



Dear All

This week, National Heritage Conservation Commission (NHCC) officially opened their new ticket office on the main road close to the border.

It was one of those formal occasions which was lightened by some drumming and dancing to start off with and then included some traditional ceremonies performed by Bedyango, the female relative of Chief Mukuni who runs the day-to-day affairs of the village.



Bedyango danced to the song of the Mukuni choir and recited all the names of previous Bedyangos while offering a libation to the ancestors and spirits of the Toka-Leya people from Mukuni village.

Following the libation, Bedyango walked around some of the audience and sprayed them with water.

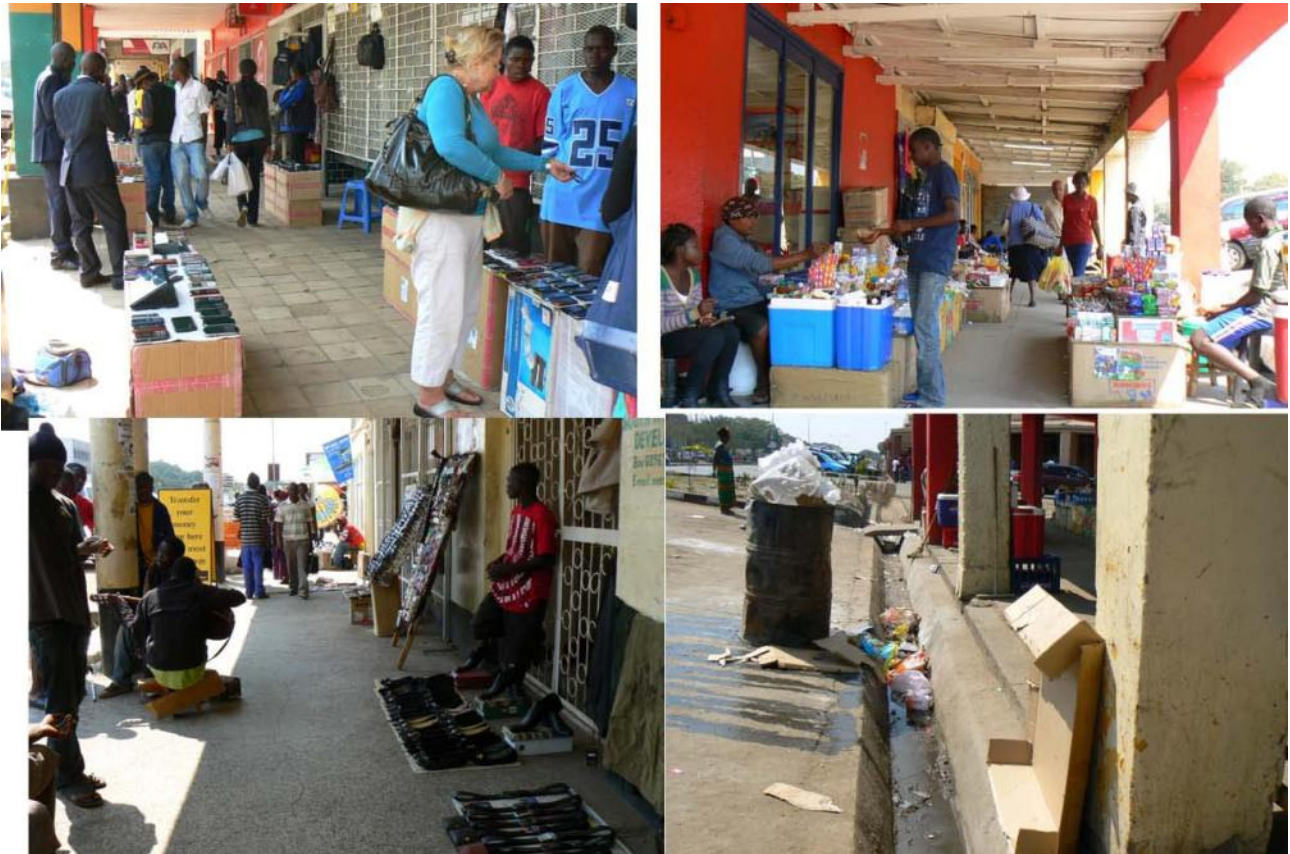
The speeches followed. Sorry, but I am not one for speeches. I just managed to pick up a bit from the first one which told us that the cost of the new ticket office as K416,000,000 and was paid for through NHCC.



