How landmark trip bolstered Uganda-Canada ties



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EDITOR: Uganda has taken a significant step in boosting its global tourism profile following the successful completion of a high-level familiarisation trip for Canadian tour operators, travel advisers, and media professionals. Canada is among the top 10 overseas markets for Uganda's tourism, with arrivals reaching 10,000 tourists as of 2025.

The Uganda High Commission in Ottawa, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, and the Uganda Tourism Board, organised the 10-day mission to showcase the country's diverse attractions and investment potential.

The delegation that I led, comprising 11 senior executives, arrived in Uganda in early April and embarked on an immersive journey across key tourism sites — from the savannah plains and tropical forests to the iconic River Nile, as well as cultural and religious landmarks. The experience provided first-hand insight into Uganda's unique offerings while strengthening its positioning in the Canadian market.

A defining highlight of the tour was a sunrise game drive across Uganda's savannah, where delegates witnessed iconic wildlife, including elephants, buffalo and Uganda kob in their natural habitat.

The experience underscored the country's strength in delivering authentic and undisturbed wildlife encounters. One participant described it as being like stepping into a living documentary, reflecting the emotional connection Uganda's natural environments inspire among visitors.

The delegation also explored Kibale National Park, widely known as East Africa's primate capital. Home to over 1,500 chimpanzees and a rich array of biodiversity, the park offered an unforgettable chimpanzee trekking experience. Visitors praised the immersive nature of the activity, highlighting Uganda's strong conservation efforts and well-curated tourism experiences.

In western Uganda, the group paused at the Kikorongo Equator Point in Kasese district, before continuing deeper into the country's landscapes. These reflective moments, combined with hands-on encounters, reinforced Uganda's appeal as a destination that prioritises authenticity, sustainability, and meaningful travel experiences.

The journey continued to eastern Uganda, where the delegation visited Jinja, further illustrating the country's growing strength in experiential tourism.

At the Source of the Nile, delegates connected with one of the world's most iconic landmarks through storytelling and a serene boat cruise, complemented by a tubing experience along the river. Together, these activities demonstrated Uganda's ability to transform destinations into lived experiences — an increasingly important factor for modern travellers.

During a press engagement at the foreign affairs ministry, the undersecretary, Stephen Kyaterekera, thanked the delegation for their interest in Uganda and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to positioning the country as a leading global destination for tourism and investment. He highlighted Uganda's unparalleled biodiversity, rich cultural heritage, and expanding infrastructure as key drivers of sustainable growth. Citing recent trends, he said Canadian tourist arrivals increased from 7,542 in 2022 to 9,688 in 2024, a 28% rise that signals significant untapped potential.

Kyaterekera said while diplomatic missions play an important role in promoting Uganda abroad, first-hand experiences shared by international visitors are far more impactful in shaping global perceptions.

Members of the Canadian delegation echoed this sentiment, describing their visit as eye-opening and as far exceeding expectations. They commended Uganda's pristine landscapes, remarkable wildlife, and, above all, the genuine warmth and hospitality of its people. Particular praise was directed towards the country's national parks and authentic cultural experiences.

Beyond tourism experiences, the delegation also engaged in high-level discussions with government officials, including finance minister Matia Kasaija and Minister of State for Privatisation and Investment Evelyn Anite. The ministers highlighted Uganda's economic progress, political stability, and improving infrastructure, emphasising the country's ambition to grow into a $500b economy by 2040, with tourism as a key driver.

Officials identified priority areas for investment, including Nile-based tourism, eco-tourism, hospitality infrastructure, and mountain tourism in the Rwenzori ranges. Engagements with the tourism ministry further highlighted Uganda's competitive edge as a destination less travelled, appealing to niche markets such as adventure travellers, birdwatchers, and eco-tourists, while underscoring the need for stronger global marketing and enhanced service delivery. The tourism ministry emphasised that Uganda's tourism sector remains a key driver of economic growth, anchored on its unique positioning as an authentic, less-travelled destination. Tourism minister Tom Butime underscored the importance of skilled tour guides and quality service delivery in shaping visitor experiences, calling for continued training and capacity building, as well as enhanced international marketing efforts. Tourism figures reflect steady growth, with Canadian arrivals rising by 28% between 2022 and 2024. Uganda is now targeting more than 20,000 Canadian visitors annually by 2028 supported by strategic partnerships and authentic storytelling.

The trip concluded in Entebbe with a visit to the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre, where delegates reflected on their experiences and committed to promoting Uganda across Canada and North America.

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