

TOURISTS WILL BE TAKEN THROUGH THE PROCESS OF GROWING, ROASTING AND HARVESTING COFFEE

Coffee to become tourism product

By Prossy Nandudu

Coffee has earned Uganda foreign exchange for years. Now the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) is planning to use the coffee experience to attract more visitors into the country.

Tourists will be taken through the process of growing coffee, harvesting and roasting.

This was revealed by the executive director UTB, Steven Asiimwe, on the sidelines of the launch for the upcoming African Fine Coffee conference and exhibition.

The conference will run from February 14 to 16, 2015 at Kampala Serena Hotel.

The conference is expected to attract over 1,000 regional and international coffee growers and professionals to discuss coffee and how it can transform the economy.

It will run under the theme, *Sustainable coffee industry for social economic transformation*.

The move is to consolidate tourism as the number one

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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foreign exchange earner.

"It is estimated that last year the tourism sector earned the country \$1.4b (sh4.6 trillion) and attracted about 1.4 million visitors, Asiimwe said.

UTB will organise coffee experiences in areas that are home to some of the biggest tourism attractions and also consider coffee as their major business, Asiimwe added.

"One of the areas lined up for coffee tourism is Kibaale. It is believed that coffee was discovered in Kibaale in Toro, which is also home to chimpanzees," Asiimwe said.

"Uganda is home to the largest primate collections, which include chimpanzees, baboons and monkeys. It is home to 50% of the entire bird species and one of the highest

mountains all of which are of interest to most tourists," he added.

Ways of marketing coffee

To further promote Uganda's coffee, officials from UTB have resorted to carrying packets of coffee to international events.

"We used to go with coffee liquors, but we decided to change the package to something that is long-lasting, such as coffee beans," Asiimwe said.

Protecting coffee

Robert Nsibirwa, the executive director of Africa Coffee Academy, called on the National Agricultural Research Organisation to patent the wild coffee species found in Kibaale for future use.

Nsibirwa explained that coffee grows in the country without much effort due to the country's eco system.

"We heard about the wild coffee in Kibaale and also know that Kibaale has the biggest germ plasm bank for



Iyamulemye (left) listening to the State minister of Agriculture, Christopher Kibanzanga (right) and Asiimwe during the launch of the 16th African fine coffee conference at Serena Kampala Hotel recently. Photo by Richard Kijjambu

Robusta coffee in the world," Nsibirwa said.

He said this will be processed, graded and promoted as another coffee product that will attract a premium because of its uniqueness.

Nsibirwa added that Uganda is one of the biggest producers of Robusta coffee, with about 50,000 metric tonnes after Ethiopia. It is followed by Kenya with 40,000 metric

tonnes, Burundi with 12,000 and Rwanda about 20,000.

"Therefore, not only do we come to the conference to get lessons from competitors from the US, South Africa and Vietnam, but to also consolidate our marketing networks because coffee is the most traded item after oil on the world market," Nsibirwa said. The executive director of the Uganda Coffee

Development Authority, Dr Emmanuel Iyamulemye, said his organisation is working with UTB on conservation in order to promote coffee tourism.

"This will ensure that more farmers do not disturb the wildlife around their farms, but find ways of growing the crop and earn from it without disturbing the wild life," Iyamulemye said.