

A weekend escape to Ziwa Rhino Ranch

Just go. Uninterrupted family time.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

Three hours from Kampala, the landscape begins to change. The traffic thins, roadside trading centres grow quieter, and long stretches of savannah woodland take over the highway north. In Nakasongola District, along the Kampala-Gulu road, sits Ziwa Rhino and Wildlife Ranch, one of Uganda's most remarkable conservation success stories and an increasingly popular weekend getaway.

For many travellers, Ziwa is a brief stop on the way to Murchison Falls National Park. But spending a weekend at the sanctuary reveals far more than a roadside break. It is a place where conservation, wildlife

and quiet countryside living come together.

The sanctuary is best known as the only place in Uganda where visitors would see rhinos in the wild until recently, when Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) translocated southern white rhinos from the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary back to Kidepo Valley National Park. Rhinos disappeared from the country decades ago due to poaching and political instability. Established in 2005, Ziwa has since become central to efforts to restore Uganda's rhino population.

The highlight for most visitors is rhino tracking. Unlike game drives where tourists remain inside vehicles, Ziwa's rhino experience happens on foot. Guided by armed rangers, visitors walk through lush grasslands and bushes in search of the animals. The experience feels both intimate

and thrilling. One moment, the landscape appears empty, the next, a larger-than-life white rhino emerges quietly from the tall grass.

Beyond rhinos, Ziwa has steadily built a reputation as one of Uganda's best birding destinations. Early morning shoebill trekking draws bird enthusiasts hoping to spot the rare shoebill stork in the sanctuary's

wetlands. Canoe rides through the marshes offer a calm contrast to the adrenaline of rhino tracking.

The sanctuary is also home to giraffes, kobs, bushbucks, monkeys, crocodiles and hundreds of bird species, making it ideal for travellers seeking a slower and less crowded wildlife experience.

Accommodation ranges from

campsites to comfortable mid-range lodges surrounded by open plains and acacia trees. Evenings at Ziwa are notably quiet. After sunset, the sounds of insects and distant wildlife replace the noise of city life, creating the kind of stillness many urban travellers rarely experience.

Part of Ziwa's appeal lies in its accessibility. Unlike some safari destinations that require long drives or domestic flights, the sanctuary easily fits into a short weekend itinerary. Travellers can leave Kampala on Saturday morning and return by Sunday evening having experienced wildlife, nature walks and birding without venturing too far from the city.

More importantly, Ziwa represents a growing shift in Uganda's tourism industry towards conservation-based travel. Every rhino born at the sanctuary signals progress in rebuilding a species once lost from Uganda's wilderness.

For visitors, however, the attraction goes beyond conservation statistics. A weekend at Ziwa offers something increasingly difficult to find, space, silence and a close encounter with nature only a few hours from Kampala.



Enjoy shared experiences and breathing space. PHOTO/TREVOR LUTALO