

tions were often marketed in parallel, sometimes even in competition

A key driver of this integration is air connectivity. Kenya Airways,

operating daily flights between Entebbe and Nairobi, has become a

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Museveni gives fresh nod to tourism sector

BY TREVOR LUTALO

The attendance of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni at the 10th edition of the was more than a ceremonial appearance. For many players within Uganda's tourism industry, it was a strong endorsement of a sector that has steadily transformed into one of the country's most important economic pillars.

Held at Speke Resort Munyonyo, the Expo brought together international buyers, investors, tour operators, hospitality players and government officials at a time when Uganda is increasingly positioning tourism at the centre of its economic growth and global visibility strategy.

Museveni's decision to personally launch the 10th edition of POATE was widely interpreted as a fresh nod to a sector whose contribution to the economy has expanded dramatically over the years. The industry is charged to achieve a 25-fold growth by 2040, supported by improved security, infrastructure investments, destination marketing and increased international exposure.

For a sector that has often argued it receives less political and financial attention compared to industries such as oil and infrastructure, the President's appearance signalled growing recognition of tourism's strategic value.



President Museveni at the opening of the 10th edition of Poate at Munyonyo last week. PHOTO/TREVOR LUTALO

Speaking at the event, the president framed Uganda as one of the world's most naturally advantaged tourism destinations, highlighting the country's climate, geography, peace and cultural diversity as key assets.

"In Uganda, you do not have extreme temperatures. The climate re-

mains comfortable throughout the year, and that is part of Uganda's uniqueness," he said.

The President also broadened the tourism conversation beyond wildlife, presenting Uganda as a destination defined by lifestyle, culture and comfort.

"When you are talking of Uganda

as a tourism destination, you are talking about comfort, culture, food and peace. It is very comfortable to live here," Museveni noted.

His remarks reflected a growing shift in Uganda's tourism positioning strategy. Increasingly, the country is seeking to market itself not just through gorillas and national parks, but through culture, cuisine, conferences, entertainment and immersive visitor experiences.

That broader strategy was reinforced by the Chief Executive Officer of the Uganda Tourism Board, Juliana Kagwa, who challenged Ugandans to take greater ownership of the country's tourism story.

"Uganda is richly endowed, but our story is still under-told. We must take ownership of telling it ourselves because no one else will do it for us," Kagwa said.

She explained that Uganda's future competitiveness would depend not only on its attractions, but also on how effectively it presents itself internationally.

Kagwa said this year's Expo marked an important evolution for the sector because it introduced new segments, including film and food tourism.

"This expo is special because it has introduced new segments, film has been added to the showcase, and so has food," she said. "Food matters deeply to us as Ugandans. We have over 50 tribes, each with a distinct culture, distinct cuisine, and a distinct way of life. We are

genuinely diversifying how the world sees us."

The inclusion of food and film reflects growing recognition that modern tourism increasingly revolves around experiences, storytelling and cultural identity. Uganda is seeking to differentiate itself within a competitive African tourism market by leveraging authenticity and diversity.

Over the past decade, POATE itself has grown from a relatively modest tourism showcase into one of the region's key tourism business platforms. According to UTB, the 2026 edition generated more than 5,000 business-to-business engagements by the close of the Expo, with organisers hoping the meetings translate into confirmed visitor arrivals and investment commitments.

Officials at the Expo repeatedly linked tourism growth to peace, stability and infrastructure development.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Doreen Katusiime, said the industry had recovered strongly following the Covid-19 pandemic. "Tourism has recovered strongly after the pandemic, and we are on the right trajectory," Katusiime said.

She credited the sector's growth partly to investments in roads and improved security, which have made tourism destinations more accessible.

Museveni used the platform to

signal possible reforms aimed at improving Uganda's competitiveness as a destination, including longer tourist visas.

"In the new government, we are going to extend visas for tourists and remove the short-term visa restrictions," he said.

The proposal was welcomed by industry players who have long argued that friendlier visa policies could encourage longer stays, higher spending and repeat visits.

The President also addressed concerns surrounding Ebola, reassuring delegates and international visitors that Uganda had the situation under control through targeted containment measures rather than blanket border closures.

"I really saw that many people were panicking," Museveni said, explaining that Ebola spreads through close contact and can be managed effectively if detected early.

The reassurance highlighted how closely tourism is tied to international confidence and perception, particularly during health scares.

Ultimately, Museveni's attendance at the 10th POATE reflected the growing importance of tourism within Uganda's economic strategy.

For industry players, the President's appearance was not merely symbolic. It was a recognition that tourism has evolved into a serious growth sector capable of generating jobs, attracting investment, earning foreign exchange and shaping Uganda's image globally.