

Uganda Immersion Experience - May 2013

Background, Security and Health Report

November 15, 2012

The Country

Uganda, known as the “Pearl of Africa,” is a landlocked country in East Africa. The southern part of the country includes a sizeable portion of Lake Victoria, sometimes considered to be the source of the Nile River. With its fertile soils, agriculture accounts for 80% of the employment in Uganda, with coffee being the primary export. The official languages of the country are English and Swahili (U.S. Department of State, Background Note: Uganda).

Uganda gained its formal independence from Britain in 1962. In the years following independence, the country was plagued by conflict and civil war among various groups vying for power. Under Idi Amin’s 8-year rule, beginning in 1971, the country went into economic and social decline. Idi Amin committed massive human rights violations and it is estimated that at least 100,000 Ugandans were murdered during his reign.



From 1986 to 2005, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) was operating in the northern part of the country where it sought to overthrow the Ugandan government. The LRA proceeded to kill tens of thousands of people, kidnapped thousands of children to serve as rebel soldiers, and displaced approximately 1.8 million Ugandans. In 2005, the LRA was finally pushed out of Uganda, but has continued to operate in neighboring countries (U.S. Department of State, Background Note: Uganda).

Any remaining LRA fighters are more than 1,000 miles from Uganda, in remote forested regions. Their contingent numbers no greater than a few hundred fighters. And while the LRA is still a threat in these remote areas of the Central African Republic and western Sudan, security has been successfully restored to northern Uganda. Absolutely no LRA attacks have occurred on Ugandan soil since 2006. The U.S. State Department has said that “relative stability [has] returned to Uganda.”

Even with the LRA presence in recent years, this activity was limited mostly to the northern part of the country and Uganda has experienced more than 20 years of relative political stability and economic growth. “Since becoming president in 1986, Yoweri Museveni has taken important steps toward economic rehabilitation and adopted policies that have promoted rapid economic development. The country’s infrastructure – notably its transportation and communications systems that were destroyed by war and neglect – is being rebuilt.” (CIA World Factbook)

Safety and Health

At John Carroll University, we strive to provide the safest experience possible for our students during immersion experiences. Many safety precautions are taken on all John Carroll immersions and the following information pertains to the Uganda immersion:

- In August 2012, there was an outbreak of the Ebola virus in Uganda, with 24 cases causing 17 deaths. This outbreak occurred in western Uganda which is a 4 hour drive west from the closest point on our intended path. Although Ebola is indeed a very dangerous virus, it is important to put these outbreaks in perspective. While AIDS kills 64,000 per year in Uganda, Ebola has killed only 1,080 people in the last 30 years (Smithsonian Magazine, November 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) is notoriously risk averse and will regularly issue warnings for any imminent danger in order to ensure the health and safety of resident and tourist populations and mitigate the potential for a pandemic. However, in regard to this outbreak, "WHO does not recommend that any travel or trade restrictions are applied to Uganda." (WHO, Ebola in Uganda - update, September 3, 2012). At the printing of this report (November 15, 2012), there has been another report of a separate outbreak of Ebola in a community 40 miles from Kampala. The CDC and WHO have not issued reports about this situation yet. We will monitor the situation to determine the severity of the outbreak and the potential risk to our group.
- Recently, there has also been a small outbreak of the Marburg virus, a sister virus to Ebola, which is only slightly less dangerous. As of October 28, a total of 18 cases and 9 deaths have been reported from 5 districts. Again, because these cases appear to have been contained, "WHO advises that there is no need for any restrictions on travel or trade with Uganda." (WHO, Marburg hemorrhagic fever in Uganda - update, October 31, 2012)
- Uganda is generally considered to be a safe country to visit, in terms of crime. From an analysis that was done using INTERPOL data, the crime rate in Uganda is demonstrably lower when compared to other industrialized countries (Crime and Society website, San Diego State University). Using recent United Nations crime data it can be shown that the crime rate in Uganda is at least 15 times lower than the United States. The crimes used to calculate this were the following: homicide, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, robbery, and assault.
- Immersions are group experiences. In Uganda, our group will be together during the entire immersion and under the care of our partners in Uganda who guide our group to safe activities. Allowing students to explore individually is not permitted. It is usually recommended by the U.S. State Department to avoid large gatherings of people, rallies or demonstrations are to be avoided to limit exposure to potential violence or terrorism. We will be following this advice during the immersion.
- All immersions are alcohol-free for all participants regardless if a participant is of legal drinking age in the U.S. or the country visited. Drinking can be very dangerous in an unfamiliar city or country because it can make one a target for crime, put one in situations which are not safe, or impair clear thinking in emergency situations. Drinking can also become a roadblock to building community in the group and can hinder the relationships John Carroll University has established with its community partners.

