



Partnership Ready Uganda: Tourism

Sector Overview

With its huge diversity of nature, culture and wildlife, Uganda offers ideal conditions for a strong tourism sector.

Its landscapes range from lush rainforests and volcanic crater lakes to vast savannahs, snow-covered mountain ranges, tropical waterfalls and the source of the Nile. With over 45 tribes, Uganda has a variety of cultures, languages and dialects, local cuisines, traditional clothing, customs and beliefs.

Furthermore, it is a unique destination for wildlife watching. In addition to the 'Big Five' (elephant, lion, rhinoceros, leopard and buffalo) and over 1,000 different bird species, Uganda is home to chimpanzees and more than half of the entire population of mountain gorillas still living in the wild. This makes Uganda one of the few places in the world where you can still encounter these endangered primates in their natural habitat.

Uganda lies on the equator in the East African region, in the western foothills of the Great East African Rift Valley. It borders Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Most of the country is located on a plateau at an altitude of over 1,000 m and enjoys a temperate equatorial climate (20°C to 27°C), enabling travel all year round.

As a constantly growing industry, the importance of the tourism sector in Uganda has increased in recent years, and not only because of its growth rate and contribution to GDP. Apart from economic development, there are other positive effects on the country and its inhabitants. In the last two decades, visitor numbers in Uganda have risen rapidly – while 205,000 arrivals were recorded in 2001, as many as 1.5 million were registered in 2018. In 2018/19, the tourism sector turned over USD 1.6 billion, contributing an estimated 7.7 per cent to GDP and creating around 667,000 jobs both directly and indirectly.

This has also made the sector an area of focus in the political sphere, with initiatives such as Uganda Vision 2040, the National





Development Plan (NDP III), the Uganda Tourism Development Master Plan (2014-2024) and the Tourism Sector Development Plan highlighting the sector's potential to contribute to national development.

Establishing a professional, regulated and sustainable tourism sector that helps to create jobs, increase foreign currency income, improve livelihoods and preserve natural and cultural resources has been defined as a strategic objective for developing tourism over the next few years.

→ STRUCTURE OF THE TOURISM SECTOR

Uganda's tourism sector is described as 'public sector led, private sector driven'. The public sector sets the course, but private tourism providers are the main actors in the tourism value chain.

Local tour operators play a key role in providing services for tourists including transport, accommodation, catering, leisure activities, guided tours and entertainment. They handle a large part of the marketing for the destination, establish partnerships with agencies in the source markets, acquire end customers, coordinate the booking process and finally implement the trip itself. There are currently around 400 tour operators in Uganda, of which 80 per cent are licensed members of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO).

The majority of these operators are small and medium-sized companies with local owners, and sometimes with foreign investors who enable them to benefit from access to capital, expertise and links to international markets.

The private sector is divided into associations, including the following:

- Uganda Hotel Owners Association (UHOA)
- Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO)
- The Ugandan Association of Travel Agents (TUGATA)
- Uganda Safari Guides Association (USAGA)
- Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA).

These professional associations are, in turn, members of an umbrella association, the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA). The UTA represents the tourism industry to the government and international organisations with a united voice, helps with strategic interventions and carries out lobbying to assert the interests of the industry.

Within the public sector, strategic planning and coordination are the responsibility of the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA), while the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) is the point of contact for product development, destination marketing, quality assurance as well as tourism research and investment. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is responsible for conserving and sustainably managing Uganda's protected areas and wildlife populations. Another important contact for foreign and local investors and entrepreneurs is the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), a semi-autonomous government authority and agency for promoting investment which works in partnership with the private sector to drive national economic growth and development.

Both the private and the public sector associations often enter into partnerships with international organisations, foreign associations and institutions and other partners which provide expert knowledge or other forms of support for the tourism sector.

→ COVID-19 SECTOR RECOVERY PLAN AND PRIORITIES

Since 1 October 2020, Uganda's borders have been open to international travellers again after a six-month closure. In order to offer visitors a safe travel experience while also avoiding putting the health of the Ugandan population and the country's wild animals at risk, binding hygiene protocols have been issued for the entire tourism sector.

VOICE4AFRICA

The VOICE4AFRICA task force is an initiative of KRPN network that works with Africa-specific tour operators to promote differentiated travel advice which takes into account the precautionary measures. They also offer transparent information and inspiration for a trip to Africa and useful tips for preparing for a holiday through its website www.voice4africa.de.



