

The new Inspector General of Police Okoth Ochola has directed all commanders to do gun audit in their areas

Stephen Asiimwe, Chief Executive Officer

Raid on Entebbe film to boost tourism

Last Friday evening, there was another raid on Entebbe Airport.

But unlike the events of 42 years ago, the only casualties were popcorn, soft drinks and perhaps a little self-esteem.

Entebbe premiered in Kampala and is the latest film version after *Victory at Entebbe*, *Raid on Entebbe* and *Operation Thunderbolt* that relives a stunning example of Israeli military audacity.

It also reminds Ugandans of one of the most embarrassing episodes of Idi Amin's reign.

Rosamund Pike and Daniel Brühl star in *Entebbe*, which was first released in the United Kingdom on March 9, 2018.

Directed by José Padilha, the film goes over familiar ground although production methods have dramatically improved since the 1970s, which gives *Entebbe* something of a renewed gloss.

Critics have mixed feelings about the film, but one cannot deny this is an opportunity for Uganda to market Entebbe airport as a historical site.

The clunky control tower still stands. You can still see the bullet holes and step into the dimness of the battered terminal building. All that is missing are the visitors from far and wide to soak in the atmosphere of an incident that caught the imagination of the whole world.

Towards the end of June 1976, a group of predominantly Palestinian and German terrorists hijacked Air France flight 139 en route from Tel Aviv to Paris.

In those days, hijacking planes was rampant, but what threw everybody off on this one, was that the hijackers ended up in Uganda and used Entebbe airport as their base to negotiate terms.

Understandably, Amin was thrilled and excited to be the centre of attention. He tried to play honest broker, but in the most dubious way possible since he never hid his support for the Palestinian cause.

The hijackers demanded a $5 million ransom for the plane and the immediate release of 53 Palestinian and pro-Palestinian militants, 40 of whom were prisoners in Israel.



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Israel does not negotiate with terrorists so while diplomatic efforts were being made to free the 100 odd hostages still left, a daring plan to be known as 'Operation Thunderbolt' was being put together.

The rest, they say, is history and Entebbe depicts what happened on July 4, 1976 in a script written by Scotsman, Gregory Burke.

Uganda cannot run away from its history, but we can cash in on it when we can. Other countries have been successful in cultural heritage tourism and there is no reason why we cannot emulate them, because we have plenty of other sites apart from Old Entebbe Airport.

Cultural heritage tourism involves traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.

Numerous surveys have shown that over 50% of respondents polled agreed that history and culture are strong influences on their choice of a holiday destination. However, there is something else even more important, culture and heritage tourism tends to attract high-yield tourists.

For the Israelis, Entebbe may rekindle national pride and hopefully a wish to visit Uganda.

Some would want to see the exact spot where unit commander, Yonatan Netanyahu died.

His young brother, Binyamin, is the current Prime Minister of Israel and has already made a pilgrimage to Entebbe. But you can be sure there are plenty of others who would like to do the same after watching the film.

Uganda's historic environment is what defines our nation today. It also contributes to our own cultural identity and sense of place in the overall scheme of things. And let us not forget that about 45 Ugandan soldiers died during the July 1976 raid, and it is a shame that we will never truly know their stories.

It is a testimony of the fascination many people across the world still have about the Israelis commando raid on Entebbe that more than 40 years on, films are still being made of that military operation. This helps keep Uganda in the international eye, which is crucial for maintaining brand presence.

What else can culture, heritage and historical tourism do for us? It injects new money into the economy, boosting businesses and tax revenues. It can create new jobs, businesses, events and attractions. In other words helps to diversify the local economy.

It helps support businesses and enables them to expand while also promoting the active preservation and protection of important local resources like the Old Entebbe Airport and other sites.

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