

## OUTLINES – ACTIVE HOLIDAY IDEAS

August 2017

**Barging, Bike & Barge for 2017 and other news**

Great last-minute opportunities and bargains in this newsletter if you are ready to take a break. Join us cruising in Burgundy, Bike & Barging from Paris to Bruges, cycling along the Danube, cooking in Provence, walking in the English Cotswolds, hiking or on safari in Africa or 4WD touring across the Australian outback.

## HOTEL BARGING IN BURGUNDY TWO FOR ONE OFFER

**Save over \$5000 per twin share cabin – but act quickly as space is very limited for dates in 2017 \***



Join us on select dates on a 7-day journey through Burgundy visiting Auxerre, Chablis, Avalon and Vézelay and you can make amazing savings on the last few cabins for NEW bookings for 2017:

Departs from Paris: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017 \*

Cruise aboard a traditional, English managed hotel barge, accommodating just 12 guests in air-conditioned very comfortable cabins each with its own private bathroom. All meals are included and the chef presents innovative and imaginative French cuisine with a contemporary twist using fresh local ingredients. Breakfast offers freshly baked croissants, pastries and bread. Lunch is a feast of salads and savoury dishes, followed by a selection of fresh fruit and cheeses. There is an 'open bar' available at all times and the sun deck or the air-conditioned saloon with its large picture windows to is the perfect place to enjoy the scenery of rural Burgundy.

For cruise details see our website: [BURGUNDY CRUISE](http://BURGUNDY CRUISE)

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**

The cruise starts with a bus transfer from central Paris and daily guided excursions include medieval towns, chateaux and the glorious vineyards of Chablis. Towpath walks are encouraged and bicycles are also provided for passengers to use and are popular early in the morning or before dinner.

If you are ready to go we can arrange some great airfares and this two people for the price of one offer but act quickly, these cabins won't last at this price.

\* Discount private charter rates available for groups on 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017 – ask for details.

## **BIKE & BARGE SAVINGS – PARIS TO BRUGES**

**Save up to \$500 per person on selected departures – but act quickly as space is very limited \***



A limited number of cabins are still available on our popular two-week cycling cruise from the beautiful city of Bruges in Belgium to Paris in France or return. Travelling in a cosy and comfortable, simple traditional barge in twin share, usually bunk-style cabins (with ensuite shower/toilet).

In Belgium we cycle through relatively flat country mostly along river banks or towpaths with some cobblestones in towns and cities. In France we follow country roads and the occasional bike path. Near cities it is sometimes possible to avoid traffic by staying on the barge on some sections.

A highlight for Australians is a two-night stop in St Quentin in the Somme region of France, not far from Villers-Bretonneux ideal to discover the war memorials and cemeteries and World War 1 museums nearby.

Visit Ghent, Oudenaarde and Tournai on the River Scheldt - towns that played an important role in Belgium's Medieval and Renaissance history. In France we follow the River Oise visiting Auvers, where Van Gogh once lived, ride through royal forests and national parks, see French chateaux such as Chantilly or Compiègne. Cruise into Paris past the majestic Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral.

Offer includes guided cycling, cycle hire and meals on these dates:

Bruges to Paris: 16<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Paris to Bruges: 2<sup>nd</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> September or 30<sup>th</sup> September - 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

Cost now \$2550 (was \$3050) per person twin share bunk cabin for two-weeks.

A limited number of single cabins are available on each date without any single supplement.

For more itinerary details of the two-week tour through the Somme see: [PARIS TO BRUGES](#)

\* Conditions apply – NEW bookings only - ask for details

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**

## CYCLING ALONG THE RIVER DANUBE CYCLE PATH

New dates and prices for 2018 – early booking essential



The Danube Cycle Path is perhaps the super highway of cycling in Europe, it is certainly one of the 'must do' cycling routes with spectacular scenery and amazing cities including Vienna, regarded as the world capital of classical music. Birthplace of the waltz and the operetta Vienna was home or workplace for more composers and musicians than any other city in Europe.

