

AVIATION, TOURISM AND CONSERVATION NEWS from Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.
A weekly roundup of breaking news, reports, travel stories and opinions by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome



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Fifth edition April 2012

QATAR AIRWAYS BAGS YET MORE SKYTRAX AWARDS



The World's 5 Star Airline has just bagged two more awards from Skytrax over the weekend, one for their Oryx Rotana Airport Hotel, rated as the best in the Middle East, and another for their Premium Terminal at the Doha International Airport, rated as the best in the world.

The Skytrax award for best Premium Terminal came Qatar Airways' way for the second year running, while the award for their airport hotel, the Oryx Rotana, is a first and astonishing for that matter, considering the hotel has only opened 2 years ago and is already globally rated as the 10th best in the world and best in the Middle East.

With their Premium Terminal award has QR beaten Lufthansa's highly rated Senator Lounge at Frankfurt Airport into second place while Thai Airways' First Class Lounge in Bangkok came a respectable third.

However, that said, when the new international mega airport in Doha opens its doors at the end of this year, a brand new, state of the art set of luxurious facilities will also open the doors for the airline's First and Business Class passengers, unprecedented in quality and the sheer range of facilities, including a dedicated duty free shop, a Spa – which according to a source in Doha will be able to compete with any luxury Spa anywhere in the world – first class dining options and business services for those passengers in transit in need to do some transactions while awaiting their onward flight.

Akbar Al Baker, CEO of Qatar Airways, received the news over the weekend and issued this media statement: *'We're extremely proud of our Premium Terminal, the first of its kind in the world to provide check-in, duty free, fine dining and transit services exclusively for our First and Business Class passengers. Our passengers always comment on how much they enjoy the experience of the Premium Terminal. It really is a one of its kind. Our focus on providing the best service to all our customers is what keeps us ahead of the rest and ensures we remain committed to delivering the ultimate in Five Star service both in the air and on the ground. After all, passengers' entire journey experience starts at an airport and it is vitally important that airlines and airports deliver what passengers expect.'*

When announcing the two awards, Skytrax Chairman Edward Plaisted was reported to have said: *'We congratulate Doha International Airport and Qatar Airways on this fantastic achievement, winning the Best Premium Service Airport award. The Qatar Airways Premium Terminal remains a unique passenger facility worldwide, unmatched in terms of exclusivity and passenger amenities. With the New Doha International Airport due to open at the end of 2012, we will watch with interest to check that the quality of product and service remains at this award winning level. In a region where it seems there is a new luxury 5-star hotel opening each month, the Oryx Rotana Doha should be pleased with their success being named as the Best Airport Hotel in the Middle*

East. To deliver such exacting standards in one of the most competitive high end hotel markets is no small achievement, and the management and staff should be proud of their place as the jewel of Middle East airport hotels.'

More to look forward to when taking the red carpet to the only 5 star service in the skies, soon from all key East African airport when besides the existing double daily service to Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the daily flights to Entebbe and Kigali Qatar Airways will add Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar and Mombasa, combined with a third daily flight to Dar es Salaam. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from East Africa's aviation industry.

EMIRATES' GROUP TAPS INTO AFRICAN HUMAN RESOURCE POOL LIKE FEW OTHERS



More and more Africans are looking abroad for employment these days, with opportunities, especially in the aviation sector, becoming easier to find by the day due to the expansion of the Gulf airlines. Substantially higher salaries, benefit packages and long term job security are luring young professionals away from their home countries for greener pastures in terms of career advances, living conditions and status – they are suddenly turned into expatriates, able to live in Dubai, Abu Dhabi or Qatar, places others go to for holidays and then stand in awe as they take in the sky lines, the range of hotels, resorts, restaurants and entertainment facilities one can find there.

A few months ago the main Gulf airlines held a job fair in the Seychelles, when it became known that Air Seychelles would downsize and make staff redundant, and similar programmes are being regularly rolled out in other parts of Africa, East Africa included.

Information received from Emirates indicates that the entire group now employs 5.530 Africans, in the air as pilots and cabin crew, on the ground as technicians, handling personnel, IT specialists and in many other positions, and only last week did Emirates announce it would require a further 4.500 staff within the next 12 months to keep pace with the ongoing delivery of their aircraft on order, a trend likely to continue for years to come. 4.500 staff from Africa that is, which would bring the African workforce to over 10.000, as a result of the positive experience Emirates' HR department has with staff from African countries.

Kenyans, from amongst the East African countries, hold the lion's share of jobs with 1.066 on the Emirates Group payroll, which is an impressive 19.27 percent, while 117 Tanzanians, 67 Ugandans, 67 Seychellois and at least 1 Rwandan too are part of one of the largest multinational workforces aviation has ever assembled.

Said an aviation source in Nairobi when confronted with these figures: ***'Aviation is an international business. For us in Kenya it is a valuable lesson that our young professionals can now find work abroad in such numbers. It creates opportunities for young people but also for experienced staff, wanting to prepare a nest egg for their future retirement. But of course that is only one side of the coin. The downside is that our local airlines find it a real challenge to retain their best, and to train more and more personnel as they also expand. Kenya Airways now has to employ expatriate captains to make sure their new planes have crews to fly them. Smaller airline find it even harder because they are often not able to match terms and conditions of employment. So when the Gulf airlines announce a job fair or a recruitment drive in Nairobi or Mombasa, that is at once both good and also not so good. As a Kenyan I am proud that my fellow Kenyans have made such an impact abroad as professionals but as an airline man I am also worried about the impact on African aviation. We lose traffic share to the giants from the Gulf and also lose trained staff and we are struggling to keep pace.'***

African cabin crew spoken to at their crew hotel in Munyonyo / Kampala over a number of occasions though, on condition of anonymity, confirmed that ***'we love our jobs'*** as well as ***'we made the right decision to apply for positions and are not looking back'***, affirming what many HR specialists have also said in recent months when asked to comment. One of them, from Nairobi, said: ***'These are opportunities for our young people. Many find it difficult after university to find a job here at home, but they are keen to work. When they are offered small salary packages and benefits, what will keep them from finding work abroad when an chance comes knocking. What we have to do is to continue to provide good educational opportunities for our kids, in particular in the aviation field but also in IT, because when they show employers from abroad the level of skills they have, the languages for instance they speak fluently, they are just snapped up when those airlines come to town to recruit.'***

As the new Emirates campaign ***'Hello Tomorrow'*** is now rolling out across the media, here in East Africa but also across the continent of Africa, the airline's added message contained in the new slogan is also addressing those young aviation professionals who want to build their own tomorrow, with an employer ready to take them on board. So to my many young readers from the region, watch out for announcements in the local newspapers, because

Emirates' will be coming to town very soon to find their next generation of employees. Alternatively do visit <http://www.emiratesgroupcareers.com/english/> for a full update on available positions and the requirements for applications.

Uganda News

PRESIDENT BLASTS TOURISM BOARD

President Museveni used a meeting held at State House Entebbe earlier in the week to discuss his presidential tourism initiative to lay heavily into the strategy and mindset of the Uganda Tourism Board, which he accused of making mistakes, claiming it lacks seriousness and originality.

UNDP has been searching for a consultant to help UTB develop a new outlook, marketing strategy and policy for the coming years, due to start work by the end of April, but considering that tourism organizations in neighbouring Kenya and Rwanda, even as far as the Seychelles, came up with award winning strategies in house, it is a telling sign that the country's president needs to spell out what has been an open secret in the corridors of the tourism industry in the country.

The president minced no words when he mocked UTB as the 'Uganda Temporarily Board', accusing them of 'killing tourism' instead of promoting it.

