



A Ugandan dance troupe entertaining guests during the 10th Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE) at Speke Resort Munyonyo, on Wednesday



Museveni (second from right) arrives for the POATE opening ceremony

POATE 2026 SHOWCASES UGANDA'S TOURISM REBIRTH

By Titus Kakembo

Speke Resort Munyonyo, formerly known as a lakeside leisure retreat spot, has steadily evolved into a sprawling convention complex whose modern architecture reflects Uganda's growing confidence in hosting international events. The setting is breathtaking. The blue skies merge effortlessly with the

shimmering waters of Lake Victoria, known to ancient communities as *Nalubaale* (home of spirits), creating a majestic backdrop for the 2026 Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE).

This year's POATE carried an unmistakable atmosphere of triumph and renewal. President Yoweri Museveni appeared visibly pleased as he toured the exhibition grounds,

nodding approvingly and smiling at the swelling numbers of exhibitors, buyers, investors and tourism stakeholders who thronged the venue during the three-day event.

The culturally vibrant mood symbolised Uganda's determination to return to the international tourism map after the devastating disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

BETWEEN THE LINES
This year's exhibition showcased how Uganda's tourism sector is diversifying beyond traditional gorilla tracking and wildlife safaris into sports, culture, crafts, culinary experiences and local technology innovations.

in livestock keeping and crop farming, giving visitors insight into western Uganda's pastoral traditions.

Eco-tourism packages prominently promoted Uganda's iconic attractions, from mountain gorillas and tree-climbing lions to the thunderous beauty of Murchison Falls National Park. Guests were enticed with stories of boat cruises along the River Nile and adventures within Queen Elizabeth National Park.

BEYOND PHYSICAL ATTRACTIONS

Across exhibition booths, tour operators marketed community tourism experiences designed to immerse visitors in local cultures.

The Ewaffe stall attracted crowds with Buganda cuisine, traditional juices, cultural dress codes and ancient love potions that sparked curiosity among guests. Kaynella Farm narrated the deep Ankole roots

in livestock keeping and crop farming, giving visitors insight into western Uganda's pastoral traditions.

The message from POATE 2026 was unmistakable: Modern travellers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences rather than mere ticking destinations off a checklist.

International buyers mingled freely with local entrepreneurs while tourism boards from across East Africa showcased regional partnerships aimed

at attracting more global travellers. The expo became both a celebration and a marketplace, a place where deals were negotiated, networks established and Uganda's tourism future reimagined.

GUESTS' REMARKS

"Ugandans love their beer, *nyama-choma* and the sandy beach. You can always tell when they are headed for Mombasa. Their dress code, English-Kiswahili accent and purchasing power give them away," joked Victor M. Shitakha, the chairperson of the Kenya Tourism Authority. Joan Ndungu of Diani Beach concurred, adding that newlywed couples are in the habit of having their honeymoon on the islands. Many return to celebrate every anniversary.

Antonio Fernandes from the United Kingdom became emotional while narrating his return to Uganda decades after leaving during the regime of Idi Amin Dada.

"I felt good seeing my school still standing — Buganda Road Primary School. I even visited the classrooms where I studied. I can walk through Nakasero with my eyes closed. Watoto Church was previously a cinema hall," Fernandes recalled warmly adding that he now hopes to market Uganda to his clients as an ideal destination for honeymoons and special events.

For many observers, the greatest achievement of POATE 2026 was the restoration of confidence; Confidence in Uganda's ability to host major international gatherings, in the resilience of the tourism sector and that the Pearl of Africa brand is once again commanding global attention.

As the sun set over *Nalubaale*, POATE 2026 left a powerful impression that Uganda's tourism industry is poised for a rebirth.

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