



**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS**

**ITINERARY**

# **UGANDA HIGHLIGHTS GORILLAS, CHIMPANZEES & SHOEBILLS**

**JUNE 13–JULY 2, 2025**

©2025



A male Mountain Gorilla looks skyward in Bwindi Forest. © Dion Hobcroft

*Uganda is where the East African savannah meets the bird-rich West African jungle. Where else but in this impossibly lush country can one observe Lions prowling the open plains in the morning and track chimpanzees through the rainforest undergrowth the same afternoon, then the next day navigate tropical channels teeming with Hippopotamus and huge Nile Crocodiles before setting off into the misty mountains to stare deep into the eyes of a Mountain Gorilla? Certainly, Uganda is the only safari destination whose range of forest primates is as impressive as its selection of plains antelope.*

*This tour is designed for people who would like a comfortable highlights package to this fascinating country. We will travel in land cruisers with pop up roofs and spend two to three nights at all of our destinations. While the focus is on Gorillas, Chimpanzees and the Shoebill, we will witness a huge diversity of birds and mammals. We have chances to see both Leopard and Lion, herds of African Elephant, Giraffe and Hippopotamus, Cape Buffalo, zebra and a tremendous diversity of hoofed mammals and primates. The birding is extraordinarily diverse with hornbills, parrots, kingfishers, bee-eaters, turacos, bustards, trogons, hornbills and an array of dazzling sunbirds and weavers leading the charge. We expect to encounter close to 450 species of birds.*



*Uganda is safe and delightfully friendly. As a country it has undergone astonishing changes in recent decades. Infrastructure improvements to the roads, lodges and development programs for the local guides have made wildlife touring in Uganda one of the best experiences possible in the natural history world.*



**June 13-14, Days 1-2: Travel to Uganda; Arrival in Entebbe.** Tour participants should make plans to arrive in Entebbe (airport code EBB) no later than the evening of June 15. Upon arrival and clearing immigration and customs, you will be met at the airport and transferred to our nearby hotel. Many of our participants find it worthwhile to arrive in Entebbe the day before the first official group activities, allowing time to relax and recover from the overnight flight and the time change before launching into early mornings in the field. Those wishing to arrive early will have plenty of birds to keep them occupied until the start of the tour. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

NIGHT (June 13): In transit (overnight flight)

NIGHT (June 14): The Protea Hotel, Entebbe



A close-up of the extraordinary Shoebill at Mabamba © Dion Hobercroft

**June 15, Day 3: Mabamba Wetlands and Entebbe Botanic Gardens.** After an early breakfast we will head out to Mabamba Wetlands, about 50 kilometers from Entebbe on the shores of Lake Victoria. This is one of the few remaining large swamps in the country protected by the local communities. This extensive papyrus swamp with its labyrinth of channels and lagoons is classified as an IBA (Important Bird Area) by Birdlife International. It is home to several pairs of Shoebills—Uganda’s most famous avian resident. This charismatic species, the only representative in its family, is certainly among the most sought-after birds in Africa and we will make special efforts today to find it while boating through the channels. There will be a good selection of classic East African waterbirds: Pink-backed Pelican, Long-tailed Cormorant, Goliath Heron, African Fish-Eagle, Yellow-billed Duck, African Black Crake, Gray Crowned-Crane, African Jacana and Malachite Kingfisher. There is also a host of more local species such as Long-toed Lapwing, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Blue-headed Coucal, Papyrus Gonolek and with luck, the rare Montane Blue Swallow and nomadic Weyn’s Weaver.

After some success with the Shoebill (we hope) and lunch, we will return to Entebbe for a siesta. In the afternoon we will make a visit to the excellent Entebbe Botanic Gardens. Here big trees attract large numbers of spectacular birds like the Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill, Great Blue Turaco, Eastern Plantain-Eater and African Gray Parrot. We have a chance for the elusive Bat Hawk, the scarce Orange Weaver and even the rarely seen White-backed Night-Heron.