- Several immunizations are recommended by the Center for Disease Control for those traveling to Uganda. Typical immunization suggested for traveling to Uganda are the following: Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Polio booster, and Yellow Fever. You can see a complete listing of the CDC's recommendations here: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/uganda.htm>. A Yellow Fever vaccination is required for all visitors to Uganda. The Immersion Program has already provided an immunization clinic on campus during the fall semester and we plan to offer another clinic in the spring for all of our immersion participants. This clinic is sponsored by the JCU Student Health Center and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. Doctors who are familiar with travel health will be present to assess each participant's immunization needs and prescribe the appropriate medicines.
- We monitor the safety situations of each of our immersion locations on a daily basis. In the unlikely event that the security condition of Uganda deteriorates before the immersion experience and/or the U.S. State Department issues a travel warning, we will reevaluate if the group should travel. In addition, if a security situation were to develop during our trip, we would take the appropriate action to remove the group from the country.

Community Partners

Our purpose for visiting Uganda is to learn deeply about the people, the effects of conflict, and the development efforts within the country. The group will spend time engaging and learning from thought-leaders in the country and those working with new technologies. They will spend several days in Kampala, Uganda's capital and largest city. Activities will include a visit to Makerere University to meet with faculty who are developing innovative technology, the iHub where young people are working with new internet applications and mobile technology, and others who are leaders in the field of mapping and GIS (geographic information systems) who are using mapping technology to address social problems. Other visits may include the Parliament, U.S. Embassy and other sites of historical and political significance.



The majority of the time in Uganda will be spent in Gulu, a town of 150,000 people who have experienced decades of conflict. The group will be a guest of the Archdiocese of Gulu and lodging with the Comboni Sisters who came from Italy to Uganda more than 100 years ago. Our group will visit the St. Monica's Girls Tailoring Center where they will meet CNN Hero, Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe. They will have the opportunity to meet with women and children who are recovering from the war and receiving education so they can lead a productive life. Gulu is also home to Uganda's only Jesuit school, Ocer Campion Jesuit College. The group will spend time visiting the school and learning about their agriculture program and solar power initiatives.

Before leaving Uganda, the group will take a different path back to Kampala so that they can visit the country's largest national park, Murchison Falls. There they will be able to see free roaming giraffes, elephants, gazelles, water buffalo, hippos and many other animals as well as the impressive falls where the Nile River bursts through a small gorge.



Initial Itinerary (subject to change)

Wednesday, May 22 -	Depart from Cleveland
Thursday, May 23 -	Arrive at Entebbe airport, afternoon Transport to Kampala, Check in at Makerere Guest House Visit Makerere University campus and meet with faculty and students
Friday, May 24-	Tour of Kampala Tech day in Kampala including visit to the iHub and mapping exercises Lodging at Makerere Guest House
Saturday, May 25 -	Transport to Gulu Lodging at Comboni Sisters Guest House (May 25 - 30)
Sunday, May 26 -	Attend church at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Gulu Neighborhood exploration and mapping exercise
Monday, May 27-	Visit Sister Nyirumbe at St. Monica's Tailoring Center
Tuesday, May 28 -	Visit BOSCO (Battery Operated Systems for Community Outreach) Visit St. Josephine Bakhita Nursery School
Wednesday, May 29 -	Visit rural village with Sister Nyirumbe

