 B2
Hotel Plaza.....	7 B2
Mayoba Inn.....	8 B1
Oxford Inn.....	9 A2
Pelikan Hotel.....	10 A2
EATING	
Friends Corner.....	11 B2
Mbarara Coffee Shop.....	12 A2
Metro/Kwiksave.....	13 B1
Western Hotel.....	14 B2
TRANSPORT	
Bus Park.....	15 B2
Taxi Park.....	16 B2

those in a hurry to move on to other parts of Uganda.

Up in price somewhat, all the midrange and top-end hotels have restaurants that serve fine food.

**Rwizi Arch Hotel** (dishes USh5000-8000) Leading the pack, this hotel has one of the most varied menus to be found in provincial Uganda, including pasta, meat and fish, and unexpected treats, like creme caramel and banana fritters.

For good, cheap, steaming mountains of local food, try the following options, both in the centre of town:

**Friends Corner** (Bremba Rd; meals USh1500)

**Western Hotel** (Bremba Rd; meals USh1500)

**Metro/Kwiksave** (Mbaguta St) Self-caterers who are heading into Lake Mburo National Park should call in here for a good selection of supplies. In fact it wouldn't hurt anyone to pop in to pick up something from its range of imported snacks.

### Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses and shared taxis from Mbarara to Kampala (USh9000, four hours), Masaka (USh6000, at least two hours), Kabale (USh6000, two hours) and Kasese (USh8000, 2½ hours). There are also EMS Post Buses running this route (see p485 for more information).

To get to Queen Elizabeth National Park, catch a Kasese-bound shared taxi and ask

to be let off at Katunguru (USh6000, 1½ hours), from where you'll need to hitch into the park.

### LAKE MBURO NATIONAL PARK

This is the premier spot in the country for spotting zebras. Located between Mbarara and Masaka and covering an area of 260 sq km, **Lake Mburo National Park** (admission per 1/2/3 or more days US\$15/25/30) is mainly savanna with scattered acacia trees. There are five lakes here, the largest of which is Lake Mburo. Created in 1982, the park features some of the rarer animals in Uganda, such as impalas, elands, roan antelopes, reedbucks, klipspringers and topis, as well as buffaloes and hippos. Adjacent to the park are the ranches of people of the Bahima tribe, who herd the famed long-horned Ankole cattle that are a common sight here, but there is a certain amount of friction between conservationists and herders over access to land in and around the park.

This is one of the parks in which visitors can walk (accompanied by a ranger), as well as take one of the usual wildlife drives. Boat trips (US\$5 per person, USh30,000 minimum) are available on Lake Mburo for something a bit more up close and personal with the hippos.

### Sleeping

There are several **camp sites** (camping USh10,000) in the park, but most people stay at either the pleasant lakeside site or Rwonyo.

**Rwonyo Rest Camp** (banda s/d/tr USh10,000/15,000/20,000) Located at park headquarters, the rest camp has rustic *bandas* with bedding, mosquito nets and shared bathroom facilities. Good meals are available here and at the atmospheric lakeside restaurant. Fishermen often sell fresh fish from the lake each morning, which is great for campers on the lakeside site. There's no electricity or refrigeration at either place, but kerosene lanterns, pit toilets and warm bucket showers are available.

**Mantana African Safaris** (☎ 041-321552; mantana@africaonline.co.ug; s/d with full board US\$144/232) This company runs a luxury tented camp on a hill with commanding views of Lake Mburo. Sunrises and sunsets across the lake are striking. Service is sophisticated; meals are taken under the roof of a central bar and restaurant.

### Getting There & Away

There are three possible ways into the park from the main Masaka-Mbarara road, but if you are hoping to hitch into the park or arrange a special-hire taxi or *boda-boda*, it is best to use the route from the Sanga gate. Trips to Sanga cost about USh2000 from Mbarara and USh4000 from Masaka. It's possible to hitch lifts with the irregular but accommodating park vehicles from the main road. If you're taking your own vehicle, a 4WD is recommended, but the trip is possible in a 2WD car during the dry season.

Coming from Kampala, the first turn-off for the park is 13km after Lyantonde. If you have your own vehicle, it is easier to take this first turn-off. The second turn-off is at Sanga, 24km after Lyantonde, and 50km before Mbarara.

### MASAKA

☎ 0481

Despite the best efforts of the Masaka tourism promotion board, Masaka is not a place to hang around. In 1979 it was trashed by the Tanzanian army in the closing stages of the war that ousted Idi Amin and has taken longer than most towns to recover. It is a sprawling place and blends into nearby Nyendo, from where direct buses to Kalangala on the Ssesse Islands leave each day. There's very little to do in Masaka, and for most visitors it is just an overnight stop en route to the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria or south into Tanzania.

### Information

The best bank in town is Stanbic Bank, which should be able to deal with cash and travellers cheques by the time you read this. Western Union money transfers are available through **Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Hobert Ave).

The post office offers international telephone and fax services. Internet access is available through **Masaka Internet Services** (Kampala Rd; per min USh50).

### Sights & Activities

Birders on the hunt for the elusive shoe-bill stork should venture to the Nabajuzzi swamp just out of Masaka on the way to Mbarara. It also provides a habitat for the web-footed antelope, better known as the sitatunga. There is a large bird-watching

in the thick of the action, if Mbarara has such a thing, then this is in the middle of town. Smart business-like rooms come with TV, telephone and bathroom.

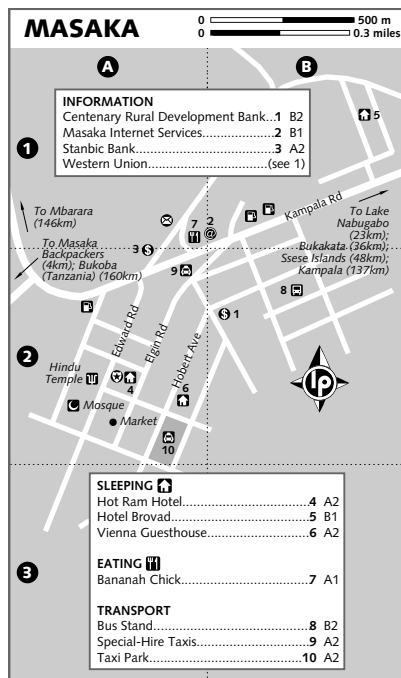
**Agip Motel** (☎ 0485-21615; Masaka Rd; s/d/ste USh60,000/70,000/95,000) Sort of sounds like a petrol-station hotel, and it sort of is, but that doesn't mean it should be sneered at. The smart executive-style rooms are popular with travelling businessmen.

**Rwizi Arch Hotel** (☎ 0485-20821; rwizi-arch@africaonline.co.ug; s/tw USh64,000/70,000, ste USh125,000; ☎) This could be the smartest hotel in town, but the judges would require a photo finish. The rooms are fully equipped with all the trimmings, and facilities include a health club and swimming pool. The hotel also boasts the best restaurant in town.

### Eating

**Mbarara Coffee Shop** (High St; dishes USh3000-5000) Head here to sample from an excellent menu of pasta, curries and African standards, plus for inveterate snackers there are inexpensive sandwiches and cakes. It is very popular with locals and offers efficient service for





tower next to the highway, which costs USh2000 to climb, and a shoebill sighting is almost guaranteed. Early morning to about noon is the best time to see the shoebill.

### Sleeping & Eating

The most atmospheric place to stay in town is ironically 4km out of town.

**Masaka Backpackers** (☎ 077-619389; camping USh3500, dm/bandas USh5000/15,000) Has a nice rural feel, the owners are friendly and helpful, and meals are available. To get here from Masaka, take a Kirimya shared taxi for USh500, get off at Kasanvu and follow the signs.

There are a cluster of budget guesthouses in the south of the town.

**Vienna Guesthouse** (55 Hobert Ave; s/d/tw USh10,000/15,000/20,000) The best all round deal among the identikit bunch. The cheapest rooms involve a shared bathroom.

**Hot Ram Hotel** (☎ 0481-20906; Elgin Rd; s/d USh25,000/40,000) Ignoring the name, which clearly conjures up images of a dodgy brothel, this new hotel has a smart selection of rooms with satellite TV and hot water. Rates include breakfast.

**Hotel Brovad** (☎ 0481-21455; www.hotelbrovad.com; s/d/tr USh4,000/65,000/80,000) The smartest rooms in town have their home here. All rooms have satellite TV, fridge and phone, and are super clean. The restaurant and bar are pretty busy by night, thanks to a large à la carte menu and a cheaper snack menu.

**Bananah Chick** (Kampala Rd; meals USh2000-5000) Masaka's answer to fast food; drop in for fried chicken, steaks or curries.

### Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses run frequently to Kampala (USh5000, two hours) and Mbarara (USh6000, two hours), and less frequently direct to Kabale (four hours).

Bukakata (from where ferries leave for the Ssese Islands) is 36km east of Masaka along a dirt road, which is in reasonable shape, except for a couple of rough stretches. Kalangala Express has two big buses a day (departing at 10am and 2pm) from the turn-off at Nyendo (3km from Masaka) straight through to Kalangala (USh6000, three to four hours).

Getting to Bukakata with your own transport can be an exercise in frustration, as there are no signposts whatsoever and the only people who seem to know the way are other drivers. Basically, head downhill back towards Kampala from Masaka centre, cross over the river bridge and then turn right (where there's a sign for the Church of Uganda Holiday & Conference Centre). From here go straight across the first junction and turn left at the next T-junction by the petrol station. Continue on this road for about 30km and take the left fork at the major junction – the right fork goes to a fishing village. The car ferry departs from Bukakata just three times a day at 8am, noon and 4pm, and from Liku at 9am, 1pm and 5pm. On Sunday, there are only two crossings, at 1pm and 4pm, returning one hour later. However, the schedule is not set in stone, due to breakdowns and waiting for the bus from Nyendo (Masaka).

Masaka is also the starting point for crossing into Tanzania via the Kagera salient and Bukoba. See p556 for details.

### AROUND MASAKA Lake Nabugabo

Lake Nabugabo is a small, attractive lake, separated from its much bigger sister,

Victoria, by a small strip of forest. The advantage it holds over Lake Victoria is that the water is cleaner and apparently free of bilharzia.

**Church of Uganda Holiday & Conference Centre** (camping USh5000, dm USh6000, d/family bandas USh20,000/30,000) is located on the lake shore. The large family *bandas* have their own lounge and bathroom. Good meals cost about USh4000, but alcohol is not available.

Getting here is not so straightforward, as it is 4km off the road between Masaka and Bukakata. If you don't mind walking the last 4km, just get on a minibus to Bukakata and ask to get off when you see the sign, about 15km from Masaka. If you don't like the idea of walking, negotiate with a special-hire taxi in Masaka, which you might be able to get for USh15,000 if you bargain well.

