

# Uganda turns to its dark history to attract tourists

Looking to attract more tourists, the government of Uganda plans to unveil a war museum showcasing colonial-era wars and more recent conflicts. It will feature a figure many Ugandans would rather not remember - the late president Idi Amin.



Late Ugandan strongman Idi Amin built the chamber on the grounds of Buganda Lubiri Palace to store weapons and ammunition, but it was later used for torture. The chamber is now part of a guided tour. Photo: [H. Athumani/VOA](#)

Gifted by Nature is a slogan Uganda uses to promote its tourism, especially wildlife, primates, and freshwater lakes. The tourist trade brings in more than \$1.3bn per year. Now, Uganda plans to join countries such as Germany, Cambodia, Japan and Rwanda as destinations for what is known as dark tourism.

## Showcasing Uganda's long history of conflict

A planned war museum will showcase Uganda's long history of conflict. Exhibits will focus on the colonial era, the Lord's Resistance Army war, and President Idi Amin's bloody eight-year rule, when as many as 500,000 people were killed in political or ethnic persecution.

The topics are unpleasant. But for Kiwanda Godfrey, Uganda's state minister for tourism, they are an opportunity to show that the country has moved on.

"Can you imagine, if you go to some countries, some people still believe that this country is still governed by Amin and some people still fear our country because of Amin?" he said. "You cannot be in leadership and you leave that. So we are coming up with a package, what we call dark tourism. We should have a record. What are the massacre memorial sites? How many are they in Northern Uganda?"

## Uganda not ready?

John Sempebwa, the deputy executive director of the board, disagrees with Godfrey when it comes to dark tourism. He says Ugandans are not ready to revisit the Idi Amin era. "Which Ugandan is going to put up a museum and say you guys come here? And this is Amin's museum," he said. "It's not ready because society is divided. There are people who are still around who don't have good memories of Amin. Now, not only won't they come, they might burn this place down."

The war museum is championed by some army generals in the ruling National Resistance Movement who fought in the Luwero Triangle guerrilla war that saw President Yoweri Museveni come to power in 1986.

Kaps Fungaroo, a legislator from Northern Uganda — a region that has borne the brunt of the war in Uganda's conflict history — says dark tourism will not help heal the wounds of people who have never obtained justice. He says if dark tourism is encouraged, it should cover all massacres that have happened around the country, including those involving the ruling party army wing, then known as the National Resistance Army. "You must also make tourists go to Teso, where the NRA war resulted to massacres of people, for example in Mukura where the NRA soldiers roasted people alive in a train wagon ... So, when you want to take that direction of the dark history of the past, be ready to carry the cross of the NRM."

Uganda tourism officials say they have earmarked a two-hectare piece of land for construction of the war museum, but no launch date has been set.

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