In fairness though, and here several key stakeholders felt that all the facts should be looked upon in subsequent conversations and mails, it is government after all which has kept UTB on a hamstrung budget, barely enough to meet recurrent expenditure, with hardly enough money to attend a handful of tourism events abroad, unlike the country's main competitors which attend tourism trade shows, hold road shows and cram events around the world.

It was also pointed out to this correspondent that neither the existing tourism policy nor the existing tourism law have been fully implemented, with special mention of the tourism levy which was meant to help finance a re-organized UTB and allow it to effectively compete on level terms with its main competitors.

Said a regular source: *'The tourism board had this coming for a while, because they are like a rudderless ship or a ship without captain. But government is as much at fault. They appointed the tourist board chief, they appointed the board members and they the same government starves the institution of money. They have been doing some one off events in the past and made a lot of fuss about it but what is required is consistency. None of those past activities has seen any follow up and the action, and the money spent, like a few years ago on a CNN campaign, just evaporated. You keep writing about Seychelles and how they have reversed the rot of a few years ago, and I can only go by what you wrote, but it seems they are doing a lot better by engaging with the media, with airlines, with the private sector and they are succeeding. Kenya is also a good example, their KTB is everywhere something happens and so is Rwanda. If I compare ourselves with the biblical figures who got the talents to work with, we put our talents and opportunities into a dark corner instead of turning them in to profit. We have too many attractions, too many unique sights, the lake, the rivers, the mountains and all and yet, the world looks on us like a gorilla destination only. Others have diversified, we have not lived up to our potential. The Lonely Planet made us the world's top destination for 2012, this year it is the 50th anniversary of our Independence, and where are we with the preparations. If anything happens it seems to be a state secret but we more suspect that little unique and creative is coming from it. UTB needs change, UTB needs money, the Ministry needs money but our government is big in lip service and very small in funding the sector'.*

Harsh words from the President and a critical view from a key stakeholder who attended the meeting at State House, but echoed by a number of others since. Quo Vadis Uganda Tourism – time to own up, shape up or ship out? Time will tell which way to go, but it has to happen fast as the October 09th Independence Day is now only just over 5 months away. Watch this space.

Kenya News

GOVERNMENT OF KENYASET TO 'PAY OFF' KWS FOR NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK LAND

News emerged over the weekend that the Kenyan government appears to have set aside 21.6 million US Dollars for the Kenya Wildlife Service as a form of compensation for the land carved out of the Nairobi National Park for the construction of the 'Southern Bypass', which has already gone underway and advancing at urgent speed.

Critics of the project cite in particular the lack of willingness by the promoters and financiers of the project to pay for a tunnel to preserve what they say are critical portions of land near Wilson Airport, claiming that profit and cost considerations have once again trampled on the environment while calling the present situation 'the financially easiest way out but at the cost of the park's integrity'.

It is also widely feared that the Kenya National Highways Authority will use this precedent to also advance plans which became public last year, to carve out a route of a highway bypass around Nakuru, which has in recent years

become congested with transit traffic, where a map showing the proposed routing saw the highway route cut into the Nakuru National Park too.

Leading companies and NGO's in Nairobi are also upset as the '*Southern Bypass*' will cause the destruction of about 50,000 trees planted by them after a sustained campaign to increase forest cover along the park boundary two years ago, only to see their effort turned to cinder and their investment in the green future of Kenya turned to naught. Friends of Nairobi National Park, or in short FoNNaP, and the Africa Network for Animal Welfare, amongst others, have recently made public their opinions and legal position, that the KNHA has breached terms and conditions contained in their NEMA License granted in February 2011 for the construction of the new highway, giving sufficient grounds for legal challenges on both facts as well as on constitutionality.

Information made available over the weekend by regular conservation sources from Nairobi shows that the legal analysis of the situation, at least going by the opinion of the opponents lawyers, concludes:

- The Nairobi National Park land is public land and not private of community land as defined under the new constitution
- The new National Lands Commission, an institution to be created under the new constitution, will hold in trust and administer in the future land set aside for protected areas
- That the notion of KWS 'holding and administering national park land' is faulty as the NLC will be the body entrusted to do that under the new constitution
- That KWS has neither powers nor right to give away national park land as it seems to have been the case here
- That the Wildlife Act's provisions giving KWS land management rights are superseded by the new constitution

It is not clear at this stage, if a constitutional challenge will be filed, alongside seeking an injunction on the progress of the building of the highway or if other legal cases might be brought at the High Court in Nairobi in accordance with the legal opinions rendered by the legal teams of conservation stakeholders, nor if a case might even be filed at the East African Court of Justice in Arusha, which only recently declared itself competent and willing to hear cases of such nature.

Meanwhile have sources close to KWS also confirmed over the weekend that should indeed the payment of nearly 21.6 million US Dollars or 1.8 billion Kenya Shillings be made by government, the entire sum will be spent to expand the Nairobi National Park through acquisition of land on the Kajiado county side south of Nairobi, something KWS and conservation groups have for long had on their wish list but were unable to accomplish due to lack of funds. Only in December last year did the Keen family bestow 100 hectares of their ancestral land to become part of the national park in a widely publicized gesture, when they signed an '*easement contract*' with KWS.

The question in everyone's mind now is if the expansion of the park on one side is worth the carving out of a 4 kilometres long route, about 120 metres into the park along its present boundaries, will be worth it or if indeed, as has been alleged this will only set a precedent for future land grabbing, as the park in years to come will constitute one of the few open spaces adjoining Nairobi and a constant source for the greed of speculators and profiteers.

It is beyond doubt that Nairobi needs the '*Southern Bypass*' to decongest traffic into the city and route the long distance trucks around the city centre. It is also beyond doubt that government has concealed, if not in part misled stakeholders in the past over their true intent and that alone is worth a legal challenge to put bureaucrats and politicians in their right place and have court tell them what they can and cannot do from here on. And while it must be pointed out that no known legal challenges have been filed yet, the question then comes up what impact for instance an injunction may have on the Nairobi traffic master plan and if public opinion, especially that of daily commuters suffering from intolerable jams when traversing the city or trying to get into the city for work, will swing against those who with the best of intent are speaking up on behalf of nature and the environment.

When is compromise too much and where does the inviolate line in the sand have to be placed. Tough questions and tough choices will have to be made. Watch this space as this saga continues and be sure to read of any legal challenges right here.

KENYA'S TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS BLAME NEW MINISTER, PUBLIC EXPENDITURE FOR BUDGET CUTS

'It is action which counts for us, not words and empty declarations. Maybe now people realize just how much damage the removal of our former minister has done to our sector. Balala was on course to fight for more marketing budget because he knew what 2008 did to the country. This is an upcoming election year and unless we go out to promote, everywhere and all the time, an already flat projection could turn into less, not more. The

new minister needs to learn fast to fight for the sector how his predecessor did successfully for years and not blame the media and others like he did last week. Let him put the money where his mouth is, did he not talk about getting more billions and not less' an upset stakeholder from Nairobi wrote in an overnight mail to this correspondent after it had become public knowledge that the planned budget allocation for tourism marketing had been reduced, made worse in fact by inflationary trends since last year.