Street Vendors

On a visit to Livingstone by the Minister of Tourism and Arts, Sylvia Masebo, she commented about the need for street vendors to find something better to do than just trading on the streets which is environmentally unfriendly as there were no toilets.

I went for a walk around town to see what the pavements looked like now. Here are some pics ...



No comment ...

Currency Control Measures

When Sylvia Masebo visited Livingstone last week she was accompanied by Leonard Kalinde from the Bank of Zambia. According to the report by AllAfrica.com, Leonard Kalinde said that the use of dollars by companies had been a way of avoiding paying tax. He complained that money from sectors like tourism had not been coming into the country and was depriving Zambia of foreign currency earnings.

I have said before that I am not an expert of economics but I don't understand this. Before the new SI on using only kwacha, credit card machines took dollars which went into a dollar account. It came to Zambia but it was in dollars. Now the credit card machines have been changed into kwacha and therefore we are getting kwacha, but the same value.

Most companies use an accounting package on their computers into which all transactions are placed. These accounting packages automatically calculate tax, etc, and cannot, as far as I know, be 'fiddled'. Also, with most companies now, there are many shareholders who all expect to have their dividends paid, so they are going to complain if the accounts are not done properly.

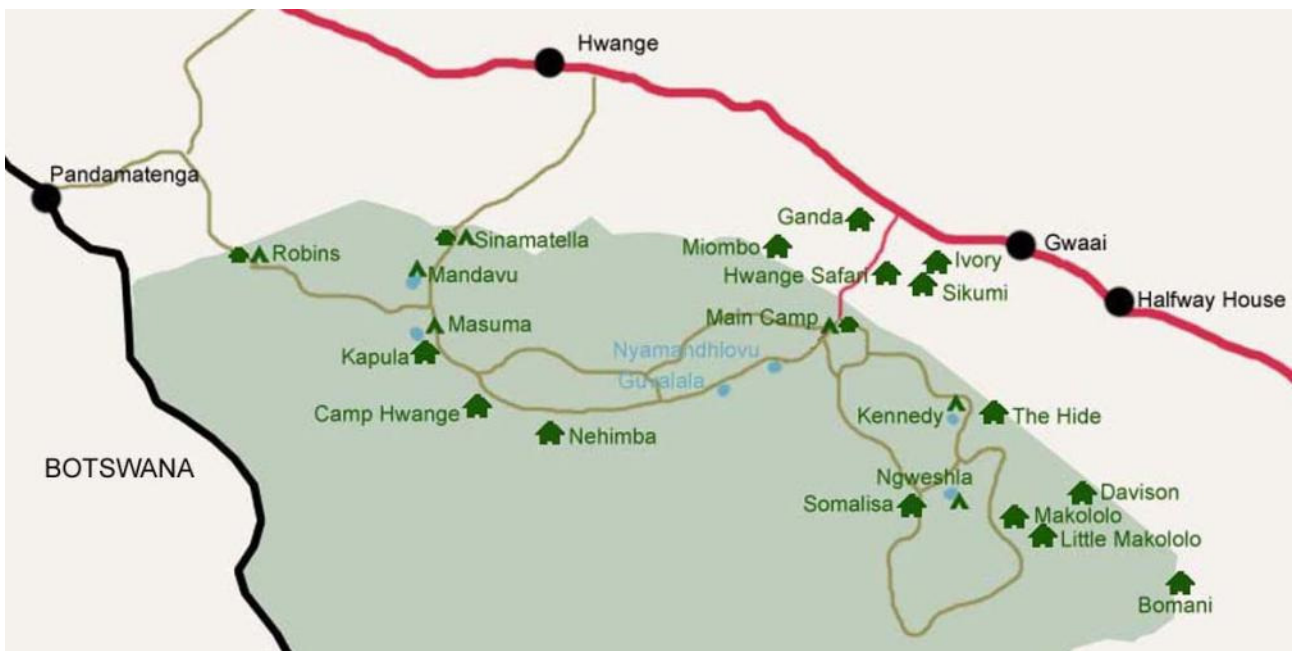
So, as I said, I am very confused. It just seems to me that we will be getting less dollars coming into the country now. And accounts will be done in exactly the same way.