See Vienna and many other highlights on the River Danube Bike & Boat cycling cruises that visit Austria, Germany, Hungary and either Slovakia or Slovenia.

See the website for 2018 details: [DANUBE TO VIENNA & BUDAPEST](#) or [DANUBE TO BELGRADE](#)

## LEARN FRENCH COOKING IN PROVENCE

Dates still available in October 2017



Join our 6-day / 5-night introduction to the art of fine French cuisine staying in very comfortable 4-star hotel with a wellness centre and spa in a typically French Provençal village. Learn from our renowned chef in his own kitchen, visit his kitchen garden, fruit and vegetable markets and meet the fishermen who supply fresh fish daily. This holiday is also ideal for non-cooking partners with walks or e-bike hire available.

Call Outdoor Travel in Brighton on (03) 57 501 441 for information or see the website: [PROVENCE COOKING](#)

## WALKING IN THE ENGLISH COTSWOLDS



### The bluebell wood (a poem by Felix Dennis)

*We walked within an ancient wood  
Beside the Heart-of-England way  
Where oak and beech and hazel stood,  
Their leaves the pale shades of May.  
By bole and bough, still black with rain,  
The sunlight filtered where it would  
Across a glowing, radiant stain—  
We stood within a bluebell wood!  
And stood and stood, both lost for words,  
As all around the woodland rang  
And echoed with the cries of birds  
Who sang and sang and sang and sang...  
My mind has marked that afternoon  
To hoard against life's stone and sling;  
Should I go late, or I go soon.*

Plan your walk among the English wildflowers – see our website: [COTSWOLDS WALK](#)

## AUSTRALIA - GREAT VICTORIA DESERT 4WD EXPEDITION

Last places - 16-days Coober Pedy to Adelaide - departs: 30<sup>th</sup> August - 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017

