

EBOLA OUTBREAK THREATENS EAST AFRICA'S PEAK SAFARI SEASON



Tanzania.

Just when East Africa prepares for peak travel season, fresh Ebola outbreak in the DRC and Uganda are unsettling tour companies. Hard to imagine a more difficult moment - crowds of tourists are about to arrive by the hundred thousand, drawn to gorilla hikes, safari drives, and local traditions across Uganda, Kenya, and

A Fast-Moving Outbreak

Midway through May, Ituri province in northeast DRC became ground zero for a fresh Ebola surge. **This outbreak traces back to the uncommon Bundibugyo variant - a form lacking any authorized vaccine or targeted therapy at present.** In just several days, the disease moved across borders into Uganda along busy travel corridors, arriving in Kampala, a central hub for visitors exploring East African wildlife circuits.

By mid-May, things moved fast. Nearly 600 infections showed up by the 20th, according to the head of the World Health Organization, along with 139 probable fatalities. Since the pathogen spread unseen long before detection, WHO stressed that figures could rise. Though officials only recently confirmed the outbreak, silent transmission had already taken hold.

Early Effects on Travel Reservations

Even though key tourist centers lie far from active conflict zones, headlines are shifting how people approach trips. Uganda, known for its mountain gorilla treks, sees multiple agencies now facing trip cancellations amid growing unease. News spreads fast, even when borders stay quiet.

Most careful are those heading out from North America, often booking premium safaris. By mid-May, warnings sharpened when Washington upgraded alerts, advising against any travel to either Uganda or the Democratic Republic of Congo because of spreading Ebola cases. Nearby regions caught attention too, especially Rwanda, now flagged for closer watch. A heightened alert followed, nudging visitors toward caution even near outbreak zones.

What We Learned from Previous Ebola Outbreaks

Some travel experts expect disruptions much like those seen during past Ebola crises, where nations without any infections still faced steep drops in reservations and image setbacks. Worry spreads easily, so regions distant from current hotspots may yet suffer economically due to emotional reactions rather than actual risk. Though cases remain limited, perceptions can shift quickly - impacting visitor numbers across East Africa regardless of proximity.

Right now, the World Health Organization hasn't set broad travel bans on the area. Still, unease is growing within a sector that's only recently begun to stabilize - fueled by an uncommon virus variant, fast international transit flows, and high visitor numbers.

Safari Season Outlook

Now, East Africa's travel industry must tread carefully - its success often tied to how safe it appears. **With shifting conditions, companies focus on clear health updates instead of rigid rules, offering changes when needed.** Attention stays sharp, grounded in real-time developments across regions.

Only time will tell if the spread stops short of harming the crucial high-demand period. Right now, the Ebola outbreak highlights just how fast health emergencies in any African region might weaken travel industries far beyond their borders.

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