Other stakeholders blamed the reduction of funding on an ever more swollen public expenditure budget, which has its roots in the new constitution. New administrative and organizational structures are to be created after the next elections and the cost of it has seemingly burst all dams of spending, leaving the Kenyan taxpayers scratching their heads why in fact they did vote so overwhelmingly for the new constitution, only to find out now what the financial implications are. *'If any sector can come to the rescue of the treasury to fund all those new jobs and positions, it is tourism. But to achieve that we need more money, not less. The reduction does not look much but considering what inflation we had since last year, in real terms it is a 20 percent cut. It is the wrong move by our government because in an election year we need to increase our promotions, tell the world that Kenya is safe to visit and that we have new mechanisms now for elections to prevent fraud and stealing of results. If the allocation of fund for tourism marketing is not reviewed and revised upwards, we are in for a tough year on all fronts'* another stakeholder from Mombasa added, leaving no doubt that the tourism sector is getting ready to throw its combined weight behind demands for better facilitation in the 2012/13 financial year.

Former tourism minister Najib Balala had advocated to allocate at least 5 percent of tourism earnings to the purpose of promoting the country abroad, in existing core markets but also the new and emerging markets of the East, which would give tourism, considering the earnings last year stood at over 98 billion Kenya Shillings, almost 5 billion Kenya Shillings in funding, and could at last put the country at par with such continental tourism giants like Egypt or South Africa, the latter now enjoys almost 10 times as many tourist visitors compared to Kenya, in spite of the catch up the rainbow nation had to undergo since the end of the apartheid era.

Fodder for thought for the powers that be in Kenya and time for tourism to stand up, stand together and make their combined voices heard. Watch this space.

LAKE VICTORIA TOURISM ASSOCIATION TO HOLD EXHIBITION IN KISUMU



(Picture courtesy of Wikipedia's Kisumu City File)

Kenya's lakeside city of Kisumu will be playing host to a planned tourism and travel exhibition next week, organized by the Lake Victoria Tourism Association. Running from Thursday to Saturday inclusive, i.e. from May 03rd to 05th, the exhibition is aimed to promote domestic travel to Western Kenya and its rich cultural and natural attractions, while also hoping to have Nairobi and Mombasa based tour operators develop itineraries for foreign tourists to tour this less explored part of the country. The theme chosen for the exhibition, *'Come and Experience the glamour of the Western Kenya Tourism Circuit'* tells the story as the LVTA is partnering with others to promote *Tembea Kenya* to such lesser known parks as Ruma National Park – now home to several rhinos which were relocated there a few months ago – or the Saiwa Swamps, but also to the islands on Lake Victoria where several upmarket fishing and leisure camps await visitors. .

On board are the Kenya Tourist Board, the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Kenya Utalii College and the Kenyatta International Conference Centre and a number of private sector stakeholders, showcasing their properties and activities on offer.

With Kisumu's airport now expanded and modernized, and a range of flights available from Nairobi on Kenya Airways and Jetlink, amongst others, the lake side city has the potential to draw in more visitors. The nearby Kogelo village, the ancestral home of US President Obama, has also been a hotspot for visitors from abroad, and the

unfolding presidential election campaign in the United States will undoubtedly bring added attention to this part of Kenya once more, as his local and even international supporters will be visiting to see where Obama's roots in Africa truly spring from.

Said a regular source from Nairobi, who hails from Kakamega: *'Western Kenya has a lot of unexplored places. Flights to Kakamega, Eldoret and Kisumu have opened up new ways to bring visitors here. We have Mt. Elgon National Park in Kitale and nearby is the Saiwa Swamp National Park. In Kakamega we have a rainforest which is about 45 square kilometres in size and which is also a park now. In Kisumu there is easy access to Ndere Island and the Impala park and not too far away is the Ruma National Park. There are cultural sites some of which are national monuments. It is good that the tourism sector is now opening up new horizons in Kenya because we have a lot more to offer than just our beaches at the coast or the main national parks. And it is even a quick drive to Kericho to see the tea estates. Western Kenya has a lot to offer and I hope more Kenyans from other parts of the country come here to see what they have missed until now.'*

The Kenya Tourist Board has in the recent past paid added attention to opening up new tourism circuits, working hand in hand with Kenya Wildlife Service and the private sector, to popularize domestic travel and channel international visitors to 'new areas' which were previously somewhat neglected in terms of exposure, promotion and facilities. Follow the #TembeaKenya hashtag on Twitter for regular updates or visit www.magicalkenya.com or www.kws.org to find out more about Western Kenya.

HOUSTON MARKETING BRINGS 'SPOTLIGHT TRAVEL WORKSHOP' TO NAIROBI

Derek Houston of Houston Marketing has just announced the date for his upcoming *Spotlight Travel Workshop* in Nairobi, now set for the 07th of June. Location will be the Southern Sun Mayfair Hotel and is targeting the outbound market from Kenya, growing significantly year after year as is inbound tourism, the destinations of Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zanzibar. DMC's, hotels, resorts, airlines and a range of other service providers from these countries will have the opportunity to meet the Kenyan corporate and leisure travel trade, NGO's, key UN agencies personnel, leading corporates and meeting organizers, all of whom are keen to learn more about tourism attractions in the nearer region, according to information released by Derek. Cost for exhibiting participants will be US Dollars 850 per table and special rates have been availed at the Southern Sun Mayfair Hotel for participants, particulars of which can be obtained from Houston Marketing.

Visit www.houstonmarketing.co.za for more details or write to Derek@HoustonMarketing.co.za for more information on the one day workshop. The Nairobi meeting follows a series of similar B2B meetings every year prior and after WTM and ITB as well as his regular series of Southern African *Spotlight Workshops*.

Notably can Skal members attend the monthly luncheon on the 06th June, details of which are available either via Derek or from the Skal Club of Nairobi.

The two B2B meeting sessions will conclude with an evening open bar cocktail session where buyers and sellers have the opportunity to meet once more in a more informal setting.

KENYA AIRWAYS RIGHTS ISSUE COMES TO AN END – WHERE TO FROM HERE



As the four weeks long Kenya Airways share rights issue offering is coming to an end on Friday, with current subscription levels a tightly guarded secret by top management and their financial advisory team and participating financial institutions, results will likely to filter through in coming days, when either targeted leaks or formal announcements will bring out the particulars, of how East Africa's largest ever share offering has performed in the East African market places.

Meanwhile though it is worth it to give an overview of what Kenya Airways intends to do with the money they now raised, as incidentally the company's finance director Alex Mbugua in two recent sessions with investors from Uganda at the Kampala Serena Hotel, the last one yesterday, also outlined once again.

Dubbed '*Project Mawingu*', the airline's 10 year strategic plan is nothing short but being the most ambitious ever developed by an African airline, aimed to more than triple the fleet over the next 10 years and adding some 60 destinations in over 30 countries to the network. 24 of these new destinations will be served with wide body aircraft and the revolutionary new B787 Dreamliner will be at the heart of this development, with the balance of wide bodied planes being made up of the equally advanced new types of the B777.



(Kenya Airways' Dreamliner image, courtesy of KQ' Corporate Communications)

While the bulk of the long haul expansion is eyeing China, the Far East and India, Europe, North and South America too are on the drawing board. Dehli is being launched with a B767 in May this year already, but both China and India will see a significant upping of destinations and frequencies over the coming years.

Information availed by the airline's corporate communications department shows that besides connecting every political and commercial capital in Africa by the end of 2013, there is more to come from '*The Pride of Africa*':

For 2013/14 an upping of frequencies is envisaged for Dehli, while another Indian destination, Bangalore is due to come on line, as is Kuala Lumpur, further cementing the South South connection. In 2014/15 new targets are Beijing, Sao Paulo and Berlin, while for 2015/16 Toronto, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai are penciled into the destination planning sheets. On goes the march in 2016/17 financial year with Chengdu, Chennai and Perth, and the following year 2017/18 it is Chongqing, Hyderabad and Washington DC. Ahmedabad, Xiamen and Moscow are planned for 2018/19 and in 2019/20 are Kunming, Dhaka and Seoul on the drawing board. This is to be followed in 2020/21 by Hanoi, Prague and Urumqi, at which time Kenya Airways will serve all 5 inhabited continent with a fleet of 107 passenger aircraft – the plan is to have at least 12 more dedicated cargo aircraft in operation at that time too – and a range of 115 destinations, most of them in Africa and the key destinations around the world.

