

AFRICA

Travel Magazine



News from 'Uganda.- Gifted by Nature'... and the East African and Indian Ocean region

Final edition of 2009

FULL HOUSE – SORRY

This correspondent received a few frantic calls just at the very onset of the long Christmas weekend for assistance to find space somewhere either upcountry or in the national parks, sadly a belated and ultimately unsuccessful attempt for some of those who wanted to come to Uganda at the very last moment. However, there was space available in Entebbe and Kampala at the leading hotels and resorts in the city and along Lake Victoria and at least two couples from Kenya seemingly did in the end enjoy their Christmas holiday away from home on the tranquil lake shores, as did incidentally yours truly too in the serene surroundings of his

gardens. Sadly, the weather was unseasonably cool and windy, with occasional rain showers but some traditional mulled red wine helped to keep the bodies warm on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

UN YEAR OF THE GORILLA 2009 ENDS

While the official celebratory year dedicated to the mountain gorillas is officially coming to an end, the campaign towards conserving their environment and species continues and will remain a major focus of the conservation fraternity in Uganda, Rwanda and the Eastern Congo. The Uganda Wildlife Authority this year also invented a new way to stay in touch with the prized animals through www.friendagorilla.org

where against a modest fee of 1 US Dollar a particular gorilla can be made a friend through Facebook and similar social network sites. Take some time over the holiday season, visit the site and make friends with a gorilla, all in the name of conservation.

It can meanwhile however be confirmed that the annual 'Kwita Izina' festival is once again on in Rwanda in 2010 when the newborn gorilla babies are expected to be formally named again, no details on the plans for celebrations in Uganda for next year are however available to this column as yet but will be reported just as soon as the particulars are at hand.

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BOTTLE RAGES ON

The two leading Ugandan beer brewers are engulfed in a 'battle for the bottle', after Nile Breweries, a subsidiary of SAB Miller obtained a court order banning Uganda Breweries, a subsidiary of Kenya Breweries (itself owned by Diageo), from using a long neck bottle, initially introduced to the market by the Jinja based brewery. While the case has caused bemusement amongst the public, wondering what the beer giants will sue each other next for, the present legal loser will undoubtedly do all possible to have the decision overturned on appeal, in the process making sure of both ongoing publicity for their products as well as keeping their lawyers in bread and butter. The battle fought in East Africa however also seems to have another dimension, as the two global brewing giants, SAB Miller and Diageo Plc are also engaged in a growing dispute over a previously agreed market and production deal for Kenya and Tanzania, which appears to have been ditched by Diageo, arguably prompting the legal tussles over bottle shapes. In an added development did then the High Court in Jinja, incidentally the home of the plaintiff's, clear Uganda Breweries to use the disputed bottles for the time being, lifting the injunction until the main case has been heard. Happy New Year and let the beer flow, regardless from which kind of bottles. And before I get a whole lot of flak, I should of course add: not for sale for persons under 18, drink

responsibly and don't drink and drive – satisfied?

GOOGLE MAIL MESSES UP CHRISTMAS MAILINGS

Gmail's apparent – and largely unknown – feature to restrict the number of mails one can send in a single day, messed up thoroughly this correspondent's Seasons Greetings dispatch, when it began to reject the mails transacted through a POP feature on my mailing programme, condemning over 2.000 recipients to only get their mail eventually on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and the following two days. There appears to be a 'cooling off' period of 24 hours, after which the system again accepts 500 mails, before restricting further transactions. The 'feature' is reportedly used by Google Mail to prevent SPAM from being sent through one of their hosted mail accounts, but judging by the amount of SPAM and SCAM mails I get from Gmail addresses it does only seem to prevent honest mailers from distributing their seasonal greetings but not halt the 'dirty traffic'. Fodder for thought Google chaps, to 'open up' ahead of festive occasions and not punish people with large mailing lists who enter the recipients via bcc to avoid disclosing other addresses.

So my apologies to those who may have thought they were forgotten, when nothing arrived on Christmas Eve or the subsequent days, while I struggled to send my greetings to you, as and when Google Mail permitted!

Kenya News

Africa Travel Magazine

NEW REGULATORY REGIME FOR KENYAN HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN 2010

The newly inaugurated Hotel and Restaurant Authority will play an important role starting next year, when all new hotel, resort and lodge projects require to be licensed first, before commencing any construction, by the HRA in Nairobi. This measure, according to tourism minister Najib Balala, is aimed to ensuring quality and compliance with relevant other laws and regulations and promoting excellence in the hospitality sector.

The authority will also embark on a nationwide exercise of grading and classification, using the East African Community regulatory regime now in place for all the five member states.

On the same occasion the minister also confirmed that his ministry will ask a 5 percent 'fund-back' based on the tourism sector's overall financial performance, in order to finance aggressive marketing abroad, so that the 2 million visitor arrival mark can be met by 2012 at the latest. Such funding from the treasure would also cover a multiyear period to ensure that the KTB's activities could roll out as planned and were insulated from the annual rush for more funds, which is known to be disruptive of marketing activities due to the uncertainties attached to this method.

It was confirmed by the minister that such a budget would amount to over 3 billion Kenya Shillings, considered sufficient for the Kenya Tourism Board to be present at ALL major tourism and adventure travel trade shows

around the world, open up new markets and support destination marketing in emerging markets through flanking measures like media invitationals and agents fam trips.

The minister, while speaking at a golfing event in Mombasa, also confirmed that sports and domestic tourism would remain high on the agenda to cash in on Kenya's sporting reputation abroad and making use of some of the facilities available, like golf courses, to attract more tourists. In regard of domestic tourism it was also appreciated that the downturn over the past two years was cushioned by an increase in domestic travel, which the minister said has become a backbone for the country's tourism industry. Mr. Balala also intimated, that following the recent 'Kenya Week' in the United Arab Emirates he was confident that leading hotel groups from the Gulf would take a fresh look at the opportunities in the country to opening top class new tourism resorts along the coast starting from next year.

Good prospects and new hope for 2010 then, way to go Kenya!

KENYA AIRWAYS DECIDES BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY
Another problem last week at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport with the runway lighting has compelled KQ, amongst others, to delay a number of flights from Nairobi, mostly affecting the departures to Mombasa. Only two weeks earlier had the runway lights gone out altogether and all inbound flights were diverted while emergency

repairs went underway, grounding all air traffic for several hours. This time round it appears according to sources from the main Nairobi international airport that the lights suddenly dimmed, and a so called 'notam' was immediately rushed out to air operators warning them of the problem. While apparently some other airlines did operate their flights from Nairobi to Mombasa, Kenya Airways decided to go by the book and rather delay the departures than operating in conditions which according to international standards were 'not safe'.

In fact a source close to KQ, although pointing out that he was not authorized to speak on behalf of the airline, did tell this column that as Kenya Airways is an IOSA – IATA's Operational Safety Audit – cleared airline, they would go by such very high safety standards, while others may judge from case to case and leaving the decision to their pilots if to take off or land under such circumstances. However, should an incident occur they would nevertheless be held responsible and legally liable for having ignored the problem, especially after being issued with a 'notam'. Questions are now being asked again why the runway lights have once more given problems only a week or so after a complete failure and subsequent repairs, and the blame is already being laid squarely on the doorstep of the Kenya Airports Authority for their repeated failure to keep the key airport installations up and running at all times and ensure the safety of passengers

and aircraft. The same source was also swift in pointing out also the complete lighting failure earlier in the year in Mombasa, when operations for days at end were restricted to daylight hours after an underground electrical duct had flooded due to poorly maintained drainage, causing severe interruptions of the flow of tourists and business travellers to and from the Kenya coast at that time.

NEW CARGO CENTRE FOR KENYA AIRWAYS

A new dedicated cold cargo centre able to hold up to 100 standard pallets of ready to ship agricultural, horticultural and fish exports at a time, will be opening in early 2010, according to sources close to Kenya Airways in Nairobi. Cargo shipments have reportedly stabilized and there seems a trend emerging of growing demand for air cargo space once again, which is good news not just for KQ but other airlines too flying in and out of Nairobi in particular and Eastern Africa in general. At the same time a new tracking system will also be launched, permitting customers of Kenya Airways to check on line where exactly their shipment is at a given time.