From a personal perspective, I notice the queues at the bank so that visitors can change their dollars into kwacha so that they can buy goods. It reminded me of one of Given Lubinda's comments at a meeting in Livingstone while he was Minister of Tourism. He said that he had been to Brazil (I think), and wanted to buy a souvenir to bring home but because he only had dollars he couldn't buy one – he didn't have time to go to a bank to change to the local currency. He came home without the souvenir. Who lost in that deal?

I know that our curio sellers/taxi drivers are not struggling with the new SI on currency control. They will sell in dollars, rand, pula ... whatever currency you like. So, please, if you are visiting, don't worry about getting around or buying a curio in dollars. Just remember that money changers on the street or hanging around the borders are illegal, but sometimes there is no choice. If you deal with them you do so at your own risk – some of them have a terrible reputation. The best idea is to get someone trustworthy to go with you to do the transaction. Find a Customs Officer at the border or possibly, a taxi driver if you are in town.

Continuing our trip to Hwange

I left you just as we had left Kapula Lodge near Masuma Dam. We took the road to Main Camp stopping here and there to chat and watch the animals along the way. Actually it wasn't a good day for viewing. It was a bit cold and windy.



We met Dave Carson on the way showing his guests around and were shown (in the distance) his lodge, Camp Hwange, near Shumba Pan. It is now on my list of places to visit ...

This practice of dividing up parts of the parks into concessions on lease to private camps works for Hwange National Park and should, I feel, be copied in other parks. In Zambia we use the same idea but the lease fees tend to be extraordinarily high. It makes running a lodge in the 'back of beyond' economically



unviable. The concession holders in Hwange have reasonable lease fees and, because of this, they can give back to the park by providing boreholes and helping game scouts in patrols and logistics.

Anyway, getting back to our trip to Main Camp ... We saw little. There were a lot of elephant skeletons, probably about 15 between Sinamatella and Main Camp. Last year's drought certainly took its toll. And it must have cut the other animal populations too.

This year things seem to be a little better although the water in the pans was generally low. Only Mandavu seemed to be full-ish. We do know, though, that ZimParks and the private companies are doing their best to provide the much needed water. The problems will come during October and thereafter as we hope for a good rainy season. These photographs of eles and pals were taken at Nyamandhlovu Pan.



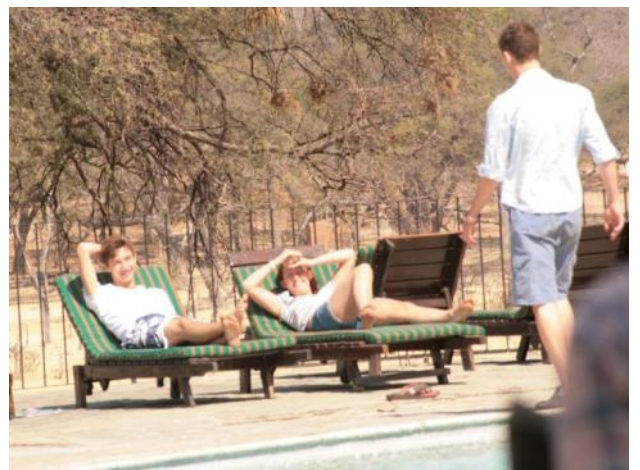
We arrived at Main Camp and took possession of our chalets - all clean, fully equipped, running hot and cold water and electricity. Feeling lazy we went and ate at the restaurant which is functioning well.