Intriguingly all these developments seem mirror imaged at Ethiopian Airlines, which while presently having an edge with more international long haul destinations has of late yielded ground in Africa to Kenya Airways. By choosing the Embraer E190 as their regional workhorse aircraft, Kenya Airways has been able to release more of the B737-800's into the continental and Middle East network expansion, besides key routes which are operated by wide bodied B767 and B777, in part to cater for a growing volume of cargo too. Here comes to a showdown not just the competition between the two airlines on its own but between Kenya Airways' partners in *Sky Team* and Ethiopian Airlines' partners in *Star Alliance*, bringing the number one and number two in the global aviation alliance business head to head. Finally has the world of aviation taken notice of Africa's potential and while *Star Alliance* with three member airlines in Africa, South African Airways, Egypt Air and Ethiopian has a certain edge in terms of aircraft, hubs and distribution capabilities, *Sky Team* will not be far behind considering the plans of their key African ally Kenya Airways, and their partners flying already to Africa, or planning to, under codeshare arrangements.

The following graph shows the planned fleet development, and what role the Embraers and B737NG's are due to play in the region and on continental routes while the plans for wide bodied aircraft give notice of intent where Kenya Airways aims to be when '*Project Mawingu*' is completed by 2020/21. Does one even dare to dream beyond that date – well, according to usually well informed sources the airline already has started to gather data and information to look into the time frame up to 2030/31, evidence that Kenya Airways has arrived, East Africa has arrived on the global aviation scene and is her not just to stay but to grow and claim their own.

FY	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
777-300ER				1	2	2	3	4	4	4	4
777-200LR					1	2	2	3	4	4	4
777-200ER	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
787-9								3	4	5	6
787-8				2	7	12	16	16	18	23	26
767	6	6	6	6	4						
737-8	5	5	5	10	14	16	16	17	18	18	18
737-7	4	4	4	7	10	10	10	10	11	11	11
737-3	6	6	4	2							
E190	1	4	12	14	15	19	22	25	27	29	31
E170	5	5	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Pax Total	31	34	40	50	60	68	76	85	93	101	107
	5	3	6	10	10	8	8	9	8	8	6
Fleet Type	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Wide body	10	10	10	13	18	20	25	30	34	40	44
Narrow body	21	24	30	37	42	48	51	55	59	61	63
Total	31	34	40	50	60	68	76	85	93	101	107
%Share	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Wide body	32%	29%	25%	26%	30%	29%	33%	35%	37%	40%	41%
Narrow body	68%	71%	75%	74%	70%	71%	67%	65%	63%	60%	59%

Meanwhile though have the last two days of the current share rights issue of Kenya Airways arrived, the last chance for those still pondering what future their investment in *The Pride of Africa* will hold for them. Well, if we are to believe that we in Africa indeed CAN and WILL achieve in equal terms and measure what others elsewhere in the world have accomplished, there is not time like the present to get on board, with shares and of course in person. Watch this space.

TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS MINCE NO WORDS OVER ROADS AND WATER

A tourism stakeholder meeting earlier in the week at the Sarova Whitesands Resort and Spa once again focused on the perennial challenges the industry at the Kenyan coast is faced with, poor roads, congestion at the Likoni ferry and a lack of enough water, amongst other issues. Mohammed Hersi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association, was reported to have said: *‘Mombasa needs immediate help. This is the gateway to East Africa and must have good infrastructure’*, a demand echoed by a number of comments received from participants, keen to expose their daily challenges and attract the attention of government and of the Mombasa City Council. Hersi, in his professional capacity the Regional General Manager Coast for Sarova Hotels, went on to demand that the road from the airport of Mombasa into the city be repaired immediately. Another regular source from Mombasa said in an overnight mail: *‘We need that road from the airport directly to the South Coast. There is a lot of potential for more resorts and tourism facilities at that side but getting there through the Likoni ferry is a nightmare. But like the road from Narok to the Masai Mara, we only hear a lot of promises and still work has not started. Then we have the issue with water. There is a big shortfall between supply and demand and even after the pipeline from Mzima Springs has been fully upgraded, we still need more water. Government has not shown us how they intend to deal with this and we are not seeing any investments in that sector. If tourism is to grow as we hope for, the resorts need water, the entire coast needs water to run businesses and homes. We also need a regular and stable supply of power at rates resorts can afford. No resort at the coast can operate without air conditioning, so we need more powerplants to cater for more demand. But the first impression when tourists come to Mombasa, is the road from the airport into the city. It is shameful how that part of the road has been neglected and how visitors are shaken up in their busses and cars. Tourism is a very big business for the coast but major investments in making Mombasa attractive are lacking. And then there is still no clear date for our elections. Our overseas partners keep asking about it because they want to be prepared. After the last elections in end 2007 that is understandable. We are almost in May now and still have no date? As a sector we are concerned that work until the elections might slow down and we cannot afford to stand still. Our competitors are not wasting time so Kenya also has to keep up the pace.’*

It was also reported that some of the participants dared the prime minister, who was at the same time on a visit to the coast to prop up his flagging political fortunes in Mombasa after he sacked the hugely popular former tourism minister Najib Balala, still an MP for one of Mombasa's constituencies, to stand in the queue at the Likoni ferry to understand what commuters are going through on a daily basis.

Watch this space for regular updates from the tourism sectors in Eastern Africa and the latest developments from each country of the East African Community.

KENYA'S NEW TOURISM MINISTER LOCKS HORNS WITH MEDIA

In an unwarranted broad side against the media and their reporting has the recently appointed new tourism minister Dan Mwazo done more harm than good to his cause to promote tourism, as he blamed flagging tourism fortunes on what he termed *'irresponsible reporting and coverage of security matters'*.

Said a regular source from the Kenyan coast, where the remarks were made at the re-opening of a hotel on Tiwi Beach: *'Here it goes to show how much we miss the skills of our former minister Najib Balala. When he had issues with the press he did not blast them in public but invited them for tea to discuss issues one on one. He built alliances and not opened up rifts. When we last met in Nairobi for the e-Tourism Conference, you might remember he was supposed to have come to open the conference. Then he stayed away, and seeing what he said now that he is in office for several weeks and surely was briefed by his staff, it is pathetic. In Nairobi he had the chance to meet the who is who in Kenya's tourism private sector but he thought that was not relevant. How can he say things like sports tourism has not been marketed by KTB? We have programmes in place to promote golfing, visits to the Kenyan' athletes training camps in Iten and elsewhere. Athletes from overseas now come here to do altitude training in Kenya and our accomplished runners are helping KTB to put Kenya's sports fame into promotional mileage for holidays and conferences.'*

Regular media contacts from Kenya also took exception over the remarks made by the minister, with one calling the outburst *'ill informed and offensive'*, not exactly good PR practice and very likely leaving KTB's corporate communications staff scrambling to swiftly gloss over the faux pas by the minister in order to maintain good relations with the media overall. Another one said *'I am personally not impressed and this minister should get his act together before he does more damage to the industry than our reporting on certain issues allegedly does.'*

Ooops comes to mind here and yes, this outburst is a market departure from the former minister's way to engage with the private sector and the media. Watch this space to find out if there is indeed a new bull in the china shop in the making.