PORINI CAMPS AND GAMEWATCHER SAFARIS GIVE TO THE NEEDY FOR CHRISTMAS

The Selenkay community near the Amboseli National Park benefitted from a remarkable initiative by Porini Safari Camps and Gamewatcher Safaris, which 'diverted' their Christmas gift

budget into 14 tons of food stuffs and related supplies, from which over 2.000 community members benefited, giving them also a Christmas to remember.

When breaking the news to this column, the management also confirmed that the 4 Northern White Rhinos, reported separately in eTN, were indeed relocated to the Ol Pejeta Conservancy, where Porini operate their 'Porini Rhino Camp' – good news for those intending to visit the rarest of rhinos now to be seen in the whole of Eastern Africa.

Porini has in the past repeatedly bagged awards for the intensity of their community involvement and their ongoing spirit of 'giving back' to their neighbours, which makes them stand tall above many others. Well done Jake and Mohanjeet, keep it up for 2010.

COAST INVESTMENT CONFERENCE SET FOR MOMBASA

A dedicated investment conference will be held in Mombasa's Travellers Beach Hotel between January 22nd and 23rd 2010, aimed to increase interest and showcase opportunities across the economic sectors, including tourism, agriculture, mining and manufacturing. The meeting is co-organized by the Kenya Investment Authority together with the business community and administration across coast province.

FLAMINGOS AFFECTED BY DROUGHT

Reports came in over the holiday period from Ugandan visitors

to Lake Nakuru National Park, who claimed that the number of flamingos, numbering in millions in the heydays of the park, were sharply reduced and the visiting experience therefore negatively impacted. Said one couple: 'we went by road to Kenya and drove through the tea fields of Kericho and through Molo to Nakuru. We expected the lake to be painted in pink with Flamingos but were disappointed that the pictures we had seen before were not the reality on the ground. But we saw lots of rhinos and other game to make up for it. We camped but the rangers also said the water has gone down a lot and they are all concerned about the future of this park.

Further enquiries by this correspondent then established that indeed the drought of the past years has impacted on the water level of the lake, likely forcing many of the pink birds to divert to other suitable lakes in the Rift Valley, like Elementaita and Bogoria.

NEW ROAD TO ADDIS GETS ADB FUNDING

The African Development Bank has formally consented to a loan of about 165 million US Dollars to support the construction, and where appropriate upgrade of a road link from Mombasa to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The funds are to be disbursed to the Kenya government for the section to the Ethiopian border, covering about 130 kilometres and part of a greater infrastructure plan launched some time ago by NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa's Development] aimed

to link Kenya with Ethiopia and Djibouti.

Ethiopia in turn will make her own financial arrangements to progress construction of the respective highways to the borders with Djibouti and Kenya, but most likely also to the Southern Sudan, which expects to become independent in early 2011.

In parallel new railroads are being developed to link the region and provide cheaper alternatives to road transport, for both cargo and passengers.

Cooperation in the region amongst likeminded countries has increased in the recent past, to develop common political and military interests in the face of the threats posed by the Islamic militants in Somalia and the stand taken by Eritrea, which is becoming the 'odd man out' more and more.

Ethiopia is not a member of the 5 nation East African Community, but it is understood that intense political and commercial discussions are ongoing between Addis and Arusha, and a future entry of Ethiopia into the East African Community cannot be ruled out, as it would in fact be welcomed by many to further expand the common market and have the greater region eventually speak with one voice on continental and global platforms. Once ready it is thought that both the new railway lines and the new roads will also facilitate tourism to a greater extent, as it would allow foreign visitors to take in the scenery along the routes from the ground rather than having only glimpses from the air. Watch this space.

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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Tanzania News

TANAPA, the managers of protected wildlife areas in Tanzania, put a special package for Tanzanian citizens on the market over the holiday period to bring added visitors numbers to the Arusha National Park. The deal apparently attracted hundreds of extra visitors from the neighbouring towns and villages, some of them seeing the national park and its attractions for the very first time. The special 'promotion' was aimed to show the locals what ordinarily the 'wagenis' or foreign visitors see, and underscore the need of conservation and protecting the environment and water catchment area of Mt. Meru and the surrounding forests. Similar tours for locals were reportedly also organized to the Tarangire National Park, in the process prompting calls for such trips to become a permanent feature offered by the parks authorities for local resident to appreciate the parks in their neighbourhood. Well done TANAPA.

Burundi News

FLY 540 OPENS OFFICES IN BUJUMBURA

Ahead of commencing flights between Nairobi and Bujumbura in early January has Fly540 opened their country offices in Burundi last week. The new premises are reportedly located at the Novotel in the heart of Bujumbura while the operations office at the airport is now also open ahead of the inaugural flight. Visit www.fly540.com for more information on schedules and news updates.

Rwanda News

NEW AMBULANCES REASSURE VISITORS

The Rwandan government, just in time for the festive season, launched 67 new and fully equipped ambulances last week which will be placed across the country and attached to health facilities and emergency centres, able to respond faster to calls for help and medical assistance. This will be good news too for the country's tourism sector which can now reassure tourists from abroad that the emergency response time will be shorter than previously the case and better facilities await individuals with an acute health problem or victims of accidents.

Horn of Africa News

ERITREA SUBJECTED TO UN SANCTIONS

Eritrea got an unwelcome Christmas present from the UN Security Council, when in a 13-0-1 vote the council opted for sanctions until such time, that the country 'ceases arming, training and equipping armed groups and their members including al-Shabab'. China reportedly abstained in the vote and predictably Libya, in a false understanding of 'solidarity' voted against the resolution, which nevertheless passed with a sufficient majority. Eritrea was previously already sanctioned by the African Union and then suspended their membership in the continental body, when their regime failed to cooperate with fact finding missions and ever more allegations and

circumstantial evidence of arms smuggling and training of Somali militant Islamic militias piled up. Regime leaders and collaborating businesses are now also subject to travel bans and a freeze of assets is reportedly underway for both individuals as well as companies. Only recently did the entire Eritrean national football team defect in Kenya after the CECAFA football tournament, incidentally won for a record 11th time by Uganda, and all players reportedly asked for and have since then obtained political asylum from the Kenyan government. In fact, Eritrean 'diplomats' were in the more recent past expelled from Kenya for activities contrary to their diplomatic status.

The Eritrean regime is considered one of the harshest and most totalitarian on the entire continent and is still in dispute with their neighbours Ethiopia over border demarcations, which led to a war between the two countries. Compared to the overall population of Eritrea the country produces the most refugees on a per capita basis in Africa, in itself a sign that all is not well in this country.

In response the regime issued a statement which said the sanctions may: 'engulf the region into another cycle of conflict' – and it can only be hoped that this is not a promise but an empty threat.

Seychelles and Indian Ocean News

A CHRISTMAS SPIRIT SHARED IS A HAPPY ONE

The management and staff of the Labriz Hotel on Silhouette Island

surprised a group a school and pre-school children with a Father Christmas party as part of their social responsibility programme, engaging with their neighbouring community. The kids, needless to say, were all smiles as they enjoyed the spirit of Christmas, incidentally replicated across the islands, where community organisations joined hands with hotels, resorts and other companies to give the less fortunate in society a treat for the festive season.

NEW HOTELS' OPENING REFLECT SPIRIT OF CONFIDENCE

Two locally owned small hotels have opened just in time for Christmas last week, one being the Hanneman Holiday Residence at Nouvelle Valle, Beau Vallon, featuring 12 bedrooms and the other one the Pieds dans L'Eau at Anse Royale with six bedrooms. Both new properties are managed by individuals with a long standing in the hospitality sector, who have served for years in senior capacities in other hotels and resorts.

Mr. Alain St. Ange, Director in charge of Marketing at the Seychelles Tourist Board, congratulated the owners and reiterated the archipelago's slogan 'affordable Seychelles' – which needed exactly such new developments to create more beds for this market segment. Guest of Honour for the opening ceremonies was the country's Vice President, who also happens to be the Minister of Tourism, Joseph Belmont.