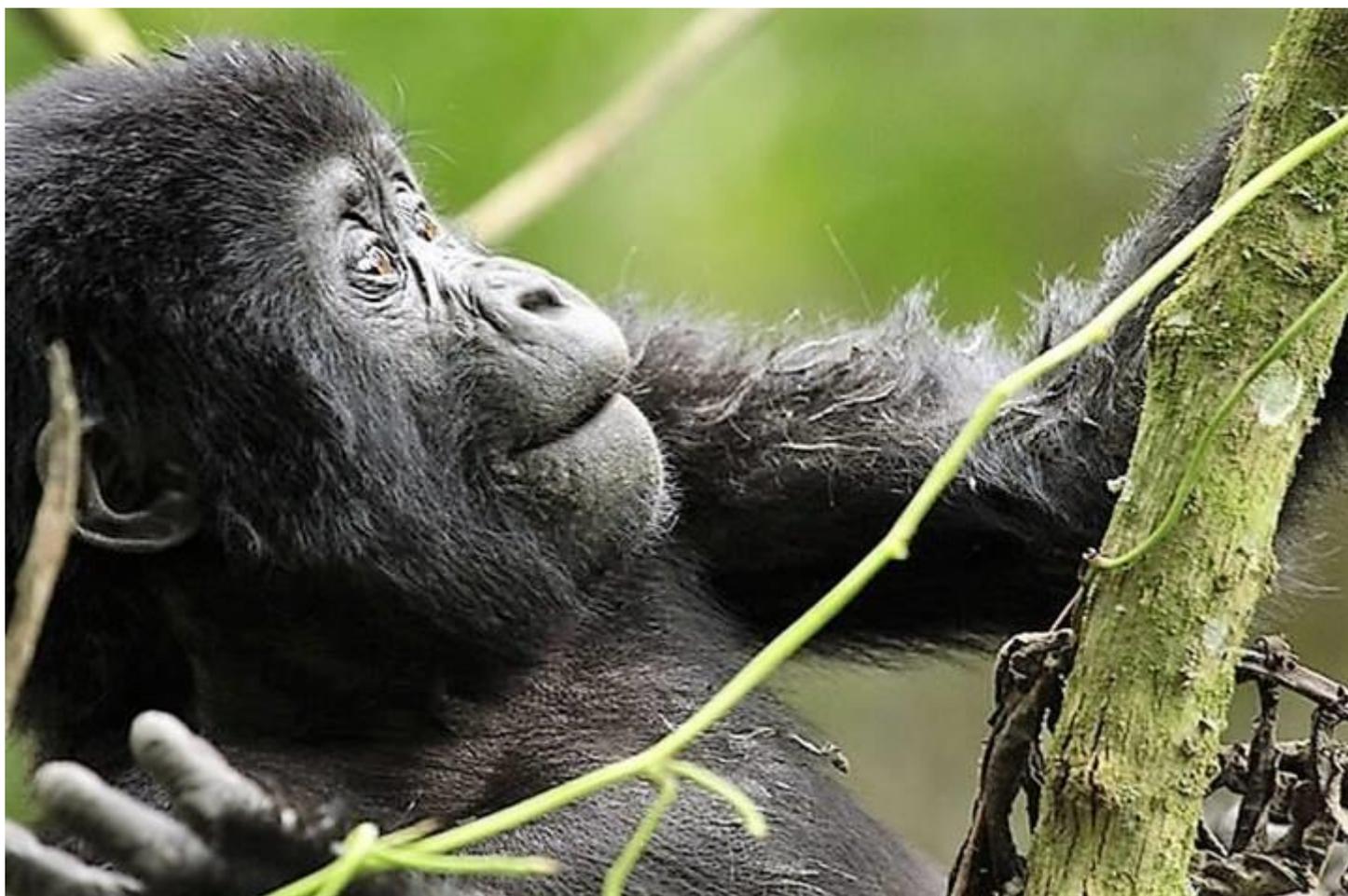


**Cost: \$5690** (was \$6200) per person

A unique expedition across the Great Victoria Desert sand dunes and sand plain - some of the largest in Australia - with no major watercourses and save for a few vehicle tracks, a vast wilderness virtually untouched by man. Departing Coober Pedy travel west on the Anne Beadell Highway through aboriginal land to Tallaringa Nature Reserve. Visit the once top secret ground zero at Emu Field, site of the first atomic tests in Australia. Cross to Laverton and from the goldfields we return across the Nullarbor to Adelaide. Interested, then call us today for a more detailed itinerary on (03) 57 501441.

## SUE & LUCIE ARE OUT OF AFRICA....

Back at their desks at Outdoor Travel in Bright – read more about their travels



Outdoor Travel staff members Sue & Lucie recently expanded their knowledge of East Africa with safari and hiking experiences, Sue in Uganda & Lucie in Kenya. Here is Sue's report:

Uganda is best described as 'A Land of Vivid Contrasts'. From the red dirt, dust, smoke and organised chaos of village streets across the golden savannah lands, to the lush, verdant valleys of the mountain region, this land-locked East African country continues to surprise.

I arrived at Entebbe airport with a few preconceptions and a small amount of knowledge, all of which was soon to be challenged. My cultural introductions were the square, windowless, mud-brick shops that lined the busy streets, the colourful and sometimes incongruous wares spilling out into the red dirt (bright clothing stalls, stacks of tin doors, furniture, fresh fruit markets, charcoal BBQ stands and the ubiquitous mobile phones shops, to name a few), all fronted by a myriad of loosely tethered goats and cows of all shapes and sizes. Add a dusty, noisy stream of seemingly random bicycle, motorbike, minibus, truck and car traffic and it soon became overwhelming.

The red brick buildings throughout the country spoke of a colonial heritage, often mixed with the bamboo, mud and thatch of the original culture. There were also many bicycles, laden with all manner of agricultural needs and produce to a degree that belied their ability to be ridden. It became obvious that most people walk everywhere, often similarly encumbered. More often than not, the ladies had a baby slung on their back and a precarious load on their head. Bright, colourful clothing was a favourite and the women were always vibrantly dressed, even when hoeing the fields. The many children walking along in their bright school uniforms or playing in the dust were always quick with a wave and a smile.