KWS GET TOUGH WITH POACHERS

News of a shootout between poachers and KWS enforcement personnel was reported overnight from the Kora National Park in Northern Kenya. One poacher reportedly was shot dead in what has been described as a fierce fire fight while others were arrested with AK 47 assault rifles and ammunition in their possession.

Meanwhile were a further 4 suspected poachers arrested in Isiola, also with firearms and ammunition in their possession besides two tusks while near Rumuruti / Laikipia another two suspects were caught with a hunting rifle, eland meat and ivory.

KWS has in recent weeks stepped up their anti poaching operations and arrested and taken to court a large number of suspects, while at the same time several poachers were reportedly killed in shoot outs with rangers and security personnel, now more decisively engaging the gangs. Said a regular source from Nairobi: *'KWS has declared to make poaching a high cost / low benefit activity and recent news in the media show that anti poaching now really means that when you get caught poaching and start a fire fight, you are likely to pay for it with your life. No amount of money can be worth one's life over a piece of ivory surely. I think KWS now has broad support for their new measures and after several KWS staff lost their lives in the course of doing their duty, they surely no longer need to worry about public opinion not being on their side.'*

KWS' CEO Dr. Julius Kipng'tich was also quoted in Kenyan media of having said: *'This is a warning to all poachers and we will not stop until we wipe them all'*, a thinly concealed message to the poaching syndicates that their foot soldiers will meet their fate in the field while the traders and financiers too are now under increased police scrutiny and higher fines and longer prison terms are looming for them as the respective laws are undergoing revision. Well done KWS! Watch this space.

SAROVA HOTELS PARTNER WITH UNIVERSITY TO COMBAT WATER WEED MENACE



Kenyatta University's Taita / Taveta based college for agriculture and technology is partnering with Sarova Hotels' Taita Hills and Salt Lick Lodges, to establish ways and means to safely eradicate an aquatic weed, which has over the past years invaded the Bura dam, a source of water, which is now under severe threat of drying up, for the private game reserve's wildlife.

The researchers might be well advised to draw on the experience of the impact of aquatic weeds on Lake Victoria, where a massive spread in the 1990's led to amongst others Murchisons Bay be entirely covered by water hyacinth, making access to Port Bell harbour for the regular lake rail ferries impossible, a situation mirrored later on outside Kisumu on the Kenyan side of the lake.

The weed was at the time, in particular behind the Owens Falls dam in Jinja, where the sheer weight pushing against the dam wall caused concerns over safety, mechanically harvested, while in other parts weevils were introduced known to feed on the weeds, though in severe cases like Murchisons Bay chemical spraying was used to kill the weed off and make shipping once again possible.

Sarova Hotels, according to information availed by the Taita Hills / Salt Lick General Manager Willy Mwadilo, has also planted over 50.000 tree seedlings in the vicinity of their 28.000 acre wide Taita Hills private game sanctuary, to support the re-growth of trees in an effort to improve the micro climate in the area. The sanctuary is home to about 300 species of birds and over 50 species of mammals, including elephant, giraffe, buffalo and lions and within easy reach from Mombasa, just 200 kilometres on good tarmac while the distance from Kenya's capital Nairobi is about 400 kilometres, also on good tarmac.

Well done Sarova in the meanwhile while we continue to monitor news about success in getting rid of the obnoxious water weeds.



(A view of the Sarova Salt Lick Lodge, deep inside the 28.000 acres private game sanctuary – picture courtesy of Sarova Hotels)

HELL'S GATE NATIONAL PARK FLOODS CLAIM SEVERAL LIVES



(One of the Hell's Gate National Park gorges often traversed by adventure tourists)

News of a tragic accident emerged on Sunday when it became known that a church group of young men and women on a day retreat yesterday morning to the Hell's Gate National Park near Naivasha got trapped in a gorge by flash floods and several of them were drowned as the raging waters carried them away beyond the help of their guides and mates. As many as 10 members of the group were initially reported missing and at least one body had been retrieved by rescuers sent to the scene by KWS and other volunteers like the Kenya Red Cross, but hopes to find any further survivors were deemed slim at best. Rescuers were working deep into Sunday night and will resume their recovery efforts again at first light on Monday morning.

Kenya as well as other parts of Eastern Africa have been hit in recent days by freak storms and way above average rainfall and rain and flood related deaths have been reported from other parts of Kenya too over the weekend,

underscoring how serious the weather conditions have become. Hundreds of people have been rendered homeless as their houses were flooded or washed away. Mike Rainy, a friend who has lived for the past two decades outside the Kenyan town of Kajiado in the Melepo Hills, described the weekend's storms as the heaviest rains he had ever seen since taking up residence there and safari operators in parks and game reserves affected by the heavy rains have reportedly advised their drivers and safari clients to be prepared for very poor road conditions in sections of the parks.

Condolences are expressed to the families and friends of the victims of this tragic accident.

Visit this website for more information on the park: http://www.kws.org/parks/parks_reserves/HGNP.html

Tanzania News

LAKE TANGANYIKA STEAMER GETS GERMAN FUNDING FOR MAJOR OVERHAUL



(Picture courtesy of Wikipedia)

Germany is expected to underwrite some major funding for Tanzania to retain part of her own heritage, closely linked with Tanganyika, which used to be Germany's colony in East Africa until the end of the First World War. The mainland of what is today the United Republic of Tanzania, formed some 48 years ago through the merger of Tanganyika and Zanzibar under the guidance of the nation's founding father Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, was in German possession and served as a base for the *Koenigsberg* and her supply ships, initially causing havoc for the British naval forces in the Indian Ocean waters off East Africa, after she slipped away at the eve of war being declared in 1914.

The MV Liemba, a Swahili word for Lake Tanganyika, was put into service on Lake Tanganyika after being built in Germany in 1913 in Papenburg's Meyer Werft, and named after the Governor for German East Africa Gustav Adolf von Goetzen. Initially part of the German naval fleet, used to assert control of Lake Tanganyika during the Great War, as WW I is also known, she was operating until the 26th July 1916, when her captain scuttled the Graf von Goetzen to avoid capture and subsequent use by the British forces, which had earlier managed to first capture one of the German gunboats before sinking another vessel, leaving the Graf von Goetzen without support.

However, engineers on board the ship from the Meyer Werft in Papenburg were careful, according to available reports, to ensure the ship could be salvaged later on and carried out preservation work before the ship was submerged. It was this care and foresight which allowed the British in 1924 to raise her and after a 3 year restoration process put her back into service as MV Liemba.

Since then, apart for times the ship had to be overhauled, the MV Liemba was in uninterrupted service on Lake Tanganyika, plying the waters of Africa's deepest lake, carrying passengers and cargo along the lake ports of Tanzania, Burundi, Zambia and the Congo.

A regular source from Tanzania's tourism sector, based in Arusha, had this to say: *'If this ship gets refurbished and upgraded, we can at last start to market Lake Tanganyika as another attraction for Tanzania. Tourists until now come to see the Northern circuit parks, climb Kilimanjaro, or enjoy the beaches of the mainland or on Zanzibar. Lake Victoria gets too little in terms of percentage of visitors, maybe because there are no suitable lake steamers of tourist passengers. Lake Victoria has a lot to offer and the Mwanza Tourist Association is keen to bring more tourists to the lake who can use Mwanza as a base. It is easy to get there because Precision Air flies several times a day from either Dar es Salaam or from Kilimanjaro. From what I know is that Precision also connects Kigoma from Dar es Salaam and from Mwanza, and that means that when the ship is ready [it is not known at this stage when this will be accomplished] tourists have another important part of Tanzania to visit. Lake Tanganyika is Africa's deepest lake and the longest fresh water lake in the world. It is bordered by three more countries apart from Tanzania, which makes a cruise interesting. Passengers could land in Zambia or Congo or Burundi even.'*

The possibilities are so many and tourist investments will surely follow when the ship is nearing the end of the overhaul'.