NEW RESORT PLANNED FOR ALPHONSE ISLAND

Located nearly 400 kilometres south west of the archipelago's main island Mahe, Alphonse is part of the 'outer' islands of the Seychelles. Information availed to this column speaks of a project to build 6 multi bedroom villas, all with private pool and elevated 'Bali style', while a further 12 suites are due to be constructed around a central Spa area and allowing for the enchanting sea views the Seychelles are so well known for. The island can be reached by air, with a paved landing strip of about 1.200 metres length providing for the use of STOL aircraft operated by scheduled and charter companies, and presently already has a small resort in operation of about 25 rooms. Arrivals by boat are also possible, albeit they take longer of course. The main activities for tourist visitors to Alphonse are snorkelling, diving, swimming, observing the excellent marine life and deep sea fishing further out into the ocean. As said in the previous article, confidence in a bright future for tourism has clearly returned to the Seychelles and more such announcements are in fact expected for 2010. Watch this space.

CONSERVATION TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Many attributes fit the Seychelles and conservation is one of them, as confirmed to this column earlier in the week, when efforts to protect the Aldabra giant tortoise were highlighted to this correspondent. At one time near extinction, due to hunting and

new predatory species brought to the archipelago, eating the newly laid eggs and feeding on the young tortoises, this giant species was at one time only found on the island of Aldabra. Since the onset of serious conservation efforts – the country has more than 50 percent under active legal protection – many organisations and NGO's have helped to spread the remaining population, carefully grown under watchful eyes, to other islands again, and several of them, including Frigate, now have once more populations large enough to give them a chance of survival. This type of tortoise can reportedly live to a ripe age of over 150 years and many of the 'survivors' will outlive their 'protectors' by many decades, giving future generations a marine heritage to pass on to their children's children.

International Aviation News
BELGIUM TAKES SWITZERLAND TO UN'S INTERNATIONAL COURT
Information was received by sources in Brussels, with whom this correspondent interacted recently during a visit to Belgium on the occasion of the joining by Brussels Airlines into the global Star Alliance, all of whom still harbour strong sentiments over the events of 2001, when SABENA was pushed into collapse by Swissair. The fallout of Swissair's bankruptcy in 2001, and the subsequent bankruptcy of SABENA, which was part of the Swissair Group at the time, has reportedly gone to the UN court. Belgium's government,

which had divested 49.5 percent of SABENA's shares to the then Swiss national airline, proceeded with the case over a pending dispute, where Switzerland stands accused of violating international conventions, when it supported Swiss courts decisions NOT to recognize a ruling by a Belgian court and NOT to stay proceedings in Switzerland. In the immediate aftermath of the Swissair collapse the Belgian national airline too was dragged to its financial deathbed, and while a few months later SN Brussels Airlines was formed in the first half of 2002, which after the merger with Virgin Europe became Brussels Airlines two years ago, the affront and damage done to Belgian aviation and the Brussels Airport at the time was never forgotten, nor

apparently forgiven, considering the latest action now before the UN International Court. Watch this space to learn the eventual outcome of this case and all the best to my Belgian friends.

And in closing, which today applies to both this column and the year 2009, once more some interesting travel experiences from Gill Staden's last visit to the Zimbabwe side of the Victoria Falls – enjoy:

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge

I had a bit of work to do in Victoria Falls Town last week, so I used it as an excuse to stay over for the night instead of rushing back through the border to Zambia. It was a bit of a lame

excuse because the border doesn't close until 10pm, but I used it anyway. I wanted to spend the night at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge.

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, 'Saf Lodge' as it is affectionately called, is high up on a hill overlooking miles of African bush. Below the lodge is a waterhole which is home to crocodiles and provides much-needed water for animals during the dry season. At lunchtime every day meat scraps from the kitchens are scattered into the bush below the deck; the vultures, kites and marabous wait patiently around the waterhole and in the trees for their midday feast.

Saf Lodge, I think I can safely

say, is the most popular lodge in Victoria Falls Town, Zimbabwe. Not only does it have an amazing view but the food and service would be difficult to beat. Docotori, my waiter during dinner and breakfast, was chatty and quite a performer,

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entertaining us all. And it is not just Doctori; all the staff are friendly and efficient.

The bush at this time of year, of course, is very green; we have had loads of rain. It was so refreshing to see the landscape so verdant after the dry months. It does have its drawbacks, however.

The animals have plenty of water throughout the bush so do not need to come to this particular waterhole. And, if the animals do wander nearby, it is difficult to see them as they are hidden by the trees. But the view is enough.

Saf Lodge was built about 14 years ago. Then, the site appeared a bit uninspiring, being an old gravel pit and a rocky lump of hill. The architect, Josh Ward, and the landscaper, Errol Tarr, though, had plans for the site. And, within two years, they had transformed the barren landscape into this amazing lodge. Errol even brought in young, but large, baobab tree all the way from Hwange, 100 km away, to plant at the entrance to the lodge. I can only imagine the expressions on the faces of the people as this tree was transported by truck along the highway. The interior designer, Belinda Jones, then came in to decorate and furnish the lodge to her usual high standards. The effect is stunning.

There are 72 rooms in the main lodge and 39 time-shares. They all range along the hill overlooking the waterhole. The time-shares have their own pool and recreation area near the

Boma. The Boma is a traditional restaurant, where guests of the lodge and other visitors to Vic Falls Town can enjoy a traditional Zimbabwean meal and entertainment. The entertainment includes drumming and dancing. It is a complete evening's entertainment and great fun.

My stay at Saf Lodge last week was relaxing and enjoyable - a good book, a view to die for and excellent food. My only shame was that I left a glass on the veranda of my room ... In the morning after I returned from breakfast, I found a small furry face looking through the glass doors into the room. The face bobbed from side to side as the eyes peered inside. It was a young vervet monkey. It soon scarpered when I went to greet it through the glass. But then its mother came for a squizz and knocked over the glass, leaving a broken glass, bits everywhere. Oh dear. So sorry, Saf Lodge.

And from Gill's Christmas journey to the 'copperbelt' in the North of Zambia comes this thrilling report:

Sunken Lake – Lake Kashiba

On Boxing Day we went to a sunken lake – Lake Kashiba. It is a couple of hours drive from Kitwe, near Mpongwe. Although the day was clear of rain, the area had had plenty of rain and the road had turned into a river. We all drove down the road without

mishap and spent an enjoyable day swimming, eating and drinking.

I don't know much about the lake. I assume that it is a National Heritage Site because a young man came to greet us and required K2,160 from each of us. He wrote all the information down in his book.

A story of this lake is that it was the home of a tribe which was being continually harassed by another tribe. Finally the chief decided that he had had enough and that the whole tribe must die rather than be under threat from the neighbours. All the people were tied to each other in a long line. Then the first one jumped into the lake, the next one was pulled after, then the next ... until they all went into the lake ... except the last one who was a pregnant woman. She was released from the chain of people and became the only survivor, all the rest drowning. Not a pleasant story.

After our stay by the lake it was time to go home. We all piled into the vehicles and headed back along the 'road-which-was-a-river'.

The first vehicle did a side-long slide off the edge of the road and became stuck. Lots of fun. The locals all joined in pushing

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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

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News from 'Uganda.- Gifted by Nature'... and the East African and Indian Ocean region

By Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome
Third edition December 2009

BRUSSELS AIRLINES JOINT CEO'S CONFIRM FOCUS ON AFRICA

(The Brussels Airlines joint
CEO's Gustin and Meyfroidt with
this correspondent at the media
breakfast in Brussels' Amigo
Hotel last week)

During the celebrations of
Brussels Airlines entry into
the global Star Alliance did
opportunity arise to speak with
the joint CEO's of SN, Mssrs.