We were told Ugandans place great store in their shops being on the road, so the streets through villages and towns were a pretty chaotic mess; busy and painted with brightly coloured advertising, usually for mobile phones. It was not until much later that we discovered more well-appointed brick homes and enclaves behind the street fronts, with the most affluent often in gated or razor-wired compounds. It was very common for the village water source to be a communal well with pump and to see many children carrying yellow plastic water cans, as fetching water was part of their daily chores.

As we moved beyond the city limits and into the countryside, it was apparent that Uganda is a green land, largely given over to subsistence and communal farming. Endless plots of corn, sugar cane and bananas dotted with little brick storerooms bordered the roads and blanketed the surrounding steep hills, covering almost every square of land to be found. Goats, cows, chickens and the occasional pig grazed the roadside vegetation, sometimes tied by one leg, but more often in small herds being tended by a patient herder. To the West up in the mountains, there were rough timber or brush fenced plots protecting a few precious livestock.

*Mud Brick Huts and Mobile Phone Masts*; should be the title of a book. Everyone had a mobile phone, even if they lived in a shack. SIM cards were cheap, the towers were everywhere and local coverage was great even in the mountains, certainly better than in most of rural Australia. All our drivers and guides were in constant phone contact, even in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Other things that appeared uniquely Ugandan included the many mud-brick kiln towers where the slow-burning fire was set underneath and within the stacked bricks to fire them to a usable hardness. The villagers were frantically making new bricks in the January and February dry season as once the wet sets in, any unfired bricks just revert to the red mud from whence they came.

Arising from the endless red dust everywhere was the constant need to constantly wash everything including the practical habit of driving all manner of trucks, cars and motorbikes into the rivers and streams, so they could be washed. Vehicles with water up to the axles was a common sight.

Time and travel were certainly haphazard and *'Ugandan Time'* took a while to figure out. A designated departure time usually meant meeting, waiting and then departing anything up to a few hours later. The same applied to the journey. Fifteen minutes meant half an hour, an hour was probably two, and 'not far' could be 20km. Speed signs were rare, instead, vehicle speed was controlled by very large, frequent speed humps, especially going through villages, a very effective traffic control measure, if somewhat tough on vehicles. Massively potholed roads needed to be seen to be believed, with vehicles driving at crazy angles on the road shoulder or on the wrong side of the road to avoid the tarmac entirely. One day a 4 hour trip actually took us 8 hours due to the roads. Gridlock prevailed in the cities and traffic lights seemed just a recommendation. Boda Boda (motorcycle taxi service) were everywhere, as were the blue & white checked taxi minibuses. Weaving somewhat alarmingly through the traffic, Boda offered the cheapest and quickest way to a destination, assuming you had nerves of steel and were happy that the correct place for a motorcycle helmet was between the handlebars, covering the headlight. Adopting a *c'est la vie* approach and building in a large fudge-factor were the best way to avoid stress, along with the oft-quoted "TIA" (This is Africa).

Our accommodation at the safari lodges was very good, if varied. They all had wide open balconies with spectacular views that took your breath away and we wished for more time to just sit on the long day beds and contemplate the scenery. Both Crater Lodge and Twin Lakes Lodge were perched on ridges. Crater Lodge looked out over the crater lake and Twin Lakes was perched on the rift rim overlooked the vast Kasenyi Plains towards Queen Elizabeth National Park and Lakes Edward and George. Twin Lakes Lodge was in the process of re-building and once completed the general facilities should match the view. Chameleon Hill Lodge at Bwindi was the most up-market, colourful and funky, built up a steep hill and although an hour's drive from the gorilla trekking, but well worth the extra time, with all the rooms having a spectacular view across serene Lake Mutanda to the Virunga Volcanoes.

