

Using tourism to save the environment

Approach. As Uganda joins the rest of the world to mark Tourism Day today, sector players say through visiting tourism and cultural sites, the importance of protecting the environment can be emphasised.

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Uganda is estimated to be earning more than a trillion Shillings from the tourism sector that includes national and game parks, mountains, hills, falls, cultural heritage sites and rituals, among others things.

As Uganda joins the rest of the world to mark Tourism Day today, tourism the world over has been cited as one of the activities that greatly impact the environment. According to www.triplepundit.com, tourism increases air pollution due to smoke from tourists' vehicles, tourism degrades land resources such as forests, wildlife, minerals, fertile soil, wetland, and fossil fuels. This ignites from expanded construction of recreational facilities that adds more pressure to both stunning landscapes and natural resources.

Other problems linked to tourism include shortage of water resources because the industry over-uses water for the development of golf courses, swimming pools, hotels, and for personal effects of individual tourists.

Both the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) executive director Stephen Asimwe and Mr Swamadu Kabagambe, the director Hearts Travel and Kabah Taxi, acknowledge that tourism has a great impact on the environment.

Mr Kabagambe says tourism exerts stress on land and could lead to soil attrition, augmented pollution, natural habitat loss, and additional burden on endangered species. He says all that progressively destroy the environmental resources depended on by tourism.

Triple pundit website adds that tourism contributes to more than 5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, with transportation accounting for 90 per cent of this.

The website adds that eco-tourism is a rapidly growing industry, with potential benefits for both the environment and the economies of the



Ms Madeline Stuart feeds a giraffe at the Uganda Wild Life Education Centre in Entebbe. Ugandan communities can use tourism to protect the environment. FILE PHOTO

tourist destinations.

Mr Asimwe says to address the likely negative impacts of tourism on environment, UTB and the tourism ministry visit tourism sites and cultural heritage where they teach managers on how to protect the environment.

"We have embarked on engaging all people involved in tourism business including those working in tourism sites to be mindful of the environment. We teach them how to protect the environment for instance planting trees," Mr Asimwe says.

Mr Asimwe adds that communities living around tourism sites are also taught to avoid reckless activities such as bushing burning, encroachment on game reserves and national parks in addition to discouraging them from clearing bushes and forests which are a habitat for wild animals.

Mr Kabagambe stresses that tourism is all about having a good time in a good God-given nature. But sadly, the negative aspect of

tourism affects many communities and the environment.

"The challenge we have is that some communities around tourism sites sometimes have a negative attitude that they benefit nothing from them. That is why they clear forests and bushes around games and national parks. But as people in tourism we encourage tree planting," he adds.

Steps taken

He says they have also rolled up numerous sensitisation programmes linked directly with cultural, natural and social environments. Their company tries to spread awareness, trigger respect for local values, and instigate endeavours towards nature every time they meet with local communities.

At Hearts Travel & Kabah Taxi, according to Mr Kabagambe, they have a programme to plant 9,200 trees in Katerera in Bunyaruguru to preserve the already endangered nature.

This, he says, was driven by the

fact that their community boarders with Queen Elizabeth National Park from East to West by the North therefore every member of the community is provided with a tree to plant and hopes to have planted 9,200 trees by 2019.

"We encourage the government to come up and support us revive our crater lakes into another environmental aspect of concern," Mr Kabagambe stresses.

"We have about 20 crater lakes in the region that are not known and of less value to both local communities and government at large. These are being misused by communities around them and we need to sensitise communities on the gold just before them," he adds.

He notes that he feel hurt when he sees animals starving and dying of thirsty because of lack of drinking water caused by deforestation in the area. He therefore uses his company to convinced people to preserve forest, water reservoirs and plant trees.

"We are therefore convinced that

others will learn greatly from our experience and this will be made more special since the citizens are willing to amicably organise working with us towards a better social environment and preservation of heritage, both cultural and natural," he says.

Mr Asimwe adds that every tourism company is encouraged to have staff whose major role is protecting the environment through identifying activities that are non-friendly to the environment.

"We have planted trees around Bwindi National Park to prevent gorillas from destroying people's gardens. Communities used to attack gorillas because they were destroying their bananas but with the planting of trees they are not able to smell bananas in far distances," he adds.

Mr Asimwe said they have encouraged communities around tourism sites to invest in hotels, eatery places and travel companies; and also to sell artifacts, sculptures and traditional wear.



WORLD TOURISM DAY

27th September 2017



On Wednesday 27 September, Uganda marks the World Tourism Day under theme:-
Sustainable Tourism - A Tool for Development. Tourism is Uganda's Number 1 export, let us keep
Join us in Kalangala District, this year's host of World Tourism Day events, and let us promote travel and