Michel Meyfroidt (Admin. &
Finance) and Bernard Gustin
(Commercial), the latter of whom
had visited Uganda a few times in
the past, showing a keen interest
in 'the Pearl of Africa'. The
discussions of course focused on
the standing of SN in Africa, and
in Eastern Africa in particular and
future developments.
It was confirmed during the
meeting that internal discussions
and evaluations were in the final
stages about the acquisition of
a 5th Airbus A330-300, and that
early in 2010 a board decision
was likely to be taken on the
matter. Should, as it is expected,
the board of SN vote for the

additional aircraft, it would give
Brussels Airlines the opportunity
to look at a carefully planned
expansion of both frequencies
and their Africa network, which
presently comprises 14 'own'
destinations plus a number of
added ones through codeshared
flights with Ethiopian to Addis
Ababa and with Lufthansa to for
instance Nigeria.
Brussels Airlines currently
operates 6 days a week, except
on Monday, to East Africa and
serves Entebbe, Bujumbura,
Kigali and Nairobi, but it was
quietly admitted that it would
be an desirable to fly daily into
the region and then use local

codeshare partners like RwandAir and Air Uganda to connect passengers to those airports where flights depart on 'off line' days. One thing did become absolutely clear though, that 'being passionate about Africa' is not just a convenient and eye catching PR phrase, but that SN is indeed aiming at becoming once again the number one European carrier to Africa as was the case with the 'old' Sabena, from which' ashes Brussels Airlines rose in early 2002.

AVIATION SECTOR 'PROACTIVE IN COPENHAGEN'

The ongoing climate summit in Copenhagen also featured last week in the scheduled question and answer sessions with the CEO's of the Star Alliance member airlines and Lufthansa's CEO Wolfgang Mayrhuber was outspoken on the issue, coming to the defence of the aviation industry. In a discussion with this correspondent in the Brussels town hall he said:

'we [the aviation sector] are the only global industry present in Copenhagen with detailed proposals of how the airlines can play their part in reducing emissions. Our industry is represented in Brussels at the top level of IATA and a technical expert group. We have for a while now worked actively on setting and achieving goals for a reduction in emissions and made concrete proposals on the way forward. I only hope that our presence in Copenhagen will not result in aviation becoming a punching bag'. He added that to

his knowledge no other industry was as proactive as the airline sector.

In further details, also obtained from IATA, the projection is that for 2009 the commercial aviation carbon 'footprint' will reduce by 7 percent compared with 2008, partly of course caused by the fall in demand since over the past 18 months. The introduction of new fuel saving flight management procedures, the use of even more efficient new engine technology, the use of new lighter materials in the construction of the next generation of jet aircraft and the introduction of bio fuels will all result in measurable reductions of emissions by the airlines over the coming years.

Mr. Mayrhuber then went on to lambast the impact and carbon footprint of the internet, claiming that the pollution caused by the worldwide computer network was a lot worse than that of the aviation industry and getting worse still... there you have it...

POTENTIAL BA STRIKE IMMEDIATELY DRIVES PASSENGERS TO OTHER AIRLINES

After the British Airways staff voted overwhelmingly for strike action earlier in the week, passengers across Eastern Africa started moving in their droves to other airlines as a precaution, not wanting to risk being stranded over the Christmas and New Year period in case of their flight being affected by strike action or fearing they might suffer of longish delays in the aftermath of aircraft rotations being severely disrupted. Some of the other

airlines in Kampala this column spoke with did confirm extra enquiries and demand for their flights over the holiday season and quietly expressed their hope to retain some of those passengers in the future after they had a chance to sample their own inflight service and performance on the ground and in the air.

Travel agents too are now actively advising their clients to drop travel plans with BA starting from the 21st December and, considering the 'hangover' of stranded passengers and aircraft likely stuck elsewhere after the 02nd January, to only return to BA a few days after the strikes have ended, it at all that is. Here a little payback may come into play, as BA was the most active and determined airline to cut commissions to 'zero' some time ago, incurring the wrath of the agencies in the region at the time, and at least one travel agent this column spoke to admitted freely that 1) he is only booking BA anyway when the clients really insist and cannot be persuaded to use another airline and 2) will use this situation to promote other airlines like SN, KLM, Emirates, Virgin, Swiss and KQ to them at the expense of British Airways. 'My sentiments about BA are not going away, they led the onslaught on our commissions and this will never be forgotten, not by me anyway' he said in closing. The damage this strike may do therefore to British Airways' medium and long term business cannot be underestimated at this stage, considering the strong sentiments expressed by potential passengers and previous BA

faithful this column spoke with, none of whom expressed even one Iota of sympathy for the intended strikes. With the strikes now sanctioned between December 22nd until January 02nd – this being the absolute peak travel period for people wanting to be with families, while others have planned long haul holidays to ‘sun and sand’ destinations – it is likely that the plans of tens of thousands of people will be disrupted, while many other airlines are waiting in the wings to absorb the extra demand. Not a happy holiday surely for travellers when ‘BA’ translates into ‘British Absent’...

EMIRATES ADDS THE A380 ON SOUTH KOREA FLIGHTS

The local office of Emirates confirmed to this column that the airline has introduced their sky giant A380 on the route to Seoul’s Incheon International Airport as of this week after taking delivery of their 6th A380 aircraft earlier in the week. The handover of the new A380 took place in Airbus’ Hamburg facility a few days ago, while the 7th A380 will join the Emirates’ fleet later in the month and will then be deployed on the Paris route as previously reported in this column.

Emirates’ in Dubai meanwhile also issued press releases pointing to the superior performance of this aircraft type in regard of ‘greener operations’ by reducing carbon output and noise levels considerably. Ugandan travellers will be thrilled at the prospect of experiencing the world’s largest passenger aircraft on yet more routes and will be looking forward to 2010 when yet more

destinations will become available on the ‘sky giant’. A leading Ugandan travel agent told this column that the A380 made an important difference for travellers from here to other parts of the world when connecting in Dubai and all of them had a good story to tell upon returning home.

UGANDA WILDLIFE AUTHORITY INVITES HOT AIR BALLOON BUSINESS

UWA has now advertised for expressions of interest to operate balloon safaris in the Lake Mburo conservation area, the first such attempt to get an attraction into one of Uganda’s national parks similar to the long standing operations in Kenya and Tanzania. Proposals must be sent by courier or post, NOT by electronic means, to The Executive Director, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Plot 7 Kira Road, Kamwokya, P.O. Box 3530, Kampala, Uganda and have to reach UWA not later than 28th February 2010 at 11.00 hrs (a.m.). The details of the available concession are available also via www.ugandawildlife.org The addition of such a new attraction, besides the recently added horseback safaris, already available for decades to tourist visitors in Kenya and Tanzania, will be welcome news to the tourism industry in Uganda, as in particular the Lake Mburo National Park can do with more visitors.

EQUATORIA HOTEL TURNED INTO SHOPPING MALL

The first hotel opened by the Imperial Hotel Group in 1993 was recently converted into a

major shopping centre, as the group’s management found the location less and less appealing to their erstwhile clientele due to increased traffic, the resulting noise and the general change of demographics and business composition in the immediate neighbourhood.

While some rooms were retained, and will reportedly operate as a bed and breakfast service serving the immediate areas adjoining the hotel, most rooms, function rooms and halls have been turned into shops now, while other facilities like restaurants previously operated by the hotel directly have now been leased out to individual operators.

What will be of value to the new shops is the parking space availability of the Equatoria, which will be a bonus for shoppers as they can leave their cars in a secure environment and find parking easily available rather than having to struggle for street parking space outside.

The Imperial Hotel Group however continues to operate the Imperial Grand Hotel and the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala and the Imperial Resort Beach, the Imperial Botanical Beach and the more recently acquired Imperial Golf Course View Hotel in Entebbe.

A source close to the hotel also inferred that a surplus of rooms in the 2/3 star market segment may have been a factor for the owners when mulling over this decision and that collecting monthly rent may now seem a better and more attractive proposition compared to low occupancies at the hotel as it was.

EGYPT AND SUDAN WANT MORE TIME FOR NEW NILE WATERS AGREEMENT

Ugandan and other East African experts are baffled by the latest spanners in the works of a new agreement over the use of the Nile waters, which the Eastern African 'producer states' of Uganda, Ethiopia, Congo DR, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi claim to be their own 'natural resource', while the arbitrary agreements signed by the colonial masters in 1929 and 1959 are now considered discriminatory, lacking basis and are already generally being ignored, as amply demonstrated by Tanzania for instance in recent years.

A new agreement has been in the making for long, but both the regime in Khartoum and the government in Cairo have been in an 'on again / off again' mood, still not coming to terms with the realities of today's life.

Egypt has been employing both carrot and stick approach, the most notable stick being introduced already in the 1970 by one Boutros-Boutros Ghali, when still a government minister in Egypt, when he speculated about a war over water, clearly aimed at intimidating the upstream countries.