NIGHT: The Protea Hotel, Entebbe

**June 16, Day 4: Drive to Lake Mburo.** After breakfast we will drive to a protected forest called Mpanga near Kampala. This is a good location for some elusive birds like the White-spotted Flufftail, Congo Pied Hornbill, Fire-crested Alethe and shy Green-backed Twinspot. Heading south and crossing the equator, we will make another stop at Kaku Swamp. This extensive wetland is a productive location for a variety of ducks like Hottentot and Red-billed teal, Fulvous and White-faced whistling-ducks, and Spur-winged Goose plus other large wetland birds like African Swamphen and Saddle-billed Stork. The beautiful Lilac-breasted Roller is often located here. We will arrive in the afternoon at Lake Mburo National Park, enjoying a game drive as we enter the park.

NIGHT: Kigambira Safari Lodge, Lake Mburo National Park

**June 17, Day 5: Lake Mburo National Park.** Lake Mburo is a superb wetland and Acacia savanna sanctuary. Birding and mammal-watching here is a delightful experience, with great scenery and a markedly different fauna from other reserves we will visit. This is the best place in the country to see mammals such as Eland as well as Boehm’s Zebra, Topi and Impala. The lakes within the park are home to Hippopotamus and Nile Crocodiles and a variety of waterbirds, while fringing swamps hide secretive papyrus specialists such as Sitatunga. There is a chance for Leopard, Spotted Hyena and Jackals. Birding is excellent. Among the many possible species are some real global rarities like White-backed Night-Heron, African Finfoot and the range-restricted Red-faced Barbet. Among a huge list of other bird species recorded in the park are African Marsh-Harrier; White-backed, Lappet-faced and White-headed vultures; Brown Snake-Eagle; African Hawk-Eagle; Coqui and Crested francolins; Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove; Brown Parrot; Red-chested, Pied, Levallant’s, Klaas’s and Dideric cuckoos; Bare-faced Go-away-bird; Striped Kingfisher; Broad-billed Roller; African Gray Hornbill; Green Woodhoopoe; Common Scimitarbill; Blue-naped and Speckled mousebirds; Spot-flanked Barbet; Nubian and Bearded woodpeckers; White-browed Scrub-Robin; Trilling, Tabora and Siffling cisticolas; Yellow-throated Longclaw; Chinspot Batis; Yellow-breasted Apalis; Red-faced Crombec; Lead-colored Flycatcher; White-winged Black Tit; African Penduline-tit; Black-headed Oriole; Tropical Boubou; White-crested Helmetshrike; Brubru; Black Cuckoo-shrike; and Greater Blue-eared and Wattled starlings.

NIGHT: Kigambira Safari Lodge, Lake Mburo National Park

**June 18, Day 6: Drive to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.** After breakfast we will enjoy another game drive as we make our way out of the park, while keeping a lookout for any additional mammals like Defassa Waterbuck, Cape Buffalo, Bushbuck, Warthog, and Dwarf and Banded mongoose. We will then head towards Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. The Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to approximately half of

the world population of 1,000 Mountain Gorillas. This vast reserve offers some of the most productive montane forest birding in Africa and supports 23 of Uganda's 24 Albertine Rift endemic bird species. Once part of a much larger forest that included the Virunga Volcanoes in neighboring Rwanda, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is now an ecological island within a sea of human cultivation, and therefore, of immense conservation importance. Excellent forest birding, not least the prospect of numerous rare and localized Albertine Rift endemics, makes this a true birding mecca.

NIGHT: Mahogany Springs Lodge, Buhoma

**June 19, Day 7: Birding in Buhoma.** We will spend the day exploring the roads and trails in this forest, one of the most bird and mammal rich sites in East Africa. Among some of the primates possible are L'Hoest's Monkey, Black and White colobus, and Red-tailed and Blue monkeys. Some other mammals possible include both the Black-faced and elusive Yellow-backed duikers, plus Carruther's, Boehm's and Alexander's squirrels. Birding, while at times may be slow, will reward the patient observer with an incredible variety of species. Among the many species possible are Black Goshawk; Bronze-naped Pigeon; Olive, Dusky and Barred Long-tailed cuckoos; Bar-tailed and Narina trogons; Cinnamon-chested and Black bee-eaters; Blue-throated Roller; Gray-throated Barbet; Willcock's Honeyguide; Tullberg's and Elliot's woodpeckers; African Broadbill; Ansorge's, Little, Slender-billed, Cabanis's, White-throated, Red-tailed and Kakamega greenbills; Red-throated Alethe; Equatorial Akalat; Blue-shouldered and White-bellied robin-chat; Black-faced Rufous Warbler; Short-tailed Warbler; and Slender-billed, Waller's, Narrow-tailed and Stuhlmann's starlings. At higher altitudes, if the weather permits, we will try our luck with Handsome Francolin, Double-toothed Barbet, Doherty's Bush-Shrike, the beautiful Purple-breasted Sunbird, Dusky Twinspot and, with luck, the Kivu Ground Thrush, to mention a few.

