

# Lake Victoria



## Further Links

- The largest freshwater lake in Africa.
- Excellent fishing.
- Very good birding opportunities.
- Water sports
- Good spot for relaxation after a safari.
- Meet local people and see ancient fossil sites

## Situation

East Africa, bordering Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

## Activities

Various water sports; visiting Ruma National Park; visiting Ngamba Chimpanzee Sanctuary; fishing; boat trips; fossil sites; village visits.

Lake Victoria is the biggest freshwater lake in Africa, forming a natural boundary between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. At over 67,000 sq kms, it is twice the size of Wales. Famously the source of the mighty River Nile in Uganda which takes the waters of Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean, Lake Victoria is known locally as Nyanza.

The Kenyan parts of Lake Victoria are home of the Luo people, who migrated here from Uganda and Southern Sudan in the middle of the 16th century. Over the centuries a unique society has developed, divided into about 40 different groups. Land ownership was vital, and, to repel raiding parties, the Luo built stone fortresses half a century ago, and the ruins of one - **Thimlich Ohinga** - can still be seen. Traditional Luo villages feature family homesteads (dala) enclosed by hedges. **Kit Mikaye**, a huge sacred stone believed to have supernatural powers was once the scene of animal sacrifices. It is still considered to bring good luck, and visitors can be guided round the rock to a sacred cave.

This huge lake has an abundance of fish life, and is the biggest centre for freshwater fishing in Africa. Fishing villages and port towns such as **Kisumu** in Kenya, with its elegant colonial architecture, or **Port Bell** in Uganda with it's bustling fish markets, lie along its shores. Local fisherman use traditional rowing boats about 12 feet long called Ssesse canoes. Watching the fishermen on this vast body of water, casting their nets or bringing in the catch as fish eagles call overhead is an unforgettable experience, and the

opportunity to view a rowing race between local boats should not be missed. In Tanzania, **Mwanza** is the biggest settlement on the lake shore and is a thriving town and port with airport access into the nearby Serengeti as well as across the lake to Rwanda.

For those who want to experience fishing the waters themselves - perhaps in search of the famous Nile Perch - there is plenty of opportunity. There are specialist fishing lodges in Kenya on the islands of **Mfangano, Rusinga** and **Takawiri**, and boats, equipment, tackle and expert guides are all readily available.

Whether or not you are a fisherman, spending time on Lake Victoria is hugely rewarding. The views are wonderful, and the wildlife - including hippo, shoals of cichlids, and rich birdlife - is splendid. Hiring a boat with a local guide is the perfect way to explore the Lake and visit local villages.

Wildlife lovers can also visit **Ruma National Park**, on the Kenyan side of the lake, home to rare species including Rothschilds Giraffe, Jackson Hartebeest, tiny Oribi antelope and the last-surviving group of Roan antelope, is so remote that it is rare to see another visitor there. In addition there are Mfangano, Rusinga and Takawiri islands, home to hippo, Vervet monkeys and monitor lizards, and Mbasia and Mholo Islands, which are breeding colonies for waterfowl.

In Ugandan waters are the **Ssesse Islands**, the largest of which, Buggala, has a few small tourist lodges and a few nights on some of these remote and peaceful islands is a great way to enjoy the rural way of life in Uganda with many trails around forests and fishing villages. Butterflies, colourful birds and monkeys live in the trees in on the islands and boat trips reveal many water birds and sometimes otters. Just a short boat ride from Entebbe lies **Ngamba Island**, a chimpanzee sanctuary where visitors can either day trip or stay overnight in the small tented camp (see link to accommodation).

