

## **UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Uganda**

### **By UNATCOM team**

Uganda is more than a country, it's the "Pearl of Africa"-- as fondly described by Sir Winston Churchill, and the former British Prime Minister who was enthused by what he found in the East African country.

In 1908, Mr. Churchill penned a book entitled "My African Journey" about his trip to Uganda in 1907, saying, "For magnificence, for variety of form and color for profusion of brilliant life - bird, insect, reptile, and beast - for vast scale - Uganda is truly the Pearl of Africa.

Since then, many a people and institutions have labelled Uganda as one of the nations with the most breathtaking features.

Below is the list of **World Heritage Sites** found in Uganda. A **World Heritage Site** is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as being of special cultural or physical significance.

This list should encourage you to travel and see some of these gorgeous features in Uganda for yourself.

### **1. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park**

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park is best known for its Mountain Gorilla populations and gorilla tracking although, it also offers some of the finest montane forest birding in Africa and is a key destination for any birder doing a Safari to Uganda.

With over 347 species of forest birds recorded in the Park, at least 70 out of 78 montane forest bird species occurring in the Albertine Rift region are found in the forest, and 22 of the 36 endemics.

Located in south-western Uganda, at the junction of the plain and mountain forests, Bwindi Park covers 32,000 ha and is known for its exceptional biodiversity, with more than 160 species of trees and over 100 species of ferns.

Due to its diverse habitats ranging from 1,160 to 2,706 m in altitude, location at the intersection of the Albertine, Congo Basin and Eastern Africa ecological zones, and probable role as a Pleistocene refugium, Bwindi has the highest diversity of tree species (over 200 species including 10 endemics) and ferns (some 104 species) in East Africa, and maybe the most important forest in Africa for montane forest butterflies with 202 species (84% of the country's total), including eight Albertine endemics.

It is also host to a rich fauna including a number of endemic butterflies and one of the richest mammalian assemblages in Africa.

This forest is believed to be a mere remnant of a very large forest which once covered much of western Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Home to almost half (about 340) of the world's mountain gorilla population, Bwindi represents a conservation frontline as an isolated forest of outstanding biological richness surrounded by an agricultural landscape supporting one of the highest rural population densities

in tropical Africa. Community benefits arising from the mountain gorilla and other ecotourism may be the only hope for the future conservation of this unique site.

Overall, Bwindi hosts numerous globally threatened species including high-profile mammals such as mountain gorilla, chimpanzee, l'Hoest's monkey and African elephant; birds such as African green broadbill, Grauer's swamp warbler, Turner's Eremomela, Chapin's flycatcher and Shelley's crimson-wing; and butterflies such as African giant swallowtail and Cream-banded swallowtail.

## **2. Rwenzori Mountains National Park**

Covering nearly 100,000 ha in western Uganda, the Rwenzori Mountains National Park comprises the main part of the Rwenzori mountain chain, which includes Africa's third highest peak (Mount Margherita) at 5109m above sea level—after Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya.

The combination of spectacular snow-capped peaks, glaciers, and V-shaped valleys, fast flowing rivers with magnificent waterfalls, clear blue lakes and unique flora contributes to the area's exceptional natural beauty.

Because of their altitudinal range, and the nearly constant temperatures, humidity and high insolation, the mountains support the richest montane flora in Africa, encompassing the charismatic giant lobelias, groundsels, and giant heathers which have been called "Africa's botanical big game".

The Rwenzori Mountains National Park is just a few kilometers from the equator, where it is contiguous with the Virunga National Park in DRC. The Rwenzori Mountains are the highest and most permanent sources of the River Nile, and constitute a vital water catchment. The Park also supplies local communities with various wild resources and is an important cultural heritage.

There is an outstanding range of species, many of which are endemic to the Albertine Rift and bizarre in appearance.

The natural vegetation has been classified as belonging to five distinct zones, determined largely by altitude and aspect. The higher altitude zones, covered by heath and Afro-alpine moorland, extend from around 3,500 m to the snow line and represent the rarest vegetation types on the African continent.

In terms of fauna, the Rwenzori's have been recognized as an Important Bird Area with 217 bird species recorded to date, a number expected to increase as the park becomes better surveyed.

The montane forests are also a home to threatened species such as the African forest elephant, eastern chimpanzee and l'Hoest's monkey. The endangered Rwenzori black-fronted or red duiker, believed to be a much localized subspecies or possibly a separate species, appears to be restricted to the Park.

### 3. The Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi

The Tombs of Buganda Kings constitute a site embracing 26.8 hectares of Kasubi hillside within Kampala City, Uganda's capital. The site is the major spiritual centre for the Baganda where traditional and cultural practices have been preserved. The Kasubi Tombs are the most active religious place in the kingdom, where rituals are frequently performed.

Its place as the burial ground for the previous four kings (Kabaka's) qualifies it as a religious centre for the royal family, a place where the Kabaka and his representatives carry out important rituals related to Buganda culture. The site represents a place where communication links with the spiritual world are maintained.

Its spatial organization, starting from the border of the site marked with the traditional bark cloth trees, leading through the gatehouse, the main courtyard, and culminating in the large thatched building, housing the tombs of the four Kabakas, represents the best existing example of a Baganda palace/burial site.

At its core on the hilltop is the main tomb building, locally referred to as the "Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga" which is a masterpiece of this ensemble. A tomb building has been in existence since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The latest building was the former palace of the Kabakas of Baganda, built in 1882 and converted into the royal burial ground in 1884. Four royal tombs now lie within the Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga.

The main tomb building, which is circular and surmounted by a dome, is a major example of an architectural achievement that was raised with use of vegetal materials comprised of wooden poles, spear grass, reeds and wattle.

Its unusual scale and outstanding details bear witness to the creative genius of the Baganda and as a masterpiece of form and craftsmanship, it is an exceptional surviving example of an architectural style developed by the powerful Buganda Kingdom since the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

The built and natural elements of the Kasubi Tombs site are charged with historical, traditional, and spiritual values. The structures and the traditional practices that are associated with the site are one of the exceptional representations of the African culture that depict a continuity of a living tradition.

The site's main significance lies in its intangible values of beliefs, spirituality, continuity and identity of the Baganda people. The site serves as an important historical and cultural symbol for Uganda and East Africa as a whole.

However, beyond this list, breathtaking scenes are everywhere in Uganda-- offering a rare package of outstanding natural beauty enhancing its territory with everything from a hospitable people, timeless villages, magnificent parks and pristine scenery.

The internet is awash with pictures manifesting Uganda's incredible beauty, but nothing beats seeing these locations in person!

*Information sourced from African Wildlife Foundation (<http://www.awf.org/>), Uganda Wildlife Authority (<http://www.ugandawildlife.org>) and UNESCO (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/UG/>)*