

Uganda Airlines: What we can learn from Turkey to grow national carrier

Lesson. Turkish Airlines has built a formidable capacity that propels its growth and ensures smooth operations.

BY JAPHETH OBUKU
jobuku@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. In his first address to the new Cabinet in June, President Museveni directed the minister for Works and Transport to conclude discussions with investors to help Uganda start a national airline as a matter of urgency. The President termed the lack of a national airline "a big shame".

Established in May 1976 by the Idi Amin regime, the national carrier was in 2001 liquidated over more than \$6m (about Shs21b) debt. The government change of heart to revive Uganda Airlines continues to raise debate.

Though sections of the public doubt the commercial viability of Uganda Airlines in the face of stiff competition from other airlines operating in the region, the President said a national airline would help the country to save \$420m (about Shs1.5 trillion) citizens spend on travel.

For Uganda Airlines to thrive, it should avoid treading on a similar path that led to it closing shop. This means that the government and the airlines authorities should start doing things differently. But one thing they must do is to borrow a leaf from successful airlines such as the Turkish Airlines, which is growing both in space and destinations.

What could be the magic bullet?

Like Uganda, Turkey has experienced intermittent political unrest with the latest being a coup attempt on July 15. There have been five military coups in Turkey in the past 60 years. Besides, there are rebels operating in southeastern part of the country. Yet in spite of such challenges, the Turkish national carrier continues to fly near and far. Just months after the July coup attempt, there are no roadblocks or visible armed-to-the-teeth security outfits menacingly wielding guns at the ready on the streets of the city to enforce law and order.

PRESIDENT'S WORD

On revival. On June 23, President Museveni, directed the Works and Transport minister Azuba Ntege to expedite the revival of Uganda Airlines and have it fly in 2017. He also criticised fellow Africans for exploitation.



The Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul, Turkey, is one of the tourist attractions the Turkish national carrier helps fly visitors to. For government to sustain Uganda Airlines, it needs to prioritise investment in tourism as well as infrastructure. PHOTO BY JAPHETH OBUKU

A visitor to Istanbul, the country's commercial city and tourists' hub, would hardly tell that the city was the epicentre of violence just a few months earlier. Political strife management is an area Uganda can learn from Turkey.

Secondly, Turkish Airlines seem to have built a formidable capacity that propels its growth and ensures smooth operations. This, coupled with its vision 'Widen Your World', endears prospective travellers to the airline. Who wouldn't want to fly with an airline that promises to widen their world?

At the World Airline Awards held at Farnborough Airshow, Skytrax announced the world's top 100 airlines in 2016, voted for by airline customers around the world. Travellers from across the globe take part each year in the world's largest 'airline passenger satisfaction survey to decide the winners. The awards are a global benchmark of airline excellence.

The world's top 10 airlines of 2016, in order of merit, are: Emirates, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, ANA All Nippon Airways, Etihad Airways, Turkish Airlines, EVA Air, Qantas Airways and Lufthansa.

Today, the Turkish Airlines boasts of capacity and a fleet of 331 aircrafts flying to 292 destinations in 117 countries, making it the largest airline by number of countries served. It is followed by Lufthansa at only 78 countries.

Therefore, even before reviving Uganda Airlines, there should be a

deliberate effort to build capacity required for sustained growth.

There is the nationalism question too. While many Ugandans take nationalism for granted, the Turkish don't. Political unrest in their country aside, nationalism seems to be quite respected among Turkish.

A tour of Istanbul shows the extent of the Turkish love for their country. The national flag of Turkey - a white Star and a Crescent placed against a red background are raised on top of business premises, restaurants, at recreation centres, and in many other places.

1.5 trillion

AMOUNT OF MONEY THE AIRLINE WOULD HELP UGANDA SAVE ON TRAVEL EXPENSES ACCORDING TO PRESIDENT MUSEVENI

Ugandans should cultivate the spirit of nationalism, which should be allowed to permeate to the air carrier. Uganda Airlines should then be used as a vehicle to fly the national flag around the world and to project our national values to global destinations just like Turkey does.

Besides, a wide range of natural and man-made features that Turkey is blessed with makes the country a top tourists hub. The magical Bospho-

rus Bridge is one of the three suspension bridges spanning the Bosphorus strait in Istanbul. A cruise along the spectacular Bosphorus strait offers a traveller a rare privilege of crossing the two continents - Europe and Asia; the Marmara Sea, regarded as one of the most beautiful seas in the world; the grand sultans palaces; and the sheer refreshing boat cruise on the gorgeous Marmara Sea, among others, turns Turkey into a must reach-and-see tourist destination.

Uganda should learn that instead of pulling down old or historical sites, as has been happening, the tourism sector is not just about the natural features, some of which Uganda has in abundance. It also encompasses preservation of man-made features - ancient architecture, new and old kingdom sites, bridges, art crafts, and so on.

To ease access to tourism sites, there should be an all-round good road network, a vibrant railway transport system, and a fleet of boats to augment Uganda Airlines transportation of people into and out of the country. There are other must-see destinations such as the Maiden's Tower, alternately called the Leader's Tower, located at the southern entrance of the Bosphorus strait.

Turkish Airlines plays a major role of flying visitors to and outside the country. The revived Uganda Airlines, should prioritise investment in the tourism sector and invest in hotels and accommodation, and establish modern airports and airfields.