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Why Uganda should celebrate this year's World Tourism Day

Tomorrow, Uganda will join the rest of the world to celebrate World Tourism Day to highlight the great strides the industry has taken and the inter-agency and stakeholder support the sector obtains. This year's celebrations will be held in Ssesse Island under the theme: "*Sustainable tourism: A tool for development*." Tourism contributes over 10% to the GDP and 25% of foreign exchange earnings surpassing any other sector. This is an industry that employs the country's youth and women. It is imperative to say tourism shall be the backbone of the motherland in the near future.

Last year's theme for this pristine day was "*Tourism for all*" that emphasised the establishment of environments that caters for the needs of all. Whether one was traveling or staying at home, have a disability, families with small children, or the ageing population to benefit from accessible tourism. Leading to a campaign dubbed, "Tourism is everyone's business."

The industry has functioned towards making this conceivable for every citizen in the country to enjoy the resources and attractions that rightfully belong to them. With the backing of the World Bank through the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP) to supplement the Government's efforts towards promoting tourism, Uganda Wildlife Authority acquired new buses which will soon be operational to enable stress-free affordable access to the national parks and other attractions. In support of last year's World Tourism Day theme, Uganda also moved to maintain the gorilla tracking permit

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tariffs at the already competitive \$600 to provide an opportunity for all to relish one of the most exciting wildlife encounters in the world that is affordable.

The revival of the national airline is also one feat to revel about this year. We must applaud the Government for the

steps taken towards realising inexpensive access to the country. The Entebbe International Airport's upgrade and expansion is already underway and that is also set to increase the country's visitor and cargo handling capacity, efficiency and safety.

This year's World Tourism Day theme is in line with Uganda Tourism Board's focus. UTB is mandated to promote and develop tourism in the country and increase the contribution of tourism earnings, attracting sustainable and responsible investment to make the "Pearl of Africa" a preferred destination. The Government is committed to the conservation, protection and maintenance of Uganda's protected nature gifted resources.

In October, Uganda will be hosting the first ever investor forum to pursue conservation-friendly ventures into Uganda's protected areas. Through the Giants Club Conservation Forum, we hope to appeal to leading name brands and investors to bolster the country's investor experience in pristine hotels, lodges and resorts.

Due to relentless conservation energies, Uganda has seen a rapid growth in wildlife population this year. The wildlife boom among endangered species speaks a lot for our conservation efforts towards the preservation and protection initiatives.

There has been a rapid gorilla population growth in both Bwindi and Mgahinga National Parks. And also an increased boom in the rhino population at Ziwa rhino sanctuary in north western Uganda. Let us take a pledge this month to be among the one billion travellers to exercise responsible and sustainable tourism that benefits the fragile world we live in.

Come join the rest of the world to celebrate tourism's continued contribution to the world and Uganda. Travel! Enjoy! Respect! as explore in the white sand beaches of Africa's best kept tropical paradise on Ssesse Island on September 27, 2017. Visit our website: www.visituganda.com to view the activity programme for this prestigious day.

The writer is the Executive Director of the Uganda Tourism Board