NIGHT: Mahogany Springs Lodge, Buhoma

**June 20, Days 8: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Gorilla Trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest.** There can be little doubt that this may be the most anticipated day on the tour. We will set off to the park headquarters, arriving at 8:00 a.m. for a briefing prior to gorilla trekking. We will be led by park guides through wet forests with a dense understory of Wild Nettles and Giant Celery, often on steep terrain, to a group of Mountain Gorillas. These groups have been habituated by researchers and park staff to daily visits by wildlife enthusiasts. The park guides vocalize to the gorilla groups as we approach to make them aware of our arrival. These huge apes are amazingly placid and tolerant of our presence. It is usually possible to get to within a few meters of them as they play and feed. It is sensational to stare into the eyes of these gentle giants and watch them in awe as they go about their daily activities. Each encounter is different and has its own rewards; you are undoubtedly going to enjoy the close views of adults feeding, grooming and resting as the youngsters' frolic and swing from vines in a delightfully playful display. It will be an unforgettable experience.

**SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT GORILLA VIEWING:** The demand for permits to view the gorillas is enormous. Permits are expensive, currently \$700 USD. It is therefore essential if you wish to accompany a gorilla trek (the only realistic way to see these magnificent animals) during your visit, that when you sign up for the tour you clearly state that you want to pay for a gorilla trek. Permits are nonrefundable. We anticipate that not everyone will want to accompany a gorilla trek, so we have kept this cost separate from the tour. You will need to be reasonably fit to undertake the gorilla viewing walk, although the pace is kept appropriate to the participant's fitness. Normally the walk involves three to six hours but occasionally, if groups are on the distant edges of their territories, it may take up to ten hours. Porters are available to assist participants, helping them with their packs and assisting them in the walk. Quite often the gorillas can be found within an hour, with some luck. On rare occasions it is possible to miss the gorillas completely. You will have more information available on the gorilla whereabouts during the briefing.

For those who choose to opt out of the Gorilla trek, we will organize birding in the excellent community forest with local guides. It is also possible to enjoy a village walk around the Buhoma community and enjoy a bit of shopping and a cup of tea or coffee.



After our gorilla trekking, we will make the drive from Buhoma to Ruhija, located in the mountains about two hours' drive from Buhoma.

NIGHT: Gorilla Mist Camp, Ruhija



A bull African Elephant with fine tusks decorates his back with grass in Queen Elizabeth National Park. © Dion Hobcroft

**June 21, Day 9: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Ruhija.** We will explore the higher altitude forests on this day from our base in Ruhija to search for as many of the special Albertine Rift endemics that we can locate with certain species preferring this upper montane region. This includes a number of scarce species like Handsome Francolin, Red-chested Owlet and Lagden's Bushshrike. Sightings of any of these birds will make it a red-letter day!

NIGHT: Gorilla Mist Camp, Ruhija

**June 22, Day 10: Bwindi to Queen Elizabeth National Park.** This morning, we will make our way from the Bwindi Forest to Queen Elizabeth National Park, always on the lookout for more bird sightings. Queen Elizabeth National Park protects varied habitats ranging from open savannah to rainforest, from dense papyrus swamps and crater lakes to the vastness of Lake Edward. It is little wonder that QENP boasts one of the highest biodiversity ratings of any game reserve in the world. Almost 100 mammal species and a remarkable 600 bird species make this superb safari territory. African Elephant, a profusion of hippos and handsome Uganda Kob with some good

chances for Lion, Leopard, Spotted Hyena and the rare Giant Forest Hog are all possible. We will drive through the Ishasha section (if conditions permit), which is famed for the presence of tree climbing Lions. If lucky, we may have a view of these magnificent felines as they bask in the trees. This afternoon after checking into the Mweya Safari Lodge, we may have an evening game drive in the park to try for some nocturnal birds and mammals. The lodge boasts a marvelous waterfront setting in the shadow of the Rwenzori Mountains.

