



Volunteering at Uganda Lodge



Hello! Agandi! Karibu!

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at Uganda Lodge Community Projects. We hope that this guide will give you a better idea of what to expect. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.



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Location

Uganda Lodge is on the main Mbarara-Kabale Road in the small parish of Ruhanga in the south-west corner of Uganda, close to the borders with Rwanda and the DRC.

Ruhanga is 320km from Kampala (6-7 hours drive) and 55km from the city of Mbarara (45 minutes drive). Ntungamo is the closest town to the lodge, approximately 10 km away (8 mins drive).

Most of the people living around Uganda Lodge are subsistence farmers and their homes are spread out over the hillside among the banana trees, with beautiful views in all directions along the valley. Ruhanga Development Nursery and Primary School is next to the lodge and the McNeil Medical Centre and Vocational Training Workshops are directly opposite.



Accommodation

Uganda Lodge has 20+ guest rooms, each accommodating between 1 and 4 people. All rooms



have hot water showers and plug sockets (UK 3-pin). Flush toilets are in a separate block close to the rooms. Each room looks out over a pretty garden area with stunning views of the surrounding hills. It is usually possible to have your own room, but you may need to share during busy periods. Bedding, towels and mosquito nets are all provided. Please bring a medium-size padlock with you for your door.

In the lodge grounds there is a large covered dining area, a bar and several thatched gazebos for relaxing under. A camp-fire is lit in the bar area at night where volunteers can play pool and darts or simply relax and enjoy a few drinks. Ruhanga is 1,500 metres above sea-level so is a very pleasant climate, it can be hot in the day but not humid and it cools down most evenings.

Rates

We ask **£100 Admin/Booking Fee** and for full board, including all meals at Uganda Lodge its just **£140 per person per week**. If you plan to stay with us longer than 10 weeks, we may be able to offer you a discounted rate. Any profits are reinvested into Ruhanga Development Nursery & Primary School and other projects that benefit the rural communities. Please note: if you go on a safari you still pay for and keep your room. The cost of this is taken into account with our pricing.

Food and Drink

Breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and evening meals are provided daily on a self-service basis. Meals consist of a variety of different vegetables and sauces with meat or fish being offered a few times a week. Mashed or boiled potatoes, chips, matoke, spaghetti or rice are the usual accompaniments. Please advise us in advance if you have any special dietary requirements. Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and bottled water can be bought at the on-site bar. Luxury items such as Nescafe, Pringles and Cadburys can be bought locally, but we advise bringing your favourite coffee or herbal tea bags and snacks as local options may not be to your taste and are very limited.

Electricity

Whilst there is mains electricity at the lodge, local and regional power cuts can occur, sometimes for a few hours at a time. As such, we recommend you bring one or more torches with you. There is a solar charging point, but we advise that you bring your own portable USB power bank with you.

Staying in Touch

You can buy a Ugandan SIM card in town, which you can load with texts, calls, tax and data and there is now 4G coverage at the lodge. If you bring a laptop with, you can use your phone as a mobile hotspot. Its safe to keep laptops & tablets in your room as you should keep your key and only allow staff in when you are there. There are several hotels in Ntungamo which may have free Wi-Fi and the town also has an internet café.

Money

Uganda's official currency is the Ugandan Shilling, which cannot be purchased outside the country. We recommend bringing cash in Pounds Sterling, (or US Dollars/Euros) in clean, large denomination notes, which can be exchanged once in the country. There are 2 ATMs in the local town, which accept Visa Debit/Credit Cards. **Please do not rely on Mastercard, Travel Money Cards or Travellers Cheques as these are generally not accepted.** If planning on travelling to other East African countries, US Dollars might be the best currency to bring.

Weather

The weather in Ruhanga is usually warm-hot during the day (20-28°C), but at 1500m above sea level it can get rather chilly at night (approx. 15°C). June and July are generally the driest months, with October-November and April-May usually being the wettest. When it does rain, it's usually only heavy for an hour or two before the sun returns. It gets dark at about 7pm each night and light around 6.30am each morning, year-round.

Laundry

Plastic basins/buckets are provided in each room for washing your clothes and there are plenty of clothes lines in the lodge grounds. Laundry detergent can be bought locally. For a small fee, lodge staff will do your laundry (except underwear).