But we were in Uganda to see the wildlife. The country is home to one of the World's largest populations of the endangered mountain gorilla and is a bird-watching paradise. It is also the source of the mighty Nile River which then flows north through Africa to Egypt. The massive encroachment of farming on the green forests of Uganda led to the essential formation of protected National Parks. We toured three of them in the West: Kibale Forest which its Chimpanzee and monkey populations, Queen Elizabeth for big game viewing and the Impenetrable Forest at Bwindi and Mgahinga, home the mountain gorillas. A strongly armed force has been put in place to protect these from poaching as well as a program to employ the locals in tourism activities in the parks so they do not need to continue poaching, which has been paying dividends, with increases in wildlife numbers over the last decade.

The chimpanzees and many monkeys in Kibale Forest were a wonderful introduction to the world of primates. It was around midday when we set off on our forest walk and I understand that an early or late tour is better, as the primates are more active. However it was amazing to sit quietly in the undergrowth and watch the chimps either resting in their nest of leaves or meandering lazily in the branches of the tall rainforest trees, occasionally picking something to eat or just swinging around. Our guide was first rate, knowledgeable and very helpful at getting us the best view of the chimps. The weather in the dry season in Uganda was warm (around the high twenties Celsius) and a little humid, but not uncomfortably so. We worked up a good sweat walking in, especially as long sleeves, pants, insect repellent and boots with gaiters are recommended to avoid the many insects, but once in the cool of the forest it was peaceful and pleasant.

Our tour in the Queen Elizabeth National Park promised a game drive and we were started off early in the morning across the Kasenyi Plains in spectacular fashion: To someone used to braking to miss a kangaroo back home, being in a Landcruiser doing the same to avoid a fully-grown African elephant was completely surreal. In fact, we saw more elephant on the 1.5hr trip between our lodge and the park than we did on the game drive. To be honest, the game drive was not up to expectation, entirely due to the logistical error of not having a Park Ranger in the vehicle. I now know this is an absolute must. Our driver did his best, there were Ugandan Kob, Waterbuck, antelope, warthog and Cape Buffalo aplenty, but the big game were not to be seen.

The evening boat safari on the Kazinga Channel between Lakes George and Edwards however, exceeded every expectation. One of the absolute highlights of Uganda. At one point I had my camera poised (unsuccessfully...) to capture four elephants, a warthog, half a dozen Cape buffalo, a Nile crocodile and a school of Hippo all in one frame. There were also African Fish Eagles, rare Forest Hogs, baboons and numerous water birds and all were so very close to the boat. It was unbelievable.

The next day we set off for Bwindi, with schedule stops at the Ishashi plains with their legendary tree-climbing Lions, who hang out in an old fig tree; as well as the Mgahinga forest to visit with the displaced Batwa pygmies and learn of their culture. Those in the know say both are highlights of a trip to Uganda and should be on everyone's itinerary. Unfortunately the cursed road logistics struck again and we didn't manage either. We did meet the Batwa who generously visited and danced for us at the gates after our Bwindi Gorilla Trek.



My personal reason for visiting Uganda was to see the mountain gorillas and our gorilla trekking experience at Bwindi did not disappoint. Properly knitted out in long pants and shirt, insect repellent, hat, gaiters and garden gloves, we expected a good slog through the dense forest and it certainly challenged those who weren't fit. However the Park Warden with our group assured me that they match groups to trekking levels and with prior notice, they have ways of facilitating the less able-bodied even if the porters have to carry them in. In our case though, they obviously thought we were up for some adventure.

Speaking of porters, I must advocate using them. It only cost around US\$15 per porter. They were not only on hand to carry backpacks and help clients over the wet, rocky creeks and pull them up rough sections, but having one also aided conservation. The local porters were poachers previously and giving them legitimate income has now allowed them to support their families without resorting to poaching.

