

Development and Marketing of Tourism Products in Uganda:

Elevating the tourism experience



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Development and Marketing of Tourism Products in Uganda: Elevating the tourism experience

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Executive Summary

The elevation of Uganda to join the league of top global tourism destinations indicates a possible rise in the number of tourists visiting the country, coupled with increased demand for quality services in the tourism sector (Fodor's travel December 2018).

The tourism experience around Uganda's products, though reportedly excellent, needs to be constantly improved, with new tourism products and innovative approaches being embraced to enhance the existing attractions.

Ironically, some of the high-end tourist destinations in the world have fewer natural visitor-pullers than Uganda, but thrive more on innovation and diversity to attract a higher number of tourists.

The policy regime in the country's tourism sector needs to sufficiently focus on the development and marketing of products, to sustainably compete on the global scene, where success is creativity-driven.

This policy brief is based on research findings presented at a public dialogue titled "Revisiting Tourism Product Development in Uganda: Policy and systemic issues".



The findings indicate that Uganda's tourism product range is narrow; delivered by a minimally-regulated network of private agents superintended by centralised agencies, whose focus is mainly on access, security and revenue.

The forum was held at the Uganda Management Institute on March 28 this year.

The research was commissioned by the Uganda Policy Development Management Forum based at the Uganda Management Institute, and Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI).

The study was conducted by way of document review, focusing on expert appreciation of the management of tourism sites in Uganda, inventory of government policies, academically-referenced literature on the tourism sector and global tourism practices; and an analysis of the emerging issues across the globe.

The findings indicate that Uganda's tourism product range is narrow; delivered by a minimally-regulated network of private agents superintended by centralised agencies, whose focus is mainly on access, security and revenue.

While innovation is cited as an important strategy for tourism development in the country, minimal

success has been registered in terms of effective facilitation and proactive interventions by scholars and practitioners to enrich product diversity.

The research found a need to revisit the current policy framework to address emerging issues, and also incorporate innovation and product development in the management of the tourism sector in Uganda.



A speaker makes his contribution during a forum to discuss Uganda's tourism sector policy. The workshop, held at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), discussed research presentations from scholars, the Government and sector players. The symposium, which brought together the public, tourism stakeholders and the media, was part of quarterly debates organised by UMI and Africa Leadership Institute (ALI) to evaluate the effectiveness of various policies on current issues discussed in Parliament. The process ends with the production of a policy brief on the subject. The publication is shared with the government, relevant parties and the public to influence policy change.



Participants at the forum.

Introduction

Uganda has been documented on several occasions as one of the top tourist destinations in the world (Uganda Tourism Centre 2012; Fodor's travel guide 2018).

These accolades should challenge the sector to move faster to meet the international expectations of a top-ranked tourist destination.

Tourism products are what tourists consume before, during and after their trips.

As such, therefore, tourism service providers must ensure that the products meet primary and secondary tourist needs (Middleton and Victor, 1988), considering that the service is delivered within the environs of transactional business (Koutoulas, 2001:473).

The bouquet of tourism products and services in Uganda is currently limited in scope (Seron, R. 2012), defined by influential practitioners who choose the destinations (Adiyia, B. 2015).

As a result, Uganda's tourism rotates around traditional products, focusing more on hitting the revenue targets of the Government and influential private practitioners in the tourism industry (Adiyia, B. 2015).

Innovative efforts to diversify products and attract more tourists is inadequately facilitated, and is hardly listed among priority sector concerns, while the service providers' network is too fragmented to systematically foster creativity, a result of structural incongruence in the sector (Ahebwa, M. W. 2012).

While a policy framework for the tourism sector exists, glaring weakness continue to manifest in a number of areas, including tourism product development strategy, regular tourism needs assessments, scientific documentation of tourism experience for learning purposes, facilitation of innovation for development of tourism products, and regulation of private tour and travel agents.

Regulation of access and management of protected areas (PAs) to mitigate poaching, climate change effects, human-wildlife conflicts and other factors that adversely affect sustainability of tourism products are catered for under the Uganda Wildlife Act Cap 200, Uganda Tourism Act 2008, and Museums and Monuments Act 1967.

However, policy guidelines on the management of emerging issues and interests need to be documented.

This research highlights the gaps and pinpoints areas for improvement in the current tourism policy framework. It also suggests avenues for policy enrichment that may raise the sector's capacity to scale to global standards.



