



MINISTRY OF TOURISM, WILDLIFE AND ANTIQUITIES



UGANDA WILDLIFE AUTHORITY

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR TOURISM SERVICES AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN UWA ESTATES AND THE REOPENING OF THE PROTECTED AREAS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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1 PURPOSE OF THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS)

1.1 Introduction

Both the Uganda Wildlife Act, 2019 and the Wildlife Policy 2014 provide for conservation and sustainable management of wildlife resources, coordination, monitoring and supervision of activities related to wildlife management in Uganda. This mandate is legally vested in UWA. In order to carry out its mandate, UWA relies heavily on internally generated revenue over 90% of which is contributed by tourism activities. However, with the closure of tourism due to the current global COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures instituted by H.E. the President of Uganda, this major revenue stream has been severely crippled. These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are meant to guide the phased re-opening and resumption of tourism and research activities to ensure safe, consistent and effective delivery of these services in the UWA protected areas. They are intended to complement other SOPs approved for the sector such as the Hospitality Enterprises SOPs as well as the directives and guidelines issued by government from time to time.

1.2 Scope of the SOPs

The SOPs cover management of the various categories of tourists, researchers, tour operators and visitor touch points along the UWA tourism and research value chain at head office and in the protected areas. These include bookings and reservations, clearance of researchers, key tourism activities, key services such as accommodations and restaurants, park access and exit, among others.

1.3 Adherence to national guidelines and directives.

All guidelines and directives issued from time to time by the Government of Uganda (GoU) and Ministry of Health (MoH) on COVID-19 shall supersede these UWA SOPs and shall be observed in entirety. However, the UWA SOPs shall be enforced in tandem with the GoU and MoH guidelines

2 SOPS FOR TOURISM SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

2.1 Tourism information centres and reservations office

- i) UWA shall provide hand washing/sanitisation facilities at the entrances of all its premises and protected areas.
- ii) Visitors shall carry their own masks.

- iii) UWA shall provide all its staff with masks. Clients and staff without masks shall not be permitted to enter UWA premises.
- iv) All staff and visitors shall, at all times, correctly and consistently wear the recommended masks prescribed by GoU/MoH. The masks shall cover the nose and mouth at all times when in use. Detailed guidelines on usage of masks are attached as Annex 1.
- v) At the Headquarters' reservations office, UWA Management shall provide a tent to serve as a waiting area for clients. The sitting arrangement will be in such a way that a 2-metre social distancing is observed and clients shall sit facing same direction. The tent and chairs shall be disinfected at least twice a day.
- vi) To ensure smooth flow of visitors in (v) above, a First in First Out (FIFO) mechanism shall apply; UWA Management shall designate specific staff to guide the movement of visitors and enforce all other guidelines i.e. hand washing, social distancing, wearing masks, respiratory hygiene and sanitisation.
- vii) Only five (05) visitors shall be allowed to enter the reservations office at a time to ensure social distancing is adhered to. Seats in the reservations office shall be marked to show where these five (05) visitors shall sit to ensure safe distancing.
- viii) At the Information centres in the various Protected Areas (PAs) and neighbouring urban areas, the respective Chief Wardens/Wardens in Charge shall ensure that social distancing and appropriate hygiene guidelines are strictly enforced whilst serving clients. However not more than five (05) clients at a time shall be allowed into the information centres. Where possible, the Chief Wardens/Wardens in Charge shall provide a tent or arrange a waiting area outside the information centre building.
- ix) Staff on duty shall sensitise the visitors on the general government approved COVID-19 operational guidelines as well as those developed and approved by UWA management.
- x) The above guidelines (viii and ix) shall be displayed clearly at all customer interaction touch points, UWA website and other relevant electronic media platforms.
- xi) Online payment options, credit / debit card payments and use of mobile money shall be used whilst effecting payment for tourism services and activities.

