

Understanding Hugamara's Commitment to Uganda

Uganda, often hailed as the "Pearl of Africa," is experiencing a dynamic economic transformation in 2026, driven by robust GDP growth projected at 6.3% to 7%, according to the latest budget brief from KPMG. With strategic positioning in the East African Community and a focus on sustainable development, the country has become a magnet for foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly in sectors like tourism, agro-processing, and information and communications technology (ICT).

As the nation rebounds from global challenges, hospitality and IT stand out as high-potential areas, offering investors opportunities for innovation, job creation, and long-term returns.

This article explores these sectors, highlighting key trends, challenges, and the pivotal role of local players like Hugamara Group.

The hospitality sector is poised for explosive growth, fueled by Uganda's rich biodiversity, cultural heritage, and improving infrastructure. Tourism contributes over 3.6% to GDP and employs one in seven workers, with visitor numbers reaching 1.5 million annually.

In 2026, the Uganda Tourism Association's Strategic Plan 2026-2030 emphasizes sustainable practices, partnerships, and global competitiveness, aiming to position Uganda as a premier destination for authentic African experiences. Investments in eco-luxury hotels, such as those planned in national parks like Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and Murchison Falls, are attracting significant FDI—evidenced by a Dubai-based firm's UGX 456.7 billion commitment to high-end accommodations. Regional hubs like Kampala are seeing a surge in MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) facilities, with the national MICE strategy targeting \$250 million in economic impact over the next decade.

Factors driving this boom include enhanced road networks, such as the redevelopment of Masaka Recreation Grounds, and a shift toward adventure and eco-tourism in areas like the Rwenzori Mountains. However, challenges persist: a two-speed market where international tourism thrives amid resilient foreign arrivals, while domestic demand remains price-sensitive due to economic pressures. Investors must prioritize community involvement and green initiatives to ensure sustainability, as seen in projects like Nzururu Heights Resort, which integrates local heritage with modern amenities.

The government's focus on infrastructure, including optical fiber networks and 4G rollout, further enhances visitor experiences and operational efficiency.

Within hospitality, restaurant businesses represent a burgeoning subset ripe for investment, blending culinary innovation with cultural fusion to cater to both local and international palates. As urban centers like Kampala expand, the demand for diverse dining experiences has surged, driven by a growing middle class, expatriate communities, and tourism inflows. According to recent industry reports, the food and

beverage segment within hospitality is projected to grow at 8-10% annually through 2030, fueled by urbanization and rising disposable incomes.

This growth is attracting investors interested in scalable models that incorporate sustainability, local sourcing, and digital integration—key elements for resilience in a post-pandemic market.

A prime example is Patio Bella, a chic restaurant located at Arena Mall in Nsambya, Kampala, which epitomizes the evolution of Uganda's dining scene. Opened in recent years, Patio Bella offers a luxurious escape with global flavors, emphasizing scrumptious meals in a beautifully designed space that captures stunning sunset views and promotes sustainable luxury dining.

Parallel to hospitality, Uganda's IT sector is emerging as a cornerstone of the digital economy, with fintech and business process outsourcing (BPO) leading the charge. The National Backbone Infrastructure initiative is connecting major towns, fostering innovation in areas like digital payments and AI. In 2026, the sector benefits from incentives like zero import duties on renewable energy equipment, indirectly supporting tech-driven green solutions. Fintech participation, through platforms like Hamz Pay, is expanding digital transaction flows across East Africa, reducing reliance on traditional industries. With a young, tech-savvy population, Uganda is attracting investments in telemedicine, e-commerce, and data processing, aligning with broader goals of economic diversification.

Companies like Hugamara Group exemplify the synergy between hospitality and IT, including its restaurant investments.

As a private equity firm founded by Ron Kawamara, Hugamara operates a portfolio of 18 companies across hospitality, fintech, green tech, renewable energy, microfinance, security, and logistics in Uganda, Kenya, DRC, UAE, and the USA. In hospitality, it owns assets like The Villa, The Patio, The Maze, and Patio Bella, emphasizing values-driven leadership and sustainable innovation. On the IT front, its fintech focus simplifies lives through technology, promoting social inclusion and economic empowerment—a vision Kawamara carried from his tenure as CEO of Jumia Uganda, where he pioneered e-commerce.

Hugamara's investment thesis nurtures purpose-driven businesses, bridging sectors by integrating digital tools into hospitality, such as AI for personalized guest experiences or microfinance for tourism startups. For Patio Bella specifically, Kawamara has promoted it as "a chic restaurant with global flavors," highlighting its role in creating memorable experiences like special celebrations. By leveraging fintech for seamless payments and AI for customized menus, Patio Bella positions itself as a model for hybrid investments.

As Vice Chairman of the Uganda Tourism Board and Chairman of the E-Trade and AI Chamber of Commerce, Kawamara plays a crucial role in advocating for investments that blend technology with tourism. In a Forbes interview, he stated, "Our goal and vision are to simplify the lives of Ugandans through technology,

whoever you are. We see e-commerce as a platform for social inclusion and economic empowerment." This philosophy positions Hugamara as a catalyst in Uganda's investment scenario, attracting FDI by demonstrating how hybrid models can yield resilient returns amid economic shifts.

Restaurant ventures under Hugamara are drawing further interest, with potential for franchising across East Africa, driving job creation and contributing to GDP.

In conclusion, Uganda's hospitality and IT sectors, including dynamic restaurant businesses, offer compelling opportunities for investors seeking impact and profitability. With government support, strategic plans, and innovators like Hugamara leading the way, the landscape is ripe for growth. However, success demands a commitment to sustainability, digital integration, and community empowerment. As Kawamara's work illustrates, blending these sectors not only drives economic progress but also builds a more inclusive future for the Pearl of Africa.