**MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK IN UGANDA/ KABALEGA NATIONAL PARK**

Murchison Falls Nation Park locally known as Kabalega National Park was founded in 1952 and is covering an area of 1503 square miles making it the largest park in Uganda. The park is situated in the North western region of Uganda in the Districts of Kiryandingo, Masindi, Bulisa and Nwoya . the park’s main attraction is the thunderous Murchison Falls where the park also derives its name.

Murchison Falls National Park is endowed with beautiful sceneries especially River Nile which flows through the park and the Murchison falls which have an astonishing look. Murchison falls was named by one of the famous British explore Sir Samuel baker who was mesmerized by the looks of the falls and there after the Name was transferred to park, the largest part of Murchison falls National Park mainly consists of wetlands open plains Savannah grass lands and woodlands .the park is part of the Murchison falls conservation area which includes Bugungu Wild life Reserves and Karuma Falls . the park boasts large forests like kaniyo Papidi which mainly contains large Mahogany and iron wood trees, Budongo Forest and Rubago Forests. The forests are prominent Habitats of various bird species and primates like Chimpanzees, Blue monkeys , black and white colobus monkeys and olive Baboons.

The Uganda dictator IdI Amin attempted to rename the falls to Kabarega falls ( in memory of the king of Bunyoro) but this only survived in his regime. The park is a wild life conservation unit with over 76 species of mammals with lions inclusively and over 445bird species .a large number of mammals were lost due to poaching and hunting in the 1970’s and this led to the extinction of the few white Rhinos that roamed the park but they is an attempt to re-introduce to the park from Ziwa Rhino sanctuary near the park by Uganda Wildlife Authority. The Uganda Wild Life Authority has tried to eradicate the vice of poaching although still present but on a small scale.

The key attraction points are the Savannah grasslands ,Nile river, and the forests inclusive the Rabongo ,Budongo and the Kaniyo Papidi forests. Murchison Falls National Park was sold to the world after the Film “African Queen” by Starring Humphrey Bogart in the park at the Nile and Albert Lake.

The park was also affected by the Konni rebellion in the 19190’s where by some countries declared it a no-go zone for the citizens but since 2005 peace has returned to the and there has been an increment in the number of tourist visiting the area

**WILD LIFE IN MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK**

The park is home to over 144 mammal species, 51 Amphibians, 51 reptiles namely Elephants, Buffaloes, Giraffes, Lions, Leopards, Hippos, Crocodiles, Hyenas, Bushbucks, Warthogs, Uganda Kobs, Hartebeests, Chimpanzees, Baboons, black and white colobus monkeys, Blue monkeys, Side striped Jackals, Monitor lizards, Defassa Waterbucks, Bohor Reedbucks, Patas Monkeys, Pythons like African rock pythons, mambas, cobras among others.

**BIRD SPECIES IN THE PARK**

Murchison Falls National Park boasts being one of the best birding destinations in Uganda with overs 556 recorded bird species namely Black Scimitar bill, billed Barbet, Black billed wood dove, Black-headed Gonolek, Bluff-bellied warbler, Denham’s Bustard, Eastern Grey Plantain, Giant Kingfisher, Long tailed Night Jar, Grey winged Ptyilia, Black faced Waxbill, Black crake, African Fish Eagle, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, African Quail-Finch, Black Scimitar bill, Thrush Spotted Owl, Sulphur-breasted bush shrike, Vaseline Masked Weaver to mention but a few.

**MURCHISON FALLS**

Murchison Falls are the major tourist attraction in park as earlier mentioned, the falls are very beautiful to watch. Murchison Falls are most powerful water falls on the planet- Nile waters passes through a small gorge of 8m wide and plunges 42m forming a dramatic fall reacting a thunderous roar of the heavily falling waters into the “Devil’s Cauldron”, the falling water form a mist and together with sun rays create an eye-catching rainbow. After the heavy fall the waters form a very calm flow forming the River Nile where the wildlife call home like Crocodiles, Elephants, Fish species, Hippos and countless bird species and is where cruise launch and spot fishing takes place.

While at the top of the falls you will notice at the ground seems to be shaking because of the heavily falling waters.

**ATTRACTION AND ACTIVITIES IN MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK**

**Visiting the Top of the Murchison Falls**

Visiting the top of the Murchison Falls is second to no other activity in the park, the first sight of the falls from the top is amazing and one of the most memorable events in the park. the rainbow formed by the mist and sun raises is eye catching, the mist has a cooling effect especially after the long day of adventure. If you’re not ready to wet your clothes have a natural shower and enjoy what nature and life have to offer you don’t hike to the top of the falls. The top of the falls offers unremarkable views of the mighty Murchison falls and the thunderous roars of the water rushing down to the river to calm down and flow smoothly.

Sight on the small Uhuru falls before the Murchison falls and don’t miss out the one spot the crocodile bar this is where crocodiles of all sizes gather and lay patiently waiting for unlucky animals and fish dragged down by the water and make them their meal.

**Boat Cruise up to the bottom of the falls**

This one of the must do activities while in the park and is just like the launch cruise on the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park. the cruise takes you to the bottom of the Murchison falls and last about 3 hours while on the cruise tourists stand a chance to sight on Buffaloes, Hippos, crocodiles, Elephants and antelopes along the shores and countless bird species like the rare Shoebill stork, Kingfisher, Fish Eagle, Herons, Ducks, Bee-eaters.