3 SOPS FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE PROTECTED AREAS

- i) All researchers coming into the PAs or close proximity of wild animals must wear clean clothing and disinfected footwear prior to going to the field for data collection.
- ii) Every researcher must carry into the field a hand sanitiser.
- iii) Time spent conducting research activities near primates shall be limited to a maximum of five hours per designated research day.
- iv) The research team shall comprise a maximum number of three people to ensure safety and health monitoring.
- v) A distance of not less than 10 metres from the primates shall be maintained at all times.
- vi) A surgical facemask must be worn by anyone coming within 10 metres of primates.

4 SOPS FOR PARK ACCESS AND EXIT

- i) UWA shall provide hand washing/sanitisation facilities at the entrances of all its premises and protected areas. All persons, including tourists and researchers accessing the PAs shall wash and or use an alcohol based hand sanitizers (containing at least 60% alcohol) at all entry points.
- ii) All UWA staff, tourists, researchers, research assistants and other categories of visitors, shall, at all times correctly and consistently wear the recommended masks prescribed by GoU/MoH. The mask shall cover the nose and mouth at all times when in use.
- iii) All tourists and researchers shall come with their own masks and correctly and consistently wear them as prescribed by MoH.
- iv) Tourists and researchers to Bwindi Impenetrable, Mgahinga Gorilla and Kibale and Kyambura Wildlife Reserve shall be required to wear N95 masks, surgical masks or cloth masks with filters.
- v) Tourists with disposable masks such as the N95 and surgical masks shall be required to carry at least two (02) or more masks to ensure single use for each day of visitation.
- vi) It is mandatory for all tourists going for primate tracking activities to carry at least two N95 masks or surgical masks or double layered cloth masks with filters.

- vii) Visitors without masks or those who do not abide by the handwashing and sanitisation measures shall not be permitted to enter protected areas.
- viii) UWA staff shall use non-contact infrared thermometers to conduct body temperature screening of all visitors at the tourism gates of the various protected areas.
- ix) Visitors with temperatures body above 37.5 degrees Celsius shall be denied entry into the protected areas and shall be reported to the respective district medical teams through the mechanisms set by MoH.
- x) International tourists shall be required to provide proof that they have undergone the necessary GoU / MoH measures for inbound travellers as shall be advised from time to time. The required documentary proof may include but not limited to clearance by MoH of mandatory quarantine or rapid test results where applicable and any other documentation that the MoH shall prescribe as a requirement for entry into Uganda and the wildlife protected areas
- xi) All common areas with heavy tourist contacts shall be disinfected at least thrice a day - before, during and after visiting hours. These include information counters, service desks, waiting areas, park offices and toilets. Toilets in particular shall be cleaned every 2 hours. Regular sanitisation of workstations, doorknobs and other susceptible surfaces shall be carried out.
- xii) All staff shall be trained on correct and consistent use of masks, infrared thermometers and other general measures required when handling tourists.

5 SOPS FOR TOURIST VEHICLES AND BOATS WITHIN THE PROTECTED AREAS

- i) The National guidelines issued by GoU and MoH shall apply to tourists visiting the National Parks i.e.
 - a) Buses, mini buses and omnibuses - As prescribed by MoH and GoU
 - b) Over landers - As prescribed by MoH and GoU
 - c) Concessionaire delivery vehicles, pick-ups and lorries - As prescribed by MoH and GoU
- ii) In addition to the above, the following guidelines shall also apply:
 - a) Private boats and launches - Half capacity occupancy
 - b) Tour operator game drive vehicles and UWA owned game drive vehicles - 6 persons.

c) Saloon car vehicles shall not be permitted to carry out game drives activities in the protected areas.

Note: The guidelines in (i) and (ii) above are subject to change from time to time as shall be guided by GoU and MoH

- iii) Social distancing of one free vacant seat between any two occupants shall be observed in the vehicles.
- iv) Tour operators and service providers shall disinfect their vehicles regularly.
- v) All tour operators shall provide their drivers with an alcohol-based rub/hand sanitiser.
- vi) UWA owned vehicles shall be washed every day before use and disinfected daily. Procedures to manage chemical wastes shall apply while disposing the used disinfectants. Every protected area shall provide a safe location where vehicle spraying shall be done and where tour operators can disinfect their vehicles.
- vii) All other precautionary measures must be enforced i.e. washing hands, social distancing and using masks correctly.