Thursday, May 30 -	Visit Ocer Campion Jesuit school
Friday, May 31 -	Early morning, transport to Murchison Falls National Park Game drive, visit Murchison Falls Travel to Masindi Lodging at Kolping House
Saturday, June 1 -	Travel to Kampala Lodging at Makerere Guest House
Sunday, June 2 -	Final Kampala activities Visit the Uganda Museum
Monday, June 3 -	Depart from Entebbe
Tuesday, June 4 -	Arrive in Cleveland

Transportation and Accommodations

A consideration on all John Carroll immersions is the mode of transportation used by the group. Typically, road safety in most of the countries in which we travel is not equal to the standards in the United States. In order to manage this risk, our group will travel in a chartered mini-bus. We will hire a transportation company based on a recommendation by our contacts in the Archdiocese of Gulu and it is possible that the transportation may be provided by them directly. Public transportation is never used. To increase road safety, transportation for long distances will take place only during daylight hours and any short-distance travel during the evening will be limited.



The group will be staying in three different cities during the immersion. In Kampala, the group will be staying at the Makerere University Guest House. The Guest House is in the center of the sprawling campus. This facility quite large and is used frequently by student groups visiting from other countries. In Gulu, our group will be the guest of the Archdiocese and staying with the Comboni Sisters. The sisters have a dorm style accommodations for around 50 people and regularly host groups for a small fee. They will also provide all of our meals. On the way back to Kampala, after visiting Murchison Falls, we will be staying at Kolping House in Masindi. Kolping House is a nicer hotel that also has a branch in Kampala.

Additional participant information for Uganda (taken from US State Department website (travel.state.gov) - Uganda: Country Specific Information)

- While traveling in Uganda, you are subject to its laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. Persons violating Ugandan laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned.
- In Uganda, you may be taken in for questioning if you don't have your passport, or a copy of it, together with your Ugandan visa.
- Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Uganda are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.
- Photography in tourist locations is permitted; however, taking pictures of military/police installations or personnel is prohibited. Military and police officers have detained tourists for taking photographs of Entebbe Airport and of the area around Owen Falls Dam, near Jinja, although the prohibition on taking photographs is not publicly displayed on signs.
- Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda and is punishable by up to 14 years in prison. A bill was introduced in 2009 which would require penalties ranging from life imprisonment to the death penalty if a person is HIV positive. Currently, the bill is in limbo, but it has been reintroduced several times over the past 3 years.

Flight Schedule

May 22 - United Airlines, departing Cleveland at 6 AM
Arrive at Washington DC 7:33 AM

May 22 - Ethiopian Airlines, departing Washington DC at 12:00 noon
Arrive at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 7:45 AM, May 23

May 23 - Ethiopian Airlines, departing Addis Ababa at 10:55 AM
Arrive at Entebbe, Uganda 1:05 PM

June 3 - Ethiopian Airlines, departing Entebbe at 5:25 PM
Arrive at Addis Ababa 7:35 PM

June 3 - Ethiopian Airlines, departing Addis Ababa at 10:15 PM
Arrive at Washington DC 8:40 AM, June 4

June 4 - United Airlines, departing Washington DC at 12:40 PM
Arrive at Cleveland 2:00 PM

Conclusion

We hope that this report will provide important information about the Uganda immersion experience. The purpose of the report is to provide background information about Uganda, our partners, the activities we are undertaking, and the safety concerns and risks involved with the trip. As with any travel, there are always risks and it is impossible for John Carroll to guarantee absolute safety. Each participant must decide if he/she is comfortable with the level of risk. We monitor the safety situations of each of our immersion locations on a regular basis. If there are any changes to the information above or increased risk factors we will evaluate and disseminate the information in a timely manner.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the program or the security situation.

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