True enough, plans to refurbish the MV Liemba will go a long way in opening up the Lake Tanganyika region of Tanzania for tourism and it can only be hoped that this happens sooner rather than later. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from East Africa's tourism industry.

CIVIL AVIATION LICENSING MEETING SET FOR MAY

The Tanzania Civil Aviation Authority's licensing committee will meet in May to consider a number of new and renewal applications, aimed to add extra capacity into the market and uphold competition.

According to data availed by a regular source in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania presently has nearly 60 licensed air operators, most of which are operating few aircraft and offer charter services only.

While no details could be ascertained on the new applications, if for charters or scheduled flights, 5 such applications will be heard for Aerovista Tanzania, Cicada Aviation, Shine Aviation, Neos and Zulu Air Tanzania.

Also on the list of applications are two more for ground handling while 15 renewal applications from existing operators are due to be considered.

Tanzania is after Kenya the second busiest East African Community member state in terms of licensed air operators and aircraft registered but is thought to have a large growth potential considering the vast distances travelers have to cover in what is the EAC's largest country. Largest airline is Precision Air, now quoted on the Dar es Salaam stock exchange but a number of other airlines, amongst them Coastal Aviation, play an equally important role in particular with their flights into the national parks.

In line with EAC resolutions has Tanzania in recent years embarked on a number of rehabilitation and expansion projects of the main airports, secondary airports, aerodromes and airfields to provide an infrastructure boost for the aviation industry through newly resurfaced and lengthened runways and state of the art passenger terminals. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from East Africa's aviation sectors.

AIR TANZANIA LAUNCHES WEBSITE FOR BOOKINGS



The launch of Air Tanzania's new website earlier in the week has raised another storm of comments, when it became known that the airline's acting CEO had in his comments said it would make bookings easier for passengers wanting to fly with Air Tanzania. ***'It shows that airline lives in cuckoo land. They have no planes so what bookings do they expect, for flying carpets made in their workshops'*** asked one regular source from Dar es Salaam sarcastically while another source accused the airline of outright dishonesty in their presentation: ***'There must be standards for advertising and making false claims or giving false impressions should be called what it is, a lie. They show an Airbus A320 with the heading FLY DAR ES SALAAM – ARUSHA. This is the aircraft which has been singled out by the parliamentary committee to have been riddled with mischief and has been stuck in France for years because a multi million US Dollars bill has not been settled. This leaves the Tanzanian tax payer again in fear that more good money meant for schools and the health sector and social services will go into that bottomless pit called ATCL.'***

It was later on ascertained when visiting www.airtanzania.co.tz that the airline had indeed inserted a picture of a plane it does not have on its registry, a move clearly misleading the public, as is the destination network which in the absence of a single operating plane shows 6 destinations within Tanzania, none of which is presently being served however.

At the same function the airline's acting CEO was also quoted to have said ATCL was intent to acquire up to 3 planes on lease from Egypt, without however saying how this would be financed. It is a known fact that lessors judge the lessee wishing to enter into a contract by past financial performance and meeting obligations and then base advance payments, security deposits and monthly lease fees on such an assessment, which leaves ATCL of course on the bottom of the pack. Considered not really credit worthy, with a huge burden of unpaid bills and years of outstanding ticket refunds hanging over ATCL's head, the airline also defaulted outright on payments in the past as the Airbus saga well shows, as it did only a few months ago requiring a major government bailout when the Q300 aircraft was under threat of being auctioned for nonpayment of the bills for maintenance.

So by all means visit them on their Facebook page, also new, via www.facebook.com/AirTanzania or follow them on Twitter via @AirTanzania or visit their new website, but as to bookings, leave along paying for services, just be extra careful and watch this space as more chapters are added on a regular basis to this never ending story.

MAIGE IN TROUBLE WITH PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE OVER HUNTING BLOCKS

Wide ranging allegations were made earlier in the week by the parliamentary committee on Land, Natural Resources and Environment against Tanzania's controversial tourism minister Ezekiel Maige, to the point of the committee chairman accusing the minister of having created a *'corrupt environment'* in the ministry. James Lembeli, according to a regular source in Dar es Salaam, went on to say: *'The minister has so far failed to enact 16 regulations as required for the implementation of the wildlife act of 2009. This leaves corruption loopholes which deny the government of revenue.'* Further allegation include that the minister ignored the advice of the parliamentary committee when granting hunting block rights to unsuitable companies, while also awarding hunting blocks to companies which had apparently not even applied for them, denying locals the chance to get into the business. Hunting in Tanzania is legal, and while a lucrative business has in recent years come under increased criticism from conservation groups around the world, especially in view of the massive upswing in illegal poaching. Unsavoury pictures published recently of the sons' of Donald Trump in a hunting frenzy, or news of the Spanish king breaking a hip while on a hunting trip – notably while holding the office of President of the WWF – have enraged the anti hunting lobby, and with Tanzania's track record on wildlife conservation under the media spotlight, these further controversies will not help at all.

Said a regular source from Arusha: *'Maige is on record of calling UNESCO's World Heritage Committee names, when they raised issues over the Serengeti highway or the planned Uranium mining in the Selous. Hunting even within Tanzania is controversial. It may bring in money but some blocks granted to Middle East sheikhs were shot empty in no time, so where was the supervision on quotas there? Smuggling out of the country of blood ivory continues, Tanzania is a conduit for illegal trade in birds, reptiles and animals. If parliament now found more dirt on how the ministry has behaved, maybe hunting should be suspended altogether and like Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya we should review our policy. Hunting excesses bring bad publicity, fiddling hunting block allocations gives a bad picture of how our tourism ministry is operating. This government has a poor track record on the conservation principles our founding father Mwalimu Nyerere has set. For them today it is all money, logging and mining more important than protecting our priceless heritage for which we became known around the world. Maybe we should have a public debate with all stakeholders from tourism and conservation confronting government and lobby for a change of direction.'*

Meanwhile did news emerge earlier in the week that villagers filed complaints with the local district commissioner for having been illegally detained and tortured by Serengeti national park rangers. The group of at least 6 were allegedly beaten and abused before handed over to a police station in Mugumu / Serengeti district, but were then released for lack of evidence. Other complaints voiced also include claims that herders were being shot at by wardens after their livestock strayed in to the park in search of pastures, accusing TANAPA of failure to promote better relations with communities living near the park boundaries.

Watch this space.

Rwanda News

MICHAEL OTIENO LEAVES RWANDAIR TO GO INTO AVIATION CONSULTING



RwandAir's widely respected Manager Corporate Communications and PR, Michael Otieno, has reportedly left the airline after nearly 3 ½ years as one of the public faces of the airline, but not without some pride over the achievements he says were made by RwandAir during his tenure.

He cited in a fare well email to this correspondent his involvement in creating INZOZI, the airline's inflight magazine which in the past featured several articles contributed by this correspondent too, the preparation of the *'Dream Miles'* frequent flyer programme, the introduction of a secure payment platform for passengers booking on line and purchasing tickets with credit cards, the initial re-branding of the airline and, one of his most exciting assignments, being part of creating the interior of the B737-800's the airline bought last year.