Security

Although the lodge is in a safe area and extremely unlikely to attract any negative attention, there are security guards at the lodge throughout the day and night.

Volunteering

Solo travellers, friends, families and groups are all welcome to volunteer and there is no age restriction. Under 18's should travel with an older responsible friend and have written permission from a parent/guardian. We recommend a stay of 3 weeks or longer if possible as this will give you sufficient time to not only make friends and a valuable contribution to the local community but also to visit some of the incredible places Uganda has to offer.

We do not charge any extra fees for volunteering – you only pay for your board and lodging at Uganda Lodge. However, we do ask if volunteers will donate or fundraise £100 or more to help towards maintaining the school and the building of new classrooms etc. It is much appreciated if you can add a Donate button on Facebook or set up your own fundraising page here:

www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ruhanga

Activities

There are many different volunteering activities to take part in and volunteers generally choose what they would like to do once they arrive; we are flexible and don't have a strict daily routine. Medical Electives can choose to split their time with the local Government hospital, our Medical Centre and working within the local community. We always have a local Co-ordinator on hand to show you around the area and help with activities etc. Ruhanga Development Nursery and Primary School, McNeil Medical Centre, Ruhanga Vocational Training Centre and all other Uganda Lodge projects are locally owned and managed by the Ugandan NGO 'Stand on Your Own', which is supported by the UK charity 'Uganda Lodge Community Projects', registered charity number 1150023.

Ruhanga Development Nursery & Primary School



Opened in 2008 with only 8 pupils, we now have over 500 students in 3 Nursery & 7 Primary classes We have 17 teachers plus a Bursar & many other non-teaching staff. 200 of our children are Boarders, and some stay throughout the year except for the Christmas period. During term-time you can work alongside the local teachers delivering a variety of subjects to children aged between 3 and 18. In the morning, you can serve porridge to the school children, who often leave home

without any breakfast. At break times and after school you can organise sports, music or arts and crafts activities, as well as tutoring the children that board. You can also provide additional special lessons on topics such as health, hygiene and domestic issues, or work more closely with the teachers on the school syllabus.

Volunteers are asked not to form close relationships with any specific children or families, but to divide their time equally between all, and give presents to none, unless its something like buying extra fruit or meat for the whole school.

School term times each year are roughly: **Term 1:** End of January – End of April

Term 2: Mid May – End of August **Term 3:** mid-September to early December

During school holidays, volunteers can run holiday activities for the local children, redecorate the classrooms and dormitories, assist at the Medical Centre and make home visits to elderly/sick or disabled members of the local community.



McNeil Medical Centre and Itojo District Hospital

The McNeil Medical Centre provides the local community with affordable healthcare and offers routine clinical care, health education, community outreach and regular baby and immunisation/ vaccination clinics. Our own school students are also all treated for free. Healthcare professionals, including doctors, students, nurses, midwives, lab technicians, dentists and opticians are welcome to volunteer at our clinic. Fully qualified professionals plus Medical Electives are also able to assist at the nearby Itojo Government Hospital and learn from, work with, or help train local staff. Even if you have no medical qualifications, you can assist with baby clinics, help with admin and make home visits. ***We do not charge any additional fee for medical elective students.***

Other Volunteering Activities

Other activities include painting, building, carpentry, sewing, hair & beauty, gardening or helping in the community. If you have specialised skills that may benefit the local community, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you.

Safeguarding

To protect the children and vulnerable people our community projects support, volunteers are required to send us a criminal record check or police check from their country of residence or two personal references from non-relatives that have known them at least 3 years and who can comment on your suitability to volunteer with children and vulnerable individuals.

Getting to Uganda Lodge

All international flights arrive at Entebbe International Airport (EBB), which is the main airport in Uganda. Skyscanner is a good website to search for cheap flights. Look for flights that allow 2 x 23kgs luggage so you can take out unwanted toys, clothes and shoes etc.