The Eastern African nations expressed repeatedly their willingness to share the waters of the White and Blue Nile with the downstream countries, but insist that the origin of the water is a natural resource within their own area of jurisdiction, just as no one in his or her right mind would begin to claim

Egypt's oil resources as partly theirs, simply because it is on the African continent. Also non negotiable is the ditching of the present requirement that Egypt and Khartoum need to formally approve any projects which require water from either the lakes or the contributory rivers, effectively keeping East Africa's industrial and agricultural developments on a short leash. That, many legislators and politicians but also technical experts have said it in the future totally out of question that anything falling inside the agreed usage portion would have to be subject to the go ahead of a foreign country.

Negotiations and discussions have been ongoing for a decade now and Eastern Africa is slowly running out of patience by the introduction of ever more old and new submissions from Cairo and Khartoum, which according to a government source in Kampala 'add no further value' to the scripts now on the table.

The so called 'riparian' countries hope to reach a final consensus by February 2010 but while they may well be ready to sign on the dotted line, will Egypt and Khartoum? Going by their previous tactics and behaviour this is not likely as they will surely find yet more points of disagreement in an effort to keep their veto rights over East Africa's water use while continuing to satisfy their growing thirst with the precious liquid 'produced' in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. Watch this space.

BRUSSELS' MANNEKEN PIS WELCOMES STAR ALLIANCE

Brussels' famous landmark figure 'Manneken Pis' took centre stage last Wednesday as Belgium's biggest airline 'Brussels Airlines' joined the global STAR Alliance. The Manneken was befittingly dressed up in airline colours and proudly wore the captain's insignia, while the invited press corps was joined by Brussels Airlines CEO Bernard Gustin and cabin crew of all the other STAR Alliance members, wearing their respective uniforms too to add colour to the ceremony and see the formal start of the day's celebrations.

While the weather put a little damper on the mood, being windy and rainy, this could however not stop those present to burst into the 'Manneken Pis song' at least those who knew the words that is – and there were many judging by the mighty chorus, as even passerby's joined the throng.

The day was concluded with a grand ceremony on the 'Grand Place' in the historical centre of Brussels with a light show while the assembled 26 CEO's of Star Alliance members and the Star Alliance CEO enjoyed a special performance by Uganda's 'Ndere Troupe' flown in on the occasion to give their special dinner function that uniquely African touch. After all, Brussels Airlines, the new Star member, is part and parcel of airtravel to Africa, a reason why the airline is so valuable for both Star as well as for their partnerairline Lufthansa. Read more about it in this eTN edition as the focus of this column

this week stays largely on STAR and this correspondent's visit to the capital of Europe.

UWA RULES OUT PARK REDUCTION

The contentious issues surrounding Mt. Elgon National Park, in spite of UWA's best and honest efforts to reach an understanding with surrounding communities, is apparently not going away anytime soon. As rumours are being spilled again, supposedly by local politicians trying to garner votes for the next election, that the park will be reduced in size to make land available for 'the people', UWA has put the foot down and refuted any such suggestions while making it very clear that no land inside the park was available for 'distribution'. Well done UWA!

IT WAS'NT ME – CLAIM OFFICIALS AS ALLEGATIONS PILE UP YET MORE PRESSURE

Officials presently being grilled by parliament's public accounts committee have been pushed into a corner over payments made to a halfbaked hotel development on Entebbe road ahead of the Commonwealth Summit in 2007, when only days prior to the opening ceremony the owners walked away with 2.4 billion Uganda Shillings of public funds. Industry observers had termed the project from the onset a 'cuckoo land' hotel, as the owners with NO prior hotel management experience promised the public '1.000 rooms and 2.000 shops'. The hotel came into the bad news column when a structure collapsed

during construction, killing and injuring workers and being shut down while investigations were ongoing. However, no court case has ever been brought, at least not as yet. Meanwhile, it was equally clear to informed observers at the CHOGM time that this 'hotel' was not only NOT on the list of approved CHOGM hotels, nor would it ever be ready in time, when the funds were dished out into the pockets of the reportedly well connected owners.

Up to date, the unfinished construction 'litters' the hill top, a stark reminder for everyone passing to and from Entebbe of the follies of this project. The bureaucrats now under the spotlight, apparently running out of excuses, now tried to shift the blame to a joint cabinet subcommittee and presidential 'directive', trying to escape the wrath of the parliamentarians who are now out to find culprits and bring them to book. Read more about this ongoing saga and how allegedly Uganda's public coffers were 'lightened' through the following web links:

www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/news/Museveni_cabinet_gave_nod_to_bad_Chogm_deal_95729.shtml

www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/sun_news/Rwabwogo_named_in_Chogm_probe_95934.shtml

www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/704389

www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/news/Government_officials_held_over_Chogm_publicity_cash_96070.shtml

ENTEBBE AIRPORT FIRE

ENGULFES FUEL TANKERS

Reports from usually reliable sources within the aviation industry and the Civil Aviation Authority came in last Saturday late morning that two fuel trucks apparently burst into flames, when approaching the airport fuel discharge docking station, where the tankers from Kenya normally offload their cargo. JetA1 fuel is carried by road from Kenya in the absence of a longer pipeline and often sees the trailer trucks involved in accidents, yet never before at the airport itself. It could be ascertained in the meanwhile that one truck, while carelessly reversing, hit another starting the blaze. While obviously nothing can be formally ruled in or out, until investigations are completed and a final accident report has been filed, it is most unlikely that this incident was anything other than an accident, putting prompt rumours and speculation to immediate rest.

Sections of the airport were evacuated to the fire assembly points in the parking areas distant from the fire or to nearby buildings as a precaution, although the fire was apparently contained at the scene of the outbreak and the swift reaction by the Entebbe Airport Fire Brigade and the Entebbe Municipal Fire Brigade helped to avoid a spreading of the fire to other areas or to the main fuel reservoir and pumping installations.

It is not believed that the accident and resulting fire will had any significant impact on air traffic to and from Entebbe today although the loss of aviation fuel may be felt a little until replacement

shipments have been delivered at the airport. Some inbound flights were, according to other sources, held at the departure point until the situation had been clarified and the Entebbe station managers given the all clear, resulting in minor delays of inbound flights.

HOLIDAYS WITH NO WATER?
The Sunday Monitor last weekend alarmed Kampala residents with allegations that the national water company would fail to complete repairs in time for the festive season, and in the process leaving sections of Kampala with dry taps. The Kampala Central opposition MP promptly waded into the public limelight seeking to increase his standing in the process with his utterances on the subject, while sources at the water company then admitted that there were indeed issues with producing and distributing the required amounts of water due to technical problems across their network. What is clear though is that the rapid expansion of the city in recent years has put extra strain on the infrastructure of the utility companies which have often failed to keep up with the growing demand on their services.

UGANDA TOURISM BOARD CONFIRMS TOURISM TRADE FAIR PARTICIPATION FOR 2010

According to a recent newsletter by UTB the following trade fairs will be attended by a Ugandan delegation in the early part of next year: Vakantiebus in Holland, FITUR in Madrid, BIT in Milan, ITB in Berlin, TUR in Gothenburg / Sweden and the

premier East African Tourism Trade Fair 'Karibu' in Arusha.

HAPPY JAMHURI DAY TO KENYA

Kenya celebrated their independence day last weekend and the best wishes go to the people and government of the Republic of Kenya on this auspicious occasion.

KENYA TOURISM CONSIDERING BOND ISSUE TO FUND ACTIVITIES

The Kenya Tourism Trust Fund is apparently considering the launch of a dedicated 'tourism bond' to raise funding for their planned activities across the country, as the EU funded tourism support programme is coming to an end. The fund was initially formed in 2002 by the Kenyan government and the EU to jointly process the disbursement of money availed by both Kenya and the EU. However, the EU project has now run its course and there is no clarity if an add on programme or 'intervention' is being considered by the EU – something which was not the case in Uganda two years ago when the UGSTDP came to an end in spite of the programme not entirely meeting its targets, largely because of the dithering on the Ugandan government side where crucial components were not put into place in a timely manner, belying constant verbal assurances to the sector of being a 'priority'. Hence, Kenya is in need to secure sustainable funding for TTF and KTB to continue aggressive marketing in existing, emerging and new markets while at the

same time adding value to the existing tourism circuits and opening up new attractions across the country.