The shop too was stocked and I managed to buy some fresh bread and sausages for breakfast.

And, yes, I know that it is wrong, ... but I fed the birds with some bread ... How could anyone resist their inquisitive looks???

We left Main Camp for a night at Hwange Safari Lodge. With three English teenagers on the trip there are times when adults have to take second place. At Hwange Safari Lodge our young adults could indulge in their loves like getting a tan, chatting, listening to their iPods



and generally being teenagers ... Meanwhile us boring adults could watch the waterhole in front and see what came to drink.



Elephants, of course, were constant visitors. The guinea fowl were ever present in large numbers – never seen so many there before.



And then, a lucky sighting, some eland came down to drink.



We finished our holiday the following morning with Josh taking one contingent back to Harare and me taking the other to Livingstone.

As the Livingstone trip was only a couple of hours away we visited the Painted Dog Foundation on the way. It was good to hear that there were only 3 wild dogs in the facility. Two of them are permanent residents because they are old and would not survive in the wild. The other one, Aurora, was brought in because she was left alone; she will stay at the facility until she can find some more playmates to form a sustainable pack.



From a Tour Operator based in South Africa

As you may know I was raised in Zambia (Copperbelt) and set up my company initially to send South Africans on holiday to Zambia, the country I love passionately. I have just spent the weekend in Victoria Falls courtesy of 1Time (their new destination) and I would like to give you some input as to what we feel are problems facing Zambia tourism.

On the Zimside we experienced nothing but optimistic and passionate operators, hoteliers, lodge owners and even airport authorities (to be expected at an airline launch I suppose). Travelling back via Livingstone we experienced surly border officials at the Falls Zambia side, miserable airport staff (Livingstone) and a general feeling that the old days of the early 90's are back. In our opinion, Livingstone seems to be sliding and once again becoming a complicated destination to send tourists to.

Having been involved in tourism since the mid 90's the one thing we have learnt is the KISS principle, and that's not KISS your tourists as per the Zimside, it's Keep It Simple, that's what tourists want and demand. One small story to add to this was the unforgivable cock-up that occurred due to the Livingstone Airport ground staff. On departure they forgot to take off the chocks that secure the aircraft wheels while at rest, result the 1Time plane could not taxi or even move despite a couple of failed attempts (the pilot initially didn't realise that the plane was still chocked). Sitting on the plane the pilot announced and explained what had happened, the general feeling amongst the passengers I spoke to was "thank god 1Time is leaving Zambia!".

OK so I get this email (below) today, another nail in the coffin, what is happening with Zambia tourism? Do the people involved not understand the concept of competition, there are two sides to this wonderful waterfall and the other side is cleaning up by doing exactly the opposite to what Zambia does.

We will always remain involved and send tourists to Zambia but I must say the Zimside is looking very attractive and the market (not I) will demand where they want to go to spend their hard earned Rand. We

hope that sense will prevail and that both sides of Victoria Falls will eventually compete on service, value and ease of doing business.

New Airport charge For Zambia

Zambia's National Airports Corporation (NACL) has introduced an Aviation Infrastructure and Development charge effective 01 September 2012 (applies to both existing bookings and new ones).

This charge will be applicable at Lusaka, Ndola, Mfuwe and Livingstone airports and will be payable direct to the NACL airport offices along with departure and security taxes. It is a flat rate for adults, children and infants.

The charges are:

Domestic ZMK28, 000 per person

International ZMK56, 000 per person

ZIMBABWE

Kariba Animal Welfare and ZimParks in Kariba

Kariba Animal Welfare does an amazing job working for the wildlife on a voluntary basis.