### SSESE ISLANDS

While not exactly the Bahamas of Lake Victoria, this lush group of islands does boast the best beaches in Uganda and the largest, Buggala Island, is a popular resting spot for time out from life on the road. This group of 84 islands lies off the north-western shore of Lake Victoria, east of Masaka and south of Entebbe. The islands are connected to the mainland by ferries from Bukakata to Liku, and fishing boats from Kasanyi to Kalangala.

The islands offer an insight into an alternative Uganda that is worth exploring, but don't come here looking for 'action' – this is R&R time. Unlike the mainland, these islands escaped the ravages of the civil war and so remain largely unspoiled. The people, known as the Basese, form a distinct tribal group with their own language, culture and folklore. They are primarily fishermen, and farmers of coffee, sweet potatoes, cassavas, yams and bananas. As you might expect, fish forms a major part of their diet.

Most islanders are members of one of the various Christian sects. A minority are Muslims. Communities are tightly knit and wandering around the islands on foot is considered safe. In fact, this is the best way to see them. The main islands of Buggala, Bufumira, Bukasa, Bubeke and Kkome are hilly and, where not cultivated, forested with a wide variety of trees. Animals include various species of monkey, hippos, crocodiles and many different types of birds,

but there are no large predators, other than crocodiles.

Many spots afford beautiful views over the lake and across to other islands. You'll have no problems persuading the fishermen to take you out on their boats. Swimming is also possible off most of the islands, as long as you observe the usual precaution about avoiding reedy areas (where the snails that carry the bilharzia parasite potentially live).

All up, you're looking at a very mellow and peaceful time on these islands. There is a plentiful variety of food and, although they remain popular, the islands are far from overrun with visitors.

### Information

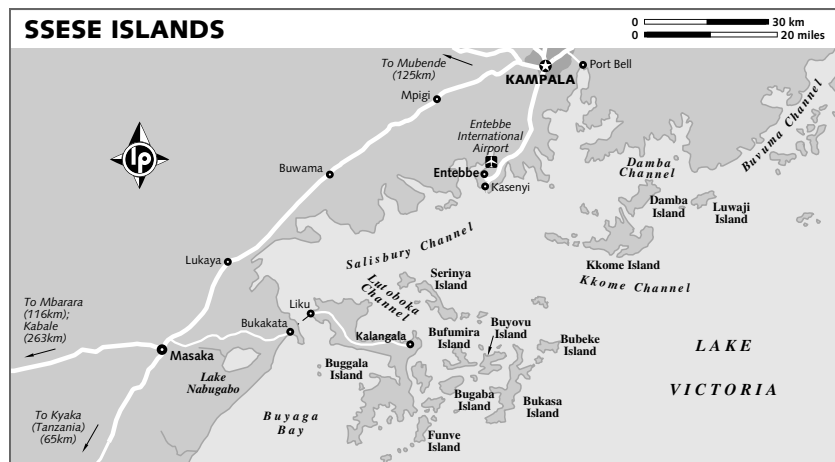
The main town on the islands is Kalangala on Buggala Island. It's the administrative centre, with a post office that has telephone connections to the rest of the world, and a branch of Stanbic Bank, which should be able to handle cash and travellers cheques' exchange. However, the safest move is to bring all the cash you need, as getting money changed is generally very difficult on the Ssese Islands.

### Sleeping & Eating

Most of the accommodation is centred on Buggala Island, on the attractive Lutoboka Bay beneath Kalangala village. There are a couple of very basic places in Liku as well, but they are best avoided given the choices around Kalangala.

**Hornbill Camp** (☎ 077-729478; www.hornbillcamp.com; camping USh4500, dm/bandas USh7500/20,000) The most popular budget camp on Buggala, Hornbill has its own secluded beach. Located about a 15-minute (500m) walk below Kalangala, the Dutch owner and his team are very friendly, making it a fun place to stay. The *bandas* are basic, but the camping ground runs down to the lakeshore. Kayaks are available for hire for just USh3000 per hour. There is also a selection of filling meals from the restaurant-bar (meals USh3000 to USh5000).

**PTA Andronico's Lodge** (☎ 0481-255646; camping USh3000, tw per person USh5000, d USh8000) Anyone who rocks up in Kalangala late can crash here, but crash is the operative word, as things are basic with a capital B. Beds are in tiny rooms and camping is possible, although space is tight. Cheap meals are



available with the family, as well as beers and soft drinks. There is a second branch of this landmark just above Liku where the ferry docks from Bukakata.

**Panorama Camping Safaris** (☎ 077-406371; camping USh3000, bandas with/without bathroom USh30,000/20,000) A step up from the standards at Hornbill, the camping here is very atmospheric, as it is set in the rainforest. The *bandas* are spacious and some include bathroom. Hot showers can be arranged on request. To find the place, walk down to the lake opposite the post office and look for the red-roofed stone huts.

There are also a couple of upmarket resorts around Lutoboka.

**Sese Palm Beach** (☎ 077-623984; bandas US\$25-65) Boasting the best location of any of the resorts here, it is on a headland with its own private beach. There are two types of *banda* available, and packages range from bed only to full board. Some *bandas* are detached, some paired up in a single unit, but all include bathroom. The restaurant has a prime location for a sunset drink and is open to allcomers.

**Sese Islands Beach Hotel** (☎ 077-505098; www.seseislandsbeachhotel.com; s USh30,000-60,000, d USh50,000-100,000; set meals USh10,000) Sitting in a wooded glade near Bugwanya Beach, this smart hotel has a selection of cottages and the top rates include full board. The hotel has hot water on demand and a generator for lighting at night. The restaurant is open to nonguests, and offers a pricey menu

of European dishes for lunch and dinner. Nice, but not as charming as Palm Beach.

**Scorpion Lodge** (camping USh3000, s/d USh4000/8000) If you are unlucky enough to get stuck in Liku, this 'lodge' is located above the Bukakata ferry docks. Bare-bones rooms only, but bikes are available for hire should you want to escape.

### Getting There & Away

A ferry links Buggala Island with the mainland at Bukakata (35km east of Masaka), while small wooden boats run from Kasenyi (a 35-minute minibus ride from Kampala), but these aren't the safest way to go. There is a direct bus from Kampala to Kalangala (USh12,000), which leaves the new taxi park in Kampala daily at 8.30am and arrives about 4pm in Kalangala.

See p536 for details of buses to Bukakata and Kalangala. If you use the ferry between Bukakata and Liku with your own vehicle, you will have to pay USh5000 to USh10,000 for the crossing, depending on the size of the vehicle.

## NORTHWESTERN UGANDA

Much of northwestern Uganda remains effectively off limits to travellers due to the ongoing war in the north, but Murchison Falls National Park remains the region's

saving grace, the best all-round protected area in the country for wildlife and attractions. The largest park in Uganda, Murchison not only has increasing concentrations of lions, leopards, elephants, giraffes and hippos, but is named in honour of one of the most dramatic falls in the region. Murchison Falls sees the Nile River surge through a narrow gorge, and the boat trip up the river to the base of the falls is a relaxed and rewarding way to view wildlife.

For all practical purposes the rest of the northern part of Uganda is a separate country from the southern part. Politically it is very isolated from the south and the continuing war effort is a drain on national resources, creating huge numbers of refugees and wiping out large tracts of agricultural land. While tourism has taken off in Kampala, Jinja and all points south, the north has seen little or no tourism due to the very real dangers in the region.

When it comes to road conditions in the north (at least the roads tourists can safely use), most are in pretty good shape. The roads in Murchison are some of the best in Uganda, as they also form crucial transport links to parts of the north. Public transport is fine to towns like Masindi and Hoima, but nonexistent in Murchison Falls itself. Public transport to points north of Murchison Falls and towns, such as Gulu and Arua, is inadvisable due to possible rebel ambushes.

### MASINDI

☎ 0465

Masindi is a quiet provincial headquarters, the last town of any substance on the road to Murchison Falls National Park. It's a good place to stock up on provisions, but there is little of intrinsic interest in the town itself.

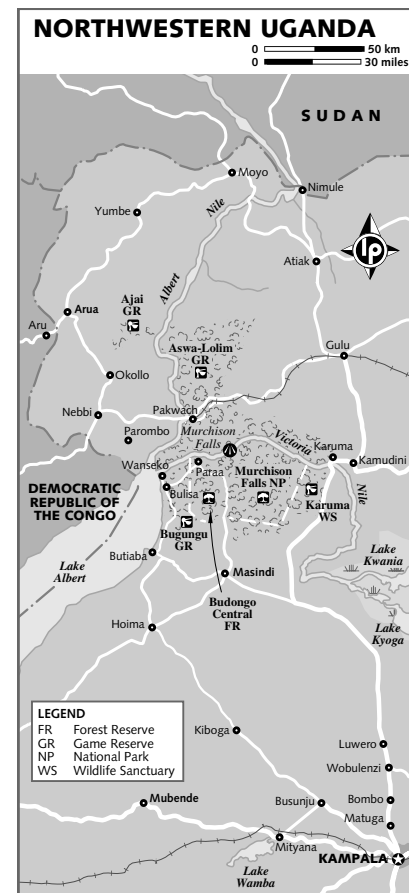
### Information

Try Stanbic Bank for exchanging money and, possibly, travellers cheques. The post office has international telephone and fax services, and there are plenty of cardphones scattered about the town.

The UWA office may be able to assist with transport into and around the park.

### Sleeping & Eating

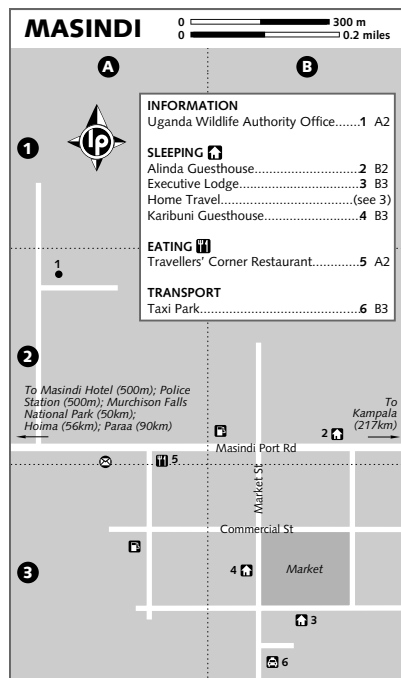
**Executive Lodge** (s/d USh3000/6000) There is nothing executive about this cheap place, but it is the pick of the budget options and is



conveniently near the taxi park. Large rooms include soap and towels, but bathrooms are shared.

**Karibuni Guesthouse** (☎ 0465-20443; s/d USh7000/10,000, d with bathroom USh20,000) 'Probably the best in town' is the claim here. Probably not, but the self-contained doubles are larger than most of the budget places and also include breakfast, which is taken in a large open-air bar area.