NIGHT: Mweya Safari Lodge, Queen Elizabeth National Park

**June 23, Day 11: Game Drive in the Park and Boat Cruise on the Kazinga Channel.** We will start early at dawn and go for a drive to look for the big game (African Elephant, Cape Buffalo, Leopard, Lion, Topi are all possible) and many excellent birds amidst great scenery. Special birds include African Crake, Marabou Stork, Lesser Flamingo, Bateleur Eagle, Black-bellied Bustard, Red-necked Spurfowl, Senegal Lapwing, Collared Pratincole, Temminck's Courser, Small Buttonquail, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Red-throated Bee-eater, Square-tailed Nightjar, Western Black-headed Batis and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, to mention a handful. This afternoon, after our lunch at the lodge, we have a boat cruise on the spectacular Kazinga Channel that runs through the park connecting Lake George and Lake Edward. Beyond the hippos and crocodiles are more classic wetland birds including such stunners as Great White Pelican, Little Bittern, Saddle-billed Stork, Black Crake, African



**A lioness attempts to bring down a male Uganda Kob in Queen Elizabeth NP. © Herbert Byaruhanga**  
Jacana, Water Thick-knee, African Skimmer, African Pygmy Kingfisher and Black-headed Weaver.



NIGHT: Mweya Safari Lodge, Queen Elizabeth National Park

**June 24, Day 12: Drive to Kibale National Park.** After a final morning of wildlife watching in QENP, we will drive to Kibale National Park. Kibale's major attraction is the opportunity to observe troops of chimpanzees. These incredible apes, more closely related to humans than to any other living creature, are tremendous fun to watch as they socialize and vocalize noisily in fruiting trees. A network of shady forest trails provides much to delight botanists and butterfly lovers, while birders are in for a treat with 335 species recorded in the forest. The elusive African Forest Elephant, smaller and hairier than its savannah counterpart, are resident in the park. In the afternoon it will be possible to have a nature walk at Bigodi wetland which is managed by the local community, a successful story of the benefits of ecotourism. It provides a good chance to look for such beautiful birds as Yellow-billed Barbet and Red-headed Bluebill, and monkeys like the Central Africa Red Colobus and Gray-cheeked Mangabey.

NIGHT: Chimpanzee Forest Lodge, Kibale National Park

**June 25, Day 13: Kibale National Park.** Birding in Uganda is astonishingly rich and Kibale is no exception. If we are very fortunate, we may be able to track down the elusive Green-breasted Pitta and this will be our main focus this morning. We have chances of finding a variety of birds with some of the notables including African Crowned Eagle, Black-billed Turaco, Narina Trogon, Black Bee-eater, White-headed Wood-Hoopoe, African Emerald Cuckoo, Pink-footed Puffback and Petit's Cuckoo-shrike. It should be mentioned that birding in the forest interior in these giant forests is often quite slow so having plenty of time will be beneficial for trying to track down some of the more elusive species.



An alpha male Chimpanzee rests on the ground very close to us at Kibale Forest. © Dion Hobcroft



NIGHT: Chimpanzee Forest Lodge, Kibale National Park

**June 26, Day 14: Chimp Tracking at Kibale National Park.** After an early breakfast we will go to the forest for birding and chimp tracking. Tracking the chimpanzee is a very interesting experience; the way they feed, climb trees, respond to humans, and care for their young ones is just phenomenal. This is a daily drama of life in a rainforest and a rare chance to look back into a window of our evolutionary history. This park is notable for its primate population, with the chimpanzees being the most famous. After success with chimpanzees we will do some afternoon birding focusing on any species that are still holding out on us.

