

WORLD TOURISM DAY

New Vision

ADVERTISER SUPPLEMENT

Digital media unlocks tourism potential

By Gerald Tenywa

You can run but you cannot hide. The digital era has hit home literally. This is because the people who are digital savvy have the whole world at a mere click. The market place has not been spared and digital technologies are being used to engage and hook clients.

"The internet can be used for research," John Ssempebwa, the deputy chief executive officer of Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), said. "There is a lot of information and if you are smart, internet will help you to conduct research."

Ssempebwa added: "At UTB, the digital technologies have simplified products. These days you do not have to look for the oldest man in the village to get information; the internet is always available."

He was speaking in Kampala ahead of the UN World Tourism Day celebrated on September 27. The day will be commemorated in Jinja, also referred to as East Africa's adventure capital under the theme: Digital Transformation and Tourism.

Apart from research, the digital technologies can be used for consumer feedback and promotion of Uganda as a tourism destination.

It also has a wide reach as opposed to conventional approaches. "We have reached the targeted audience at a reduced cost," Ssempebwa said.

The digital technologies are being applied by tourism firms hired by UTB to sell Uganda to different citizens in the US, UK and Germany. He said UTB is going to do the same in the Gulf States; also referred to as the Middle East in addition to Japan and China.

More packages coming

"We will be able to design a package and reach millions of Japanese," he said, adding that the different sectors of the economy would benefit from tourism promotion. "When I take a picture and put it on the internet, I am marketing Uganda."

"Can you imagine that in Uganda, you have to get permission to get drones to certain events?" he wondered.

The country should have technology that detects a drone that has entered sensitive sites, but not deter importation of drones. In countries that have succeeded in marketing their destinations, even families have drones, which take images that are shared around the world.

In addition to tourism promotion, computer analysis helps to establish what Uganda's competitors are doing in a short time. "When Tanzania, Kenya or Rwanda unleash new promotional drives, we get to know what they are doing in good time," he said, adding that they have apps that alert them about any development in the region.



A Uganda Tourism Board website advertising rafting while on the right, a lady enjoys bungee jumping at the Source of the Nile

Mukono youth becoming inovative

A team of grassroots communities at Wasswa village, Nagoje sub-county, Mukono district have made a breakthrough in marketing their tourism operations at Griffin Falls in Mabira forest reserve.

They have been calling intending visitors to experience Mabira Forest canopy through their website and also social media platforms shared by the youth who pay a visit to Griffin Falls.

The Mabira Forest Canopy Super Skyway is a canopy "zip-line" system that sends you soaring over trees in the rainforest.

It is located 44km East of Kampala city, outside of Lugazi town at the Griffin Falls camp.

He also pointed out that tourism is private sector-led and that the youth need to be guided in order to develop apps that could facilitate tourism and help them earn money.

"As tourists disembark at Entebbe International Airport, they should know which bird species to see and where they are found," Ssempebwa said. "This would be possible if there was an App for bird watching."

Ssempebwa said UTB has been engaging embassies in Uganda

The skyway can make your day great.

"You are led through ancient trees by experienced sky captains or sky guides across a network of five zip-lines that stretch 250 meters across River Musamya," states a website belonging to Mabira Forest Integrated Conservation Organisation.

Another impressive group of expatriates and local tourism enterprises in Jinja have a twitter platform where they post photos and videos of big events taking place there and the greater Kampala.

Tour operators also have interactive websites and social media platforms where they portray Uganda as the best tourism destination.

that tend to author negative travel advisories to intending visitors from their countries.

"Can you imagine a fight at Kisekka market which is not the tourism hub causing an embassy to issue a travel advisory? Some of the countries are rape capitals of the World but we never issue travel advisories to discourage our citizens from travelling there.

He added: "We have found a way of engaging the embassies so that the countries do not damage



Uganda's image through the travel advisories."

The tourism guru also said UTB would engage the media as well as the Police in order to promote the image of the country.

"When tourists come to Uganda, we make money as a country and we all benefit," he said.

Gifted by nature

Uganda has a lot to offer ranging from wildlife-based tourism, which includes more than half of the global population of mountain gorillas and more than 1,000 bird species. Uganda also has diversity of culture as well as unique features, including the source of the Nile, Murchison Falls along the Nile, white water rafting and bungee jumping.

In recent years, Uganda is also witnessing growth in conference tourism, with big hotel brands

coming to Kampala and some of the protected areas.

There are also many accommodation facilities for budget travellers in most of Uganda's upcountry Towns.

Rising tourism numbers

Tourist arrivals in Uganda increased to 1.449 million in 2017 from 1.323 million in 2016. The arrivals in the country averaged 648,790 during the 1990s.

Two years ago, Uganda started an aggressive and marketing campaign in order to increase tourism numbers from 1.3m in 2016 to four million tourists by 2020.

During the launch of the drive, Ephraim Kamuntu, the tourism minister referred to Uganda as the Pearl of Africa and that it has a lot to offer, but it remains undeexploited.