We had a very early start from our lodge, which is just as well, as the unmarked and rough roads meant we ended up arriving at the trekking office late. Formalities were soon out of the way (please ensure you have your passport available as it is checked off against the previously issued trekking permit), including a detailed briefing. There were five habituated gorilla families in this part of the park and the maximum group size for each was eight clients. Park rangers stayed with the gorillas during the day keeping track of their location and relayed this information by radio and mobile phone to the trekking guides (yes, even in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest!). Early each morning the Rangers would go back to where the gorillas had nested the night before and find them again. Due to our late arrival we were to take a short trek to meet up with a gorilla family which was moving down a ridge into the valley below.

***Setting off with our Park Warden, armed Rangers and team of porters, we trekked in on a narrow, formed track for about an hour and a half, before settling down to wait for another hour until the gorillas came closer. It was at this point things got interesting. We left our porters behind and followed the Rangers straight up the mountain as they hacked a vertical path in the dense shrub, tree and vines thickets of the forest with machetes, for us to clamber through. I don't think we touched the ground for the next hour or so. After a solid and sweaty vertical then horizontal trek, we suddenly heard guttural warning grunts, looked down and there they were.... Our gorilla family!***

The big male silverback, a younger silverback, two females and their incredibly adorable two babies, all nestled in the thick undergrowth. They knew we were there, but continued with their leisurely feeding without any sign of bother. The warnings were to each other about who got which food source. The silverbacks were absolutely huge and I couldn't get over how big their heads and arms were. The babies were playful and put on a show, swinging around on the trees and falling all over their parents. We were utterly captivated.

We were allowed 15 minutes with the gorilla family, most of which I spent sitting quietly just observing and absorbing the experience of being in their presence. Others moved around taking photos of the group, assisted by the Rangers who found the best vantage points for us. When the gorillas moved further down the mountain we were allowed to follow them though never closer than seven metres. This rule which was applied throughout the trek, and was aimed at maximised safety and minimising and spread of disease between humans and gorillas. Indeed, anyone with a bad cold or flu virus was not allowed on the trek. The only variation to this was if gorillas, who are naturally curious, decided to come to us. If this happened we were to stand still, remain calm and let them do so. We weren't lucky enough to experience it, but one of our fellow trekkers in the less heavily vegetated Mgahinga Forest did have a young silverback come and sit next to him. Of course the resultant photo was enviously viewed by all and sundry later that night.

The trek out of the forest seemed much easier, if more precipitous, and quicker probably because we were going downhill and we were on such a high, even though the total trek time was six hours. It really was a once on a lifetime experience and a privilege to spend time in the wild with such wonderful yet endangered creatures. Dinner back at the lodge that night was a celebratory affair and spirits were high, not in the least because the Chameleon Hill lodge staff took our very muddy boots and gaiters and gave them a complimentary clean and dry overnight. Certainly service above and beyond!

Our return from Bwindi included a light plane flight, which turned out to be another great touring experience. It was also a far more comfortable way to travel to/from Uganda's West. We started in the dawn light out of Kisoro in clear, quiet air. The low-level flight across the mountain range was amazing and spectacular. It included a drop into Kihikihi airport to collect some other clients, giving the experience of landing on a gravel runway and a reminder of how extremely good the Aerolink/Air Kenya pilots were. It was then a very scenic flight with a great overview of the countryside, all the way to Entebbe.

There was also a visit to Jinja, Uganda's adventure capital and home of the Nile to the east of Kampala. Many wild and hard-core adventure activities were on offer, from bungy jumping and zip-lining, to quad biking and white water rafting. However, the unanimous favourite was the horse-riding trek through local villages and along the Nile. Run by an ex-pat Australian who had many years of experience in Kenya, the well-organised program with its lovely, well-schooled horses offered wonderful rides for everyone from the beginners to the experienced riders. It gave a chance to visit the locals, see the local communities and also enjoy the tranquility of the river.