**Boat ride to the Nile Delta**

The Nile Delta is the point where Nile river connects to the Lake Albert, this activity is perfect for birders. It involves cruising beyond the Usual Launch cruise stop then take a turn stream up to the Nile Delta. More mammals are a must sight on, then spot various bird species including the rare Shoebill Stork, King Fisher, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, African Quail-Finch, Black-lored Babbler among others.

**Karuma Falls**

Karuma Falls are found near Gulu district in the north-eastern section of Murchison Falls National Park. the falls are formed at the point where the River Nile waters squeeze through several rocks and then drop with a roar. The waters from by the rushing river and rocks are very white are beautiful to sight on. The area is also home to a number of wildlife life and various bird species like Baboons, Buffaloes, Monkeys, Antelopes, Lions, Uganda Kobs, Hartebeest, Giraffes etc.

**Game Drive**

Just all other Safari game parks in Uganda, game drives are the best way to get a close encounter to the ark’s wildlife. The park offers morning, afternoon and night game drives and last 2- 3 hours. Possible sightings include Leopards, Spotted Hyenas, Warthogs, Monitor Lizards, Lions, Giraffes, Buffaloes, Hippos, Bush bucks, Baboons, Black and White Colobus Monkeys, Serval Cats, Reptiles, Vervet Monkeys, Hartebeests, Oribis, Bohor Reedbucks among others.

**Fishing**

Murchison Falls National park is one of the best fishing destinations in Uganda. Fishing can either be done on a boat cruise along the Nile River or stand at the bottom of the falls and through the line, fishing can also be arranged at Karuma falls or even on one of the pools on the river side. Some of the common fish caught include Tiger Fish, Tilapia, Nile Perch. The biggest ever caught fish was a Nile Perch weighing over 200 pounds and can still be caught.

**Note;** One is required to acquire a fishing license and carry their own fishing gears.

**Forest and Nature Walks**

Forest walks can be done in Rabongo and Budongo Forest or even Chobe. The Forest walks are mostly for study purposes, birding and primate watching like Monkeys and Chimpanzees.

**Note** that the walks are only led an experienced guide or park ranger who is well familiar with the forest and well knowledgeable about the species in the forest.

**Bird watching**

Murchison Falls National park is one of the best birding destinations in Uganda and Africa as a whole, the park is home to thousands of different bird species, bird watching can be combined with other activities like game drives, nature walk, boat cruise. The park offers countless opportunities to sight on different bird species like water, migratory and forest birds. Some of the bird species to sight on include Black Crake, Black-headed Gondola, Blue-naped Moosebird, Shoebill Stork, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver, Denham’s Bustard, African Quail-Finch, Abdi’s Stork, African Jacana, Black-headed plover, Bluff-bellied Warbler among others.

**Chimpanzee Tracking in Budongo Forest**

Murchison Falls is the second-best place to sight on chimpanzees in their natural home Kibale National Park. the park has a healthy population of Chimpanzees calling Budongo Forest their home, during this activity tourist are given a chance to hike into the forest looking for these Apes one foot in their natural home while also adventuring the tropical rainforest.

**Note;** This activity is only led by experienced park ranger guide whoa re well versed with the forest, trails to use and how to behave while in the forest.

**Hot Air Balloon Wildlife Viewing**

The park was the first place to launch hot air balloon followed by Queen Elizabeth National Park that has just introduced it recently. This is an opportunity for tourist to view the park and its wildlife from above the ground.

**Camping**

Camping requires one to carry their own camping gears, it can be arranged with in the lodges but they are more fun and preferred in the forest or wilderness like in Kaniyo Pabidi forest. The camps only provide firewood, water and tents, you need to bring your own food and equipment or hire them at the lodge or park authorities.

**Cultural Encounter/ Cultural Visit**

What’s a trip to Africa without engaging in cultural visits, this activity in Murchison takes you to Boom Village, the visit can be for a few hours or take a whole day with the Boom Women’s group. The women offer accommodation, village tours and shops of their hand made African craft art. Engage in local meal tasting, sleeping in a traditional African hut, storytelling, learn how they manage their day to day activities among others.

**How to get to Murchison Falls National Park**

Murchison Falls National Park can be accessed by road and Air transport

**By Road;**

Murchison Falls is approximately 305 km from Kampala/Entebbe about 4-5 hours drive. The park is 280km from Fort Portal. Private and Public transport can be used to access the park though public vehicles are not allowed inside.

**By Air;**

Charted flight can be arranged from Entebbe international airport or Kajjansi airfield to Pakuba airfield or Bugundu and Chobe airstrips near the park. then your guide driver picks you up and transfer to the Park HQ or Accommodation.

**What’s the best time to Visit Murchison Falls National Park**

Murchison Falls National Park welcome and is open to tourists all year through, though just like any other Ugandan Safari game part its best to visit during the dry season in the months of June to September and January to Mid-March.

**Accommodation Options in Murchison Falls National Park**

Visitors to Murchison Falls shouldn’t worry about where to host their nights because the park has a number of accommodation facilities for all pockets ranging from Luxury, Mid-range and Budget some of which include Nile Safari Lodge, Paara Safari Lodge, Red Chilli Rest Camp, Sambiya River Lodge, Pakuba Safari Lodge, Murchison River Lodge, Masindi Hotel to mention but a few.