

EAST AFRICAN TOURISM - THE JOINT PROJECT OF KENYA, UGANDA, RWANDA



African tourism authorities rely more and more on synergy. In East Africa, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda have decided to join forces to improve their visibility to tourists across the world. After signing a tripartite agreement in October, these countries created their first joint marketing plan in London at World Travel Market.

The biggest international tourism trade fair opened its doors in London from November 7th to the 9th. Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda opted for a common stand, announced Godfrey Kiwanda Ssuubi, the Ugandan Minister of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities.

As a reminder, **these three countries of East Africa recently signed a common cooperation agreement regarding the tourism sector which consists of joint promotion of the three destinations as if it were only one.** The objective: boost African tourism, increase the number of visitors, and indirectly help the economy of each of the three countries.

Countries Where Tourism Counts

In Kenya, tourism, which accounts for about 11% of the GDP, has been in trouble for a few years, a situation in which the attack on the Westgate shopping center in Nairobi—which occurred in September 2013, killing 68 people and injuring over 200—is not foreign.

In Uganda, the tourism industry, which is the primary source of revenue, is traditionally seen as an important aspect of the economy. In 2015, it generated 2.6 billion dollars in revenues, representing 9.8% of the GDP and employing 247,000 people. But according to authorities, the potential of the country remains mostly untapped.

More known for its technological boom, Rwanda is also trying to diversify its economy by focusing, among other things, on tourism. The country has managed to set up a tourism development strategy which has successfully boosted the number of visitors from around 25,000 to nearly one million between 2004 and 2012. And the synergy created with its neighbors also aims to multiply its economic impact.

Single Tourist Visa

The joint agreement between the three countries also aims at the establishment of a single visa. “We are implementing a single tourist visa. This is the first time that we have signed an agreement of this kind and we are committed to promoting our countries' tourism together,” said Ugandan Tourism Minister Godfrey Kiwanda Ssuubi. But he wants to make it clear right away: the joint promotion is not synonymous with 'less aggressive politics.' “We will continue to be innovative in order to capture the largest market share in East Africa.”

As for the Kenyan government, it has recently called on the other countries of the sub-region (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Burundi, Tanzania, Seychelles, Comoros, and Mayotte) to implement the single tourism visa as well. The aim is to build a strong sub-region and boost East African tourism.

This Rwandan-Ugandan-Kenyan tourism strategy is a first in Africa. It is a sign that the trend of synergy observed here-and-there across the continent, notably in West Africa in the financial field, has spread gradually to different industries.

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