Back in Kampala, I took the opportunity to join a bird-watching friend on a half day canoe tour of the Mabamba Swamp, just out of Entebbe. The swamp system, which borders Lake Victoria and surrounds a series of islands, is a fascinating and picturesque ecosystem of papyrus beds, beautiful water lilies and swamp grasses, which the local fisher folk traverse via a network of channels. After a 6am pick-up in Kampala and 1.5hr road transfer by comfortable 4WD, we boarded a traditional 3-seater wooden canoe, with non-traditional outboard motor. Our guide and boatman were friendly and informative with a great knowledge of the multitude of bird-life in the swamp. Their skill at manoeuvring the boat round the narrow, winding channels by motor, poling or both was entertaining in itself. Once close to a bird, they would cut the engine and pole along quietly to allow maximum viewing and photo opportunities.

The bird life was stunning. My friend and the guide's identification were rapid-fire and the variety was enormous: Harriers, Weaver birds, Lapwings, wader birds of all description, the water-lily-walking African Jacana and the exceptionally pretty Malachite Kingfisher. We were captivated. However the hunt was on for the elusive Shoebill Stork, that great big, prehistoric looking bird, much sought after by bird-watchers and photographers alike. A thunderstorm didn't dampen our spirits and our crew were determined to find it for us, asking local fishermen for their last sighting, as they rowed past in their canoes. Such patience was rewarded and after 3 hours and the boatman's superhuman poling and dragging efforts across the swamp, we found our majestic, lone Shoebill and had all the time in the world to enjoy it. I felt very privileged at this unexpected highlight of my Uganda trip and certainly recommend it.

For the experienced traveller who is flexible, understands the vagaries of the road less travelled, is travel-savvy and is prepared at times to stretch the limits of their comfort zone, then I can certainly recommend Uganda as a place well worth visiting. Despite a heavy armed police presence which can be confronting at first, the people are very friendly (even those toting AK47's for your protection). The many different tribal

cultures and heritage are fascinating and showcased in a very entertaining, must-see, dinner and show at the Ndere Cultural Centre in Kampala. The food is great and worth trying the local fare, especially matoke (steamed plantain) with peanut sauce and anything muchomo (BBQ over charcoal) and there is usually fresh tropical fruit with every meal. The diverse landscapes are spectacular; from the cool mountains, primate forests, coffee and tea plantations of the west to the volcanic crater lakeland and the spectacular Rift Valley and golden savannah with its Acacia tree umbrellas sheltering wildlife from the midday sun, northwards to the mighty Murchison Falls, south to the wetlands of Lake Victoria and the mighty Nile River lands in the east.

Uganda is evolving as an international tourist destination. The tourist sector and government are working hard to shrug off the country's chequered history and the outside world's preconceptions of the past. There are the challenges of improving infrastructure, especially the roads, logistics and services to allow it to showcase its unquestionably amazing natural attractions and wildlife. Reputable tour operators do it best and I strongly recommend a comprehensive tour package including all transfers, etc, rather than trying to be independent. But in a place where they say "You are welcome" before you have even asked the question and "I am sorry" for any misfortune even if it had nothing to do with them, the helpful, vibrant, and gregarious Ugandan people go a long way to making a visit memorable.

Follow in Sue's footsteps in Uganda: [UGANDA WILDLIFE SAFARI](#)



Hike in Lucie's footsteps in Kenya: [KENYA WALK SAFARI](#)

Call us at **Outdoor Travel** for a chat about your active holiday ideas or to make a reservation. Alternatively call in to see us in our office in the centre of beautiful Bright in NE Victoria.

If you would like help with flights, travel insurance, accommodation and any other travel arrangements, please call Yvette, Lucie or Kristen at our Fares Desk on (03) 57 501 044 or email [fares@outdoortravel.com.au](mailto:fares@outdoortravel.com.au) or on our Facebook Page you can see our latest offers and recent adventures. Find us here: [FACEBOOK](#)

**Contact Outdoor Travel directly for more details and reservations**

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