Getting from the airport into Kampala and onto the right bus to Uganda Lodge is not easy and a little daunting, even for the most seasoned of travellers and particularly at night. As such, we advise volunteers to make use of our airport pick-up service for £55 per person or £40 each for two or more people booking and travelling together. This includes airport pick-up, private vehicle to Kampala bus station, bus ticket and, if needed, overnight or a few hours rest at our Kampala Guesthouse. For £30 extra we can arrange for an escort to travel with you on the bus. Alternatively, a private car from Kampala will cost £160 extra between two or three arriving on the same flight.

After approximately 6 hours, you will arrive directly outside Uganda Lodge. On arrival after a friendly greeting, you will be shown to your guest room and around the lodge and various community projects. All Uganda Lodge guests are required to have an orientation interview/tour and complete a lodge guest form when they arrive.

Lodge Staff will help arrange your return journey to Kampala/Entebbe a few days before you leave. You should allow approximately £50 to cover your bus fare, pick-up from Kampala bus station and then a private vehicle back to Entebbe Airport. A few hours rest at our Kampala Guest House is included for free if needed. Additional overnight stays are 50,000 UGX (approx. £12) for a single room and 80,000 UGX (approx. £18) for two of you, with breakfast included if required.

Local Transport

Uganda Lodge has its own vehicles and drivers that can take volunteers to nearby towns and attractions for very reasonable fees. While this is the recommended mode of transport, there are also shared minibus taxis (matatus) and motorbike taxis (boda-bodas) that pass the lodge.

Profits from all our Treks Trips and Safaris are fed back into supporting our projects

We offer some fantastic trips at incredibly low prices and here are some of our most popular:

Queen Elizabeth National Park 3-day Safari



Queen Elizabeth National Park, 3 hours from the lodge, is Uganda's most popular tourist destination and favourite safari for our visitors. It is home to more than 95 mammal species, including 4 of the 'Big 5' (rhinos are only found in Uganda in Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary), and an incredible 600 bird species. You are likely to see many elephants, the famous tree-climbing lions of Ishasha, Uganda Kob, waterbucks, warthogs, hippos, buffaloes and crocodiles, among many others. You may even see hyenas or an elusive leopard!

Our fully inclusive 3-day safari to Queen Elizabeth National Park is **only £320 per person**, based on four or more participants. This includes transport from/to the lodge, game drives in a 4x4 vehicle, fuel, driver, park entrance fees, boat cruise, Guest House accommodation alongside the park and all meals. We strongly advise booking in advance to ensure a place is available on a suitable date. If there are less than 4 participants, you can each add a small surcharge, or maybe the programme can be amended. Frequently visitors ask to stay an extra night as they are enjoying themselves so much.



Gorilla Trekking

Only 800 Mountain Gorillas remain in the wild today as a result of poaching, civil war, disease and habitat destruction – one population in Uganda's Bwindi National Park and another in the Virunga



Mountains that border Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC.

Our gorilla trekking trips are usually taken in Mgahinga National Park as the general consensus is that the forest is less dense and than in Bwindi and also often the trekking groups are smaller than the maximum of 8. **The cost is now £880 per person or only £800 per person if two or more volunteers trek together.** Included is your gorilla permit, guides, trek leaders, transport from/to the lodge, overnight accommodation and all meals.

Only 80 gorilla permits are issued daily, with a maximum of 8 people per group. The trek can take anything between 1 and 5 hours to locate the gorillas and then one hour is spent in close contact with the gorilla family.

The incredible privilege of a personal encounter with these gentle giants in their natural environment is a truly magical once-in-a-lifetime experience! Bookings & payment should be made in advance of arrival in Uganda.

Batwa Experience

It may be possible to add an extra day and experience the 'Batwa Trail' - a 5 hour trek with these forest people in the mountains to learn a little of their old ways of life. Profits from your hike help fund local Batwa children learn to keep their heritage alive.

Chimpanzee Habituation Experience

Chimpanzees share 98% of our DNA and many of our behaviours, which is why observing these primates in the wild is so captivating. A chimpanzee habituation experience is a unique opportunity to follow a chimp group that is currently being habituated - getting them used to the presence of humans and eliminating fear - a process that takes at least 2 years.



Accompanying rangers, you will be on the forest floor early in the morning to watch the chimps leave their nests and search for food. You will then follow them throughout the day.