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Africa Leadership Institute's team is joined by civil society representatives and other stakeholders during an inter-agency meeting at the organisation's Bugolobi offices to discuss presentations made during an earlier forum at the Uganda Management Institute on Uganda's tourism policy. The participants made contributions to enrich policy research findings before the production of a policy brief.



A speaker makes his point during a forum to discuss Uganda's tourism sector policy at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI).

Methodology

This policy research was conducted through:

- Review of literature on the tourism sector.
- Deep analysis of documented tourism experiences in Uganda.
- Examination of the tourism information systems.
- Assessment of technical reports from the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities.
- Evaluation of the inventory of Government policies (2018).
- Scrutiny of academically-referenced literature on global and local tourism practices.

This approach enabled the researchers to gain a deep understanding of the policy needs in the sector.



A panel of experts conducts a debate on Uganda's tourism sector policy at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI). Research presentations from scholars, the Government and sector players were discussed. The symposium, which brought together the public, tourism stakeholders and the media, was part of quarterly debates organised by UMI and Africa Leadership Institute (AFI) to evaluate the effectiveness of various policies on current issues discussed in Parliament. The process ends with the production of a policy brief on the subject. The publication is shared with the government, relevant parties and the public to influence policy change.

Key findings

Uganda's tourism potential is enormous, but it is extensively underdeveloped. The country boasts enormous natural resources, including:

- Large water bodies.
- River Nile.
- Mountains and ranges.
- Uniquely diverse bird species.
- Vibrant entertainment industry.

Nonetheless, only a few of these incredible attractions meet international tourism standards. The variety of tourism products marketed is narrow, and also disproportionately focused on wildlife.

This is largely because of the scarcity of innovation and fundamental knowledge on tourism product development, which leaves some potential tourism products, such as like cultural tourism, essentially unexploited.

Uganda's tourism products are delivered by fragmented service providers, making the offerings expensive due to the absence of effective internal regulation systems.

The existing associations formed by the practitioners have no legal muscle to make any impact. In reality, they can hardly compel their members to provide joint services with a view to reducing costs for tourists. Owing to privatisation, private tour and travel agencies that deliver the final tourism product to the clients work with minimal centralised guidance on fees, professional conduct and sensitivity to national interests (Seron, R. 2015).

Professional training for tour guides is limited, and many of them learn on the job because they cannot access the available training facilities. Schools of hospitality and tourism domiciled in public universities have set high entry qualifications, yet few institutions exist outside the college setting to offer professional on-the-job training.

Many practitioners emerging in the countryside need training and facilitation with information about the changing tourism products. This will enable them to gain the necessary knowledge and competence to market products to international and local visitors.

Additionally, the relationship between stakeholders, including the Government, religious and cultural institutions; and communities living adjacent to tourism products, is not sufficiently oriented to supporting development and marketing of potential products.

The management of revenues accruing from tourism is spread across various other sectors, with minimal consideration for recapitalisation of the sector to widen productivity, product development, research and innovation. Besides, the budgetary allocation to the sector is not commensurate to the earnings that the Government pockets.



The relationship between stakeholders, including the Government, religious and cultural institutions; and communities living adjacent to tourism products, is not sufficiently oriented to supporting development and marketing of potential products.

Policy recommendations

The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities should revisit the existing policy framework through a participatory process that enables all stakeholders to contribute ideas for the identification, development and marketing of tourism products.

Moreover, the ministry should facilitate experts in the academia and the corporate sector to establish evidence-based, sustainable procedures for identifying and developing tourism products that meet universal standards. Licensed tourism practitioners should be adequately trained to acquire the basic skills in hospitality and marketing.

The ministry should also establish an accessible tourism database to monitor the sector's performance, as well as document any tourism potential.

The Government should sponsor tourism research to enable scholars and practitioners to bring out useful knowledge on potential tourism products to be marketed across multiple tourist profiles.



Mr. Jude Rwemisisi, a Senior Research Fellow at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), makes a presentation during an inter-agency meeting at Africa Leadership Institute's Bugolobi offices. Delegates from the civil society and other stakeholders discussed presentations made during an earlier forum at UMI on Uganda's tourism policy. The participants made contributions to enrich policy research findings before the production of a policy brief.



TOP & BOTTOM: Participants during the presentation of a research papers at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI). Various experts and stakeholders made presentations on Uganda's tourism sector policy. The symposium, which brought together the public, tourism players and the media, was part of quarterly debates organised by UMI and Africa Leadership Institute (ALI) to evaluate the effectiveness of various policies on current issues discussed in Parliament. The process ends with the production of a policy brief on the subject. The publication is shared with the government, relevant parties and the public to influence policy change.

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