HOTELIERS IN NAIROBI 'PLEASED' WITH 2009

Occupancy levels in Kenya's capital city have risen to the 2007 levels once again, following two years of downturn in the market. In spite of the opening recently of the Crowne Plaza, which has added another 250 rooms and suites to the market, occupancy levels now are at par again with the pre-election and pre-global economic crisis period, bringing smiles to the faces of hoteliers, which a year ago looked rather gloomy. Meetings, conferences, conventions, events and incentives now constitute a major market for Kenya, estimated to be reaching well over 20 percent of the overall tourism arrivals soon, signalling that Kenya has found her way back into the good books of the world's leading tour and travel agencies which had stood the country down over fears of safety and security only two years ago.

One leading hospitality source in regular contact with this column in fact spoke already of 'constraining factors for further growth' when discussing available aircraft seats and capacity, calling on airlines to bring in larger planes and increase frequencies of their flights to Nairobi and Mombasa. He was also asking the Kenyan government to make extra efforts to attract new airlines, in particular from the South and Far East but also from Russia and other former Soviet Union

countries to commence operations into Kenya.

NAIROBI RUNWAY LIGHTS GO OUT – KAA SILENT

The crucial runway lights failed on the evening of the 09th December at Nairobi's main international airport Jomo Kenyatta International, halting all incoming and outbound flights for several hours.

It is understood from reliable sources in Nairobi that while the runway lights were eventually brought back on line around 01.30 hrs a.m. on the 10th of December, no immediate explanation was offered by the Kenya Airports Authority or any other governmental entity until well into Thursday, i.e. the following morning. Meanwhile more than a dozen flights had been affected and planes bound for JKIA had to be diverted to either Mombasa or Kilimanjaro International to 'sit out' the period of technical fault until services eventually resumed. In other cases aircraft were kept at the point of origin before being cleared by air traffic control in Nairobi to commence their flights to Kenya.

A similar fate had struck the Mombasa airport a while ago when for several days in fact the runway lights were out following the flooding of an underground electricity cable duct, restricting operations at the time to daylight hours and hence causing a severe impact on the flight schedules in and out of the coast's main international airport. Watch this space for the most up to date reports on Eastern African aviation.

KENYA AIRWAYS RESUMES KISUMU FLIGHTS

'The Pride of Africa' has last weekend announced the resumption of flights from Nairobi to Kisumu, effective 10th of December, following the successful completion of runway repairs and upgrades by the Kenya Airport Authority.

The airline will fly twice a day, in the morning and late afternoon, and use their new Embraer 170 aircraft on the route. To support the launch commercially KQ has offered for the time being a 're-launch fare' of only Kenya Shillings 710, return, plus taxes, or a little over 100 US Dollars in hard currency. This fare will be available until the 20th December and terms and conditions apply. KQ had previously halted their flights to Kisumu several times when the state of the runway was judged as dangerous to their operation, and again a few weeks ago as the available runway length was less than an Embraer 170 required to land safely, while other air operators using different and smaller jets and turboprops were able to continue operations. The new fare however will be a challenge for the competition as KQ is set to wrestle market share back in their favour. Notably, service has been resumed just ahead of the busy festive season when many more people are expected to fly home to Kisumu for the holidays.

TURKISH AIRLINES SET TO EXPAND IN AFRICA

The Turkish national airline some time ago commenced flights into

Kenya, following the withdrawal from the route of Kenya Airways in 2008, offering nonstop services between Istanbul and Nairobi. Some weeks ago the ambassador of Turkey in Tanzania was also reported to have said that Turkish Airlines may even consider adding Dar es Salaam to their growing Africa network. (see previous column item to that effect)

During a meeting in Brussels on the occasion of SN joining Star Alliance, the opportunity arose to have a chat with Dr. Temel Kotil about the airline's plans in that direction.

Turkish Airlines has in past years, and more intensely so since joining Star Alliance in 2008, shed its old image and rebranded itself successfully as an upcoming global airline, no surprise for regular aviation observers as they have a joint venture airline, SunExpress, with Lufthansa, aimed mainly at the leisure market from Germany and other source markets to Turkey's Mediterranean coastal resorts and in operation now already since 1989.

The CEO further confirmed that as more new aircraft come on line, the airline expects delivery of 9 more wide bodies in 2010 and 10 more in 2011, they are indeed keen to expand their Africa network, which they intend to feed from across the CIS states and other source markets, as their efforts accelerate to increase their transit traffic via Istanbul. Turkish Airlines has both A330's and B777's on order to cater for the different capacity demand on their present and future network.

Dr. Temel Kotil was however guarded as to time frames and potential destinations – something his competitors would surely have been keen to read about in this column. What Dr. Kotil did confirm though was that their cost basis was substantially lower compared to the main European airlines, which he termed as the foundation for success. Watch this space for breaking news.

LUFTHANSA NOT COMING BACK ANYTIME SOON

Many travellers will still recall the links Lufthansa provided for Eastern Africa, when they still operated their daily passenger flights into the region (Nairobi and Dar es Salaam) up to the end of the 1990's. At that time LH withdrew with little notice from the two countries, citing poor yields and lack of suitable aircraft, having just sold their fleet of A310's and not having the right size aircraft available at the time, or so they said and told the story. Other carriers however capitalised on this development and to date Frankfurt can only be reached nonstop from East Africa if flying on a holiday charter to and from Mombasa or else, on scheduled airlines via Brussels, Zurich, Amsterdam, London, Addis Ababa or Dubai.

When meeting the CEO of Lufthansa in Brussels for the Star Alliance event celebrating Brussels Airlines membership, opportunity arose to speak with Wolfgang Mayrhofer about their plans for East Africa. Asked about the chances of LH resuming direct flights he said that while Lufthansa was always monitoring

demand and traffic flow to and from Eastern Africa, the airline presently is happy with their arrangements of using the code share with Brussels Airlines to Entebbe while in fact considering expanding code shares to the other three Eastern African SN destinations of Bujumbura, Kigali and Nairobi, subject to regulatory approvals.

Lufthansa holds 45 percent of the Brussels Airlines' shares already and has the option to purchase the balance of shares in 2011.

The same applies for Swiss which LH has already fully integrated into the Lufthansa Group. Swiss presently flies into Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and provides an easy connection for passengers from Germany, using Lufthansa and Swiss's joint flights between the German airports and Zurich, where they can transfer to the long haul flight to Nairobi or Dar. Mr. Mayrhofer said he was satisfied that these two group airlines were doing a good job in offering seats for the German market via their respective hubs and there would therefore not be a resumption of LH operated flights to Eastern Africa any time soon – while not ruling out a return in the long run, once demand had sufficiently risen to justify it. Lufthansa however remains committed, it was pointed out to this column by another source within Lufthansa, to operating regular cargo flights in and out of Kenya and on demand cargo charters to other East African airports as required from time to time.

TANZANIA CELEBRATES

Africa Travel Magazine

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Congratulations to the people and government of Tanzania on the occasion of their 48th Independence Day, celebrated last week.

KADCO SHOWN THE DOOR

Reports from Arusha gave confirmation over the last weekend, that the government has apparently terminated the management contract of the Kilimanjaro Airports Development Company, in short KADCO, as a result of non performance and missing agreed targets.

KADCO initially had a contract for 25 years, but this was of late under scrutiny over a range of issues, while air operators regularly complained that the user charges were high in comparison with other similar airports in the region, hampering the wider development of air transport. It is not clear if the KADCO shareholders will go to court to seek an injunction and sue for wrongful termination of contract, as one source close to the company has already intimated.

TANZANIA FEELS MALAWI QUAKE TREMORS

A 5.9 earthquake in Northern Malawi was also felt across the border in Tanzania last week, scaring residents into sleeping in the open. Quakes of this intensity are rather rare in the wider region although a series of minor quakes and volcanic activity were witnessed last year in parts of the Africa rift, affecting both Tanzania and Uganda. The intensity of the

earthquake was also confirmed by the US Geological Survey which monitors seismic activity around the world and is normally the first official agency to confirm the strength of an earthquake.