Snares

Snare Sweeps around Kariba continue. During the week between 30 July and 3rd August a total of 27 snares were found.

Hoover

Also during the week, they tried to find an elephant they had named Hoover. Hoover had an abscess on his eye and it had been treated. They wanted to see how it was getting on. Finally, finding Hoover, they saw that the abscess had gone down and hope that it will heal without the need to dart it again to give it more antibiotics.

Zebra

It is this time of year when zebra stallions fight to become the head of the harem. Unfortunately one young zebra was found injured after such a fight and had to be put down. Several other stallions showed signs of fighting but it was hoped that the wounds would heal without intervention.

Antelope Island

The feeding programme on Antelope Island continues.

NAMIBIA

Lower Okavango River

The Okavango Delta is a Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance). Recently, at the meeting held in Bucharest by Ramsar members, Namibia applied to have the Lower Okavango (Kavango) River proclaimed a Ramsar site. This is the part of the river which runs through Bwabwata National Park.

WOLFGANG'S COLUMN

COMESA SET TO HOLD ITS FIRST EVER TOURISM FORUM IN NAIROBI

The Lusaka headquartered Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, in short COMESA, has of late decided to pay greater attention to the trade block's tourism potential. The organization, which now spans

much of the African continent reaches from Zambia to Congo and from East Africa through the Horn of Africa to Egypt, will hold its first ever Tourism Forum in Kenya's capital Nairobi between 22nd and 24th of August.

Titled 'Shaping the Future of Tourism in the COMESA Region', the Nairobi meeting will be the first of a series of such gatherings across the trade block, bringing together the private sector, which is expected to drive investments, expansion, job creation and foreign exchange earnings, while other participants will be drawn from the respective governments. Here in particular are planners and policy makers being targeted to ensure that the needs of the private sector are better understood and incorporated into the respective national planning and budgeting processes.

Also participating in this first ever sustainable tourism forum will be decision makers from the UN's World Tourism Organization, The World Travel and Tourism Council WTTC, UNCTAD, EU, OECD, SADC, EAC and IGAD, to bring all those on board which in one way or another are linked to global tourism and have the capacity to shape things through economic and technical cooperation to help the COMESA trade block reach its goals.

The main objectives of the Nairobi forum have been outlined in details availed to this correspondent as:

Discuss and develop a sustainable tourism development programme

Bring together private and public sector stakeholders to define the means of shaping the future of the sector

Formulate regional programmes on tourism, including the movement of tourists and partnerships between member states

While this is a tall order, considering the variances in the development status of some of the 19 member countries vis a vis tourism, it is thought that sub-regional pilot programmes could match countries where tourism is already a major economic force and then pass on the lessons learned and the experience drawn from cooperation amongst them. Instead of re-inventing the wheels it will then be possible to transfer experience and knowledge to other countries, where a tourism potential exists but where it has not been exploited in any significant way until now. Participating countries, according to information at hand, have already expressed their hope that with the planned introduction of a regional East African tourist Visa, such developments could be used as an anchor to make the tourism industry one of the economic pillars to create jobs, attract investments and spread prosperity, though it has been acknowledged that bringing the 'least and less developed countries' in terms of general economic activities and more specifically tourism, will take a major effort.

Hence is the presence of international organizations and development partners thought crucial for the success of this first tourism forum and its objectives for future economic developments across COMESA, using tourism as a platform to combat poverty and bring some level of prosperity in particular to those countries, where tourism is right now an unexploited potential only. Watch this space.

TANAPA CHARGES RISE BY AS MUCH AS 400 PERCENT FROM 2013 ONWARDS

In a move, termed by sections of the tourism fraternity as 'suicidal' has TANAPA raised a range of fees to enter the country's national parks, effective from July 2013.