The Tourism Sector Recovery Business Plan published in July 2020 serves to set strategic objectives for the period from July 2020 to June 2022 and specifies the following priorities and measures, among others

- **Building trust in Uganda as a travel destination:** Clear and regular communication on the current health situation in the country and the applicable local hygiene and safety protocols; organising tours for the press and for buyers
- **Destination marketing:** Intensive advertising of the destination in all source markets based on in-depth market information, focusing on digital marketing, and developing a uniform 'destination brand' and consistent, coherent brand marketing. Professional PR agencies currently represent the destination in the key source markets, specifically the USA and Canada, the UK and Ireland, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (DACH), and in China, Japan and the United Arab Emirates, which are new sales markets identified as promising. With 13,460 tourists arriving in 2018, DACH is Uganda's third-largest source market (compared to 61,776 recorded arrivals from the USA and 33,546 from the UK).
- **Product development and diversification:** Positioning as a destination for nature, active and cultural holidays by developing products tailored to the source markets
- **Professionalising the private sector:** Training and continuing professional development on tourism products, digital marketing, service standards and sustainability for tour guides, travel agencies, hotels and activity providers; regulating the sector by developing binding quality standards; sustainability mentorship programmes and certifications
- **Tourism sector crisis response:** Relieving financial pressures on the sector to overcome the crisis and preserve jobs by providing low-interest loans and subsidies, e.g. from the EU Tourism Intervention Fund; supporting adaptation to changed requirements in the travel industry

Potential for growth

Despite the sector's rapid development in recent years, Uganda has not yet been able to make the most of its potential as an attractive, diverse travel destination.

Potential for growth is particularly to be found in product development and marketing, infrastructure, practical training and continuing professional development, sector regulation and regional integration.

→ PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

Mountain gorillas and chimpanzees as the main attraction

In spite of its spectacular diversity of landscapes and cultures, Uganda is often known merely as a destination for tracking gorillas and chimpanzees. As these activities are subject to strict regulations to protect the primates and, understandably, can only be permitted where it is possible to ensure that the animals are not disturbed by tourists, only one visitor group per habituated family of gorillas is allowed each day. This significantly limits tracking authorisations (known as permits). Their availability also determines the number of tourists in the country because many only choose to travel to Uganda if permits are still available for the time they want to travel. Even tour operators in the country restrict themselves almost exclusively to marketing primate tracking as the main attraction and thereby reinforce the impression that Uganda has no other attractions to offer, meaning that they miss out on the opportunity to promote a more nuanced picture of Uganda. Therefore, one of the priorities of the Uganda Tourism Board and private sector is product diversification.

Year-round tourist season

Although Uganda offers good weather conditions for travel all year round, two main tourist seasons that attract many more visitors than the rest of the year can be identified: July/August and end of December/January/February. The accumulation of tourists at these peak times coupled with the limited number of available permits for primate tracking and the relatively low number of accommodation options mean that customer requests for the peak travel time have to be refused, while no trips at all are made in other months despite good conditions for travel. Tours in the low season with more attractive prices and a sustainability aspect that can be marketed should therefore be advertised more heavily.



→ PRODUCT DEMAND

In Uganda's source markets, particularly in Europe, the demand for niche products and 'special interest' tours to untouched destinations is growing.

Activities in nature, slow travel and the conscious exploration of the destination country through hikes, cycle tours and experiencing local cultures, amongst others, are becoming increasingly popular. It is to be expected that travellers' desire to avoid large groups of people and make more conscious consumption decisions will be reinforced even further by the pandemic.

Specialisation and niche products

A wider range of tourist attractions would not only make Uganda more attractive as a destination, but also reduce the pressure on primate tracking as the sole attraction and thus support efforts to save mountain gorillas from extinction and conserve their natural habitat. Local agencies, and ultimately also tour operators in the source markets, would be given the opportunity to establish themselves as specialists in a niche product. Active tourism, mountain hikes, botanical, historical, ethnological and religious study trips and authentic experiences of the local cultures have been identified as particularly promising niche markets.