CAMP MANAGER A SUSPECT, OFFICIAL SOURCES SAY

The manager of an upmarket safari camp, reportedly a citizen of a Southern African country, has allegedly disappeared from his job after rumours appeared that authorities wanted to talk to him about the death of an elephant near the camp, which had the tusks missing when it was discovered. Sources in Tanzania did mention to this column last weekend that the authorities have in fact announced that he will be subjected to an arrest warrant when all facts have been established and prosecution can proceed.

The camp owners also have reportedly denounced any knowledge and complicity in the apparent act of poaching by their – now surely – former manager. Oooops...

NEW PAYMENT SYSTEM NEEDS CHANGES

Some of the Tanzanian tour and safari operators have requested changes to the present system of paying for park entrance fees, which – to counter fraudulent practises at the various gates – was introduced by TANAPA in 2007. The system is in place across the ‘northern’ circuit where the banks participating in the scheme have set up cash and card machines.

The cashless payments were

welcomed at the time by tour and safari operators to avoid the loss of cash, but issues emerged reportedly soon afterwards about how the system works.

The complaints are apparently focused on the use of MasterCard payments, which operators claim often remain unpaid by the bank yet they (the operators) have provided services and made payments on behalf of their clients, who by the time the dispute arises have already returned home.

However, other tour and safari operators contacted by this column claim that it may be the use of this particular brand of credit card only as others do not experience problems when processing the payment vouchers through their banks.

SERENGETI GAME COUNTS DOWN

A researcher with TANAPA recently published results of studies carried out over a prolonged period of time, which claim that certain game species have substantially reduced in numbers, raising concern over the future of some of them. Rhino in particular have suffered a very substantial decline and are now seriously endangered, although TANAPA is engaged in a major relocation programme to boost numbers and create once again viable breeding stocks. Elephant numbers too are reported to have declined to a fraction of their former numbers, while buffalo herds reportedly shrunk from some 70.000 to only 40.000 over the past 20 years. It appears from data sent to this column that the

records were first taken for this study in 1988, i.e. two decades ago, which by all standards would constitute an alarming trend and require immediate action to maintain the status of the Serengeti as one of the world’s premier game parks.

It was also revealed at the same time that TANAPA has of late intensified programmes to engage with neighbouring communities adjoining the national parks and game reserves to enlist them in their conservation programmes, aided by setting aside considerable funding from ‘gate receipt sharing’ for the development of social amenities, aimed to create the necessary goodwill at grass root levels.

NOW LAKE BABATI TOO SUFFERS FROM DROUGHT

Hotel operators and local guides have voiced their concern over the migration of the hippos previously resident in the lake in their hundreds to other places, after the water level in the lake shrunk from drought and much of the water mass is now covered by weeds and water hyacinth, possibly affecting the habitat of the animals. Not long ago the area was featured as a tourism attraction on the ‘cultural circuit’ available now for visitors, but the loss of the hippo spectacle in the lake has now put a damper of the local’s hopes to make a sustainable living from the tourism industry.

RWANDAIR RECEIVES FIRST OWN BOMBARDIER CRJ

The Rwandan national airline took delivery earlier in the week

of their first 'owned' CRJ200 jet, purchased together with a second such aircraft some months ago from Germany's Lufthansa.

The arrival of the aircraft in Kigali today will mark a milestone in the airline's development and is in line with the implementation of their strategic plan, which aims at owning rather than wet leasing and will permit a subsequent expansion of both frequencies and their network.

Some years ago the airline actively sought a partner in order to grow, but when no serious bids came forward the Board changed direction and began work on a new strategy aimed at developing their own strengths and rather cooperating with suitable airlines bringing value to RwandAir's operations. This resulted in a recent codeshare with Brussels Airlines, allowing RwandAir to sell tickets on the 'shared' flight between Kigali and Belgium. Both of the Bombardier CRJ200 planes come with a spare part package and maintenance support from Lufthansa Technik, giving reassurance in regard of flight safety.

The airline will, when the second aircraft arrives, resume their full schedule as published for the 'winter season', which was in a rather variable state since RwandAir terminated their wet lease of similar aircraft with Kenyan airline Jetlink a few weeks ago.

It was also confirmed that RwandAir is seeking to add a larger jet to their fleet in early 2010, to give them greater flexibility in serving high density routes, most likely a B737NG

type aircraft. In a related development the airline also confirmed that it will seek full membership in IATA, beginning the process early next year.

A ceremony was held at the Kanombe International Airport by RwandAir, and general airport workers and staff of other airlines on duty also joined the celebrations.

Congratulations all round to RwandAir on this momentous occasion.

AKAGERA NATIONAL PARK TO BECOME 'JOINT VENTURE'

Information received from Kigali last week confirms that the Rwanda Development Board – Tourism and Conservation, has apparently entered into a partnership agreement with the 'African Parks Network' to jointly manage the park and raise finance for further infrastructural developments.

Since the woes of Dubai World have hit the headlines of the financial press, concern has been growing that their plans for Akagera too were not coming to fruition and the arrival of APN was giving the RDB another option for the park. Dubai World was to invest over 250 million US Dollars in Rwanda but has apart from taking over a safari lodge in Ruhengeri not taken roots and the planned hotel development cum golf course in Kigali appears to have been snatched up by a consortium using Marriott International as their chosen managers. The recently signed agreement for the Akagera management cooperation will

span over an initial 20 year period and can be extended if so desired. The deal was approved by the Rwandan cabinet.

ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES ON STAR ALLIANCE HORIZON
Star Alliance's CEO Jaan Albrecht gave the clearest indication yet that serious discussions were going on between the world's leading airline alliance and Ethiopian Airlines, one of the potential additional 'African Stars' after South African Airways and Egypt Air. Information had filtered slowly in past months from Addis that indeed discussions were ongoing, but the apparent volume of work towards compliance and meeting the stringent Star Alliance membership criteria may have delayed a formal invitation for some more time. Yet, ET would undoubtedly add to the value of Star's standing in Africa, being the erstwhile Pan African carrier and still almost matching Kenya Airways' extensive Africa network which the Kenyan airline developed over the past years with the aim to transport connecting traffic from across Africa via Nairobi.

A potential Star Alliance hub in the wider Eastern African region would also put Sky Team on notice, that their dominance so far in East Africa through the KQ/KLM/AF alliance in Nairobi would finally have to make do with a serious 'rival' next door in Addis, which is less than two hours away from Nairobi and ideally placed in geographical terms to distribute Star Alliance traffic into the continent via Addis Ababa.

SEYCHELLES HOSTS WORLD WETLAND WEEK

The Indian Ocean island nation will host the global 'world wetland week' from the 01st of February next year, which will bring together experts and lobbyists from around the world. Visit www.ramsar.org for more information on the agenda of the meeting and the main speakers and experts expected to come to the Seychelles for this purpose. Meanwhile has the Island Conservation Society of the Seychelles continued with their work and will be using the international conference to also keep the national focus on the need to preserve natural resources and conservation activities.

SEYCHELLES AT 'INTERNATIONAL LUXURY TRAVEL MARKET' IN CANNES

A team of Seychelles Tourism and the private sector attended the ILTM in Cannes last week with a tailored message to the tourism sector that the Seychelles is well placed and equipped to offer luxury packages to visitors in an exclusive and serene environment. The private sector participants represented in fact the upmarket properties available on the archipelago and the diversified message, of course different from the main tourism trade shows, was that luxury seekers will find what they are looking for on the Seychelles. Already on arrival are exclusive helicopter charters available from the international airport to the respective luxury resorts, often set above secluded

beaches offering the finest cuisine, Spa treatment centres and a variety of entertainment fit for the proverbial 'kings', which clients with deep pockets surely are these days.

The attendance of ILTM concluded the annual tourism trade fair programme set up by the Seychelles Tourist Board while the schedule for 2010 will be finalised at the annual marketing meeting in January, where both public and private sector will brainstorm and agree on the way forward under the theme: 'Consolidating the Seychelles Tourism Industry'. Well done STB and partners and all the best for next year.

NEW TIME SHARE LUXURY RETREAT FOR CERF

A South African property development company is now offering month long time shares in 4 bedroom luxury villas on Cerf Island, which will cost in the region of 200.000 US Dollars per time share. The new project, aptly named 'Simply.Perfect' is being driven by a group of specialists comprising architects, designers and project managers keen to add such an option to the growing range of attractions across the archipelago. No website or email details are presently available however but will be added as and when at hand.

