



UGANDA MARTYRS' TRAIL.

The **Uganda Martyrs Trail** is Uganda's exclusive faith-based tourism product that takes you through different places where the first Christian missionaries passed and preached from, and where some of the Uganda Martyrs were killed before their bodies were taken to be burnt at Namugongo.

The death of these martyrs has always been memorable in the hearts of many people especially Christians who celebrate the lives of the martyrs on **3rd June of every year** – a day the republic of Uganda considers as the **Uganda Martyrs' Day** and a public holiday. Their remembrance was amplified when the Catholic Church of Rome beatified the martyrs of its faith in 1920 and canonized them in 1964.

Many pilgrims, especially Christians, from all over the world descend to the Pearl of Africa to join together with Ugandans to commemorate the martyrs' day. This is celebrated in remembrance of 45 young men (recorded) both Anglicans and Catholics who were killed on the orders of **Kabaka Mwanga II** (then the King of the Buganda Kingdom in Central Uganda), for refusing to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ or Christianity. The execution took place between November 1885 to June 1886 with a climax at Namugongo on 3rd June 1886, after the Kabaka (king) thought the Whites were 'infiltrating' his subjects with Christianity to cause rebellion against him. As a result he killed most of his servants at Namugongo.

Since its launch in 2014, the Uganda Martyrs Trail was expanded to cover such places like:

- i. Mapeera site in Ssesse
'Mapeera Site' at Bugoma, Buggala Island in Ssesse is the spot where Fr. Simeon Lourdel, who was later named "Mapeera" and Brother Amans first touched Ugandan soil when they landed at the site to spend the night of 15th February 1879 on their way to Lubaga to meet with Kabaka Muteesa I, seeking permission to set up a camp in Buganda to preach, teach and spread Christianity.
- ii. Kigungu Church, Entebbe
This is the second spot where Fr. Simeon Lourdel & Brother Amans landed on 17th February 1879 after spending a night at Bugoma, Buggala Island in Ssesse, en route to Munyonyo to meet with Kabaka Muteesa I.
- iii. Mapeera site in Kisubi
On their way to meet with King Muteesa I at Munyonyo palace, the missionaries also stayed at Kisubi, on the shores of Lake Victoria along Entebbe road, a place the Catholic Church later revamped and established a seminary, schools and a well maintained beach and gardens.
- iv. Uganda Martyrs' shrine, Munyonyo
In the same area where Kabaka Muteesa I had his palace lies the Munyonyo Matryrs' Shrine. This is the place where the missionaries met with the Kabaka who had earlier on [written a letter to Queen Victoria of UK](#) in 1876 inviting Christians to come, teach and preach in the Buganda Kingdom. It's also the place where the journey of the Martyrs, both Catholics and Anglicans, began before their martyrdom at Namugongo, happening after Kabaka Mwanga had assumed power when his father (Kabaka Muteesa I) died in 1884.



It was at Munyonyo where King Mwanga took the crucial decision to begin putting Christians to death. The blood of Uganda's martyrs was shed on the soil around Munyonyo. The first three Christians to render their lives for Christ's sake after the king's decision did so on 26 May 1886. They included, St. Denis Ssebugwawo and St. Andrew Kaggwa. It is also in this place where in 1886 Saint Charles Lwanga, leader of the Christian community in Uganda baptized St. Kizito, St. Mbaga, St. Gyavira and St. Muggaga.

The place has now been refurbished with a Cathedral and a monument which were inaugurated by Pope Francis on 27th November 2015, when he visited the Pearl of Africa.

v. Mackay Cave in Nateete

Alexander Murdoch Mackay was a Presbyterian missionary to Uganda and one of the Pioneer Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society who reached Uganda in 1878 after they were invited by Kabaka Muteesa I of the Buganda Kingdom.

Due to his great skills and aptitude for mechanics gained after spending several years as a draftsman in Germany, Mackay taught various skills to the people of Buganda, including carpentry and farming.

