

Conservation and Culture Weekend Promotes Sustainable Tourism

The Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA) held a pair of events to celebrate “Conservation and Culture” this past weekend at [MishMash](#) in Kampala. We send out thanks to all of you who attended to support UCOTA, Pearls of Uganda, community tourism and conservation and culture in Uganda.

The weekend was focused around dual events, one being a stakeholder forum to announce the Pearls of Uganda Program’s Sustainability Leaders as a culmination of the sustainable tourism criteria program that UCOTA has been developing for the past six months. The second event was a public festival that invited Pearls communities to perform, sell crafts, and hold workshops.

The Uganda Community Tourism Association Pearls of Uganda stakeholder event on Friday 23rd, March brought together government, private sector, NGOs and media to celebrate Sustainability Leaders amongst the country’s tourism providers.



Over the past six months UCOTA developed a set of sustainable tourism criteria based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. This process included the creation of an advisory board made up of representatives from the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage (MTWH), the Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO), the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA), the Uganda Safari Guides Association (USAGA), Uganda Hotel Owners Association (UHOA) and Makerere University's Department of Biodiversity and Tourism. This board met on two occasions to advise on both the criteria and survey distribution, as well as to design the grading mechanism to measure respondents' performances individually. The survey was distributed to all private sector partners of the Pearls of Uganda program, which included over 65 tour operator and accommodation businesses. Twenty-two of these partners managed to complete the lengthy survey that measures a businesses performance on the three key elements of sustainability: management, social/economic benefits, and environmental considerations. From the gathered statistics, the top five performers from tour operator and accommodation provider categories were chosen based on quantitative and qualitative scores.

The top five Pearls of Uganda Sustainability Leaders include:

Tour Operators	Accommodation Providers
The Far Horizons	Marasa Africa
Matoke Tours	Sanctuary Gorilla Forest Camp
Great Lakes Safaris	The Uganda Safari Company
Pearl of Africa Tours and Travel	Mahogany Springs
Red Chillis	Uganda Lodges

These Sustainability Leaders were recognized with a special banner and certificates at the Friday evening event, which included speeches by Honorable Professor Ephraim Kamuntu, Minister of Tourism, Wildlife, and Heritage, and Helen Lubowa, Executive Director of UCOTA.

Accompanying the event was an art exhibition opening based on the theme of Conservation and Culture. Pearls of Uganda worked to gather personal quotes on this theme from the various stakeholders in Uganda to accompany the artwork. This exhibition will be open for the next two months at MishMash and will educate the broader public on the important link between conservation and culture. Coverage of the Friday event was aired on Uganda television that Saturday and Sunday, focusing on the importance of cultural tourism in Uganda.

Sunday, 25th March, was the Conservation and Culture Festival, which brought in some of Pearls of Uganda's top community tourism enterprises to perform, sell their crafts, and hold workshops. In attendance were representatives from various tour operators and accommodation providers who were anxious to test new products, representatives from UWA and MTWH, as well as the general target market for domestic tourism. Nearly 400 people attended the event, giving the communities an experience with audiences larger than they had ever experienced. The communities raised millions of shillings in revenues from craft sales, gained experience performing and holding workshops with broader audiences and were able to network with important stakeholders in the industry. The community Pearls that participated in the Conservation and Culture Festival included:

<p>Kikorongo Women Community Katwe Tourism Information Center (KATIC) Ruboni Community Camp Rubona Basket Weavers</p>

BBC Honey
Basongora Women's Group
House of Love
Nyanzi'ibiri Community Eco-Campsite
Bagalayaze Heritage Site
Art-Wooki Crafts Project



The event also featured a visit from UWA rangers clad in gorilla costumes, a conservation and culture quiz with prizes donated from the private sector, a children's Snapshot Safari board game corner, and a screening of the Batwa Trail documentary. Thanks to all of our sponsors from the private sector including Orange, Air Uganda, The Far Horizons, Kyaninga Lodge, GeoLodges, Great Lakes Safaris and Budongo Ecolodge, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, Nile River Explorers, Nyanzi'ibiri Community Eco-Campsite, Emin Pasha, Adrift Adventures,

and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The festival was a huge success, raising awareness amongst various stakeholders, marketing community products, improving membership benefits for UCOTA's members, and bringing people together to celebrate conservation and culture.

