

## **Tourism, peace and instability: Uganda and the problem of security**

**Dr Stan Frankland**

**University of St Andrews**

### **Abstract**

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, tourism in Uganda ceased to exist in any significant form due to prolonged and violent socio-political disorder. As safari tourism boomed within East Africa and Kenya became a mass tourism destination, the central role that Uganda had played in establishing National Parks and encouraging the development of wildlife tourism was quickly forgotten. However, with the return of relative stability under the regime of President Museveni, tourism re-emerged as an important tool in the restoration of peace and the rehabilitation of the economy. As with many other countries emerging from a period of crisis, tourism became a key component within the scheme of national redevelopment, serving as a symbol to the outside world of the return to normalcy and the desire for progress. Consequently, during the 1990s, Uganda tried to sell a tourist-friendly image of a secure nation and to re-present herself as the “pearl of Africa”. In marketing terms, this relied upon a formalised notion of safari tourism in which National Parks were sold as the main attractions. The collection of National Parks and a few secondary attractions close by formed the “Uganda Trail”, a secure route that limited tourism space to areas of the country presumed to be safe. However, in 1998, Uganda made front-page headlines around the world when 8 tourists were murdered in Bwindi National Park, the main visiting centre for those wishing to see mountain gorillas. The effects on tourism were both immediate and dramatic. Drawing from ethnographic experiences both prior to and after this event, my paper looks at a range of responses from hosts, guests and industry operatives alike concerning the risks and dangers of tourism. How do people respond when tourism, as both a product and signifier of peace, is threatened by instability? Three main themes emerge from out of this analysis: the partiality of and control over knowledge; the proportionality of risk and the ways in which the magnitude of physical danger are negotiated; and lastly, the maintenance of the chimera of security. This is particularly critical in relation to the external presentation of an image of Uganda as a nation of peaceful regeneration and the internal political realities on the ground. In this sometimes contradictory and ambiguous situation, it is important to look at the various ways in which contingency is reckoned with by all the actors within the tourism arena if we are to fully understand the complex fragility and future possibilities of the local Ugandan tourism market.