He described working with local, regional and world media as *'a thing which gave me a natural high'* and true to his form he was ever available, at any time of day or night, to answer questions and respond to enquiries, making *'his airline'* always appear in their Sunday best. Creating a Twitter handle for RwandAir via @Rwandair1 too was part of his brief and the swift replies gave Twitter users contacting the airline via this social network the confidence that using this avenue of communications was actually working. Needless to say, the airline also established a Facebook page for fans of RwandAir and the *'traffic'* on the page speaks volumes for its acceptance in the market.

I wish Michael well in his future career and be sure to read of the appointment of a successor right here, where breaking and regular news from East Africa's exciting aviation market are told.

South Sudan News

10TH EXTRAORDINARY HEAD OF STATE SUMMIT OF EAC TO DISCUSS JUBA'S MEMBERSHIP

Ministers preparing in Arusha for the Saturday Head of State Summit have confirmed that they have formed a joint verification committee to assess the state of readiness for the South Sudan to join the East African Community as soon as possible, following a formal application by the new country soon after attaining independence. Some of the criteria used by the EAC are geographical vicinity, i.e. adjoining any of the member states, good governance, democracy, rule of law, social justice and observance of human rights. Also required are a range of harmonization measures to be introduced by the new applicant vis a vis economic reforms and legal as well as regulatory issues, to ensure that a level playing field exists when a new member is finally admitted.

The Head of State Summit in Saturday will according to a regular source in Arusha look at the recommendations the ministerial meetings will have produced but it is also expected that the wider implications of the war mongering from Khartoum will be discussed. Last year did the East African Standby Brigade, and organ of military cooperation between the EAC countries, carry out exercised inside the South Sudan and Uganda has already gone on record that they will come to Juba's aid, should an all out war threaten to inflict another genocide on African people. The rhetoric in Khartoum, speaking of the Southern population as insects which need exterminating, is strikingly similar to the rhetoric used in the run up to the 1994 Rwanda genocide when the frenzy of incitement called out to kill the 'cockroaches' and in doing so is very likely to have the EAC countries stand as one by Juba as these threats are in a wider context also linked to not just grabbing South Sudan's oil but also greedily eyeing the water sources of the Nile upstream, on which Khartoum Sudan depends entirely.

Already is South Sudan present at all key meetings of the EAC organs and at summits as observers, a status not lost on their Northern neighbours in Khartoum, who have been on a war path for months now trying to repossess the South's oilfields and whose own application to join the EAC was earlier in the year rejected for not meeting key criteria of membership, and that not just referring to not having a common border with any of the EAC countries but a range of other totally incompatible traces of regime character too.

In this regard it is noteworthy that another blistering commentary by Eric Reeves is now being circulated widely amongst the who is who in the East African Community, putting into perspective the Chamberlainesque appeasement efforts of the UN, the US, the EU and the African Union, which has all but encouraged Khartoum to continue its aggression, war rhetoric and ethnic cleansing of African populations – when ever will the world learn from past mistakes.

Find Eric Reeves' latest commentary right here for further information:

Scandalous International Hypocrisy on Sudan

Eric Reeves

April 23, 2012

The stench of hypocrisy and expediency is in the air wherever one turns in assessing international responses to recent events in Sudan. The deeply imbalanced reactions to the seizure of Heglig by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) give us our starkest picture to date of how selective and tendentious the world is prepared to be in creating a narrative for the present multiple crises that threaten war in Sudan and South Sudan. And in their attempts to achieve a factitious "even-handedness," various actors—including the UN, the U.S., the AU, and the EU—have encouraged Khartoum to believe that it has somehow gained the diplomatic, even moral upper hand. It is difficult to imagine a more dangerous response to have encouraged, and the currently [ongoing offensive military actions](#) against South Sudan by the regime's Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) stand as stark confirmation. Notably, international reaction has worked to encourage the most vehemently bellicose language on the part of Field Marshal and President Omar al-Bashir, who has very recently declared that (northern) Sudan is now [essentially at war with South Sudan](#), and that Khartoum's military ambition is to destroy the "insect" government in Juba. We have heard such language of racial contempt many times from al-

Bashir's regime; in this instance it is difficult not to recall the infamously ubiquitous calls in Rwanda in 1994 for the destruction of Tutsi "cockroaches."

Certainly during the widespread ethnic slaughter in Kadugli (South Kordofan), beginning in June 2011, we repeatedly heard reports of similar racial contempt. "Yusef," a Nuba from Kadugli, told Agence France-Presse and *The Independent* (UK) that he had been informed by a member of the notorious Popular Defense Forces (PDF) that they had been provided with plenty of weapons and ammunition, and a standing order: ["He said that they had clear instructions: 'just sweep away the rubbish. If you see a Nuba, just clean it up.'"](#) He told me he saw two trucks of people with their hands tied and blindfolded, driving out to where diggers were making holes for graves on the edge of town."

This racial contempt and hatred, combined with a *jihadist* rhetoric, has already proved a potent brew in Khartoum, where on Saturday (April 21) various news agencies have reported the destruction of the Presbyterian Evangelical Church. Following an incendiary sermon by a nearby Muslim cleric during Friday evening prayers, hundreds of Muslims attacked and destroyed the church. Reuters offers the most authoritative account:

"Hundreds of Muslims stormed a Christian church complex used by southerners in Khartoum at the weekend, witnesses said, raising fears that recent clashes between Sudan and South Sudan were stoking ethnic tensions in the city. The attackers ransacked buildings, knocked down walls and burned Bibles on Saturday, Youssef Matar, secretary general of the Presbyterian Evangelical Church told Reuters."

"The attack on the church came a day after South Sudan's army pulled out of the key Heglig oilfield, an area it seized from Sudan in the worst violence between the two countries since secession. Sudan quickly declared victory over its former civil war foe, prompting widespread celebrations in Khartoum. A Muslim preacher known for fiery sermons took advantage of the excited climate to call for 'jihad' against Christians during Friday evening prayers, prompting hundreds to attack the church complex the next day, Matar said."

The attack represents a terrible precedent in Khartoum, especially given the ineffectual presence of security forces:

"'No one could believe it. Nothing like this has ever happened before,' Matar said. While Sudan is known for long and bitter conflicts fuelled by religious and ethnic animosity, communal violence in the capital is relatively rare. But communities also live separately for the most part and distrust between them often runs deep. Ethiopians, Eritreans and Indians, as well as Christians from Sudan and South Sudan, use the church, Matar said. A Reuters witness on Sunday saw smoke rising from some of the trees on the church compound, *and security vehicles waiting nearby.*"

[\(Reuters \[Khartoum\], April 22, 2012\)](#) (emphasis added)

We should expect to hear very little about this terrible incident from the unctuous UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon or other feckless international actors, certainly no condemnation commensurate with this state-sanctioned attack on a place of worship. What we may be sure of, given the details of this dispatch, is that this assault was tacitly sanctioned by the regime's security forces, who in turn have no difficulty discerning what they are to do in restraining, or allowing, racially and religiously motivated attacks on Southerners.

In fact, the [ethnic culling of Southerners has been looming for many months](#), and on April 8 became regime policy, stripping as many as 700,000 "Southerners" of their nationality solely on the basis of ethnicity. No internationally recognized standards for de-nationalizing citizens have been observed or even promulgated. And yet again, there has been no urgent or appropriately forceful international condemnation of this ruthless policy of de-nationalizing those judged ethnically "Southern."