He was named Muzunguwa Kazi by the Ugandans, a name that means "white man of work".

Alexander Mackay constructed a cave in Nateete as a hiding place near a water spring (Well) when the kings (Mwanga & Kiweewa) started persecuting all Christians in the country. He had established his camp in the same area where he taught, preached, made carpentry works, bricks, and set up Uganda's first printing press – which can today be found at the Uganda Museum. He had also started a school in the area, a hospital and Nateete became the main place of worship and workshop for the native Anglicans.

It is also at this cave where Mackay is believed to have translated the gospel according to St Mathew into Luganda, before the first Anglican martyrs were arrested and later taken to Busega for execution.

vi. At Busega Martyrs' Church – Busega is where some of the Anglican martyrs who were picked from Mackay's cave and the surrounding, were killed.

vii. Lubaga Catholic and Namirembe Anglican Cathedrals

On two of the highest hills of Kampala lie the centres of Christianity in Uganda. Visiting both the Catholic Cathedral on Lubaga (Rubaga) hill and the Anglican Cathedral on Namirembe hill shall provide you with the best knowledge, feel and experience of how the death of the Uganda Martyrs bred an everlasting spirit in the lives of the people of Uganda. Surprisingly, these are the two hills that surrounded the central palace of the Kabaka of Buganda at Mengo, and they are believed to have been donated by Kabaka Muteesa I to both the Catholic and Anglican missionaries respectively.

viii. St. Mathias Mulumba in Old Kampala

In Old Kampala, the former trading capital of Kampala City, a church was built on the actual site of the martyrdom of St. Mathias Mulumba, the oldest of the Uganda Martyrs. He was about 50 years of age at the time of his martyrdom and served in an official Kingdom position at the time

of his arrest. He was still a relatively newly baptized Catholic at the time he was asked to bear supreme witness to Christ. In order to be baptized he had to separate from most of his multiple wives (whom he continued to support materially), choosing only one to be his Christian wife, and so is also a great witness to the sanctity of Christian marriage. He was killed ahead of and in a different place than the other Ugandan martyrs when he failed to endure the distance to Namugongo after being tortured, and hacked by machetes and left to die, enduring an agony that lasted for several days.

ix. St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

A walk of about half a mile down Mengo Hill (location of Kabaka's Palace) through the valley between Mengo and Nakasero Hills lies the river Nakivubo, and the spot where Joseph Balikuddembe was beheaded, thrown onto a heap of burning firewood and burnt at Nakivubo, Kampala – now St. Balikuddembe Market (formerly known as Owino Market). St. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe was the head of the Catholic Church in the absence of the Catholic Missionaries and a leader of all Christians.

x. Uganda Martyrs' shrine, Namugongo (both Anglican & Catholics' side).

The climax of the plight that befell the Uganda Martyrs between 1885 and 1886 happened at Namugongo, and the place was earmarked by the construction of a church. The construction of the [Uganda Martyrs' Shrine](#) (Catholics section) began in 1967 and it was completed and formally opened by the special Papal envoy, His Eminence Sergio Cardinal Pignedoli on 3rd June 1975.

The Uganda Martyrs minor basilica/Shrine is a Catholic church dedicated to the Martyrs of Uganda who shed their blood because of the Christian faith. The Shrine is well known for its beautiful and unique interior and exterior, but it is especially notable for its shape and architectural plan: the 22 copper pillars-over 100 feet long that support the shrine built in form of an African hut and its wooden doors that depict the history of the Martyrs. The Shrine has a capacity 1000 seats arranged in a circular form.

It is here that 14 of the 22 Catholic Uganda Martyrs were burnt alive, on the orders of Kabaka Mwangi II in 1886, having refused to denounce their Christian faith. Following the holocaust of these Martyrs which reached a climax on 3rd June, 1886 Namugongo has steadily taken on the image of attraction as a place of pilgrimage, as God simultaneously has honoured them before Believers.