6 SOPS FOR SPECIFIC TOURISM ACTIVITIES

6.1 Briefing of tourists

Before engaging in any tourism activities, tourists shall be briefed regarding the activities they are about to engage in. The briefing will be done at the designated briefing areas in the various PAs. COVID-19 prevention measures shall be an integral part of briefing messages in addition to having Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials displayed in appropriate access locations

6.2 Gorilla and Chimpanzee Tracking

- i) At the briefing points, visitors and staff shall wash hands or sanitise and have their body temperature taken.
- ii) Briefing and debriefing shall be done in small groups of eight (08) tourists after they have been assigned gorilla families for tracking.
- iii) Tourists, staff, and porters who, during the briefing, are observed to be sick shall not be allowed to track. These include anyone with signs of flu, and those who report to have diarrhoea, stomach upsets and malaria among others.
- iv) All the visitors, staff and trackers must wear masks.
- v) A maximum of eight (8) tourists shall be allowed to track a gorilla group per day.

- vi) A maximum of six (6) tourists shall be allowed to track a chimpanzee group at a time.
- vii) The tourists must keep a distance of not less than 10 metres away from the gorillas and chimpanzees during this period.
- viii) The assigned UWA guides shall ensure there is social distancing of 2 meters among the tourists while tracking, where practical.
- ix) Before the gorilla and chimpanzee viewing commences, all people in the group shall sanitise their hands again.
- x) The tourists shall carry light equipment to minimise the need for porters while they undertake the tracking. This information shall be communicated to potential tourists through the tour operators and other UWA communication platforms such as the UWA website and social media platforms.
- xi) Due to the reported side effects of wearing masks for long periods and in high altitudes, visitors shall take frequent breaks during the tracking give themselves time to breathe fresh air.
- xii) During these breaks, social distancing shall be strictly observed.
- xiii) In case a tourist or accompanying members of the team experiences a health related problem, UWA staff shall apply the established evacuation and first aid guidelines to move the affected individual from the field.

6.3 Game Drives

- i) The regular park rules in place shall apply.
- ii) The vehicle guidelines in section 6 above shall also apply.
- iii) Where a guide is requested to accompany tourists on a game drive, the guide shall sit in the front of the vehicle and shall continuously remind the tourists to observe social distance requirements
- iv) Masks shall be worn at all times and disposed of appropriately in accordance with the guidelines on use of masks. (Attached as Annex 1)
- v) Where a tourist experiences side effects due to wearing a mask for long, the tourist shall inform the guide who shall find a safe and secure place to park the vehicle and allow the tourists to get fresh air while maintaining social distance. Should there be no improvement, UWA shall arrange immediate evacuation and transfer to the nearest health facility. The game drive activity shall be suspended.

6.4 Boat Cruises

- i) The regular park rules shall apply.
- ii) The boat and launches guidelines in section 6 above shall apply.
- iii) All boats operating in the protected areas shall be cleaned and disinfected daily before deployment on any boat cruise activity.
- iv) The guide shall ensure that passengers on the boat strictly observe social distancing requirements - one free vacant seat between any two occupants.
- v) All passengers and crew shall wear masks at all times while on the boat.
- vi) Where a tourist experiences side effects due to wearing a mask for a long time, the tourist shall inform the guide who shall find space within the boat for the client to get some fresh air for a few minutes.

6.5 Large groups and events

- i. Large groups such as school groups exceeding 25 people shall not be permitted in the park at the same time for the same activities.
- ii. Events such as destination weddings shall not be permitted in the interim in UWA protected areas.

NOTE: The guidelines in Section 6.5 above shall be reviewed from time to time, as the Ministry of Health shall so advise.

6.6 Other Activities

All tourism activities within the protected areas shall be undertaken in a manner that ensures strict compliance with these SOPs and the relevant guidelines issued by GoU/MoH.