Keeping up with the chimps swinging through the forest canopies can be fast-paced but they tend to come down in the afternoon to escape the sun, relax on the ground, play, mate, groom each other, etc., giving you a fascinating insight into their behaviour in their natural habitat.

A 1-day chimpanzee habituation experience in Kalinzu Forest is **£160 per person**, based on four or more participants, and includes your trek, transport from/to the lodge (2.5 hour drive), food & drink.

Lake Mburo National Park 2-day Safari

Lake Mburo National Park is located close to the city of Mbarara and is approx 3 hours drive from Uganda Lodge. It is the only place in southern Uganda to see zebras and giraffes, the only National Park in the country with impalas, and occasionally you may spot a leopard. Other animal species are present including hippo, hyena, eland, crocodile, buffalo, oribi, waterbuck, topi, and reedbuck. Lake Mburo is also home to 325 different bird species. You will not find elephants or lions in this park, so that is why many of our visitors choose Queen Elizabeth if they don't have time for both parks.



Our all-inclusive 2-day Lake Mburo Safari is **only £170 per person**, based on four or more participants, and includes transport from/to the lodge, game drives in a 4x4 vehicle, fuel, driver, park entrance fees, afternoon boat cruise, overnight camping and all meals.



We can also offer a 1-day Lake Mburo Safari for £150 per person, again based on four or more people. However its not always possible to find the giraffes as there is usually only time for one game drive.

Lake Bunyonyi

Lake Bunyonyi, meaning 'place of many little birds', is a stunning freshwater lake in south-west Uganda, only 2 hours drive from the lodge. It is thought to be the second deepest lake in Africa and, unlike many lakes in East Africa, it is bilharzia-, crocodile- and hippo-free, so perfect for swimming, albeit a little cold. It was also the filming location for the 2018 blockbuster movie 'Black Panther'. The 29 islands dotted across the lake create a truly magical vista. For some relaxation and a beautiful change of scenery, day trips or overnight stays can be arranged. Facilities include boat trips, canoe or bike hire, restaurants, bars and craft/souvenir shops.



Other Trips

We can also arrange trips to other places, such as Lake Nyabihoko, Murchison Falls National Park, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, Batwa (indigenous pygmy tribe) cultural experience and Rwanda. Day and overnight trips exploring the local area can be organised once at the lodge. We can also arrange for you to visit a local family where you help prepare a traditional meal to enjoy with your hosts.

Profits from all our accommodations, trips and safaris are fed back into our projects.

Fundraising

We ask all our volunteers to try and raise £100 or more to help fund our current projects before you come. You can easily set up a Facebook Donate button (*for Uganda Lodge Community Projects*), or make your own fundraising page: <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ruhanga> Alternatively make a donation directly into our UK charity account, where an extra 25% Gift Aid can be claimed from eligible donors:

Account Name: Uganda Lodge Community Projects **IBAN:** GB73 BUKB 2090 5653 2520 94
Sort Code: 20-90-56 (Barclays, Walton-on-Thames) **SWIFT BIC:** BUKB GB22
Account No: 53252094

Before you begin fundraising please feel free to discuss exactly how you would like your money spent. We usually have ongoing new build or perhaps some specific repairs need doing. Or maybe its text books or other equipment that is needed.

Vaccinations and Anti-Malarial Medication

It is recommended that you seek advice from your GP or local travel clinic regarding vaccinations and anti-malarial medication. **A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Uganda**, although if you don't have one they will give you the vaccination plus a certificate that lasts forever on arrival at Entebbe Airport for US\$40/£30. (See COVID info later)

Travel Insurance

You should arrange adequate travel insurance before travelling and it is strongly advised that this includes medical expenses and repatriation cover. We have our own village medical clinic across the road from the lodge, with lab facilities. There is a district hospital in the nearby town Itojo (5 mins drive away), a much larger one in the city Mbarara (1-hour drive away) and several in the capital Kampala (5/6 hours drive).