While appreciating the one year notice given to build the risen fees and charges into their pricing for safaris and services for next year, some stakeholders expressed hardly concealed fury over the level of increases ranging between 100 and 400 percent.

'We are not amused. TANAPA has completely ignored the current market trends and the difficulties selling Tanzania's tourism products. We are struggling abroad with our reputation. Conservation NGO's are branding the country as anti conservation because of the ambiguous stand on the highway across the Serengeti. And true enough, with the track record of our government misleading us, there is no guarantee that in say 5 or 10 years they would not tarmac that section, then claiming reasons beyond their control. There is the Selous issue, the power plant at Stiegler's Gorge, the carving out of 200 square kilometres critical boundary area to mine for toxic

uranium and telling us all is ok and there is no poison and no danger. It is about the Coelacanth marine park in Mwambani which is set to be destroyed when they build a new deep sea port. It is about the routing of the planned railway to Musoma which would by shortest way run across the Serengeti too and again, we have no firm undertakings from government. There is the entire issue of poaching and illegal logging and smuggling of ivory and trophies through our ports. Combined with the sudden rise in airport fees by 10 US

Dollars and the increase in immigration permit fees, also with immediate effect and no notice at all, this is all a setback for the sector. The riots in Zanzibar, as much as government wants us to forget those, overseas markets are still asking and are still worried about tourists being targeted next by extremists. The multiple marine accidents also worry people, even foreign tourists some of which seem to have drowned last time. We are being promised action, nothing happens and then there is much lamenting when the next ferry goes down. Air Tanzania coming back, going away again, now they have an aircraft and now they don't and cancel flights on which tourists have been booked, all these many issues have damaged our reputation and the worst was the murder in a Serengeti camp last month of the tourist and the manager. And now TANAPA does that? Are they for real? At least they gave a year notice and not as before just decide to raise fees overnight' commented a regular source from Arusha in audible anger.

Other sources from both Arusha and Dar es Salaam, but also Zanzibar where many tourists visitors go after a safari on the mainland, have equally expressed their exasperation over the extensive hike in charges, saying such increases should take into account general market trends and the need to be attractively priced in comparison with key competitors in the East African region and in Southern Africa, where – going by the comments made – tourists seem to be getting better value for money.

An official source close to TANAPA however, on condition of total anonymity, rejected the claims and insisted that after several years of keeping entrance fees at the same level there had to be an increase to cater for the high cost of maintaining the parks and improving on infrastructure. The source also pointed to Rwanda where the charges for gorilla tracking permits have been raised from 500 US Dollars per person to 750 US Dollars per person per tracking, although Uganda and Congo DR – where tracking presently is strictly not advisable due to the raging conflict which has also spread into the Virunga National Park – have kept their charges at the US Dollar 500 level.

Killing the goose which lays the golden eggs comes to mind, as fees and charges, including a planned VAT charge in Kenya on tourism services, is according to stakeholders creating huge problems on being competitive with other beach and safari destinations while at the same time not investing enough back in the sector in terms of marketing and in particular keeping the roads to the various parks in good shape. Fodder for thought for sure and another glaring example of how state functionaries live a world apart from the economic realities the private sector is faced with and left to resolve on their own while their respective governments seek to milk them first dry and then some more. Watch this space.

THE SMILE

From New Scientist

Species: *Fukomys anselli*

Habitat: putting rabbits and badgers to shame in woodland areas of Zambia

Even with modern equipment, digging tunnels is hard work. It took Swiss engineers 14 years to dig the world's longest rail tunnel, the 57-kilometre Gotthard Base Tunnel under the Alps. It was finished in 2010, but construction began in 1996.

The Zambian mole rat doesn't dig all the way through mountain ranges, but it does dig some of the longest tunnels in the natural world, and the longest of any non-human mammal. A single underground colony can stretch for 2.8 kilometres. Yet on average, each colony contains just nine or 10 mole rats. These guys are digging machines.



Have a good week

Gill