7 SOPS FOR ACCOMMODATION, RESTAURANTS AND CURIO SHOPS

All UWA owned accommodation facilities, restaurants, canteens and gift shops together with concessionaire accommodations and services shall be run in a manner that provides a safe environment for both staff and tourists as per the guidelines and measures by the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA) and Uganda Tourism Board (UTB). The UWA COVID-19 Task Force shall enforce the implementation of these guidelines, which include among others:

- i) Ensuring social distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene measures at all the accommodation sites.
- ii) Ensuring the necessary equipment and medical kits are provided by the facilities.
- iii) Ensuring all technical and maintenance services such as dishwashing and laundry equipment, dispensers are regularly checked, cleaned and are serviceable.
- iv) Ensuring that restaurants, breakfast and dining rooms and bars are enforcing/ observing social distancing and hygiene measures such as hand washing and sanitising.
- v) Ensuring housekeeping and cleaning is done daily, with emphasis on disinfecting the different surfaces.

ANNEX 1: GUIDELINES AND SOPS WHILE USING SURGICAL FACE MASKS

Introduction

Wearing a face mask often helps people feel protected and reassured. It is recommended that face masks be worn when you have cough, sneezing, fever and other respiratory symptoms, while caring for/attending to somebody with respiratory symptoms, while in community/public settings and for health care providers or first responders. A properly worn surgical mask may help block transmission of large-particle microorganisms from droplets, sprays, splatters, and splashes. The mask also reduces the likelihood of hand-to-face contact. It is a recommended best practice by IUCN that humans visiting primates wear masks to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory diseases to primates.

Components of a surgical face mask

The surgical face mask has three-ply layers and work as follows:

- The outer layer repels water, blood, and other body fluids.
- The middle layer filters certain pathogens.
- The inner layer absorbs moisture and sweat from exhaled air.

Steps to putting on face masks

1. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or rub your hands together thoroughly with alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Check for defects in the face mask, such as tears or broken loops.
3. Position the coloured side of the mask outward.
4. If present, make sure the metallic strip is at the top of the mask and positioned against the ridge of your nose.
5. If the mask has:
 - a. Ear loops: Hold the mask by both ear loops and place one loop over each ear.
 - b. Ties: Hold the mask by the upper strings. Tie the upper strings in a secure bow near the crown of your head. Tie the bottom strings securely in a bow near the nape of your neck.
 - c. Dual elastic bands: Pull the top band over your head and position it against the crown of your head. Pull the bottom band over your head and position it against the nape of your neck.

6. Mold the bendable metallic upper strip to the shape of your nose by pinching and pressing down on it with your fingers.
7. Pull the bottom of the mask over your mouth and chin and ensure the mask fully covers your nose and mouth.
8. Be sure the mask fits snugly.
9. Don't touch the mask once in position.
10. If the mask gets soiled or damp, replace it with a new one.

Do not

- Touch the mask once it is secured on your face as it might have pathogens on it.
- Dangle the mask from one ear.
- Hang the mask around your neck.
- Crisscross the ties.
- Reuse single-use masks.
- If you have to touch the face mask while you're wearing it, wash your hands first.
- Be sure to also wash your hands afterward, or use hand sanitizer.

Steps to taking off a face mask

- i) Before you take off the mask, wash your hands well or use hand sanitizer.
- ii) Avoid touching the mask itself as it could be contaminated. Hold it by the loops, ties, or bands only.
- iii) Carefully remove the mask from your face once you:
 - unhook both ear loops, or
 - untie the bottom bow first, followed by the top one, or
 - remove the bottom band first by lifting it over your head, then do the same with the top band.
- iv) Holding the mask loops, ties, or bands, discard the mask by placing it in a covered trash bin.
- v) After removing the mask, wash your hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer.

Disposal of used masks

Masks are medical wastes and should be treated as such. Different germs can survive on a used mask for different durations. Used masks should not be thrown indiscriminately in PAs, workplaces, homes or open dust bins as they can pose a potential health hazard to people who come in contact with such masks. Also, some people can pick them for re-use/sale hence putting their lives in danger.

- Surgical masks are disposable/single use only.
- Fold used masks inwards to ensure droplets are not exposed.
- Used masks should not be disposed in the field or into open dustbins.
- Used mask should be placed in polythene bags (a biohazard bag is preferred) and burnt to ash.
- Reusable masks should be washed thoroughly with soap, dried and disinfected before re-use.