NIGHT: Chimpanzee Forest Lodge, Kibale National Park

**June 27, Day 15: Kibale National Park to Masindi.** After some early morning birding and mammal watching, we will travel north to Masindi. The roads are all currently undergoing extensive construction with significant stretches improved and almost the entire way on a sealed road surface. We will make several birding stops along the way in both forested and farm bush environments, and are guaranteed some good bird sightings on this travel day.

NIGHT: Masindi Hotel, Masindi

**June 28, Day 16: Budongo Forest.** The Budongo Forest is one of the most celebrated forest birding sites in all of Africa. An extension of the inaccessible forests of the Congo that just cross into Uganda, it is a unique location for a selection of rare forest birds. We will make a day out of taking in the best this forest has to offer. Birds we will search for include Nahan's Francolin, Blue Malkoha, Cassin's Spinetail, African Dwarf Kingfisher, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, White-thighed Hornbill, Buff-spotted and Golden-crowned woodpeckers, Chestnut and Jameson's wattled-eyes, Ituri Batis, Green Hylia, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Brown and Pale-breasted illadopsis, Yellow-breasted Forest Robin and Red-tailed Ant-Thrush. In the afternoon we will return to our comfortable hotel in Masindi.

NIGHT: Masindi Hotel, Masindi

**June 29, Day 17: Drive to Murchison Falls National Park.**

We will drive through the Budongo Forest and enter a new faunal zone as we enter the tropical savanna woodlands of Murchison Falls National Park. Depending on the rain, we will begin by exploring the Butiaba Escarpment, an area where we may find some special birds like the Black-billed Barbet, Mocking Cliff-Chat, White-rumped Seedeater and Foxy Cisticola. We will later cross the Victoria Nile River and check-in at Paraa Safari Lodge. Murchison Falls Conservation Area (MFNP) is comprised of Bugungu and Karuma Wildlife Reserves. It derives its name from the Murchison Falls where the mighty Victoria Nile River explodes through a narrow gorge and flows down to become a placid river whose banks are thronged with hippos, crocodiles, waterbucks and buffalo. The vegetation is characterized by savannah, riparian forest and woodland. Wildlife includes Lions, Leopards, elephants, Giraffes, buffalo, hartebeest, oribis, Uganda Kob and Patas Monkey.



Rothschild's Giraffe pose symmetrically in Murchison Falls NP. © Dion Hobcroft

NIGHT: Paraa Safari Lodge, Murchison Falls National Park

**June 30, Day 18: Game Drive in Murchison Falls National Park.** After an early breakfast we will go for a full morning game drive in the delta area, followed by lunch and a siesta. Birds to be on the lookout for include Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Senegal Thick-knee, White-crested Turaco, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Silverbird. After our rest we will take an afternoon boat cruise, bringing us up close to the

base of these magnificent falls. The bizarre Palm-nut Vulture, African Fish-Eagle, Rock Pratincole, spectacular Black-winged and Northern Red bishop plus the peculiar Piapiac are on the radar of possibilities this afternoon.

NIGHT: Paraa Safari Lodge, Murchison Falls National Park

**July 1, Day 19: Murchison Falls National Park.** After breakfast, we will have another boat trip, this time down the Nile River to its delta at Lake Albert. This will provide another chance to enjoy viewing the big game in the largest conservation area in Uganda. It is also excellent as a backup chance to see the Shoebill in case we missed it earlier. In between mammal sightings, there are still a huge variety of birds to keep searching for, including at least four species of sunbird, eight species of cisticola and a confusing array of starlings, weavers, seedeaters, and Giant Kingfisher. After a relaxed lunch at the Lodge followed by a break, we will enjoy a drive to the top of Murchison Falls to see the power of one of the world's most turbulent stretches of water.

NIGHT: Paraa Safari Lodge, Murchison Falls National Park

**July 2-3, Days 20-21: Drive to Entebbe and Departure for Home.** Today we will make the return drive to Entebbe to freshen up before boarding our flights home. Evening departures (after 8:00 pm on July 2) will make connections with flights to the USA, which will arrive home on July 3.

DAYROOM (July 2): Airport area hotel, Entebbe

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Dion Hobcroft (assisted by a local leader)



**Dion Hobcroft** has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led many tours (more than 180) to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, Indonesia, India, China, Southwest Pacific, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Malawi, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Antarctic. In 2007 and 2013–2019, 2022-23 alone, Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 40 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australasia, listing over 1,200 species, placing him in the top echelons of the

region's birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife, Lise, and two children, Grace (age 22) and Daniel (age 18).

