

A Journey Through Uganda: Beauty, Chaos, and Unforgettable Experiences

Guest contributor Nava Oxman

My extended family and I embarked on an amazing trip to Uganda from December 24, 2024 to January 1, 2025. We landed in Entebbe and then traveled to Kampala, Jinja to see the source of the Nile, and finally to Murchison Falls National Park for a safari.



A boda boda motorcyclist transports an oversized load of bananas

Uganda is a stunning country with warm, kind, and friendly people. Throughout our trip, however, we were constantly struck by the absolute chaos on the roads. Even though we hired local drivers, navigating the traffic was challenging and, at times, unnerving. While we were assured that our vehicles had functional safety features, we often found seat belts that were stuck or didn't properly lock.

The roads were a whirlwind of congestion — cars, rickshaws, bicycles, trucks, and pedestrians all competing for space. Street vendors, many of them young children, lined the roadsides, rushing toward vehicles the moment traffic slowed, eager to sell their goods.

Potholes riddled many roads, forcing drivers to swerve and maneuver carefully. In some areas, large speed bumps made for an uncomfortable and sometimes hazardous journey. Night travel was particularly dangerous due to the lack of streetlights, leaving drivers to rely on their headlights (those who have them) and instincts. I often found myself gripping the car door handle, trying to mask my nervousness, and instinctively pressing my foot down on my own imaginary brakes.

One of the most striking road customs we encountered was the use of tree branches placed on the pavement to signal a broken-down vehicle ahead. Our driver had to do the same when our car broke down en route to Murchison Falls National Park.

Among the most unpredictable elements on the roads were the thousands of boda bodas (bicycle and motorcycle taxis) that seemed to operate under their own sets of rules. Many boda boda drivers lacked helmets or reflective vests, and some rode without functioning



Large potholes on a road in Uganda



A boda boda driver carries several people without helmets on the back of his motorcycle

headlights. They carried everything imaginable — from oversized equipment to towering stacks of goods — often in ways that seemed dangerously unbalanced. Incredibly, we saw boda bodas carrying three, four, or even five people at a time, including children and infants, sometimes with bags and suitcases precariously piled on as well.

Curious about the state of road safety, I spoke with several of our drivers, who expressed deep concerns. They told me that traffic laws were rarely enforced, and many drivers had obtained their licenses through bribery rather than training.

Another major issue we encountered was air pollution, particularly in Kampala and other major cities. The air was thick with vehicle emissions, making it difficult to breathe at times. Many of the cars on the road were old and spewed black smoke. When I first arrived in Kampala at night, I noticed a strange haze around the moon and stars — only later did I realize it was pollution. A sandy dust coated everything, even inside homes, settling again just hours after being cleaned.

Despite these challenges, Uganda's natural beauty and the warmth of its people left a lasting impression on me. The country is rich in breathtaking landscapes, diverse wildlife, and a vibrant culture. While the roads were chaotic, they were also a reflection of a country full of energy and resilience. This trip was an eye-opening experience — one that gave me a deeper appreciation for both the joys and struggles of daily life in Uganda and a deeper understanding of the need to make roads safer everywhere.

We are grateful to Nava Oxman, our guest contributor, for her keen observations. While some progress is being made, road conditions, driver behaviors, and law enforcement are not being sufficiently addressed in many countries and continue to pose serious challenges. ASIRT recommends that travelers familiarize themselves with the road risks they may encounter as they plan their itineraries.

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