Uganda

Location

Uganda is located in southeast Africa between 1° N and 4° N latitude, and 30° E and 35° E longitude. The country is approximately twice the size of Pennsylvania, as the land surface is 241,139 square kilometers. Uganda is bordered by Tanzania and Rwanda to the south, Zaire to the west, Sudan to the north, and Kenya to the east. Uganda is landlocked and lies 800 kilometers inland from the Indian Ocean.

Geography

Uganda’s geography is very diverse in that it consists of volcanic hills, mountains, and lakes. The country sits at an average of 900 meters above sea level. Both the eastern and western borders of Uganda have mountains. The Ruwenzori mountain range contains the highest peak in Uganda, which is named Alexandra and measures 5,094 meters. Uganda also has a plentiful amount of lakes, including Lakes Albert, Kyoga, and Edward.

Climate

Uganda has an equatorial climate, meaning that it receives a lot of sun. The mean annual temperature is 16° C in the southwest highlands, 25° C in the northwest, and often exceeds 30° C in the northeast. Rainfall occurs regularly in northeast Uganda, while the south has two rainy seasons. In the north however, it rains regularly between April and October, but is dry from November through March.
History

The two main ethnic groups in Uganda settled there quite a long time ago. In fact, the Nilotic people may have settled in Uganda as early as 100 AD. The Bantu people settled in Uganda between 1500-2000 years ago. In the 1860’s British explorers discovered Uganda, and soon took control of the country. Uganda gained independence from Britain in 1962. During the period following independence, tension began to develop between the two main ethnic groups, Bantu, and Nilotic. Milton Obote ruled Uganda until 1971, until Idi Amin seized power during that same year. Amin’s dictatorship created havoc in the country and increased ethnic tension. Amin invaded Tanzania in 1978, causing uproar in the Ugandan and Tanzanian armies. Obote was restored to power in 1979 as a result of Ugandan and Tanzanian armies turning against Amin. Unfortunately, Bantu and Nilotic relations did not improve, and Uganda continued to unravel in all aspects. In 1986, Yoweri Museveni gained power by declaring a ‘no-party’ democracy, and thus, finally brought a sense of stability to Uganda. However, Uganda has been involved in wars with the Congo, Sudan, and most recently, the Lord’s Resistance Army in northwest Uganda. The Lord’s Resistance Army has been attempting to overthrow the current president, and have created greater strife throughout Uganda.

Important Dates

Uganda celebrates New Years on January 1st, Easter, Labor Day on May 1st, Independence Day on October 9th, and Christmas. Additionally, the country has some smaller celebrations throughout the year.

Population
There are two main ethnic groups in Uganda. These groups are the Bantu and Nilotic peoples. Presently Uganda has a population of 28,195,754. The growth rate is currently at 3.4%. The life expectancy in Uganda is 52.7 years.

**Currency**

The currency in Uganda is the Ugandan shilling (Ush). During the past several decades, Uganda's economy has been out of control, and the shilling's value has increased and plummeted on numerous occasions. The current exchange rate is $1 US to 1766.02 Ush.

**Education**

Uganda's educational system, while lacking in many areas, has seen significant change in recent years. The educational system is set up so that children spend seven years in primary school, six years in secondary school, and three to five years in post secondary school. In 1997, the government declared that primary school would be free for all children. This amendment has had huge benefits. In 1986, only two million children were attending primary school. By 1999, six million children were attending primary school, and this number has continued to climb.

Only 40% of children go on to secondary school, and even fewer make it to universities. Though there are quite a few universities throughout Uganda, 95% of students attend Makerere University in Kampala. Currently, 9,000-12,000 students attend higher education per year.
Language

Uganda’s official language is English, though in 2005, Swahili was voted in as Uganda’s second official language. However, as many as forty-six tribal languages exist. Prominent tribal languages include Ganda, Luganda, and Niger-Congo languages.

Religion

The main religion in Uganda is Christianity, as 88.7% of the population is Christian. Of that percent, 33% are Protestant, and 33% are Roman Catholic. Independent, Anglican, and Orthodox denominations are also represented. Additionally, 6% of Uganda’s population is Muslim, and 4.2% practice traditional/ethnic religions. A very low percent of the population is Baha’i and Hindu.

Agriculture

Eighty percent of Uganda’s population is involved in agriculture. Farms are extremely small and only average between two and four acres. Crops are Uganda’s main source of agricultural production. Coffee, cotton, tea, tobacco, sugar, and cassava are the most frequently grown. Livestock is not widely produced at this point in time, though there is definitely room for expansion. The entire agricultural spectrum requires attention and growth if Uganda is to develop. Many farmers have no tools to work their fields with, sometimes not even a hoe. Production can, in no way, increase in such circumstances. The transport of crops often cannot occur, due to lack of vehicles or developed roads. Furthermore, market access is nearly impossible to achieve. The wealthy are able to learn what to expect from the markets and plant crops accordingly. However, most farmers have little to no access to technologies or people that could
inform them of market prospects. For example, the coffee market has dropped drastically in recent years, leaving farmers with very little income.

Despite all of the current problems within the agricultural field, there does appear to be hope for Uganda. Several governmental and non-governmental programs are making strides of improvement within agriculture. Perhaps most notably is the National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO,) which has outlined an agricultural growth strategy for Uganda. Included in the strategy are education and extension program development, financial assistance, technological development, accessible market information and more. As a result of this strategy and other efforts, Uganda has seen economic growth in recent years.

**Trade**

Most of Uganda’s population is involved in agriculture, which lends to the fact that most things exported are agricultural products. Coffee, fish, tea, cotton, flowers, horticultural products, and gold are the items most exported. Uganda regularly imports capital equipment, vehicles, petroleum, and medical supplies. Uganda trades with its neighboring countries, both Rwanda and Kenya. Additionally, trade with Europe often takes place; Uganda trades with France, Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium.

**Food**

A stable food item in the Ugandan diet is the matoke, which is a green banana that is mashed and steamed. Posho, which is cornmeal, is another common food item. Kidney beans, ground peanut sauce, cassava, and sweet potatoes are also frequently consumed. In addition, fresh fruits and vegetables are eaten regularly. Meat is very expensive in Uganda, and is consumed only rarely. If meat is eaten, it is generally beef.

**Landmarks**
There are many physical landmarks to see in Uganda. Lake Victoria and islands within Lake Victoria, such as Kome, Biukara, and Bugala are frequented. There are many national parks throughout the country, which include mountain ranges or lakes in them. Popular national parks include, Bwindi, Mt. Elgon, and Queen Elizabeth.

The two largest cities in Uganda, Kampala and Entebbe, located in the south, also contain buildings, statues, and other landmarks.

Conclusion

Uganda has faced its share of problems and turmoil. Difficulties with the government and economy have hindered Uganda’s growth to this point. However, in recent years, Uganda has seen greater prosperity in many areas. With continued educational and financial assistance, Uganda will be able to make the changes necessary to insure that all of its people have equal opportunities for successful and happy lives.

Lindsay Krone