

Ibrahim Kayondo, Director of Trip Addict, tells Trevor Lutalo over lunch about how the domestic tourism experience has to be tailored to cater to the interests of a constituency aged between 18 and 35.

'Our domestic tourism mustn't treat youth like an afterthought'

By the time the food arrives at Chaote Boutique Hotel and Restaurant in Kampala, Ibrahim Kayondo has already mapped out half a dozen ideas on how Uganda's domestic tourism could work better.

He speaks quite fast. Not out of nervousness, but urgency. His words tumble into each other, animated, confident, sometimes unfinished, the mark of someone whose mind is always a few steps ahead of the conversation. Dressed simply in a white polo shirt, his head of hair neatly kept, Kayondo looks less like a traditional tourism executive and more like the kind of person you would expect to find leading a road trip to Jinja. Which, in many ways, is exactly what he does. Kayondo is the Director of Trip Addict, one of the companies that has helped reframe how young Ugandans think about travel within their own country.

A new kind of traveller

Over lunch, he is less interested in selling destinations than explaining behaviour, why Ugandans travel the way they do, why they hesitate, and why the tourism industry still struggles to understand its biggest potential market: Ugandans themselves.

"The Ugandan domestic tourist today is not just someone going to see animals or waterfalls," Kayondo says, barely pausing. "People are travelling for business, for entertainment, for long stays, for daycations. Travel now has many meanings."

From his experience, the typical domestic traveller is young between 18 and 35, urban-based, and curious. Over the last five years, he has watched young people enter the tourism space not only as travellers, but as operators, service providers, photographers, drivers and storytellers.

"That is a very good sign," he says. "It means the future of this industry is being shaped by people who actually use it."

This shift matters because Uganda's tourism sector was, for a long time, designed almost entirely for foreigners. Luxury lodges, dollar pricing, long itineraries and rigid packages defined the experience. Ugandans were not the target market. They were an afterthought, but Covid-19 changed that.

"When borders closed, people realised something," Kayondo says. "Ugandans are important to the business cycle. Very important."

Suddenly domestic travellers were no longer optional. They were necessary.

remain incredibly popular with young people. It is not just the Nile or the activities. It is a bus ride with music, laughter, games and conversation. It is the feeling of escape long before arrival. "In many cases, the road trip is the holiday," he says.

This understanding has shaped how Trip Addicts designs its packages. Short trips. Group travel. Experiences that feel achievable. Affordable fares that still offer value.

"Young people earn less, but they want to travel," he says. "So affordability is key. And added value. It is also why places like the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre (formerly Entebbe Zoo) and the Uganda Museum continue to attract hundreds of thousands of Ugandan visitors each year. They are accessible, familiar, and affordable."

Limits of time, money

Yet Kayondo is quick to point out that interest alone does not translate into movement.

Uganda's economic structure

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places real limits on domestic tourism.

"Most Ugandans don't have time," he says. "Unless it's a public holiday, it's very hard. People work long hours."

Leave days are few. Disposable income is limited.

Travel becomes something squeezed into long weekends or national holidays," he explains.

This reality, he argues, should guide how tourism products are designed. Expecting people to take week-long safaris is unrealistic. Short trips, three days or less are far more practical.

"We are still in an awareness creation stage," Kayondo says. "It's not about high earnings yet. It's about helping people start."

Daycations, weekend getaways and flexible payment options have played a big role in getting more Ugandans to travel, especially the youth.

Yet he is convinced, now more than ever, that the tourism experience in Uganda is built for foreigners, adjusted for locals.

For decades, about 90 percent of tourism businesses in Uganda targeted foreigners. Domestic tourism existed, but on the margins.

The pandemic forced a rethink. Lodges began offering subsidised rates for Ugandans during low seasons. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) maintained relatively fair entry fees for citizens. Numbers slowly began to rise. But Kayondo believes the shift is still incomplete.

"We still have an awareness problem," he says. "Take schools, for example, we have over seven million learners, but many schools visit the same places year after year. There are so many lesser-known gems, but they are not being explored."

He also points to a lack of differentiation in how operators are treated.

"Someone dealing with domestic tourists is not the same as someone dealing with inbound international tourists," he says. "But policy does not recognise that."

Frustrations on the ground

For first-time domestic travellers, the frustrations are predictable. High costs. Confusing pricing. Poor communication.

Services that do not match what was promised. Kayondo traces many of these problems back to structural gaps.

"There are few seminars focused on domestic tourism operators. Limited funding is invested in this segment."

is lacking. Domestic tourism has not really been on the government ladder," he says.

"Hotels and lodges, too, have been slow to adapt. Some still insist on charging in foreign currency. Others offer services priced far beyond what most Ugandans can afford. Luckily, town motels have stepped in. They have filled a very big gap," he adds.

There is something else that is bridging a big gap—the power of social media. Indeed, if there is one force that has truly changed domestic tourism in Uganda, Kayondo believes it is digital storytelling.

"I am a beneficiary of this myself," he says with a smile. "Trip Addicts relies heavily on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and WhatsApp to market trips. The reach is wide. The cost is low. The impact is immediate."

More importantly, social media makes travel feel possible.

"When people see others like them travelling, it builds confidence," he says. "They start to believe, 'I can also do this.'"

In a country where tourism was long presented as something for wealthy foreigners, that shift in perception is powerful.

Small changes, big impact

Beyond pricing, Kayondo believes simple changes could unlock growth. Awareness campaigns that actually reach ordinary Ugandans. Insurance policies that protect both travellers and operators. Sector funding to equip local players with better tools. He also calls for collaboration.

"Imagine if large companies were required to sponsor two internal trips for their staff every year," he says. "That alone would move numbers."

Existing campaigns like Tulambule and Kii Uganda Kinyuma, he argues, are well-intentioned but often short-lived and poorly targeted.

"They need to reach the 'common man,'" he says. "The common Ugandan."

Kayondo is clear about the role companies, such as Trip Addicts play. It is not just about selling trips. "We educate people," he says. "We tell them what to expect, how to budget, how to travel."

Group travel, he explains, helps reduce costs significantly. It allows people to experience places they might not afford alone. Over time, travellers gain confidence to plan trips on their own.

"Our goal is not to trap people," he says. "It's to empower them."

As our lunch meeting comes to an end, the conversation turns to the long term.

"Countries like the United States, China and India rely heavily on domestic travel."



Ibrahim Kayondo

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