**KIDEPO VALLEY NATIONAL PARK**

Kidepo Valley national Park is located in Kaabong district in the Karamoja region in northeastern part of Uganda. Kaabongo is the nearest town found on the border between Uganda and South Sudan. Kidepo Valley national Park is Uganda’s most isolated and remote park consisting of hills, rugged savannah plains, surrounded by Morungole Mountains ( 2,750 meters (9,020 ft) and great Valleys. The park has an area coverage of 11442 sq. km (557 sq. mi), it got its name from one of its major attraction the Kidepo Valley.

Kidepo Valley National Park is gifted with two major Valleys Kidepo and Narus, each valley has a river with its same name. these rivers are the major source of water in the ark but dry off in the middle of the dry season leaving the animals to survive on remaining Oasis (small pool). Kidepo Valley National park boasts being the park with the best landscape in the country and together with mountains, semi-arid conditions, Savannah grasslands, great numbers of wildlife gathering in one place and endless plains combined make it the best national park to go for wildlife viewing.

The park was listed among the 3 most attractive parks in the world by CNN Travel. For Travelers who wish to explore Africa’s wilderness before modernity then Kidepo Valley national Park is the only best destination for you and is among the great destinations for a cultural trail especially those who would like to untouched Karamojong culture despite the fast modernization. Kidepo is the only park that can be compared to Kenya’s Masai Mara National park and Tanzania’s Serengeti National Park.

**Wildlife and Bird species in Kidepo Valley National Park.**

Kidepo National Park has wildlife species that can’t be found any other Ugandan National Park.

The park boasts semi-arid endless savanna plains that spread into the horizon beyond eyes can see and in these plains is where high population of wildlife call home. The park is home to over 86 mammal species, 500 bird species though because of the difference in annual rainfall and vegetation between the two valley in the park (Narus and Kidepo Valley) , wildlife population also varies with Narus Valley hosting the most.

Some of the wildlife species in the park include Spotted Hyenas, Lions, African Leopards, Cheetahs, African Wild Dogs, African Bush Elephants, Zebras, African Buffaloes, Bat-eared fox, Rothschild’s Giraffes, aardwolf, caracal, Jackals, Klipspringer, Antelope species include elands, Bohor reed buck, Bush buck, Bush duskier, Defassa water buck, Jackson’s hartebeest, Reedbuck, kudu, Oribi, Uganda Kobs.

Over 500 bird species some of which include Ostriches, Verreaux’s Eagle, Yellow-billed hornbill, Kori bustard, Karamoja Apalis, Jackson’s Hornbill, Northern carmine bee-eaters, Pygmy Falcon, Egyptian Vulture, Secretary birds, little green bee-eaters, Abyssinian roller among other species.

**History of Kidepo Valley National Park**

Kidepo National park was first gazette as a game reserve in 1958 y the Colonial British Government, the main reason behind it was to protect the wildlife from excess poaching, clearing and burning the vegetation by the Dodoth and IK as away of controlling tsetse flies in the park that caused sleeping sickness to people and Nagana to their cattle. In 1962 following Uganda’s independence under president Milton Obote the game reserve was upgraded to National A park level and renamed Kidepo Valley National Park.

**Important places to visit While on a Safari in Kidepo Valley National Park / Must Visit Places in Kidepo .**

**Apoka Tourism Center**

Apoka Tourism center is the hub for all tourism activities in the park, the center is beautifully built overlooking the great Narus Valley. Because of its strategic location overlooking the Narus Valley, during the dry season tourists can spot animals as they got quench their thirst at the Narus River. Most of the Uganda Wildlife Authority staffs (UWA ) are stationed, all the army park rangers plus guides ready to escort you into the deeper ends of the park while on a game drive.

A few lodges are built around the center some of them owned by UWA.

Cooking equipment for those who wish to go camping can be booked at the center. N**ote** that other souvenirs can be got from the craft shops like Soda, Drinking water, Alcohol, Books among others. The center also provides safari vehicles for hire for those without proper Safari Vehicles.

**Narus Valley**

The Narus Valley is the most important gathering place for wildlife in the park and one of the famous gathering place for wildlife in Africa. The valley is surrounded by mountainous landscape and covered with rolling savannah grasslands. Down the valley is where the major water source of the wildlife in the park is the Narus River. The Narus River dries off during the driest season of the ear leaving mud ponds and the artificial Narus water dam as the only source of water for the animals.

Possible sightings of wildlife at the valley include Jackson’s hartebeests, Leopards, Buffaloes, Cheetahs, Giraffes, Lions, Oribis, reedbucks among others.

**Kidepo Valley**

Kidepo Valley is the second-best place to sight on wildlife in the place, unlike the Narus Valley, the water here is very scarce during the dry season, when River Kidepo dries off only a long trail of white sand is left behind. A number of bird species call this area home like Ostriches.

**Kanangorok Hot Springs**

Kanangorok Hot Springs are situated past the Kidepo River and Valley along the border of Uganda and South Sudan. These Springs are the best place to view the mountain rages clearly.