The Adventure Tourism Uganda collective is a private sector initiative for product diversification. Funded by the Dutch government authority RVO (Netherlands Enterprise Agency) as an 'impact cluster', a group of small companies is working together to develop and market adventure and cultural tourism in Uganda. The project's activities include developing a national cycle route, opening up new hiking trails, promoting sports tourism through training camps for long-distance runners and Mount Elgon Marathon participants, and eventually developing and implementing a continuing professional development programme for adventure guides with a component to support female tour guides. It is important to stress the joint objective of this initiative – although it is an alliance of private companies, all project activities aim to generate added value for the sector as a whole with positive effects that are to be demonstrated at the end of the project. Both the public sector, particularly the Uganda Tourism Board and Uganda Wildlife Authority, and the private sector, represented by its associations, have offered support to the initiative and will remain open to further collaboration of this nature in future.

→ MICE TOURISM

To increase the number of tourist arrivals and income from business tourism and to attract more investment to the sector, the Uganda Convention Bureau (UCB) was set up in 2018 to manage the development of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Events) tourism in Uganda. The Uganda Association of the Conference & Incentive Industry (UACII) is the private sector association which aims to enhance the competitiveness of business tourism in the destination and raise service standards to an international level.

→ OPENING UP NEW TRAVEL ROUTES AND INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Until now, most tour programmes through Uganda focused on a main travel route from the north-west to the south-west of the country, from Murchison Falls National Park in the north via the Kibale and Queen Elizabeth National Parks to primate tracking in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. As a result, tourist infrastructure in other parts of the country had previously been very limited, offering little opportunity to travel through areas beyond the fully accessible route. The potential for travel in less-visited regions of the country therefore remained unrealised. However, in recent years, a clear shift has emerged, for example in Karamoja, a region in the north of Uganda which used to be relatively inaccessible for tourists. By investing in accommodation that meets the expectations of international travellers and developing a variety of activities, Karamoja has become a popular region for travellers.

This development also made it possible to establish a new tour route through the north-east of the country, connecting the attractions in the east, Jinja and the source of the Nile, the Sipi waterfalls and the coffee plantations on Mount Elgon with Kidepo National Park in the north of the country via Karamoja.

Investment in tourist infrastructure is required to support future product development. The destination would particularly benefit from investment in accommodation along new travel routes and visitor and information centres, or in developing and maintaining new hiking paths and cycle routes.



→ EXPERT KNOWLEDGE FROM SOURCE MARKETS AND DATA COLLECTION

Products should be developed based on market information from the relevant source countries to ensure that supply corresponds to demand. Cooperation would be desirable with associations or institutions from the source markets which can share expertise, market information and advise on product development and marketing.

It is all the more important to exchange information with experts from source markets as it has not yet been fully possible to introduce a reliable system for collecting and analysing data for the tourism sector in Uganda, meaning that there is a lack of fundamental information to serve as a basis for strategic planning and analysis.

→ BUYER AND PRESS TOURS

Buyer and press tours must become an essential component of the marketing strategy. Product tours for tour operators in the source markets are required to disseminate the latest knowledge on products and applicable hygiene and safety protocols and to help tour operators to provide their customers with reliable advice. Press tours for journalists are just as important to boost destination marketing through travel stories and rebuild visitors' trust in travel to Africa and Uganda with targeted media reports.



Professionalisation of the sector

→ TRAINING AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERTS

The absence of a standardised and practical training system is one of the challenges affecting training and continuing professional development. The Tourism and Hospitality Sector Skills Council has been created to support competence development for the sector as a whole. It is made up of public and private sector representatives and has the task of preparing profiles for tourism professions and developing standardised and practical teaching and training plans. These plans are to be available to all institutions and interested companies that would like to hold training courses.

The subsequent final examination, which leads to a state-approved qualification if passed, is being implemented by the Uganda Tourism Board's quality assurance department. Training and further training is often organised via the private sector associations, frequently in cooperation with development partners. As the umbrella association, the UTA implements joint programmes for all member associations such as the EU-funded sustainability certification project with Travelife, which runs training courses for hotels (via UHOA) and travel agencies (via AUTO).

One significant digital innovation is the open source platform Ukarimu, which provides practical teaching plans for the tourism and hospitality industry. The programme gives trainees the technical knowledge, market awareness and soft skills they need to start a career in tourism. The teaching plans have been developed together with young Ugandans, various Ugandan tourism companies and six training institutions in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. The plan is to expand them on an ongoing basis in cooperation with the private and public sectors and experts from the source markets. The programme has been implemented successfully in a pilot project in the Rwenzori and Karamoja regions – within three months of completing the course, 75 per cent of graduates had found a job.