Visa Requirements

A single entry 3-month Visitor Permit can be obtained at Entebbe Airport for US\$50/£40 cash. If you will also be travelling to Kenya and/or Rwanda, you can get a 3-month East Africa Tourist Visa allowing multiple entries into Uganda, Rwanda & Kenya for US\$100/£80 cash. While it's possible to obtain your visa in advance online (<https://visas.immigration.go.ug/>), this is not recommended as the process can be complicated and queues at Immigration tend to be longer than paying upon arrival. Uganda Visitor Permits can be extended for a further 3 months in Mbarara, an hour from the lodge, but East Africa Tourist Visas **cannot** be extended. Please Note – you are a Tourist.

Bringing Donated Items

If you can book a flight with 2 x 23kgs free luggage - great. We have many donated items such as shoes and clothes etc near Heathrow waiting to go out to the village (see Ann McCarthy) Please do not buy things specially to take out as what is really needed is usually cheaper in Uganda, but if you are offered them, the following are always useful:

- Rubbers, Sharpeners, Correction Fluid, Paint Brushes, Rulers, Permanent Markers, Highlighters, Felt Pens, Coloured Chalk, Hole Punchers, Staplers & Staples, Sellotape, Scissors, Biro, Blu-Tac, Coloured Crayons, Glue, Pritt Stick,
- Coloured & Foil paper/card, Colouring Books, Small Pre-school reading books,
- Footballs, Lego & Duplo, Soft Body Dolls, Loom Bands, Beads,
- Bandages, Plasters and non-adhesive wound dressings etc for our medical centre
- Unwanted good condition clothes and shoes of all sizes for children & adults (especially Mens)

How to Book (with special COVID options)

1. Fill in what you can now and return the booking form together with your £100 admin/booking fee. Add your approx. flight dates & we guarantee we will accommodate you when you confirm your dates. Details such as Insurance can be added later.
2. Send us a copy of your recent DBS/Disclosure Scotland Certificate, Police Check or two references from non-relatives who have known you for at least 3 years
3. Send your flight details once booked and 2 weeks before your flight send us payment for your airport transfers, accommodation and meals plus gorilla treks and possibly safaris.
4. Keep us informed about your negative COVID test which is currently needed for entering Uganda & confirm again your exact arrival time and date.

Account Name: Ruhanga Resource Centre **IBAN:** GB26 BUKB 2090 5613 0753 46
Sort Code 20-90-56 (Barclays Walton-on-Thames) **Account No:** 13075346

For International Payments a service such as TRANSFERWISE is efficient and usually cheaper. Please note that all monies received are immediately transferred out to Uganda and thus are non-refundable, but they can be credited for a future visit.

Packing Suggestions

In addition to the usual things you'd pack for a hot destination, we strongly recommend:

- Raincoat/waterproof jacket
- Sweater/fleeces (especially for evenings)
- Walking boots/shoes or trainers
- Long-sleeved shirts & full-length trousers (for hiking/trekking)
- Medium size Padlock for your door
- Unlocked mobile phone (*Buy a Uganda Sim*)
- Memory card/USB stick to back-up photos
- USB power bank, batteries/charger

- Prescription medication & anti-malarial tablets
- Yellow fever vaccination certificate
- Basic first aid kit, including rehydration sachets
- 3-pin plug adaptor(s)
- Torch & batteries /charger
- Small rucksack/day backpack
- Copies of your passport, e-ticket and travel insurance etc

Other Ways you and your friends can support our projects and the local communities:

- Support a child to help them attend Nursery and Primary school for only £5 per month <http://www.sponsorachild.co.uk>
- Encourage friends to support you by adding a "Facebook Donate" button or better still set up your own donation page on <http://www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/ruhanga>
- Hold a Fundraising Event such as a Race Evening, Clothes Swap Party, or hold a Car Boot Sale
- Help with admin or promote volunteering, our safaris, sponsorship scheme or fundraising

Please note that although the UK Charity Uganda Lodge Community Projects (1150023) supports and advises all the above mentioned projects out in Uganda, you are travelling independently and staying at a Ugandan run Social Enterprise Guest House and projects out there are run by a Ugandan registered NGO called 'Stand on Your Own'

Further Information www.Ruhanga.com

Uganda Lodge website: www.ugandalodge.com

Ugandan NGO Website www.standonyourown.org

UK Charity Website www.supportugandalodge.com

Uganda Lodge Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ugandalodge

Ruhanga Development School Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ruhangedevelopmentschool