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$13,375** per person based on double occupancy from Entebbe, Uganda. This fee includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 2 ending with dinner on Day 19, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, park entrance fees, boat cruise, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. Tour fees do not include airfare from your home to Entebbe and return, optional gorilla trekking permit, visa fees, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or items



of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may be charged. The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,295**.

**NOTE: The cost of the optional gorilla trekking permit is \$700 (subject to change and nonrefundable once purchased) and MUST be purchased on your behalf by VENT at the time of booking. It is important to note that the gorilla permits are subject to availability and therefore it is imperative that you book early and inform the VENT office that you require a permit.**

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (November 17, 2023). If you prefer to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (January 16, 2024).

**CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

**Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 209 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
210 days or more before departure date	Your deposit(s) minus \$500*
209 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding

COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

**FUEL & FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** While on this tour you will be travelling in high clearance, air-conditioned land cruisers with large windows that can be opened. Space in the land cruiser is quite good but on travel days the luggage will take up much of the back seat area. We try to ensure everyone has a seat with a window to make the most of all the wildlife viewing. To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, **please limit yourself to one medium-sized soft-sided wheeled suitcase or duffel bag and one carry-on bag.** Laundry services are available everywhere that we spend more than one night, so you need only a few changes of clothing. Please use the VENT luggage tag that will be sent to you, as it helps immensely in identifying our group's baggage.

**CONDITIONS:** This tour does not require a high level of fitness but participants should be in good general health as much of the forest birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. On just a few occasions, we may be walking on narrow and/or steep forest trails (entirely optional) to find a few special birds. Our pace will, however, be slow as we bird in the forests. There will be a few lengthy drives and many of the days will be long with early starts; however, we retire for a siesta during the heat of the day when possible. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.

The **optional** gorilla trek at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest (see Day 8) can involve several hours of potentially strenuous walking on steep slopes, often off-trail. The chance of finding the gorillas is very high, but on some occasions in the past the trackers have not been able to locate the mobile family groups.



While some roads in Uganda are remarkably good, many areas still require work (such as various sections of road between Masindi to Kibale). We will also be driving on dirt tracks such as in Queen Elizabeth National Park and Lake Mburo National Park, and at times some of those roads will be bumpy.

**CLIMATE:** The temperatures will be warm to hot (80's) during the day and pleasantly warm to cool (60's) at night. Night temperatures are cooler at a few places, reaching the low 50's, while midday temperatures may locally reach into the 90's. We can expect some showers and misty-foggy weather, especially in the mountains.

**CLOTHING:** Long-sleeved and light-weight shirts and pants are appropriate, with a sweater or light jacket for the evening, and a thermal top for "layering." Neutral colors such as gray, khaki, and tan are best for field wear (bright colors and patterns, including white, can spook the birds and animals). Please note Tsetse flies are attracted to bright blue so this is not recommended in the narrow zones where they are a nuisance. Clothing that can be easily rinsed out and dried quickly is helpful. Dress will be casual throughout the tour. There is no need to bring formal dinner attire. The hotels are not heated, so bring something warm to sleep in. You will need good, solid but comfortable walking boots as we will be walking quite a bit in forest areas, albeit mostly along level or slightly rising and falling terrain. On some days, shorts will be appropriate, and a few of the hotels have swimming pools. Please remember that luggage space in the bus is limited, and laundry can be done at every lodge.

**CURRENCY:** Uganda Shilling (USh); currency can be exchanged at the airport banks and major hotels upon arrival. MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, while American Express has limited acceptance. ATMs may be available at a few select stops if you need additional cash. U.S. currency notes need to be in mint condition and printed after 2013, otherwise they are difficult to exchange.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months with at least one blank page for entry stamp and a visa are required for United States citizens to enter Uganda. Non U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. **All visa (E-Visa) applications must be completed via the Government of Uganda's website: [visas.immigration.go.ug](https://visas.immigration.go.ug). Under the new application process, you must apply online for your visa at least two weeks prior to travel.** The cost at the time of publication is \$50 USD. A current certificate for Yellow Fever Vaccination is required in order to obtain your visa for entry into Uganda, and you may be asked to show your YFV certificate upon arrival at the airport. Please be mindful not to apply too early for your Uganda visa as they expire 90 days from the date your visa is approved.