**Morungule Mountains**

On the mountains is where the Ik people leave and also act as boundaries of the par., these mountains rise up to 2,750 meters tall. They can be hiked with the help of park ranger

**Namamukweny Valley**

The valley is located in the northwestern part of the park. the Valley is a birder’s haven with several bird species like Common Bulbul, White-crested Turaco, Green Wood Hoopoe, Eastern Paradise Whydah, Abyssinian Roller among others thrive in this isolated valley.

The Valley’s name Namamukweny means a place of few people or birds in native Napore language. **.**

**Lomej Hills**

Lomej Hills are located near the park headquarters, perfect for bird and wildlife sighing like the mountain reedbucks.

**Lonyili Mountain**

Lonyili Mountain is located in Kitgum district on the border between Uganda and South Sudan. The mountain is a home to small primates like Colobus Monkeys.

**Note;** visitors need specials guidance and permission to hike these mountains.

**Things to do in Kidepo Valley National Park**

**Game Drive**

Game drives are the best way to get a close view of the park’s wildlife in a 4x4 Safari vehicle. Though the roads in the park are murram they are passable throughout the year and also offer areal feeling of untouched nature, most of the small roads leading to the remote areas are hard to pass through during the wet season. Game drives are only done in 4x4 Wheel drive Safari Vehicles making navigation and driving through most roads easy. All vehicles are accompanied with an armed park ranger.

Possible sightings during game drive include Lions, Buffaloes, Elephants, Zebras, Hartebeests, Antelopes.

**Nature Walks and Hikes.**

Hiking the Morungole mountains is most popular hiking activity in the park, nature walks to the dream lodge built but incomplete by Uganda’s most famous president Idi Amin Dada.

**Note;** nature walks and hikes are only done under guidance of armed park rangers.

**Birdwatching**

Because most parts of the park are virgin and rarely visited, they are home to countless number of bird specie. The park is best known for housing birds of prey namely Pygmy Falcon, Verreaux’s Eagle, Egyptians Vulture to mention but a few. other bird species are Ostriches only found in Kidepo in Uganda and the zoo and other animal reserves, for their conservation and increase their number the UWA collects their eggs from bushes and hatch them artificially.

**Visiting the Karamojong**

Karamojong’s are nomadic pastoralists who inhabit the northeastern part of Uganda including some areas neighboring the park. Karamojong are related to the Masai of Kenya and they are to Uganda what the Masai are to Kenya. Just like the Masai Karamojong’s believe all cattle on earth belong to them and their lives are centered around their animals.

Karamojong raid their neighboring tribes’ cows because they believe all animals that don’t belong to them must have been stole from them at some point in the past. These raids because bloody when they got their hands-on guns in the 70’s and 80’s , luckily the government has disarmed them of recent. Despite the high speed of civilization, the Karamojong’s culture remains untouched. A cultural visit to these people is very interesting because still live as they used a thousand years back unveiling to you to true untouched African Culture and how Africans lived before colonization.

**Visiting the IK People**

The Ik people live on Mountain Morungole in an isolated life. The Ik are believed to have migrated from Ethiopia and settled around Kidepo, they lived in the area before the arrival of the Karamojong.

The Ik people were forced into the mountains because of constant fights with their neighbors the Karamojong and other tribes like the Dodoth. A visit to the Ik people is considered one of the best cultural experiences in Uganda.

**Why Does Kidepo National Park receive few visitors despite being such a true wilderness with amazing landscape and wildlife.**

One of the many reason why Kidepo receive few tourist despite all its virgin treasures as already mentioned is remoteness, the park requires several hours to reach unlike other Ugandan National Park that take few other to reach for visitors who can afford a flight from Entebbe to the park and despise long drive. The other reason Kony rebellion in the 80’s and 90’s highly affected the image of the area and the park.

The park is also located in a neglected area by the previous and current governments of Uganda, Local people here are rarely appointed to influential government positions. The road to the park took many years to be tarmacked. The last reason but very crucial is that the park is not properly marketed by the Ugandan Government.

**How to reach Kidepo National Park**

The park can be accessed by Road and Air.

**By Road**

Kidepo Valley National Park is approximately 521 kilometers from Kampala city. The Park is 219 kilometer from Moroto town.

**By Air.**

This is the most convenient way to get to the park though the road is the most rewarding. The flight is from Entebbe airport or Kajjansi airstrip along Entebbe.

**When to Visit Kidepo Valley National Park**

Kidepo Valley National Park is open to tourists all year round, though wildlife viewing is best done in dry months of December-March and July-August. During the dry season all water bodies in the park dry leaving small oasis where animals gather for water making it easy to sight on them. In the rainy season there is a number of water source hence animals scatter to feed in small groups making sighting difficult.

Best time for bird watching and game viewing is during the short rains. Offer amazing greenery perfect for photography. During the rainy season some animals move to high grounds to avoid getting wet.

**Accommodation in Kidepo Valley National Park**

Kidepo had fewer visitors compared to other Ugandan game parks. Some of the accommodation Options include Apoka Safari lodge, Nga’Moru Wilderness Camp, Apoka Rest Camp, Kidepo Savannah Lodge.