

Kenya Unveils Massive Tourism Plan

If it were a race Kenya could probably be miles ahead of Zimbabwe though with no clear indication where the race was heading.

Political Turmoil

Kenya's grand coalition is a year old and Zimbabwe's inclusive government is just about two months old, with both nations having survived bitter political turmoil. Kenya and Zimbabwe have many things in common though. More importantly, both need to push for tangible reforms to placate their restive populace. They also need to quickly craft universally accepted constitutions to open up democratic space and bolster confidence in their sickly economies. In Kenya, the constitutional making process is running six months behind schedule.



Kenyans are losing hope as President Mwai Kibaki and his rival, Prime Minister Raila Odinga, drift apart over how best to manage their marriage of convenience. But despite the despondency across the east African nation, most Kenyans are working hard to turn their country into the pride of Africa through tourism.

African Tourists

Kenya's key tourism players recently unveiled an ambitious plan to market the country. They literally invited the whole of Africa to see what their country has to offer. Hordes of travel and tour operators as well as journalists were flown into Nairobi, Kenya, from 20 African nations by the country's national airline, Kenya Airways, for what might probably be the continent's biggest tourism promotion yet.

Riding on the historic election of Barack Obama, an African-American with Kenyan roots, to head the world's most powerful nation (the United States), Kenya is not wasting time. The country has moved a gear up to position itself as a key destination for tourists. There are ambitious plans to turn Kogelo in the country's Kisumu area where Obama's father was born, into a world heritage site. Although scores of visitors especially from the United States have been flocking to Kogelo, tourism industry players say they are still to assess the overall impact of Obama on the country's tourism.

Kenyan authorities say the global financial crisis, which resulted in a 30 to 40 percent dip in tourist

arrivals from the major source markets such as Europe and the United States has prompted them to look closer home to Africa for inspiration and possible revival of the tourism industry.



Kenya is seeking to lure tourists not only from the 30 African destinations its national airline flies into but to also tap into the largely under-exploited population. And because Kenya relied on mainly Europe and the United States as source markets it meant that the country had to be content with low and high seasons of tourist arrivals, which the ambitious plan now seeks to correct by attracting people from the continent. “Africa is not all disaster,” said Kenya Airways managing director and chief executive, Titus Naikuni.

Free Trade Zone

With chances high that the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) could finally become a reality by mid June the east African nation is gearing for the new order which hopes to turn 26 economies into arguably Africa’s largest free trade area.

“We have made fantastic progress towards finally establishing COMESA,” said Kenya’s Immigration Minister, Otieno Kajwang in an interview with The Financial Gazette in Nairobi.

With COMESA on the horizon Kenya has become one of the early pacesetters by relaxing its visa rules. Visa fees have been considerably slashed for adults while children under 16 years are now exempted from paying the fees.



Although tourism brands on the continent can be considered as almost similar each country however is unique in one way or the other with Kenya having a distinct advantage over many of its neighbours. Its people, for instance, are in a class of their own. Kenya’s diverse cultures and ethnic groups have managed to resist modernity in the most astonishing way. Mention the word Maasai anywhere in the world and immediately people know you are talking about Kenya.

A book titled “The Beautiful People of Kenya”, which describes Kenya as a melting pot of people says: “Kenya’s more than 40 different indigenous groups are as diverse and contrasting as the country’s landscape and equally magnificent.”

Even some of the country’s wildlife is also unique to Kenya. Travelling across the equator, tourists are treated to magnificent sights of animal species found nowhere else but Kenya such as the reticulated giraffe.

Marketing Budget Boost

Kenya Tourism Board has been given an additional Kenya Shillings 250 million (€2.5 million) by the government to boost tourism marketing this year. Apart from the magnificent wildlife for which Kenya is best known, and its unspoilt beaches, promotions will also highlight a range of other attractions. Events and sports opportunities a focus, including kite–surfing, the Safari Sevens rugby tournament, the 4WD ‘Rhino Charge’ motor rally, the spectacular annual camel race, and possibly the world’s most gruelling rally, the KCB Safari which is part of the African Safari Championship. Last year Kenya was voted the best ‘undiscovered’ golf destination by the International Golf Travel Writers Association which commended both the standard of Kenya’s courses and the year–round perfect weather. Cultural themes range from the Maasai and Samburu cultures to the Karen Blixen Museum and archaeology (the lost city of Gedi and Fort Jesus in Mombassa). Messe–Berlin.de

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58