

Culture, Wildlife and Hospitality

INTERVIEW WITH MARIA MUTAGAMBA

MINISTER OF TOURISM, WILDLIFE AND ANTIQUITIES



MARIA EMILY LUBEGA MUTAGAMBA

Ugandan economist and politician. She is the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage in the Ugandan Cabinet. She is also Member of the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB). Formerly she was the President of the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW 2005 – 2007), the Minister of Water and Environment (2006 – 15th August 2012), Minister of State for Water (November 2002 -2006) and the Chairperson of the Nile Council of Ministers. She is a strong advocate for the promotion of cultural and environmental development in Uganda.

(L) The Rwenzori Mountain.
(R) Mountain Gorilla Tracking is the most popular tourist attraction in Uganda

Why is Uganda such an attractive proposition to international tourists?

Uganda offers a dream tourism destination to all visitors as it is endowed with abundant natural and cultural resources. Uganda, a country “Gifted by Nature” is characterised by some of the most diverse and unique eco-systems, scenic physical features, water bodies, varieties of flora and fauna species as well as a fast and vibrant stable economy. Many of our tourist attractions make Uganda competitive. Mountain Gorilla Tracking is a phenomenal experience, and Uganda is host to more than half of the world’s endangered Mountain Gorillas which can be seen in their natural habitat. We also have the highest concentration of primate species, with Kibaale National Park hosting over 13 primate species. Our skies are home to over 1060 bird species including the seasonal Southern and Northern migratory birds and endangered species including the Shoe Bill Stork. Uganda is endowed with 56 indigenous communities each with a distinct cultural heritage built over the generations. This cultural diversity is another source of attraction for the tourism industry. Moreover the

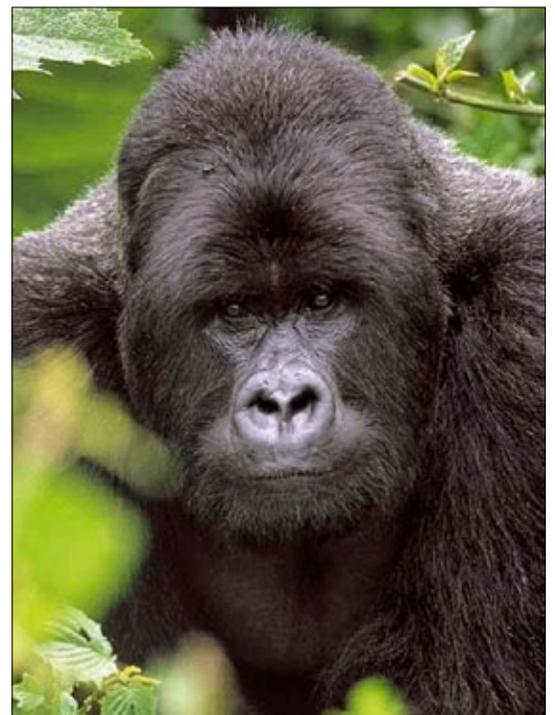


country is proud of having 7% of world’s mammals and more than 450 plant species. The climate is the best a tourist can expect (it rarely goes below 15 degrees and hardly above 30).

Mountain Rwenzori is a wonder in itself, situation on the equator yet snow all year round. For the spiritual seekers, we are also home of the Religious Uganda Martyrs and we host the only Bahai temple in Africa out of the six in the world. Finally, we have some of the most hospitable people in the region, eager to welcome tourists and guide them through a country they are most proud of.

What opportunities in the sector do you have for potential investors?

Destination Uganda is ready for investment, as it is improving the infrastructure and regulatory environment to attract business. There are opportunities for investment in the accommodation and hospitality industry, the establishment of tourism and hospitality training, touring and travel, restaurants, transport service, product and infrastructure development, value addition and the



processing of tourism supplies. Furthermore there are plenty of opportunities of investment based around the scenic landscape for example, the mountainous regions and Lake Victoria.

Regarding tourism, what is your competitive advantage compared to regional counterparts such as Tanzania and Kenya?

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, Uganda has unique cultural and natural endowments such as Kidepo Valley National Park. Importantly, there is peace and stability in the country, which unfortunately can't be said about some other parts of the region. Furthermore our central location makes it easier to connect to other destinations. For investors we have an attractive framework of Economic and Fiscal Incentives for Private Investors in the Tourism Industry. Uganda's incentive package provides generous capital recovery terms, particularly for investors whose projects entail significant investment in plant and machinery and whose investments are likely to yield profits over longer term, tax holiday etc.

What are you plans to maintain the culture and heritage of Uganda in the midst of rapid economic modernisation?

Firstly, it is important to note that we have formulated the Museums and Monuments Policy to establish, conserve, preserve, promote and present Uganda's heritage. We are developing our cultural heritage sites into tourist destinations and our resolve to preserve our heritage includes surveying and demarcating cultural and heritage sites (eg Bigo Bya Mugenyi, Nyero Rock Art Paintings among others). We are also expanding the National Museum and establishing regional Museums and promoting private Museums in the country.

What interventions have you made to ensure the protection of wildlife in Uganda?

Uganda is building Ranger Force capacity through recruitment, training and the provision of services. We have established a

dedicated Wildlife Crime intelligence unit in order to gather and analysis intelligence information to prevent wildlife crime. Also, we ensure the integration of security and law enforcement agencies such as UPDF, Police, Judiciary and Customs to ensure the safety of tourist and tourism resources. We consistently revise our policies and legislations to ensure that these correspond to current situations. The Uganda Wildlife Policy has been reviewed while the Uganda Wildlife Act review is ongoing. What is also important in this regard is regional and international collaboration to curb cross border related crime eg illicit wildlife trade and trafficking such as the Lusaka Agreement on Co-operative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Flora and Fauna, CITES and Interpol. We also engage with communities through community conservation programs and benefit sharing mechanisms (Revenue Sharing, Collaborative Management, Resource Access etc). We are also mitigating human wildlife conflicts especially crop raiding, as well as digging of elephant trenches, use of buffer crops like chilli and tea, alive fences among other things.

What about infrastructural obstacles to the development of tourism in Uganda?

It is true that we have inadequate public transport infrastructure (air, road, water and rail transport) and poor ICT facilities in remote areas. It is a challenge, but one we are determined to overcome through our work with a variety of stakeholders.

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Kidepo Valley National Park