IT IS 51 AND 60 FOR REFERENDUM IN 2011

Agreement has finally been reached over the last weekend between the political leadership and Government of Southern Sudan and the regime in

Khartoum over key issues concerning the independence referendum vote due to be held in early 2011.

It was learned from usually reliable sources in Juba that a 51 percent yes vote will suffice for the South to attain the much longed for independence, just as long as a 60 percent voter turnout is registered.

A general election in April 2010 is seen as a precursor towards this goal and all systems in the South are set on 'go' by the SPLM to commence campaigning and march towards a political victory through the polls. Congrats to GOSS for having dug in their heels and compelled Khartoum to accept reasonable modalities for the referendum.

Similar agreements appear to have also been reached over the forthcoming vote on the future of Abyei, the Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile regions, all of which had been excluded at the time of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005.

STAR ALLIANCE CEO: WE NEED 'NO HUB IN THE DESERT' SAND

Star Alliance CEO Jaan Albrecht, while discussing other issues with this correspondent in Brussels last week, also made it quite clear that the world's leading airline alliance was not presently seeking a member or members from the Gulf area, saying 'we do not need a hub in the desert sand'. He continued to point out that the Gulf area is being served by Star Alliance members from their present hubs in the East, South and West with sufficient

capacity, and that the alliance's focus remains on other areas in the world which could add value to Star's market standing and their passengers. It was also understood from other remarks made by the Star Alliance CEO that Brazil's TAM (founder member VARIG was dropped by the alliance when it went into administration at the time) and Air India, amongst others, were at advanced stages of discussions with Star for attaining membership, but that no specific time frame could be availed at this time due to 'the complex nature of compliance and harmonization of procedures and systems'.

THE WHY'S OF CHOOSING ONE AIRLINE OVER THE OTHER

Flying has apparently lost lots of the glitz and glamour which was in the past associated with it, both for crews and for passengers, if frequent reports in eTN are anything to go by about experiences by travellers in particular in North America. Constant cuts in service levels, (and pay, terms and conditions for the crews) combined with equally constant new charges being invented to have passengers part with extra money, have made flying almost a 'kiosky bus ride in the sky', with the added intrusive and often unnerving security checks driving at times even the calmest and most frequent of travellers 'nuts'. 'Low service' has become part of many airlines, not necessarily because that particular carrier is truly 'low cost' but because airline executives seem to believe in the 'minimax' principle, trying to charge ever more for

ever less, and encouraged because they appear to get away with it. In fact, every airline around the globe must either manage to lower their cost or must go out of business, the Lufthansa CEO Wolfgang Mayrhuber intimated last week, when he set his targets at a 40 percent cost cut for LH's European routes!

Here in Africa, flying is on many of our regional routes more expensive than in other parts of the world, when looking at the same distances flown, and true low cost airlines are far and few between – here in East Africa only Fly 540 being a dedicated LCC while others try to be poor copycats, not apparently understanding the concept. However, that said, load factors on the East African regional and domestic routes remain remarkable high and passengers do demand, AND GET a full service on board of their chosen airline. A flight from Entebbe to Nairobi, Dar es Salaam or Johannesburg for instance, depending on the time of day, attracts a continental breakfast, a light lunch or supper meal or at least a snack, plus drinks of course – often with free beers and wine – and that is in economy class. Business class passengers can expect a warm breakfast, a choice of menu for both lunch and dinner and during off meal periods at least a cold platter and some salad besides the larger selection of drinks available. Coming to the long haul flights, many of which leave East Africa for Europe as overnight flights and an added dimension

comes into play. Seat comfort in the cabin becomes a very important factor, besides in flight entertainment, catering and the service levels offered by the crew. Most airlines flying into Entebbe offer a 32 inch pitch in economy class and the latest generation of Y-class seats is offering better sitting comfort and reclines compared to those dreaded 'narrow gauge' contraptions used in the past. Service in the cabin normally includes a dinner soon after reaching cruising altitude out of Entebbe and a breakfast before arrival at the European airport. The availability of reading materials may have been scaled down in economy class, partly to save weight but also to save the cost of purchasing it, but the latest film releases, of course adapted for the wide audience on the flight being able to see them, including kids, are available even in the main cabin, and can now mostly be watched through personal screens in the backrest of the seat in front.

Upfront however a real revolution has taken place over the past decade, as several airlines now offer 'flat bed' or 'almost flat bed' seats in business class – previously strictly found in the 'First' cabin – giving passengers a more realistic chance to catch some 'zzzzsssss' in flight and arriving at the destination ready to put in an immediate day's work. A lot of airlines have abandoned the traditional First Class from their aircraft – Emirates being one of the notable exceptions on flights to Entebbe – but since then enhanced their business class section to remain attractive

for full fare and premium passengers. Laptop power sockets, individual large TV screens and a variety of films and other video and audio entertainment available ‘on demand’ – able to last throughout the trip – give premium passengers the choice of either working on the large fold out tables, enjoying the latest film releases, sampling the constant flow of snacks and meals accompanied by a fine selection of wines and spirits, or simply putting the eyeshades on after takeoff, telling the crew when to deliver a ‘wakeup call’ and sleeping during at least some of the flight hours.

My most recent flying experience to Europe took place on a Brussels Airlines’ A330, which of course also offers the much in demand ‘almost’ flat bed seats, maintained the ‘savoir vivre’ in the air, offer enhanced lounge comfort for connecting passengers in Brussels, including shower and ‘silent’ rest facilities, fast track premium passengers through ‘express’ channels bypassing the long queues at immigration and security check points, provide a separate boarding entrance for premium passengers, and – another crucially important plus, deliver the bags for premium passengers ‘first’ for a swift get away from the airport both in Brussels and back home in Entebbe. On the return flight the weather permitted magic views right across the snow covered alpine mountain peaks, of course not visible during the night flight into Europe a few days earlier. Brussels Airlines, now operating under Lufthansa’s ‘Miles and

More’ frequent flyer programme, presently offers a 20 percent extra miles credit as a further incentive to their regular passengers, which earns them valuable added credits to ‘burn’ at global partner outlets. SN comes highly recommended by this correspondent, who after countless flights over the past decades, admittedly most of the times as a passenger in the front cabins, can offer a well founded opinion as to the quality of the overall product experience of pre- during- and post flight performance of any airline, and SN on this occasion excelled throughout.

And in closing this week some more interesting travel reports about ‘Destination Zambia’ taken from the ‘Livingstone Weekly’ courtesy of Gill Staden, Livingstone / Zambia, including – considering the ongoing climate summit in Copenhagen – a piece on the plight of the Zambian forests and how the raping of natural resources seems to be ongoing in spite of the publicity from Copenhagen about the need to properly manage our resources and in particular protect the great forests around the globe...

Timber cutting in Sesheke District (a report by Gill Staden, eTN Ambassador, Zambia)

I was told the other week about the fast-disappearing indigenous forests around Sesheke. It seems that there are a number of South Africans on Temporary Work Permits who are cutting down the forests at a rate of knots. They use the local people as

intermediaries who they provide with the equipment. There are, I am told, about 3 big trucks loaded with raw timber crossing the Katima Mulilo border each week.

These people do not have legitimate businesses in Zambia; they pay no tax, except what is applicable at the border. They are making big fat profits ... all of which is accrued in South Africa. During this week we have listened to the talks on global warming. I don’t suppose the local people around Sesheke know much about global warming, but the authorities should. Those trees are so important to us (and the rest of the world) and should be a renewable resource. There are strict guidelines about the size of trees which can be cut. A tree has a lifespan, and there is nothing wrong with cutting old trees because they will die naturally, anyway. But who is controlling what is cut? Actually, no-one, I expect.

There is also the big problem of forest fires. We know that we are addicted to setting the bush alight during the dry season. These South African operations have no-one watching to see if the area around each felled tree is cleared. The unusable branches are left lying on the ground and fuel forest fires during the dry season.

And, what about erosion? Once the trees are gone on this area of Kalahari sand, there will be nothing to stop the rain in its tracks as it pours down the hillsides. We have seen on the news the landslides going on