**Alinda Guesthouse** (☎ 0465-20482; 86 Masindi Port Rd; s/d USh10,000/18,000, d with bathroom USh20,000) Located on the main road from Kampala, this friendly guesthouse is the most popular with NGOs among the cheaper places to stay in Masindi. All rooms are clean, and rates include breakfast.



**Masindi Hotel** (☎ 0465-20023; masindihotel@africaonline.co.ug; Hoima Rd; s/d USh55,000/70,000) Originally built by East Africa Railways in the 1920s, this is Masindi's most venerable hotel. The whole place was given a significant overhaul after privatisation and the rooms are now very smart for this part of the country. Breakfast is included. There's a good bar and restaurant (meals USh5000 to USh7000), which makes a convenient lunch-time stop on the way to/from Murchison Falls, as it is right next to the park turn-off.

**Travellers' Corner Restaurant** (Masindi Port Rd; mains USh3000-5000) In the middle of town near the post office, this is a popular gathering spot for locals and tourists alike. It caters to *mzungu* tastes, making it a good lunch and dinner haunt. It has some of the best sausages found outside Kampala.

### Getting There & Away

The road between Masindi and Kampala is in pretty good condition, particularly once it merges with the road from Gulu. Minibuses between Kampala and Masindi (USh9000,

### WARNING: SECURITY IN NORTHERN & NORTHWESTERN UGANDA

The security situation in the north and northwest of Uganda has been very bad for the last few years, as rebels of the LRA continue their vicious attacks on villagers, refugee camps and public transport. At the time of writing it is unwise to visit Gulu and all points north and west, even east as far as Lira, as the rebels have been mounting attacks all over the region. They are weak, but mobile and volatile, and it is just not worth the risk of travelling through this area.

Even Murchison Falls National Park has seen infiltration by the rebels, and although this has been confined to remote areas, it tragically claimed the life of British resident Steve Willis in late 2005. See the boxed text (p542) for more on security in Murchison Falls National Park.

three hours) travel throughout the day. There are also irregular departures to Hoima (USh4000, one hour), Bulisa (USh7000, two hours) and Wanseko (USh8000 2½ hours). **Home Travel** (☎ 0465-20459) has a daily bus to Kampala (USh8000, four hours) at 7am, which leaves from near Executive Lodge.

For details of getting to Paraa, see p544.

### HOIMA

Hoima is not a town with a great deal to offer the casual visitor, but some travellers do end up spending a night here when taking the dirt road between Fort Portal and Murchison Falls National Park. Hoima is also a useful starting point for a back route into the national park via Lake Albert. Bring cash to this town, as there are no banks or foreign exchange bureaux.

The best budget choice in the centre of town is **Classic Inn** (s/d USh6000/10,000), offering basic rooms with mosquito nets and shared facilities. There is also an inexpensive restaurant and bar out the front where locals gather to quaff an ale or two in the evening. There is a sign saying 'no idlers allowed', which is probably aimed more at Ugandans than backpackers.

More interesting is **Africa Village Guest Farm** (www.traveluganda.co.ug/africavillageguestfarm; camping USh4000, cottages USh30,000), which has great little *bandas* with balconies spaced around

its large grounds. There is a well-regarded restaurant, which is popular with locals, plus the possibility of camel rides in the near future.

### Getting There & Away

The road from Fort Portal is reasonable, if dusty in the dry season, but is hard work in the wet season. Direct minibuses cost USh12,000, if available, and the trip takes about five hours. More likely, it will require a change in Kyenjojo on the main Fort Portal to Kampala road. The road from Masindi is a short stretch by minibus (USh4000, one hour).

Minibuses run to Butiaba (USh5000, two hours), an atmospheric fishing port on Lake Albert. The last leg of the journey is spectacular (see p545).

### MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK

This **park** (admission per 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50) is the best all-rounder in Uganda, with animals in plentiful supply and the raging Murchison Falls easily accessible by boat. Sir Samuel Baker named the Murchison Falls in honour of a president of the Royal Geographic Society, and the largest park in the country was subsequently named after the falls. The Victoria Nile River flows through the park on its way to Lake Albert.

This used to be one of Africa's best national parks; during the 1960s as many as 12 launches filled with eager tourists would buzz up the river to the falls each day. The park also used to contain some of the largest concentrations of wildlife in Africa, including as many as 15,000 elephants. Unfortunately, poachers and troops, both armed with automatic weapons, wiped out practically all wildlife, except the more numerous (or less sought-after) herd species (see the boxed text, p543). There are now no rhinos and only a few groups of lions, but other wildlife is recovering fast and you can see good numbers of elephants, giraffes, Ugandan kobs (antelopes), buffaloes, hippos and crocodiles.

Wildlife drives usually take place on the north bank of the Victoria Nile, in the area between Paraa and Lake Albert. There is very little wildlife south of the river, and driving in from Masindi you could be forgiven for thinking you were on a vegetarian safari.

If you want to take your vehicle into the park it incurs a one-off fee of US\$6/20 for local/foreign-registered cars and US\$15/40 for 4WDs.

While the Paraa area of the park is considered safe these days, several embassies still warn against visiting, so it is worth checking the latest security situation in Kampala before setting off.

For more information on the park, pick up a copy of *A Guide to Murchison Falls National Park* by Shaun Mann. Although dated, it is still the best guide to the park and its attractions.

### Murchison Falls

Despite there being less wildlife in the park than in Kenyan or Tanzanian parks, it is well worth visiting to see the falls, which involves a superb ride up the Victoria Nile River to their base. En route there are crocodiles and hippos, thousands of birds and, usually, elephants and giraffes. If you are very lucky, you may also catch a glimpse of the rare shoebill stork, as there are several pairs in the park.

The falls are awesome when viewed up close, they were once described as the most spectacular thing to happen to the Nile along its 6700km length. The gorge through which the Nile passes is just 6m wide, making this possibly the most powerful natural surge of water to be found anywhere in the world.

There is a beautiful walking trail linking the base of the falls with the top, and this offers some stunning views of the raging water and sections of the waterfall that those on the boat trip or at the viewing point never get to see.

There's an old ranger station at the top of the falls, which is staffed by local people who sell soft drinks and will guide you around for a small fee. There's also a picnic area with shaded *bandas* and a basic camp site with pit toilets. Hopefully, a more sophisticated camping ground will be developed here with *bandas*, as it is a great place to spend the night (although not for sleepwalkers perhaps).

You can also visit the falls by vehicle. A rough track leads off from the main access track 24km south of Paraa, and from here it's about a 30-minute drive; 2WD is OK, but take care.



## Activities

### LAUNCH TRIP

The three-hour launch trip from Paraa up to the base of the falls operates daily at 9am and 2pm if there's enough demand. The cost is US\$15 per person if there are eight or more people, with a minimum charge of USh300,000 for the whole boat. On the weekend, there's a good chance of finding other people to share the cost with; on weekdays you may have to cough up the full whack.

If you take the morning launch up the river, it is possible to ask the captain to let you off at a trail head for the recommended walk up to the top of the falls. He can then pick you up later if there is an afternoon launch. This is also a good way for backpackers to get to the camping ground at the top of the falls, where you can camp overnight before returning to Paraa the next day.

### WILDLIFE DRIVES

There are several circuits on the north bank of the Victoria Nile River (see p545 for details of ferry times and prices). The best

routes for wildlife viewing are the Queen and Albert Nile tracks, which lie just to the west of the Pakwach road, bordered by the Albert and Victoria Niles. This area is the best for spotting some of the park's healthy giraffe population. It is also possible to see lions, leopards and hyenas in this part of the park, as well as the more numerous herd species, such as buffaloes and elephants.

### SECURITY AT MURCHISON FALLS

Murchison Falls National Park has also witnessed its share of troubles, although these incidents have all been north of the Nile in more isolated parts of the park. Long-term resident Steve Willis was tragically shot dead by LRA gunmen in a remote part of the park in November 2005, but as a promoter and operator in the park, he would hate to think that his death caused visitors to desert the park he so loved. The Paraa section of the park is still considered safe, although many embassies currently warn against visiting Murchison.

Those with their own vehicles should definitely take a ranger-guide (US\$5/10 per half/full day) – they are adept at spotting elusive predators. Red Chilli Rest Camp offers four-hour wildlife drives costing USh25,000 per person (minimum USh100,000), including guide and ferry crossing, which is pretty handy for independent travellers.

### CHIMPANZEE TRACKING

Run by the Forestry Department rather than the UWA, the chimp visits are very affordable in Murchison when compared with the prices in Kibale Forest and Queen Elizabeth National Parks. It costs just USh12,000 at either Busingiro or Kaniyo Pabidi Forest, but bear in mind that the latter is inside the national park boundaries, meaning you pay the US\$20 park fee on top. See p545 for all the details.

### SPORT FISHING

It is possible to fish for the gargantuan Nile perch in the national park. A permit costs US\$50 per day, US\$100 for four days and US\$300 per year. You will also need a boat; these are available for US\$150/300 per half/full day. There is now an annual fishing competition on the river here if you fancy yourself as a serious angler. For the full story on fishing opportunities at Murchison Falls, check out **Sport Fishing Murchison Falls Uganda** ([www.fishingmurchison.com](http://www.fishingmurchison.com)), which is packed with useful information. Fishing gear is available for hire from Red Chilli Rest Camp.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### PARAA

The park headquarters at Paraa is on the southern bank of the Victoria Nile. There's a small village for park workers and their families.

**Red Chilli Rest Camp** (☎ 077-709510; [www.redchillihideaway.com](http://www.redchillihideaway.com); camping USh10,000, safari tent USh25,000, banda tw USh30,000, with bathroom USh45,000) The popular Red Chilli team from Kampala has been running this rest camp for several years, bringing a budget option to backpackers in Murchison. Camping is on a grassy site with some views of the river. The *bandas* are comfortable, and some have their own bathroom if you don't fancy wandering the camp at night. The restaurant and bar area is set under a huge thatched roof and is popular on weekends. The international

### 'ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE...'

Although it seems like sacrilege to say it, the mass slaughter of wildlife that took place in Murchison Falls National Park may have been a good thing from an ecological viewpoint. Before Idi Amin's regime the park was carrying many more animals (particularly elephants, with herds of more than 500 commonly seen) than it could sustain. The elephants alone, which numbered more than 15,000, chomped their way through 1.4 million tonnes of vegetation each year! Add to this the 26,000 buffaloes, plus herds of hartebeest, kobs and hippos, and the scale of the ecological problem can be appreciated.

