**QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK**

Queen Elizabeth National park is Uganda’s most popular and visited national park by both local and international tourists. the park is situated in western part of the country spanning in Kamwenge, Rubirizi, Kasese and Rukingiri districts, it borders Kibale National Park in Uganda and also an extension of DR Congo’s Virunga National Park. the park gained popularity when its name was changed from Kazinga National park to Queen Elizabeth national park after Queen Elizabeth II (late) of England as a way of commemorating her visit to Uganda.

Queen Elizabeth National park has an area coverage of 764 square Miles (1978 Square Kilometers) making it the second largest park in Uganda after Murchison Falls National Park. Queen Elizabeth National Park is located with in the rain shadows of Rwenzori Mountain ranges meaning the park doesn’t receive long droughts like Kenya’s Masai Mara and Serengeti National Park of Tanzania as a result the Park boasts green scenery through out the year. The park’s sheer natural beauty alone wood still amuse and attract tourist to the park made up of Woodlands, Lakes, Great forests, Plains, Rivers, Gorges , Volcanic features like deep craters like Lake Katwe and Volcanic cones.

The park plus the adjacent Virunga National Park of DR Congo were declared lion conservation unit with over 200 lion individuals in 2006 including the unique and intriguing tree climbing lions because they were considered potential lion strong holds in East Africa. The park is home to over 95 mammal species namely Warthogs, Topis, Lions, Uganda kobs, Water bucks, Spotted hyenas, Sitatunga, Serval Cats, Mangoose, Large Forest pigs, Leopards, L’Hoest’s monkeys, Hippos, Jackals, Elephants, Civets, Crocodiles, Buffaloes, Chimpanzees, White and Black Colobus Monkeys. Over 490 bird species call the park home, 10 primate species and over 20 carnivores. The park is one of the few conservation areas where human activities take place like mining in Lake Katwe.

The park is managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority together with several wildlife conservation organizations plus team of international and local researchers.

**HISTORY OF QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK**

The park was first gazetted in 1952 as Kazinga National Park by combining Lake George and Lake Edward game reserves and in 1954 it was it renamed as Queen Elizabeth National Park following the Queen’s visit in Uganda in the 1950’s which impressed the government so much hence naming the park after her. The Basongora people who lived in the park where forced to flee out in 2006.

**ATTRACTIONS IN QUEEN ELIZAETH NATIONAL PARK**

**Game Drive**

Game Drives are the best way to get a close encounter with all animals in Savannah Parks. During a game drive in Queen Elizabeth National Park tourist will sight on all the wildlife they would see in the Serengeti but with better landscape and scenery like savannah grasslands, Forests, Swamp lands, Crater lakes, Acacia woods, Gorge and magical sighting of the Rwenzori mountain ranges.

The park offer both morning and afternoon game drives that last 3-4 hours of searching and sighting on wildlife in any of the 3 park sectors that Ishasha best for tree climbing lions or the Katwe crater fields, Kasenyi plain best for sighting on the Kazinga channel and the Kyambura gorge best for primates especially the Chimpanzees, lastly the Mweya sector. Which ever sector you choose for a game drive prepare to be guided by a park guide and sight on Lions, Leopards( if lucky enough), Elephants, Hyenas, Buffaloes, Antelopes, Uganda Kobs, Crocodiles, Elephant’s flamingos, primates and countless bird species.

**Bird Watching**

Queen Elizabeth national Park is one of the best birding destinations in Uganda, the bird observatory will provide you with the list of all bird found in the park. these bird species inhabit places like the Budongo forest, Kazinga Channel, craters, the plains, gorges like Kyambura gorge.

Millions of migratory birds fly from Europe to the park to escape the harsh winters. Some of the bird species to sight on include Spotted Redshank, Slender-tailed mourning, Slender-billed, Dove, Saddle-billed storks, Shoebill Stork, Whalberg’s Eagle, Winding and Carruther’s cisticolas, Weavers, Yellow throated cuckoo, Yellow-backed, Sedge warbles, Red-chested sunbirds, Pin-tailed whydah, Papyrus Gonolek, Open-billed stork, Northern Pochard, Little stint, Lesser and Greater Flamingos, Common Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Gabon and Slender-tailed Nightjars, Chapin’s Flycatcher, Brimstone canary, African Open-billed stork, African Mourning Dove, African Harrier Hawk, African Broadbill to mention but a few.