On 6th June 1920 Pope Benedict XV beatified the Uganda Martyrs. Pope Paul VI canonized them on Mission Sunday, 8th October, 1964 in Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome. The same Pope honoured the Martyrs with a pilgrimage on 31st July to 2nd August 1969 - the first visit ever by a pope to the African Continent.

Remembering the work executed by St. Charles Lwanga when still a page in King Mwangi's palace, when he spearheaded the excavation of the legendary Kabaka's lake in Ndeeba, a Martyrs' lake was excavated at Namugongo. Many pilgrims have often drawn water from this lake and later given testimonies about this water healing them of various diseases.



The Pavilion (Island) in the lake is another unique feature at Namugongo with a clear view that can be seen from all angles of the over 15 acres Shrine compound. It is inside this pavilion where the main celebrant sits on big occasions like Martyrs' day, June 3. This grass thatched pavilion, also in circular form like the Shrine is supported by 4 pillars and can accommodate more than 300 priests and a number of bishops that turn for the High Mass on Martyrs Day.

In remembrance of the 23 (recorded) Anglican martyrs, the [Anglican Church of Uganda](#) also constructed a museum that collects all the information of the story, right from the coming of the first missionaries, to the torture of the martyrs and the spread of Christianity all over Uganda. Visiting these places shall provide you with all inspirational and spiritual knowledge.

Both sites have so far been visited by three Popes; including; Pope Paul VI in 1969, Pope John Paul II in 1993 and Pope Francis in 2015.

Other recognized places

xi. [Uganda Martyrs' Shrine, Mityana](#)

In Mityana along Kampala – Mubende highway, you'll find one of the grand martyrs' churches in Uganda where it is believed that St. Noah Mawaggali was killed. Noah was found in the same house they used to share with St. Luke Baanabakintu, St. Mathias Mulumba and other catechists. By that time Luke had already been arrested together with Mathias Mulumba at Munyonyo, Kampala.

The Church was constructed and finished in 1964 alongside Noah Mawaggali's house/chapel, with three pillars atop, symbolizing the three martyrs who were good friends to each other, that is; Mathias Mulumba, Luke Baanabakintu and Noah Mawaggali.

xii. [Bishop Hannington site at Kyando in Mayuge \(Eastern Uganda\)](#)

The [revamped site in Busoga](#), Eastern Uganda marks the place where the ordained bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, James Hannington, was killed on 29th October, 1885 on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga II, the King of Buganda Kingdom then. Together with his Christian porters, are regarded as the first Ugandan Martyrs who were killed at the time when Kabaka Mwanga had become suspicious of the German imperialism in neighboring Tanganyika, and the refusal of many of his subjects to renounce Christianity.

After eight days of captivity, on orders from King Mwanga II, Hannington's porters were killed, and on 29 October 1885, Hannington himself was speared in both sides. Kabaka Mwanga had become more suspicious of all white missionaries who were descending to his land, yet an oracle/traditionalists (emmandwa) had informed the King that Buganda's conqueror would come from the East. As he died, his alleged last words to the soldiers who killed him were: "Go, tell Mwanga I have purchased the road to Uganda with my blood."

Widespread persecution of Christians followed, many being killed (the Ugandan Martyrs) or sold to Arab slavers. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, a Roman Catholic and an official at Mwanga's

court, rebuked the king for the deed, and was beheaded for it. Hannington and his companions were among the first Martyrs of Uganda.

Hannington's feast day in the Church of England is October 29. A dedication stone, erected in his memory along with the Bishop Hannington Memorial Church, Hove, England in 1938, bears the inscription "Thou hast turned my heaviness into joy".

xiii. Catholic Church at Kasubi, Nabulaggala – Burial place for Fr. Simeon Lourdel

At the pioneer Catholic Church in Kasubi, Nabulaggala, Kampala is where the remains of many of the first Christian missionaries were buried, including Fr. Simeon Lourdel (Mapeera) and Br. Delmas Amans.