The wiping out of most of the large animals has given the environment here a breather, and while it was obviously a major disaster from a wildlife point of view, it means that the park's ecology is now in excellent condition and the animals are on the increase. Despite this new beginning, the concentrations of game are relatively low, however, so don't come to Murchison expecting a scene from the Serengeti.

menu includes the signature hippo breakfast so popular in Kampala.

**Paraa Safari Lodge** (bookings ☎ 078-260260; [www.paraalodge.com](http://www.paraalodge.com); s/d with full board US\$99/150; 🚽) On the northern bank of the river, this hotel-style lodge has a striking location with expansive views upriver towards the falls, and excellent facilities, including a swim-up bar overlooking the Victoria Nile. The rooms are pretty much four-star standard, so don't be put off by the exterior, which looks rather like a Japanese POW camp.

### ELSEWHERE IN THE PARK

**Camp Site** (camping USh10,000) At the head of the falls this camp site has a very nice position right on the river, although you'll definitely need a 4WD to get to the best sites near the river's edge. You'll also need to be self-sufficient, as there are no supplies of any sort, and the only facilities are a pit toilet.

For information on the camp site at Kaniyo Pabidi, see p545.

**Bandas** (dm USh7500, bandas s/d USh10,000/15,000, with bathroom USh20,000/30,000) There are national

park *bandas* in Rabongo Forest, in the remote southern part of the park. Few visitors make it to this part of the park, however, due to its remoteness and lack of good trails.

**Sambiya River Lodge** (bandas s/d USh65,000/110,000, with bathroom USh80,000/140,000, cottages US\$50/100) Just off the main track beside the turn-off to the falls, this is a modern, comfortable lodge in a secluded spot with a tempting mix of *bandas* and cottages. Full board rates are available at an extra USh20,000 per day. Campers are also welcome for USh10,000, which includes access to the swimming pool. There is also a large bar and restaurant. Unlike Paraa, this area is pretty much free of mosquitoes. It's run by **Afri Tours & Travel** (☎ 041-233596; www.afritourstravel.com).

North of the river are two old lodges: Pakuba Lodge, which is very close to the Albert Nile in the western part of the park, and Chobe Lodge on the Victoria Nile River in the far east of the park. Pakuba Lodge is a massive, empty old place put up by Idi Amin during the 1970s. The location, overlooking the Albert Nile, is fantastic, but the building is pretty much beyond repair these days.

#### OUTSIDE THE PARK

Arguably the nicest place to stay actually lies outside the park's western boundary, between Bugungu gate and Lake Albert.

**Nile Safari Camp** (s/d with bathroom & full board US\$135/180; 📍) This camp site has an unrivalled position, high up on the south bank of the Victoria Nile River, with sweeping views over the water. Accommodation is in comfortable permanent tents, each with a balcony with river views. There's also an atmospheric bar and dining area, as well as a lovely swimming pool with a view. The well-signposted turn-off to the camp is 15km from Bulisa (on Lake Albert) and 4.5km from Bugungu gate; the camp is then a further 11.5km along a rough track. It's operated by **Inns of Uganda** (☎ 041-258273; www.innsfuganda.com).

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

Several of the top-notch safari companies include charter flights to Murchison, using the Pakuba airstrip on the northern bank of the Nile. Landing fees are USh5000 per person.

#### ROAD

From Masindi there is the choice of the direct northern route or the longer but more scenic route, which heads west to Lake Albert and then enters the park via the western Bugungu gate. A return trip might be best for those with a vehicle, entering via one route and leaving by the other. Both routes go through Budongo Central Forest Reserve, a recommended stopover.

Getting from Masindi directly to Paraa by public transport is not possible. With a bit of bargaining, however, you can charter a minibus (USh75,000) or special-hire taxi (USh60,000) to take you all the way.

From Masindi the only scheduled public transport are the buses and taxis to Wanseko on Lake Albert. These run daily, and are popular because local people from the Arua region in the northwest often prefer to travel to Kampala via the lake rather than via Gulu, because of security problems along the Arua–Gulu road. Either go as far as Bulisa for USh7000, from where you can negotiate for a *boda-boda* to take you to Paraa for around USh10,000, or go to Wanseko for USh8000 and then negotiate with the minibus driver to continue to Paraa for about USh40,000. Bulisa is the obvious option for solo travellers, but groups should carry on to Wanseko.

The best chance of hitching a lift is with the park vehicles that come from Masindi a few times a week. On the weekend there's a good chance of getting a lift with other tourists from Masindi – hang out at Travellers' Corner Restaurant and Masindi Hotel for hitching opportunities, as these are popular rest stops. Getting out of the park is much easier in this respect, as you can find out where vehicles are heading to and book yourself a ride.

The other option is to go on an organised safari from Kampala. The most popular options are the budget safaris offered through Red Chilli Hideaway and Backpackers Hostel, both in Kampala (see p476 for details). These leave at least twice weekly in the high season, and include park entrance, accommodation, meals, chimp tracking, a launch trip, wildlife drive and transport, making them one of the best deals in East Africa.

More upmarket safari companies also offer trips to Murchison Falls (see p95 for contact details). Paraa Safari Lodge, Nile

Safari Camp and Sambiya River Lodge offer three-day safaris, including transport, accommodation and meals, that are good value, particularly those of Sambiya, which sometimes advertises prices under US\$200 per person for groups of six.

#### Getting Around

##### BOAT

A vehicle ferry crosses the river at Paraa. It operates to a schedule but breakdowns are not uncommon and you may have to wait a few hours. The crossings take just a few minutes, and are scheduled pretty much hourly from 7am until 7pm. The fare is USh1500 one way for passengers, USh20,000 each way for passenger vehicles and USh60,000 for overland trucks. Unscheduled crossings cost USh100,000 minimum. Guests staying overnight in the park pay only once and can cross back and forth throughout the day.

You can take a small speedboat across the river at any time for USh6000 per person return. All ferry and speedboat fees are payable at a small booth near the ferry landing.

##### CAR

Tracks within the park are generally well maintained, and a 2WD vehicle with good ground clearance should have little trouble. However, the tracks can be treacherous in the wet season. There are also some nasty bumps where drainage channels have been built, so look out for concrete culverts on the side of the road and slow down.

Fuel is available on the northern side of the Victoria Nile River at Paraa, but it's much more expensive (about an extra 20%) than in Masindi.

#### BUDONGO CENTRAL FOREST RESERVE

The main attractions of Budongo Forest are the numerous primates and affordable chimp visits, the prolific bird life and the huge mahogany trees that dominate this area. The forest is right on the road to Murchison Falls, just to the south of the park, and is a great place to stop and have a guided walk through the dense virgin tropical forest.

The forest's '**Royal Mile**' is thought by many to offer the best bird-watching in the whole of Uganda. There are more than 350 species found here, including several types of kingfisher, hornbill and eagle. At dusk it is possible to view bat hawks.

Two areas have been developed for chimpanzee habituation and viewing, **Kaniyo Pabidi** (admission USh12,000; camping USh10,000, bandas per person USh15,000) and **Busingiro** (admission USh12,000; camping USh10,000, bandas per person USh15,000). Both offer combination packages for guided walks and accommodation, effectively halving the cost of your stay. Kaniyo Pabidi is on the main Masindi–Paraa road, 29km north of Masindi and actually inside the southern boundary of Murchison Falls National Park – you will have to pay the US\$20 park entry fee for the park on top of the chimp fee. Busingiro is 40km west of Masindi on the road that connects Masindi with the national park via Lake Albert, and is outside the park, making it by far the cheapest place in Uganda to track chimpanzees. Both are part of the Budongo Forest Ecotourism Project, which aims to protect the forest in cooperation with local communities.

At both places guided walks (with a guide and an armed ranger) take place daily at 7am (8am at Kaniyo Pabidi) and 3pm, although they can basically be arranged on demand, as there are no minimum numbers. Walks last anything from one to three hours. Kaniyo Pabidi is one of the few sites in Uganda to employ a female ranger-guide, a breakthrough some travellers might like to encourage. The forest is also more dramatic at Pabidi.

The camp sites are liveable enough, with pit toilets and hot showers. The *bandas* are simple, with shared facilities. There are information centres at both of these places, but no food or cooking utensils – come with everything you might need. Beers and drinks are available, however.

Kaniyo Pabidi is not served by regular public transport, but it is possible to arrange a charter from Masindi for about USh30,000. Busingiro is on the route used by buses and minibuses heading for Bulisa or Wanseko (see opposite). The trip should cost about USh4000. Access to the Royal Mile is pretty limited without transport – the turn-off is 32km from Masindi, marked by the Nyabyeya Forestry College signpost.

#### LAKE ALBERT

Lake Albert is part of the Rift Valley system that extends from the Middle East to Mozambique, and since 1894 has formed part of the border between Uganda and DR

Congo. The first European to spot the lake was the British explorer Sir Samuel Baker in 1864, who named it after Albert, prince consort of Queen Victoria.

The people who live by the lake make their living from fishing its waters, and a visit to one of these fishing villages along the eastern shore makes an interesting diversion. The approach for the turn-off to the fishing village of **Butiaba** on the eastern shore is spectacular as you wind down the Albertine Escarpment, with sweeping views of the lake and the Blue Mountains of DR Congo in the distance. The village itself is small, but judging by some of the old buildings had its share of Asian traders. It was from here that the East Africa Railways Corporation used to run river steamers up to Fajao at the base of Murchison Falls. The majestic old boats were slowly decaying in the lake's waters for many years, but, sadly, were hacked apart for scrap.

The best time to visit is late morning when the fishing catch is brought ashore from the small fishing boats – huge Nile perch weighing in excess of 50kg are quite common.

While there is no formal accommodation in the village, you could probably find someone willing to put you up for a day or two, but be sure to agree on a fair price for them. There are some excellent sandy beaches near Butiaba, for that Costa del Congo experience.

## GULU

Gulu, the largest town in the north of the country, is heavily militarised – it is the supply centre for the government's war against the LRA. As long as the war continues, there is absolutely no reason for tourists to come here and plenty of reasons to stay away. About 30km north of Gulu at Patiko is Baker's Fort, built by the British in the 1870s as a base from which to suppress the slave trade.

**Diana Gardens Guesthouse** (r with/without bathroom USh12,000/6000) is considered the best of the cheaper hotels in town, while **Hotel Roma** (s/d with bathroom USh25,000/35,000) is currently the smartest option.

There are a huge number of local restaurants around town, catering to the many government personnel and soldiers who pass through this town.

## Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses go between Kampala and Gulu (USh12,000). The road has good bitumen most of the way and the buses absolutely fly along here, doing the trip in around four hours.

Gulu is on the railway line that connects Pakwach with Tororo in the southeast, but passenger services were suspended some years ago because of security problems.

