Uganda wins prestigious award in India

BY PHILIP WAFULA

KAMPALA. Uganda has been awarded the Best Exquisite Destination Award at the three-day Outbound Tourism Mart (OTM) 2026 held in Mumbai, India, from Thursday to Saturday.

The OTM is the biggest and most influential travel trade exhibition in Asia, bringing together over 50,000 travel enthusiasts, tour operators, and stakeholders from over 60 countries.

This was Uganda's second appearance at the OTM 2026, which also demonstrated its commitment to tapping into the Indian and wider Asian outbound travel market. Over 30 private tour operators from Uganda participated in the exhibition.

The OTM 2026 was preceded by a series of engagements to promote Destination Uganda across India, including a destination marketing campaign dubbed 'Explore Uganda-India Roadshow', which took place in the cities of New Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai.

Through its presence at the OTM 2026, Uganda strengthened tourism, aviation, and business linkages with India, while advancing its broader strategy to diversify source markets and position tourism as a key driver of economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange.

A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs quoted Uganda's High Commissioner to India, Ms Joyce Kikafunda, as saying: "Participation in OTM 2026 underscores the country's efforts to showcase its unique natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and diverse wildlife, making it an ideal destination for travellers seeking an authentic African experience."

Ms Kikafunda added that the mission in New Delhi will continue to work with all partners to sustain the promotional efforts and boost Indian arrivals in Uganda from the current 43,000 to 100,000 by 2027.

Mr David Elyelu, who represented the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) at the expo, said the country is determined to increase its footprint in the emerging markets, including India, adding that the OTM 2026 was an opportunity for creating new partnerships in tourism and strengthening economic and cultural ties with India.

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The Head of the Regional Economic Cooperation Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Richard Kabonero, said since the ministry started implementing aggressive marketing of Destination Uganda under the Economic and Commercial Diplomacy (ECD) strategy, the results have been encouraging, particularly in tourist arrivals and inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Ms Barbara Baruka of Crystal Safaris, a first-time participant at the OTM 2026, noted that while there is a perception that many Indians are already familiar with Uganda, awareness of Uganda as a tourism destination remains limited among a broader segment of the Indian market.

Uganda's participation at the OTM 2026 is expected to boost the country's tourism sector in its ambition to achieve tenfold growth of the economy from $50b to $500b by 2040.