The Catholic Church resolved to re-bury the remains of the missionaries at Nabulaggala in Kasubi in 2011 because it's the land that Kabaka Muteesa I offered them to build the first Catholic Church in Uganda in 1879. This came after the remains of the white fathers were collected by the late Cardinal Nsubuga from Bagamoyo and Lubaga cemeteries and kept them in a secret place. Other than Fr. Simeon Lourdel and Brother Delmas Amans, the remains of Mgr Leon Livinhac, Fr Leon Barbot and Fr Girault Ludovic were also re-buried at this church.

xiv. Kasubi tombs in Kasubi, Kampala

In the outskirts of Kampala in Kasubi along Kampala – Hoima highway, lies four of the Kings of Buganda (Bassekabaka), who ruled during the periods of imperialism and and initial spread Christianity in the Eastern Africa (1870s – 1960s). These include Ssekabaka Muteesa I, Ssekabaka Mwangi II, Ssekabaka Daudi Chwa II and Sir Edward Frederick Muteesa II.

Kasubi Royal Tombs were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in December 2001 and it has since become a major tourist site in Central Uganda.

xv. Kabaka's Lake – Ndeeba:

At Kabaka's lake in Ndeeba is where St. Charles Lwanga and St. Kizito (the youngest of the Martyrs) were arrested. This is the same lake that St. Charles Lwanga had spearheaded its excavation, when he was still a page in King Mwangi's palace, for Mwangi who wanted to connect his palace at Mengo to the one in Munyonyo, to ease transport. It's also believed that it was at this legendary Kabaka's lake in Ndeeba where many of the first Christian converts were baptized, while its excavation was halted by the persecution of the Martyrs and many more Christians at that time.

xvi. Nalukolongo House of Charity:

At this site is where the missionaries settled on their return on 12th July 1885 and where they gave instructions and teachings to many of the Christians who were then being hunted and persecuted, and kept slave children that had been rescued.

The House of Charity, was inaugurated by Cardinal Nsubuga and it is a place which has always been associated with the Church's outreach to the poor, the handicapped, the sick.

Pope Francis visited the site on 28th November, 2015.



Some of the Uganda Martyrs who were killed include;

Catholics

1. Achileo Kiwanuka
2. Adolphus Ludigo-Mukasa
3. Ambrosius Kibuuka
4. Anatoli Kiriggwajjo
5. Andrew Kaggwa
6. Antanansio Bazzekuketta
7. Bruno Sserunkuuma
8. Charles Lwanga
9. Denis Ssebuggwawo Wasswa
10. Gonzaga Gonza
11. Gyavira Musoke
12. James Buuzaabalyaawo
13. John Maria Muzeeyi
14. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe
15. Kizito
16. Lukka Baanabakintu
17. Matiya Mulumba
18. Mbagu Tuzinde
19. Mugagga Lubowa
20. Mukasa Kiriwawanvu
21. Nowa Mawaggali
22. Ponsiano Ngondwe

Protestants

23. Makko Kakumba
24. Yusuf Lugalama
25. Nuwa Sserwanga
26. Mukasa Musa
27. Eriya Mbwa
28. Muddu Aguma
29. Daudi Muwanga
30. Muwanga
31. Kayizzi Kibuuka
32. Mayanja Kitogo
33. Noah Walukaga
34. Alexander Kdoko
35. Fredrick Kizza
36. Robert Munyangabyanjo
37. Daniel Nakabandwa
38. Kiwanuka Gyaza
39. Mukasa Lwakisiga
40. Lwanga
41. Mubi
42. Wasswa



43. Kwabafu
44. Kifamunnyanja
45. Muwanga Njigiya

More details at www.ugandamartyrsshine.org.ug and <http://ugandamartyrsmuseumnamugongo-cou.org/>

When to do it

One can visit at any time of the year but the most favorable time is between May and July every year, during which you can also join in the annual celebrations of 3rd June every year.

Who to contact:

A list of potential tour operators is available for you to choose from. They'll take you to get the best experience ever in your adventurous life.

You're Welcome!