## ARUA

Arua is the largest town in the far northwest, with a large population of aid workers, as it is the distribution centre for relief efforts in southern Sudan and DR Congo. This means there is also a large number of Sudanese and Congolese refugees living in tented camps on the outskirts of town, which is a pretty sorry sight if you have never seen this sort of suffering before.

Few travellers make it up here, due to dangerous stretches of road between here and Kampala. However, the market is very lively, as it attracts people from all over the region.

It is possible to change cash at **Centenary Rural Development Bank** (Adumi Rd), which also represents Western Union for money transfers. The post office is the place to make phone calls, and there are cardphones nearby.

**Hotel Pacific** (Adumi Rd; s/d with bathroom USh10,000/15,000) is reasonably comfortable, but is often full of aid workers. There is also a small restaurant and bar here.

**Rhino Inn** (s/d with bathroom USh25,000/35,000), also popular with aid workers, is the smartest place in town. Rooms are clean and the restaurant is a good bet at night.

Nile Coach runs daily buses between Kampala and Arua (USh22,000) that leave at 6am, but it is a long direct journey of about nine or 10 hours. Check the security situation extremely carefully before travelling, as buses have been attacked along this route.

If you want to visit friends up here or travel for work, **Eagle Air** (☎ 041-344292; www.flyeagleuganda.com) flies here daily, charging US\$95/180 one way/return.

## UGANDA DIRECTORY

This section covers information specific to Uganda. For general information applicable to the region, see p617.

## ACCOMMODATION Camping

Almost every destination in Uganda offers some sort of camping, so it's worth carrying a tent if you're on a budget. Kampala has several options, as do most other popular towns and all the national parks. The cost of camping is usually USh3000 to USh10,000 per person per day, plus the entry fee if you're staying at a national park (US\$10 to US\$20 per person per day). When it comes to camping at some of the smaller national parks, it is possible to use camping grounds just outside the park boundaries, thus saving on the park entry fee. Facilities are generally basic (pit toilets, cold water) at the national parks.

## Hotels

Hotels range from fleapits to five-star, although at the moment the former far outnumber the latter in most towns. Places are not exceptional value when compared with some other parts of Africa. As tourism and commerce continue to pick up, so does the construction of new hotels and lodges. Currently, genuine upmarket hotels are limited to Kampala; elsewhere the best you'll find are no more than about three-star quality.

The same applies to the lodges in the national parks. Again, things are gradually improving, and a number of sophisticated operations have opened their doors (or tent flaps) for business.

At the other end of the scale, you can count on all small towns having at least one basic lodge. Some of these are pretty miserable places to stay, but as the towns get bigger, so does the choice of hotels.

Budget single/double rooms are available from about USh5000/8000, rooms with bathroom start at USh10,000/15,000, and comfortable rooms with TV and hot water can be found from USh40,000/60,000. Top-end hotels and lodges start at around US\$100 and can go a lot higher.

## National Parks & Reserves

There is a wide range of accommodation available within Uganda's national parks, from simple camp sites with pit toilets and campfires, to *bandas* (thatch-roofed huts) with camp canteens, to luxury tented camps and lodges with prices to match the facilities.

## PRACTICALITIES

- Uganda uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Uganda is 240V, 50 cycles, but is universally unreliable. British three-pin plugs are mainly used.
- Local newspapers that are available include the government-owned daily *New Vision* or the more independent daily *Monitor*. International magazines, like *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *Economist*, are also readily available.
- The government-run TV station is Uganda TV, but decent hotels and many bars have satellite TV for international news and sport.
- Radio Uganda broadcasts in English and local languages on AM frequencies. BBC World Service broadcasts on 101.3MHz, while the phenomenally popular Capital FM can be found at 91.3MHz.

Camping in most national parks costs USh10,000 per person per night and tents are usually available for hire for an additional USh10,000. *Bandas* usually cost about USh10,000/15,000 a single/double with shared facilities and USh20,000/30,000 with bathroom. As for the luxury tented camps and lodges around Uganda, they charge anything from US\$65 to US\$200 per person per night with full board, depending on the facilities and the time of year.

Accommodation charges do not include park entry fees, so many independent travellers opt to stay outside the national parks in nearby towns, guesthouses or camping grounds. Uganda Community Tourism Association (Ucota) has a number of excellent community camping grounds around the country, including on the edges of Bwindi Impenetrable, Mgahinga Gorilla and Rwenzori Mountains National Parks, and around the Kibale Forest area. See p474 in the Kampala section for more details. For more on Uganda's national parks, see p467.

## ACTIVITIES Bird-Watching

Uganda is one of the world's best birding destinations, a twitcher's fantasy offering

more than 1000 species in this compact country of contrasting terrain and climatic diversity. Bird-watching legends, such as the shoebill stork, are found in the west, while the country's unique geographical position allows visitors to view Albertine rift endemics in Semuliki National Park (p513) on the same trip as dry-season eastern specials in Kidepo Valley National Park (p507). Even amateurs will be enthralled by the diversity of beauty among Uganda's bird life.

### Boating

There are two famous launch trips on offer in Uganda: the journey up the Victoria Nile River to the base of Murchison Falls, and the cruise along the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park. Both trips offer the opportunity of viewing hundreds of hippos, buffaloes and often a few elephants. Although it is often more common to see predators, such as lions and leopards, along the banks of the Kazinga Channel, the Murchison Falls trip is ultimately more spectacular – the falls themselves are awesome, and there is a reasonable chance that bird-watchers will spot the elusive shoebill stork (see the boxed text, p468).

### Caving

For information on caving near Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, see p532.

### Chimpanzee Tracking

Primate tracking is a very popular activity in Uganda and there are several places where viewing chimpanzees is possible. Most popular of these are Budongo Central Forest Reserve (p545, part of Murchison Falls National Park) and Kibale Forest National Park (p511). The chance of seeing chimps at both of these parks is very high – as good as 85%. It is best to set aside two days for chimpanzee walks, so if you draw a blank on the first day, you can try a second time. As Budongo Central Forest Reserve is run by the forestry department, chimp viewing here (US\$12,000) is far cheaper than in Kibale Forest National Park (US\$50). Budget Murchison Falls trips operating out of Kampala include chimp tracking in Budongo.

Kyambura (Chambura) Gorge, part of Queen Elizabeth National Park (p521), is a truly stunning setting in which to track chimps (US\$30). Sightings here are not as

certain as in Budongo and Kibale, but the walk itself is enchanting. Semliki Valley Game Reserve (p514) also has a chimp habituation project well under way.

For guaranteed chimp sighting, the sanctuary on Ngamba Island in Lake Victoria (near Entebbe) is the place to go – the chimps live in a semi-tame, protected environment here. For details, see p489.

### Fishing

The Victoria Nile River is a favoured habitat of the massive Nile perch, some weighing more than 100kg. Sport-fishing permits are available for US\$50 per day in Murchison Falls National Park. Some companies also offer fishing trips on Lake Victoria – see p490 for more details.

### Gorilla Tracking

Gorilla tracking is one of the major draws for travellers in Uganda. It's possible to track the mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (p523; US\$360 per person) throughout the year. It is also sometimes possible to see them at Mgahinga Gorilla National Park near Kisoro, but they had not set foot in Uganda for several months during our last visit. Bookings should be made with the UWA office (p474) in Kampala. For more information on the mountain gorillas, see p97.

### Guided Walks

Guided walks are offered in many of the forested national parks and a number of smaller forest reserves throughout Uganda. The most popular are the chimpanzee-viewing walks; however, there is also a variety of other types of forest walks available at Bwindi Impenetrable, Kibale Forest and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks, offering an opportunity to view some of Uganda's many birds and monkeys.

Beyond the national parks, there are some excellent trails in smaller community reserves around the country, particularly at the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary (p512), near Fort Portal, as well as at Mabira (p490) and Mpanga (p490) Forest Reserves, which are both found around Kampala and are easy day trips from the capital. Sipi Falls (p504), in the foothills of Mt Elgon, also offers some splendid walking country and local guides know the terrain well.

At Lake Mburo National Park (p535) it's possible to undertake a walking safari with an armed ranger and have close encounters with hippos, buffaloes and herds of zebras, particularly around water holes in the dry seasons.

Most guided walks now cost US\$5/10 per person per half day/full day in national parks, often less in community forest reserves.

### Hiking & Trekking

Uganda has always had a strong attraction among the dedicated trekking fraternity, mainly for the opportunities presented by the Rwenzori Mountains and Mt Elgon. Both Rwenzori Mountains and Mt Elgon National Parks are in pristine condition, and serious trekkers consider the Rwenzori Mountains one of the best ranges in Africa, if not the world. The Rwenzoris or 'Mountains of the Moon' present one of the most challenging mountain experiences in Africa and offer the chance for genuine climbing if you attempt one of the peaks. However, Mt Elgon is the more affordable option for the casual climber. See p519 and p503 for more.

It is also possible to climb the three volcanoes at Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (p532) – Mt Muhavura, Mt Sabinyo and Mt Gahinga. These are day climbs and each costs US\$40 per person. The views towards Rwanda and DR Congo are spectacular.

### White-Water Rafting & Kayaking

Only in Uganda is it possible to raft the source of the mighty Nile River, and the water here is big, oh so very big, with four Grade Five rapids waiting for the uninitiated.

The trips are operated by four companies – Adrift, Equator, Nabulale and Nile River Explorers – and can be booked in Kampala or Jinja. For details, see the boxed text, p495.

The Nile offers world-class kayaking and a couple of the white-water-rafting companies offers kayaking classes. Check out **Kayak the Nile** ([www.kayakthenile.com](http://www.kayakthenile.com)) for more on one-, three- and five-day classes and an introduction to tandem kayaking, taking on the wild waters without the responsibility. For more details, see p495.

### Wildlife Watching

There are four national parks in Uganda that offer the opportunity for wildlife drives:

Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth, Kidepo Valley and Lake Mburo.

The greatest variety of wildlife is to be seen on a drive through Queen Elizabeth National Park, as it has the highest number of species of any park in Uganda; however, Murchison Falls, north of the Nile, offers the larger mammals in greater concentration and fast-recovering populations of giraffes not seen in Queen Elizabeth National Park. At both parks you should see elephants, buffaloes, bushbucks and kobs; and, although it's not so easy to spot predators, with a bit of luck you might also see lions and leopards. Taking a ranger-guide will increase the chances significantly.

In Kidepo Valley National Park, much of the wildlife is within a short walking distance of the Apoka rest camp, so organised wildlife drives aren't so necessary. However, to have an opportunity to spot cheetahs or giraffes, you may need to venture further afield.

As Lake Mburo National Park is the only savanna environment in Uganda where you can undertake guided walks with an armed ranger, many people don't bother with wildlife drives. It's also usually possible to see the large herds of zebras, for which it is famous, as you drive into the park.