It is very important to have your passport and money with you at all times. Suggestions for doing so are a money belt or a pouch with a shoulder strap to be worn on your side or around your neck. It is also wise to carry a copy of your passport information pages in a separate piece of luggage or photographed on your mobile phone.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should have a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a day-pack for carrying books, sunscreen, etc. Your tour leader will have a spotting scope; however, you are welcome to bring your own if you so desire. You should bring all the camera equipment and spare batteries that you will need as they will be difficult to obtain once we leave Entebbe. And yes, do bring a folding umbrella and/or rain jacket, as we may well encounter mist or rain on a few occasions.

Other items that will be useful are a hat and sunscreen for sun protection, small flashlight or headlamp, alarm clock, and a small amount of non-aerosol insect repellent (insects are remarkably few, but the best way to avoid any chance of disease is not to get bitten). You may also want to have a small supply of snacks. Moist towelettes are also refreshing to have. Pepto-Bismol is recommended in case of mild stomach upset. Bottled water is available throughout Uganda, so a water bottle is not necessary. All participants should bring a good supply of all of their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as they will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour.

**HEALTH:** A current certificate for Yellow Fever Vaccination is required for entry into Uganda. VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations

are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19.

Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Food standards are high in Uganda and few people experience any problems. We recommend drinking only bottled water (available everywhere) or filtered water provided by the lodges.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

Electricity – 240 volts, 50 cycles. British standard square three-pin plug.

Language – English and Swahili are the “official” first and second national languages.

Time – 8 hours ahead of EST

**INTERNET:** Available at The Boma Hotel in Entebbe and most of the hotels we stay in, generally in the lobby only. The Wi-Fi is often fairly slow. Mobile phone coverage is very good and you can text from most locations.

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### ***Birds (Field Guides):***

Stephenson, Terry, and John Fanshawe; Illustrated by Brian Small, Norman Arlott, and John Gale. *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa*. Princeton Field Guides, Second Edition. A comprehensive field guide to all the birds of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. It includes concise text on identification and illustrations from three of the best bird illustrators working today. One of the best bird books ever written! Also available as an app.

### ***Field Guides (other topics):***

Blundell, Michael. *Wild Flowers of East Africa*. HarperCollins, 1994. Good field guide with high-quality photos.

Dorst, Jean and Pierre Dandelot. *Collins Field Guide to Larger Mammals of Africa*. London: HarperCollins, 1998. Adequate alternative to Jonathan Kingdon's guide.

Kingdon, Jonathan. *The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals*. Academic Press Inc., 1998. A complete and informative guide to all of the mammals. All the known species of African land mammal are covered in a concise text providing full information on identification, distribution, ecology, evolutionary relationships, and conservation status.

Williams, John George and R. Fennessy. *Collins Field Guide to the National Parks of East Africa*. HarperCollins Inc., 1998. Very useful guide with background information and simple maps for each park and reserve, plus a section on mammal identification and the more conspicuous birds.

There is a wealth of reading material available for this region, and the following are just a few selections from various topics. A personal favorite is *The Tree Where Man Was Born/The African Experience* by Peter Matthiessen and Eliot Porter. The results of several long-term studies of the mammals have been published as popular books. The best include *Among the Elephants* by Iain Douglas-Hamilton, *The Serengeti Lion* by George Schaller, and *Portraits in the Wild* by Cynthia Moss. Especially if you have never been to East Africa, you may enjoy some of these “light” books about the region, history and wildlife: *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen, *Flame Trees of Thika* by Elspeth Huxley, *I Dreamed of Africa* by Kuki Gulman, and *A Bird Watcher in Kenya* by C. van Someren. *Nine Faces of Kenya*, compiled by Elspeth Huxley, is a good introductory primer to East African history and settlement.



**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 22, 2023, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant’s Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant’s risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the “**Airline**”) is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline’s aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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