Best Practice

GIZ Uganda – Employment and Skills for Sustainable Development in Africa (E4D)

The Employment and Skills for Sustainable Development in Africa (E4D) Programme in Uganda is implementing a project to develop skills in tourism and hospitality from December 2020 to December 2022. Privately run regional tourism clusters offer practical training and internship opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs, site guides, activity providers, tour guides and hospitality staff. This particularly enables young people and women to access decent jobs or improve their employment situation.

As a response to the coronavirus pandemic, local tour operators and hotel staff are also trained to deal with the negative effects of the pandemic and to be better prepared for future crises.

The programme is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

www.giz.de/en/worldwide/31947.html

→ QUALITY ASSURANCE

The long-term professionalisation of the tourism sector will only be possible if uniform standards can be established and quality controls guaranteed.

Until now, the lack of regulation in the sector has also been evident in the absence of standardised hotel categories and reliable quality indicators for tour operators. Evidence of membership of one of the relevant private sector associations often served as the sole indication of a tourism company's trustworthiness, even though the associations' acceptance criteria are frequently minimal and therefore have little meaning.

However, the Uganda Tourism Board has already started to implement specifications according to which all hotels, travel agencies and tour guides must be registered and licensed. For



example, it is no longer possible for companies to attend international tourism fairs as an exhibitor on the Uganda stand if they cannot produce a valid UTB licence. In order to register, travel agencies must produce a valid trading licence and current tax certificate, among other documents. UTB's quality assurance staff will also visit the agencies' business premises to inspect them in person.

A general code of conduct and examples of best practice have been developed specifically for the tourism industry to make companies aware of service standards and the expectations of international travellers.

Training courses and certifications on sustainability are also offered through partnerships between the private sector, represented by its associations as well as Travelife and TourCert (the latter as part as of the TourCert Excellence Initiative Sustainable Destinations).

→ EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC) – REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Growth in the tourism sector in Uganda is also encouraged by regional development in East Africa.

The EAC Vision 2050 prioritises marketing the region as a combined travel destination with a joint marketing strategy. As a lesser-known destination country compared to its neighbours Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda is benefiting from the additional advertising of tourism. An initial major success of this project was the introduction of the East Africa Visa for which tourists can apply via a digital platform in their country of arrival, which makes travelling in the region easier.

There are also plans to develop and introduce uniform standards for the region, such as for hotel classification or tour guide training levels. Together with the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda (NACCAU), a member of the UTA, and under the leadership of TradeMark East Africa, the standardisation of art and craft products sold as souvenirs has already been initiated.

The East African Tourist Guides Portal is another product that strengthens the countries' shared identity as a single destination. This portal is intended to serve as a publicly accessible directory of professional tour guides in East Africa and provides information on training levels, qualifications and customer reviews online.



Useful information and links:

- Uganda Tourism Board
www.utb.go.ug
- Uganda Tourism Association
www.ugandatourismassociation.org
- Uganda Wildlife Authority
www.ugandawildlife.org
- Private Sector Foundation Uganda
www.psfuganda.org
- Uganda Investment Authority
www.ugandainvest.go.ug
- Trademark East Africa
www.trademarkea.com
- East African Tourist Guides Portal
www.touristguidesportal.com



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Economic growth creates jobs, improves people's incomes, and promotes innovation. That is why the United Nations 2030 Agenda provides for the active involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Global Business Network (GBN) Programme encourages local and German companies to get involved in sustainable economic development in selected countries in Africa and Asia. Via Business & Cooperation Desks the GBN-Coordination provide information, advice and guidance for businesses on existing support, financing and cooperation instruments of German development cooperation. The GBN-Coordination work closely with the German Chamber of Commerce Abroad (AHK) regional offices. The GBN is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

www.bmz.de/gbn



NEW MARKETS – NEW OPPORTUNITIES: UGANDA

In order to support the sustainable engagement of German companies in emerging and developing countries, Germany Trade & Invest (GTAI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs) as well as other partners combined their expertise in the publication series “New Markets – New Opportunities”.

The booklet shows companies the economic potential of future markets as well as the funding and consulting opportunities offered by the German development cooperation. “New Markets – New Opportunities: A Guide for German Companies” is supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). All issues are published on the websites of GTAI and GIZ. You can find selected issues, for example on Uganda also at

www.bmz.de/ez-scouts



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Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
T +49 6196 79-0
F +49 6196 79-11 15
info@giz.de
www.giz.de

Project

Global Business Network (GBN) Programme

Responsible

Linda Schraml
linda.schraml@giz.de

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