### BOOKS

There are not a whole lot of books that relate specifically to Uganda, but several excellent works of fiction dealing with Uganda's turbulent past have come out in the past few years. For more on these titles, see p466.

### Guidebooks

The Uganda Tourist Board (UTB) has published several informative books covering wildlife and national parks in the country. For keen bird-watchers, *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda* by Jonathan Rossouw and Marco Sacchi is an absolute must; it covers every major bird-watching area in the country, with a rundown on what to look out for and where. The book has some excellent photographs of some of Uganda's more than 1000 bird species and some good maps of the country's national parks. UTB has also produced guides to several other national parks, including Murchison Falls, Bwindi and Mgahinga, and Kibale Forest.

If you want a guidebook for the coffee table once the trip is over, *Eye of the Storm* –

*A Photographic Journey Across Uganda* by David Pluth is worth picking up.

For some more information on field guides to the wildlife and bird life of East Africa, see p73.

### History & Politics

*Uganda – From the Pages of Drum* is a lively compilation of articles that originally appeared in the now-defunct *Drum* magazine. These chronicle the rise of Idi Amin, the atrocities he committed, as well as Museveni's bush war and his coming to power. It includes photos and forms a powerful record of what the country experienced.

For a better understanding of the man who has controlled Uganda for almost two decades, try *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, President Yoweri Museveni's autobiography.

*Fong & the Indians* by Paul Theroux is set in a fictional East African country that bears a remarkable likeness to Uganda. It is set in pre-civil war days, and is at times both funny and bizarre as it details the life of a Chinese immigrant and his dealings with the Asians who control commerce in the country.

*The Man with the Key has Gone!* by Dr Ian Clarke is an autobiographical account of the time spent in Uganda's Luwero Triangle district by a British doctor and his family. It is a lively read and the title refers to a problem that many a traveller may encounter in provincial Uganda.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and businesses in Uganda are generally open between 8.30am and 4.30pm or 5.30pm, with a short break for lunch some time between noon and 2pm. Most shops and banks do not break for lunch, but some banks close early at 3.30pm.

Local restaurant hours are 7am to 9pm, and international-type restaurants are open 11.30am to 2.30pm and 5.30pm to 10.30pm.

### CHILDREN

Uganda can be a lot of fun for children, with some great national parks, lots of water-based activities and lots of attention from the Ugandan people. That said, the prevalence of dangerous diseases makes it a place to travel cautiously. As elsewhere in the region, make them cover up and apply repellent religiously, as malaria is an ever-present threat. Baby products are widely available in

Kampala and other major centres, but soon dry up elsewhere. Cots are available in major hotels in the capital, but not elsewhere, and child seats are hard to come by in restaurants or for hired cars. That said, hundreds of expats bring their children up happily in Kampala, it's just upcountry where a little more care and caution needs to be applied.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Even today, two decades on from Museveni's rise to power, Uganda still has a lingering image as a dangerous and unstable country to visit. This is a great shame, as for the most part it is one of the more stable countries in the region – at least the parts that most tourists visit – and also one of the safer, as mugging and petty theft are still relatively rare in Kampala.

That said, there are still some places where your safety cannot be guaranteed. The north has long had a reputation for instability and, at the time of writing, remains the most dangerous part of the country. The rebels of the LRA have been running amok since they were dispersed from their bases in southern Sudan, and it is unwise to travel to Gulu, Lira and all points north. Even Murchison Falls National Park has been affected and remote areas of the park are considered unsafe. The LRA doesn't usually operate in the northeast, but this doesn't make it that much safer – there is cattle rustling and banditry there. It is imperative to check local security conditions before attempting to make an overland trip to Kidepo Valley National Park.

As for the southwest, it has been very stable since the murder of eight tourists in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in March 1999. Bwindi now has a large military presence to ensure that visitors are kept safe; Mgahinga Gorilla National Park also has some military presence, although less than at Bwindi. It is still wise to check the latest conditions if you are planning on visiting remote border regions, such as Ishasha in Queen Elizabeth National Park, though, as it would be easy for Congolese rebels to infiltrate these porous border areas.

The most important thing to remember about security is that there is absolutely no substitute for researching current conditions when you enter the country. Read newspapers, ask other travellers and hotel staff for the latest, and check locally once

you are in the provincial areas. Things can change – for the better and worse – very quickly in East Africa, and it pays to be well informed.

### DISCOUNT CARDS

It is worth carrying an ISIC card when travelling to Uganda, as student visas are available for just US\$20. There is also a 25% discount for entry into national parks, which can save a lot of cash during a long safari.

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

#### Ugandan Embassies

For Ugandan embassies in Kenya, Rwanda or Tanzania, see the relevant section in those chapters. Ugandan embassies worldwide:

**Belgium** (☎ 02-762 5825; Ave de Tervuren 317, 1150 Brussels)

**Canada** (☎ 613-613 7797; 231 Cobourg St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J2)

**Denmark** (☎ 31 62066; Sofievej 15, DK 2900, Hellerup)

**Ethiopia** (☎ 01-513531; Africa Ave H-18, K-36, Addis Ababa)

**France** (☎ 01 53 70 62 70; 13 Ave Raymond Poincare, 75116 Paris)

**Italy** (☎/fax 06-322 5220; Via Ennio Quirino Visconti 8, 00193 Rome)

**Japan** (☎ 03-3465 4552; 39-15 Oyama-chi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 151)

**South Africa** (☎ 012-344 4100; Trafalgar Ct, Apt 35B, 634 Park St, Arcadia 0083, Pretoria)

**UK** (☎ 020-7839 5783; Uganda House, 58/59 Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DX) Represents Australia and New Zealand also.

**USA** (☎ 202-726 0416; 5909 16th St NW, Washington DC 20011-2896)

#### Embassies in Uganda

Foreign embassies in Kampala:

**Belgium** (☎ 041-349559; Rwenzori House, Lumumba Ave)

**Burundi** (☎ 041-235850; Hannington Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) A one-month single-entry visa costs US\$40, requires two passport photos and can usually be issued the next day. Visas are available at land borders and the airport, however.

**Denmark** (☎ 041-350938; 3 Lumumba Ave)

**DR Congo** (☎ 041-230610; 20 Philip Rd, Kololo) Anyone planning to visit DR Congo can obtain an eight-day visa (US\$35) at the border.

**Ethiopia** (☎ 041-341885; Nakayima Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Visas cost US\$50 for most nationalities and require two passport photos. Visas take at least 24 hours to process – often longer, depending on your nationality.

**France** (☎ 041-342120; 16 Lumumba Ave)

**Italy** (☎ 041-250450; 11 Lourdel Rd, Nakasero)

**Kenya** (☎ 041-258235; 41 Nakasero Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A visa costs US\$50 and two passport photos are required. If you apply before noon, the visa can usually be issued the same day. It's easier to get it on arrival.

**Netherlands** (☎ 041-346000; Rwenzori House, Lumumba Ave)

**Rwanda** (☎ 041-344045; 2 Nakayima Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm) Next door to the Uganda Museum.

Visas cost US\$60 (the same for all nationalities), require two passport photos and are issued the same day if you apply in the morning. They are also available on arrival.

**South Africa** (☎ 041-230001; 15A Nakasero Rd)

**Sudan** (☎ 041-243518; 21 Nakasero Rd; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue & Thu) A visa costs US\$30 for single entry and can take up to one week to process.

**Tanzania** (☎ 041-256272; 6 Kagera Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Visas are valid for three months, require two passport photos and take 24 hours to issue. Costs vary according to your country of origin.

**UK** (☎ 078-312000; Kira Rd)

**USA** (☎ 041-259791; Gaba Rd)

### HOLIDAYS

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**NRM Anniversary Day** 26 January

**International Women's Day** 8 March

**Easter** (Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday) March/April

**Labour Day** 1 May

**Martyrs' Day** 3 June

**Heroes' Day** 9 June

**Independence Day** 9 October

**Christmas Day** 25 December

**Boxing Day** 26 December

### INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is easy in Kampala and there are places all over town, charging US\$25 to US\$50 per minute. Access has spread beyond the capital, but it is more expensive – from US\$100 to US\$300 per minute. Access is currently possible in popular places like Jinja, Mbale, Fort Portal, Mbarara and Kabale.

### INTERNET RESOURCES

There isn't exactly an abundance of useful material on the Internet about Uganda, but the **Uganda Travel Planner** ([www.traveluganda.co.ug](http://www.traveluganda.co.ug)) is the best place to start looking. It's a comprehensive online travel guide to Uganda and has plenty of links to other Uganda websites.



## MAPS

The best available map of Uganda is Macmillan's *Uganda Traveller's Map* (1:1,350,000), which is available in bookshops in Kampala (US\$8000). It includes insets of the Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth and Rwenzori Mountains National Parks, and a street map of Kampala.

## MONEY

The Ugandan shilling (US\$) is a relatively stable, if rather weak, currency that floats freely against the US dollar.

Notes in circulation are US\$1000, US\$5000, US\$10,000, US\$20,000 and US\$50,000, and coins are US\$50, US\$100, US\$200 and US\$500.

## ATMs

The only banks in Uganda with ATMs that accept international credit cards are Standard Chartered Bank and Barclays Bank. Standard Chartered has a network of ATMs at branches and Shell petrol stations in Kampala, and at branches in Jinja, Mbale and Mbarara. Stanbic Bank has a comprehensive network of local ATMs nationwide and was talking about upgrading them to accept international credit cards; check on progress at the main branch in Kampala.

## Cash

The Ugandan shilling trades at whatever it's worth against other major currencies and there's usually little fluctuation from day to day. However, it has been on a slow downwards path over the last decade. Small-denomination US-dollar notes attract a much lower rate of exchange than US\$50 and US\$100 notes, so unless you don't mind losing as much as 20% of your money in a transaction, come with large notes. Barclays Bank is the one bank that exchanges at the same rate for all notes. Notes issued before 2000 are also deemed unacceptable, so come with newer bills. Barclays Bank in Kampala will change notes issued from 1996-99, but at a 1% commission with a minimum charge of US\$10.

## Credit Cards

For credit-card cash advances, the only realistic option is Barclays Bank in Kampala, although in a fix you might be able to persuade an upmarket hotel to give you a cash

advance against your card. Barclays Bank offers advances in US dollars or Ugandan shillings, but charges a hefty commission.

## International Transfers

Money transfers are actually more straightforward than one would imagine, even in provincial areas, but they are an expensive way to secure some cash. Western Union is quite well represented in major towns throughout the country, as it has a partnership with Centenary Rural Development Bank.