**Launch Cruise**

Boat cruise in the park take place at the famous Kazinga Channel one of the best places to sight on wildlife in Africa. The channel connects Lake George to lake Edward and is the major source of water in the park where most animals come to quench their thirst, hunt and bathe. During bird migratory season birds that can be found at the channel are more than those found in north America, this bird life will impress even those that have done birding in other safari destinations. Possible sightings at the channel include Hippos, Crocodiles rule the waters, Elephants, Antelopes, Leopards, warthogs , countless bird species among others.

**Spot Tree Climbing Lions**

The park boast being the best place in the world to sight on the rare tree climbing lions nested in its Ishasha sector. These lions are not sub-species or different from lions of Kasenyi rather these lions just adapted the habit of climbing trees after hunting also avoiding insects and parasites on the ground (scientist haven’t come up with a clear theory as to why these lions climb trees). The sector also has other animals like Buffaloes, Antelopes, Elephants, warthogs among others.

The sector is located near the high way to Bwindi hence a combined Safari can be arranged with a stopover to sight on lions while on your Gorilla Trekking Safari.

**Chimpanzees Trekking at the Kyanbura Gorge**

Chimpanzees in the park can be tracked in the Kyambura gorge, these species are on of the intriguing primates on the planet very intelligent more than the larger gorillas. The gorge a valley 16km long, 100 meters deep, 500 meters wide located in the western sector of the ark that was formed by the strong waters of Kyambura river, its now covered with thick vegetation, forest and water streams.

The gorge is not only home to chimpanzees rather other primate species like Black and White colobus monkeys, Baboons, Red tailed monkeys etc. the gorge also offers sighting on birds, butterflies, snakes, vegetation types. These all can be spotted from the viewing platform.

**Nature Walks at the Maramagambo Forest**

Maramagambo Forest is very popular especially for bird lovers. The walk in the forest are organized using established trails, hikers stand a chance to learn about forest conservation as well as spotting birds, primates, crater lakes and other forest creatures.

The forest is home to over 9 primate species namely L’Hoest’s Monkeys, Vervet Monkeys, Bush baby, red-tailed monkeys, baboons. Visit caves that are home to thousands of bats and pythons this is viewed from a safe view point. Chimpanzee can be sighted on though they are not habituated.

**Vising Lake Katwe Salt mine**

Lake Katwe is one of the best salt mines in East Africa. Salt mining has been done at katwe for centuries and was very lucrative till other salt mine sources and methods were discovered.

Salt is mined here using hands despite the dangers, mostly in the dry season locals gather to remove salt from the milky water. Most of the salt used in Uganda homes is got from lake Katwe.

**Cultural Tours**

A trip to any Uganda or Africa destination is incomplete without tasting on the rich culture. A cultural visit can be arranged to visit the Kikorongo Equator Cultural group. Cultural visits are very fun and full of life, tourist can be taught how to make local art crafts, storytelling through music dance and drama, buy some souvenirs to support their livelihood.

**Hot Air Balloon Rides**

This is a newly introduced activity in the ark borrowed from Murchison Falls National Park, this offers visitors a chance to have an Ariel view of the park and its wildlife.

**WHATS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK**

Queen Elizabeth welcomes visitors all year round though the best time to visit is during the dry season in the months of June-September and December-January, during these months’ roads are less slippery and less muddy, wildlife gather around the major sources of water making easy to sight on them, vegetation is less thick and clear making spotting animals easy.

During rainy season its always likely to rain interfering with safari plans, animals quench their thirst from wherever making sighting a little bit hard.

**ACCESSING QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK**

Tourists can access the park by both road and air transport.

**By Road;**

The park approximately 420 km about 8hours drive from Kampala/ Entebbe to Queen Elizabeth National Park. From Fort Portal town the park is a 4 hours’ drive and from Lake Mburo it’s a 6 hours’ drive. The main roads are well tarmacked but those leading the park are of hard murram and also inside the park.

One can use private or public vehicles to get the park but public vehicles aren’t allowed inside the park. **the best way to travel to the park is through tour operators.**

**By Air;**

Visitor can hire a chartered flight from Kampala/ Entebbe International Airport or Kajjansi airstrip to Ishasha, Mweya or Kasese sector of the park, there after a private car takes you to hotel or Park HQ. A guide driver from Kilagala Escape Safaris will be waiting for your arrival at the airstrip and transfer you to either a hotel or Park HQ.

**ACCOMMODATION IN QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK**

Visitors to the park shouldn’t worry about where to host their night while in the park because the park has a number of accommodation option both inside and out side ranging from Luxury, Mid-range and Budget. Some of the accommodation Options include Queen Elizabeth Bush Lodge, Jacana Safari lodge, Hippo Hill Camp, Mweya Safari Lodge, Kyambura Gorge Lodge, Katara Lodge, Ishasha Wildlife Camp to mention but a few.