## Moneychangers

There is no black market. As a result, it doesn't really matter too much where you change your money, though the foreign exchange bureaus generally offer a slightly better rate than the banks. The trouble is that not every town has a foreign exchange bureau and, where one doesn't exist, the banks take advantage of this by offering poor rates. Likewise, hotels give bad rates. The best bank rates are available at Crane Bank, which is represented in Kampala and Jinja. Standard Chartered Bank is another option in Mbale and Mbarara. The best all-rounder these days is Stanbic Bank, as it covers all major towns in Uganda.

## Tippling & Bargaining

Tippling is not always expected in Uganda, but as wages are very low by Western standards, a tip will always be appreciated. The size of a given tip is up to the individual, but as a guideline 10% is probably fair in restaurants, while US\$5000 to US\$10,000 is reasonable for ranger-guides or escorts in national parks.

For bargaining tips while shopping, see p626. It's a good idea to bargain when looking for transport, for example, on minibuses beyond Kampala, *boda-bodas* and special hires.

## Travellers Cheques

Thanks to a major scam a few years ago, travellers cheques are now rarely accepted by banks or foreign exchange bureaus outside of Kampala. Where they can be changed in the capital, rates offered are generally slightly lower than those advertised for cash. Standard Chartered Bank can change Amex travellers cheques in Kampala, Jinja, Mbale and Mbarara at just 1%.

Elsewhere it can be very difficult, attracting dire rates even if it is possible. Stanbic Bank was in the process of trialling the exchange of travellers cheques at the time of writing and this will be a welcome development if it lasts, as it's the most widespread local network.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO Film & Equipment

Colour print film and APS film are widely available in Kampala, but harder to come by elsewhere. Expect to pay around US\$6000 for a 36-exposure colour print film. Slide film is much harder to find, so it's safer to bring your own. For a wide selection of film, including one slide option (100 ASA/ISO) and B&W, try **Colour Chrome** (54 Kampala Rd). This is also a reliable place to get your films developed. Think twice before developing any shots in the provinces, as the washed-out look seems to be fashionable these days! For cheap film there are lots of shops along Wilson Rd, and these places can also do passport photos in about an hour. There are also quite a number of instant photo booths around town for those in a hurry. Most Internet cafés and some photo shops can burn digital pictures to CD if the memory card is filling up fast.

## POST

The cost of sending a postcard is US\$1100 to Europe and US\$1200 to the US or Australia. There is an efficient poste restante service at the main post office in Kampala.

Provincial post offices are reasonably reliable, and with the EMS Post Bus servicing a number of provincial capitals, postage often only takes a day or two more than from Kampala.

## TELEPHONE

Telephone connections, both domestic and international, are pretty good, although not always so reliable in the provincial areas. The two big operators are Uganda Telecom (UTL) and MTN. Both have cardphones in towns throughout the country – try outside the post office if they aren't obvious elsewhere. UTL and MTN rates are pretty similar. Calls can also be made from privately operated booths in major towns across the country. This can be useful for short calls if you don't have the cash for a phonecard handy.

From public phone boxes international calls are charged at the rate of US\$1000 to US\$3000 per minute.

The country code for Uganda is ☎ 256. To make an international call from Uganda, dial ☎ 000. The number for directory inquiries is ☎ 901.

## Mobile Phones

Mobile (cell) phones are very popular: mobile codes include ☎ 071 (UTL), ☎ 075 (CelTel), and ☎ 077 and ☎ 078 (MTN). All mobile-phone companies sell prepaid starter packs with SIM cards and airtime vouchers for topping up credit. For those on roaming, MTN probably has the best coverage across the country.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

There isn't an abundance of tourist information in Uganda. UWA has the best information, but it only covers the national parks. Most travellers get their information from the most popular backpacker places in Kampala and Jinja.

**Uganda Community Tourism Association** (Map p471; UcotA; ☎ 041-501866; www.ucota.or.ug; Kabalagala)

Promotes community tourism in Uganda.

**Uganda Tourist Board** (Map p472; UTB; ☎ 041-342196; www.visituganda.com; 15 Kimathi Ave, Kampala;

☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat)

Responsible for tourism promotion in Uganda.

**Uganda Wildlife Authority** (Map p471; UWA; ☎ 041-346287; www.uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd) Promotes the country's national parks and protected areas.

## VISAS

Most non-African passport holders visiting Uganda require visas. One-month single-entry tourist visas cost US\$30. If you are a student, this visa costs US\$20, so it is worth having some ID handy for the embassy or border guards. It is easiest just to rock up at the airport or border and arrange one there, as no photo is required. For those who like to organise things in advance, two passport photos are required and the visa is issued within 24 hours, possibly the same day if you plead.

## VISA EXTENSIONS

For visa extensions, pay a visit to the **immigration office** (Map p471; Jinja Rd, Kampala), which is 300m northeast of the roundabout after Centenary Park. Kampala is a good place

for picking up visas to other countries, as there are usually few queues at the various embassies. For visas to neighbouring countries, see p551

## VOLUNTEERING

Uganda has more volunteering opportunities than many African countries thanks to a number of good grassroots organisations operating around the country. One of the most popular places to volunteer is at Bujagali Falls through **Soft Power Education** (www.softpowereducation.com), which has a number of projects to upgrade schools and improve education in the area. Also consider the local cultural organisation **Edirisa** (www.edirisa.org), which may be able to use volunteers to help with some of its education projects around Lake Bunyoni and Kabale.

Another good group to link up with is the **Uganda Community Tourism Association** (Map p471; Ucotat; ☎ 041-501866; www.ucota.or.ug; Kabalagala) based in Kampala. It works with tourism-related projects across the country and should be able to advise on volunteer opportunities.

# TRANSPORT IN UGANDA

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information on getting to Uganda from outside East Africa, see p632.

### Air

Located on the shores of Lake Victoria about 41km south of the capital, **Entebbe International Airport** (EBB) is the international gateway to Kampala and Uganda. Few budget travellers enter Uganda by air because most of the discounted air fares available in Europe and North America use Nairobi (Kenya) as the gateway to East Africa. However, for tourists on a short trip, there are some pretty good airlines offering smooth worldwide connections, including British Airways, Emirates and KLM.

### AIRLINES IN UGANDA

**Air Burundi** (airline code 8Y; ☎ 041-256137) Hub: Bujumbura.

**Air Tanzania** (airline code TC; ☎ 041-345773; www.airtanzania.com) Hub: Dar es Salaam.

**British Airways** (airline code BA; ☎ 041-257414; www.britishairways.com) Hub: London.

**EgyptAir** (airline code MS; ☎ 041-233960; www.egyptair.com.eg) Hub: Cairo.

**Emirates** (airline code EK; ☎ 041-349941; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai.

**Ethiopian Airlines** (airline code ET; ☎ 041-254796; www.flyethiopian.com) Hub: Addis Ababa.

**Gulf Air** (airline code GF; ☎ 041-230524; www.gulfair.com) Hub: Abu Dhabi.

**Kenya Airways** (airline code KQ; ☎ 041-344304; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Nairobi.

**KLM** (airline code KL; ☎ 041-344304; www.klm.com) Hub: Amsterdam.

**Rwandair Express** (airline code WB; ☎ 041-232555; www.rwandair.com) Hub: Kigali.

**SN Brussels Airline** (airline code SN; ☎ 041-234200; www.brusselsairlines.com) Hub: Brussels.

**South African Airways** (airline code SA; ☎ 041-345772; www.flysaa.com) Hub: Johannesburg.

**Sudan Airways** (airline code SD; ☎ 041-230438; www.sudanair.com) Hub: Khartoum.

### TO/FROM BURUNDI

Air Burundi is currently the only airline offering flights between Bujumbura and Entebbe. There are, however, more expensive indirect tickets available with Kenya Airways.

### TO/FROM KENYA

Kenya Airways is the only consistent option connecting Entebbe and Nairobi.

### TO/FROM RWANDA

Rwandair Express offers reliable connections between Entebbe and Kigali, while Air Burundi also touch down in Kigali on flights to Burundi.

### TO/FROM TANZANIA

Air Tanzania offers the only connections between Dar es Salaam and Entebbe.

### Land

Uganda shares popular land border crossings with Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania. Bus services connect the major cities in each country or local transport is available for those wanting to break their journey along the way. There are also land border crossings with DR Congo and the Sudan, but with the exception of the Bunagana border post between Uganda and DR Congo for mountain gorilla visits, it is currently not advisable to travel overland to these countries due to civil instability (see p556).

### TO/FROM KENYA

The two main border crossings that most overland travellers use are Malaba and Busia, with Malaba being by far the most popular.

The Ugandan and Kenyan border crossings are about 1km from each other at Malaba and you can walk or take a *boda-boda*. Taking a vehicle through this border crossing is fairly straightforward and doesn't take more than an hour or so.

The other crossing is via Busia, which is further south. Busia only appeals to those travelling direct from Jinja or Kampala to Kisumu. There are frequent minibuses between Jinja and Busia (US\$6000), and *matatus* (shared minibuses) between Busia and Kisumu.

Doing the journey in stages, there are frequent minibuses between Malaba and Kampala (US\$9000, three hours) or Jinja (US\$6000, two hours) until late afternoon. There are also frequent minibuses between Tororo and Malaba (US\$1500, approximately 30 minutes).

On the Kenyan side there are daily buses between Malaba and Nairobi with various companies, departing at about 7.30pm and arriving at about 5.30am the next day. If you prefer to travel by day there are plenty of *matatus* between Malaba and Bungoma, which take about 45 minutes. If you need to stay in Bungoma overnight there are plenty of cheap hotels to choose from. From Bungoma there are several buses daily to Nairobi, which leave at about 8am and arrive about 5pm the same day.

Most travellers avoid local transport altogether and opt for the direct buses running between Kampala and Nairobi, which range from basic to luxurious. Some of the overnight services arrive in Nairobi in the early hours of the morning – take care, as Nairobi is a more dangerous city than Kampala.

**Scandinavian Express** (☎ 041-348895; 8 Colville St, Kampala) operates a luxury coach to Nairobi (US\$50,000, 12 hours, departing at 1pm) that includes drinks and movies, making it possibly the company of choice, although the arrival time is a bit of a nightmare.

**Akamba** (☎ 041-250412; 28 Dewinton Rd, Kampala) operates two classes daily. The 'executive'-class buses cost US\$23,000, take about 12 hours, and depart at 7am and 3pm. The daily 'royal' service is more comfortable, with larger seats similar to business class in an

### DEPARTURE TAX

There is a departure tax of US\$40 on international flights from Entebbe, but as this is payable when you buy your ticket you never notice how hard you are being hit.

aircraft; there are only three seats per row! Tickets cost US\$38,000 and the route goes via Kisumu (approximately 12 hours, 7am departure).

**Regional Coach** (☎ 041-256862; 4 Luwum St, Kampala) has modern buses and has a daily service to Nairobi (US\$23,000, approximately 12 hours, departing at 4pm).

**Busscar** (☎ 041-233030; 8 Burton St, Kampala) also operates a service to Nairobi (US\$22,000, departing at 3pm), but the buses aren't quite as comfortable as the other options.

### RWANDA

There are two main border crossing points: between Kabale and Kigali via Katuna (Gatuna on the Rwandan side), and between Kisoro and Ruhengeri via Cyanika.

Between Kabale and Kigali there are lots of minibuses, but these involve a change of vehicle at the border. There are minibuses (US\$1000) and special-hire taxis (US\$15,000 for the whole car) travelling back and forth between Kabale and Katuna. It takes up to one hour to get through the two border crossings. On the Rwandan side there are minibuses travelling to Kigali (RFR1500, 1½ hours) throughout the day, but they can take time to fill up. There are several military checkpoints between the border and Kigali where all baggage is searched.

From Kisoro to Ruhengeri via Cyanika the road is in reasonable condition on the Ugandan side and in excellent shape on the Rwandan side. Infrequent minibuses link both sides of the border with Kisoro (US\$1000, 12km) and Ruhengeri (RFR500, 25km). If transport is thin on the ground consider taking a motorbike.

There is also the option of taking a direct bus between Kampala and Kigali. **Jaguar Executive Coaches** (☎ 041-251855; 26 Nakivubo Rd, Kampala) offers a 'VIP' bus (US\$20,000, departing at 7am and 9am) and a standard service (US\$15,000, departing at 5am and 6am) taking anything from eight to 10 hours, including a slow border crossing. The

VIP bus is worth the extra cost and includes movies.

**Regional Coach** (☎ 041-256862; 4 Luwum St, Kampala) has one bus a day to Kigali (US\$23,000, approximately nine hours, departing at about 9am).

**Gasol Bus** (☎ 041-572917; Bus Park, Kampala) has one bus a day to Kigali (US\$20,000) leaving at the rather ridiculous hour of 2am. Hit the town first for some beers and save a night's accommodation perhaps? This service continues to Bujumbura (US\$40,000) in Burundi, arriving at 4pm.

## TANZANIA

The most commonly used direct route between Uganda and Tanzania is on the west side of Lake Victoria between Bukoba and Masaka, and goes via the border crossing at Mutukula. Road conditions have improved dramatically over the last few years, and it's possible to do the journey from Kampala to Bukoba in just half a day. See p634 for more information.

There's another border crossing at Nkurungu, to the west of Mutukula, but the road is bad and little transport passes this way.

For information on Scandinavian Express connections between Kampala and Dar es Salaam via Nairobi and Arusha, see p555. Akamba also has a service to Dar es Salaam (US\$53,000, departing at 7am and 3pm) passing through Arusha (US\$38,000). See p555 for contact details of both these companies.

## Lake

There used to be passenger services on Lake Victoria between Port Bell (near Kampala) and Mwanza (Tanzania) via Bukoba (Tanzania), but they were discontinued several years ago.

Some travellers have managed to book passage to Mwanza on cargo ferries run by **Tanzania Railways** (☎ 041-233884). Permission for this can be arranged at the railway station in Kampala and should cost about US\$20,000. The trip takes 16 hours and it is usually possible to make a deal with one of the crew members for their bunk once on board.

## Tours

For all the juicy details on safaris and tours in Uganda, see the comprehensive Safaris section (p95); for more on international

## CROSSING INTO DR CONGO OR SUDAN?

### DR Congo

It is now possible to cross the border into DR Congo to visit the mountain gorillas at either Djomba or Bukima in Parc National des Virungas – see p561 for more details. However, much of DR Congo has been embroiled in a messy civil war for many years, and even with the advent of peace there are still several rival rebel factions roaming the countryside. For this reason, we cannot currently recommend crossing at any border, except the Bunagana crossing, and even in this case, check, check and check again in Kampala and Kisoro so you are not heading into the unknown.

### Sudan

The civil wars in northern Uganda and southern Sudan effectively wiped overland travel between the two countries off the map. Peace has come to southern Sudan and there is talk of regular land borders opening once again. However, even if the situation in southern Sudan is now considered stable, travelling this way still involves extensive travel through northern Uganda, the most dangerous region of the country due to the brutal activities of the LRA. Do not undertake such a journey without checking the security situation every step of the way.

operators organising tours to Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa, see p635.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

#### AIRLINES IN UGANDA

Domestic flights are few and far between in Uganda. There are some smaller airlines offering both scheduled and charter flights from Kampala. **Eagle Uganda** (☎ 041-344292; 11 Portal Ave) and **United Airlines** (☎ 041-349841; Kimathi Ave) offer connections to remote towns in the north, but these aren't really destinations of interest to the average tourist.

Other private operators, such as **KAFTC** (☎ 077-706106; barnsey@imul.com), offer charter services to destinations like Kidepo Valley and Murchison Falls National Parks.

## Boat

Given the immense size of Lake Victoria, there are very limited opportunities for travel by boat, the only options being the short ferry to the Ssesse Islands from Bukakata (east of Masaka) and the small boats operating from Kasenyi (a 30-minute taxi ride from Kampala). See p538 for details.

## Bus

Standard buses connect the major towns on a daily basis. They're usually slightly cheaper than minibuses, but travel just as fast; too fast in fact – some drivers seem reckless to the point of being nutters. Standard buses usually stop far less frequently than minibuses, which saves time on longer journeys. From Kampala, standard buses rarely have fixed departure times, as they leave only when full, but there will be at least one bus per day to most towns, the first one leaving as early as 4.30am. However, returning from provincial destinations, they tend to have scheduled departure times.

In addition to the normal private buses, there are EMS Post Buses. These travel from Kampala to all the major centres daily. They cost about the same as a normal bus, but they are safer and stop less frequently than minibuses.

See p485 for details of routes, schedules and prices.

## MATATUS

Uganda is the land of shared minibuses (known as taxis or *matatus*), and there's never any shortage of them. Fares are fixed and vehicles leave when full. Travel on the major routes out of Kampala is relatively civilised, even though many drivers are speed maniacs who go much too fast to leave any leeway for emergencies. However, overcrowding is a big problem as soon as you are a fair distance away from urban centres and stuffing as many as 30 people into a 14-seat minibus is common.

## Car & Motorcycle

There's a pretty good system of sealed roads between most major population centres in the southern part of the country. It is somewhat pointless to talk of which particular roads are good and which are bad, as this changes rapidly from year to year. Uganda has two wet seasons, which means the roads

take a serious pounding from the elements, and surfaces deteriorate rapidly. Roads that are good this year are bad the next and, if repaired, good again the following year. When travelling on sealed roads, it is necessary to have your wits about you – large potholes often appear from nowhere.

The quality of dirt roads varies widely depending on whether it is the wet or dry season. In the dry season dirt roads are very, very dusty and you'll end up choking behind trucks and taxis, while covering the local population in a fine layer of orange dust. In the wet season a number of the dirt roads become muddy mires, almost carrot soup, and may be passable only in a 4WD vehicle. If you are travelling around Uganda in the wet seasons, always ask about the latest road conditions before setting off on a journey.

Road signs are totally absent in Uganda. There are hardly any, even outside major towns. Unless you know where you're going, it's possible to get hopelessly lost.

Carrying a map is one solution, but you'll also need a compass, since there are no decent large-scale maps. Getting out of the vehicle and talking to local people is obviously the best idea, but sometimes they don't know the way either! A GPS is handy for a serious adventure.

Another problem in Uganda is road safety. Bus and minibus drivers seem to be hellbent on overtaking everything on the road, even if it is quite clearly travelling faster! Horrific crashes are fairly common, which means the utmost vigilance is required when driving on Ugandan roads. Thankfully, the further you travel from Kampala the lighter the traffic becomes.

## DRIVING LICENCE

If you have an International Driving Permit, you should bring it (although you really only need your local driving licence from home).

## FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Fuel is expensive by regional standards. Petrol costs about US\$2000 per litre; diesel is about US\$1600 per litre. In provincial areas, fuel is a little more expensive the further you get away from major towns.

## HIRE

Uganda's vehicle-hire industry is small scale and that means prices are very high

compared to other parts of the world. Many independent travellers find it cheaper to negotiate directly with 'special-hire' taxi drivers or local minibus touts.

**Hertz** (Map p472; ☎ 077-450460; Colville St, Kampala) is a trusted if expensive option, charging around US\$65 for a small car with insurance and US\$130 and up for 4WDs. This doesn't include excess kilometres above the paltry 100km allowance, which are charged at US\$0.30 for a small car and US\$0.50 for a 4WD.

It works out considerably cheaper to deal with one of the local travel companies hiring cars. **City Cars** (☎ 077-412001; www.driveuganda.com) is one of the leading local car-hire companies. It charges US\$35 per day for a small car, with 150km and US\$0.20 per kilometre thereafter. A Land Rover will cost US\$70 per day, also with 150 free kilometres per day (US\$0.30 each excess kilometre). Drivers are available for an extra US\$20 per day, and more luxurious vehicles include the Land Rover Discovery or Toyota Landcruiser.

**Wemtec** (☎ 043-121314; engineering@wemtec.biz), based in Jinja, has reasonably priced Land Rovers for hire with drivers. A 109 soft top costs US\$130,000 per day and a 110 hard top is US\$170,000.

There are also saloon-car taxis throughout the country, known commonly as 'specials' or 'special-hire' taxis. These can be chartered around the capital, between cities and into national parks, but are more expensive than minibuses. However, they can be a cheap alternative to hiring a car if you are prepared to bargain hard, and cover the driver's food and accommodation as you go. You may be able to negotiate something

around US\$35,000 a day, excluding fuel and the driver's accommodation and food.

### Hitching

Without your own transport, hitching is virtually obligatory in some situations, such as getting into national parks, to which there's no public transport. Most of the lifts will be on trucks, usually on top of the load at the back, which can be a very pleasant way to travel, though sun protection is a must. Free lifts on trucks are the exception rather than the rule, so ask before you board.

Other sources for lifts are rangers and staff who work in the parks, international aid workers, missionaries, businesspeople and the occasional diplomat, but you may have to wait a long time in some places before anyone comes along. See p638 for more on hitching in the region, including safety.

### Local Transport

Kampala has a local minibus network, as well as 'special-hire' taxis for private trips. Elsewhere you'll have to rely on bicycle taxis (known locally as *boda-bodas*, as they originally shuttled people between border posts) or, in places like Kampala, Jinja and Fort Portal, motorbike taxis.

### Train

There are two main railway lines in Uganda. The first starts at Tororo and runs west all the way to Kasese via Jinja and Kampala. The other line runs from Tororo north-west to Pakwach via Mbale, Soroti, Lira and Gulu. However, at the time of research all passenger services had been suspended indefinitely and they are unlikely to resume.