Sadly, our best guide to the world's responses to Khartoum's current multiple violations of international human rights and humanitarian law can be discerned in previous perfunctory responses to cross-border aerial assaults on South Sudan, going back to November 2010. These attacks include multiple, deliberate bombings of civilian targets, including the refugee camp at Yida (Unity State) on November

10, 2011. International response has been equally indecisive in the face of Khartoum's campaign of ethnic annihilation by means of starvation in northern border states, a campaign that has been underway in the Nuba Mountains for over ten months and in Blue Nile for almost eight months. Khartoum's campaign is a ghastly reprise of the genocidal assault on the Nuba in the 1990s, a fact that seems to inform almost none of the present desultory discussions about the future of these people, even as heavy and isolating seasonal rains are impending.

Of a piece with the this perverse diffidence is the refusal to credit fully the massive evidence of atrocity crimes committed by Khartoum's regular and militia forces in Kadugli, including definitive evidence of mass graves that may hold many thousands of Nuba---evidence that includes both [substantial satellite photography](#) and eyewitness accounts gathered by a wide range of sources, including the [UN human rights team present in Kadugli in June 2011](#). Skepticism on this matter by the Obama administration, and [special envoy Princeton Lyman in particular](#), has been a shameful episode in U.S. Sudan policy, which has been conspicuously misguided from the beginning of Obama's presidency.

[There is a grimly revealing and familiar history leading to current international failures, one that may be readily traced](#). Certainly at key moments in the build-up to Khartoum's military seizure of Abyei (May 20-21, 2011) the international community refused to condemn the clearly impending assault---or to respond subsequently with anything approaching the misguided fervor that has defined international reactions to SPLA actions following SAF military assaults originating in Heglig. There has been, for example, no meaningful demand that Khartoum demilitarize Heglig, or allow deployment of a UN buffer force, as requested by Juba as the basic condition for its military withdrawal. Instead, there has been merely rhetorical posturing; and again the Obama administration---and President Obama himself---have seemed especially culpable, particularly in light of earlier deeply misguided administration efforts to compel Juba to "compromise" further on the nearby Abyei region (fall 2010).

At the time, such efforts---by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, special envoy Scott Gration, and part-time envoy and prevaricator Senator John Kerry---attempted to foist on Juba more "compromises" than were already embodied in the Abyei Protocol of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA, 2005) and the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on Abyei's boundaries (July 2009). Nor, we should recall, did the U.S. object meaningfully when the findings of the Abyei Boundaries Commission were peremptorily rejected by Khartoum (July 2005), or when Khartoum's regular and militia forces mounted a brutal assault on Abyei town and its surroundings (May 2008). Failures of U.S. policy in Sudan have been thoroughly bipartisan, despite the critical U.S. role in securing the CPA.

Given the tense history of the region, SAF military seizure of Abyei represented an extraordinary provocation, as did the consequent forced displacement of more than 100,000 Dinka Ngok into South Sudan. Juba did not respond militarily, and yet watched in deepest anger. For the international community was in effect sanctioning the permanent displacement of these indigenous people; certainly in the significantly reduced area defined as "Abyei" by the PCA, the Dinka Ngok were unquestionably the only "residents" and thus the only ones guaranteed (by the CPA) the right to vote in the self-determination referendum scheduled for January 9, 2011.

Encouraged by misguided U.S. policy expediency on Abyei, Khartoum all too predictably refused to allow the Abyei self-determination referendum to take place. Unsurprising, given its previous diplomatic posture, the Obama administration largely ignored this abrogation of the Abyei Protocol, evidently in the interests of preserving at all costs the self-determination referendum in the South. Southerners, for their part, may be forgiven for believing that the U.S. justified such acquiescence before Khartoum's unilateral decision on the basis of Juba's "refusal to compromise" yet further on Abyei in fall 2010.

With its unerring nose for hypocrisy, Khartoum watched this history of Abyei unfold over a period of six years and calculated---all too accurately---that there would be minimal consequences for a final abrogation of the Abyei Protocol. And after its military seizure of Abyei, the regime also calculated that it could sign an agreement on June 20, 2011---committing it to withdraw its forces from Abyei with

deployment of an Ethiopian peacekeeping brigade under UN auspices---and then simply renege on the agreement, also without consequences. Yet again, this cynical calculation proved all too accurate. If we turn from these obtuse and expedient responses to Khartoum's annexation of Abyei--- and *annexation* is precisely what the international community has countenanced, despite various *pro forma* objections---and examine in this context the international response to the SPLA's retaliatory and defensive occupation of Heglig---from which it has now withdrawn---it is impossible not to be struck by the radical asymmetry.

Implications

Certainly the leadership in Juba has taken stock of what has transpired over the past ten days, and is even now re-calibrating what it can and cannot count on from the international community. The Southern leadership has seen its extraordinary military forbearance over the past eighteen months essentially dismissed, even as Khartoum continues to test that forbearance by means of ever more provocative actions ([multiple sources report SAF attacks across a range of territory in Unity State today](#)). These re-calibrations by Juba will be tough-minded, fully prepared to encounter future international hypocrisy, and even more determined to protect the territorial integrity of South Sudan. Certainly the international community will no longer have the influence it had even a month ago.

Khartoum of course is also recalibrating its military policies, and the largest conclusion the regime has drawn is that it may continue its [longstanding military policy of aerial attacks on civilian and humanitarian targets](#) in the sovereign territory of South Sudan without meaningful consequences, and that it can continue its campaigns of annihilation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The regime has been persuaded, on the basis of ample evidence, that even South Sudan's putative friends regard "sovereignty" as one thing for Khartoum and quite another for Juba.

It is hard to see a greater encouragement to war.

La Reunion News

REUNION TOURISM ARRIVALS JUMP



The French Indian Ocean island of La Reunion established a new visitor peak for the year 2011, when 471.268 arrivals were recorded. This constitutes an increase over the previous year 2010 by 12.1 percent, way ahead of the global average increase in tourism, which was pegged at 4.4 percent by the UNWTO.

Partnering with the Seychelles for the Carnival International de Victoria too has increased visibility of La Reunion, thought to exponentially benefit the island in coming years, as will the decision by La Reunion based Air Austral to immediately resume flights to Sydney after the sudden withdrawal by Air Mauritius from that route was announced a few weeks ago. All this will benefit the island, the very least through extra transit passengers, if not en route stopovers when travelers take advantage of special offers put on the market for that purpose.

Notably did spending increase above the 12.1 rise in arrivals, recording a new record also with 388.7 million Euros, a rise over 2010 by 18.3 percent.

La Reunion, together with the Seychelles and other Indian Ocean islands like Mauritius, Madagascar, Mayotte and the Comoros work hand in hand to promote Indian Ocean island holidays under the joint '*Vanilla Islands*' concept, which has seen increased marketing activities, often hand in hand with key airline partners.

Mauritius News

MAURITIUS INVESTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE TO BE READY FOR THE FUTURE



(Impression of the new terminal building in Plaisance)

Information was received from Port Louis overnight about two key infrastructural projects, aimed to keep the island at the cutting edge for tourism and travel.

First was the announcement that a new harbour bridge was set to go ahead and that government has been in talks with residents affected by the project to compensate them and relocate them to new locations. The new bridge will be linking key traffic arteries and is hoped to decongest access to Port Louis when ready in a few years time, making access to the city for locals and tourists alike easier. The estimated 8 billion Mauritius Rupees project has been spearheaded, according to the source, by the Mauritius Port Authority and will be a public / private partnership.

At the same time it was also confirmed that the international airport at Plaisance is now expected to be ready by early 2013 according to information sent to the media by the Airports of Mauritius Company last Friday. Nearly 2.7 million passengers used the airport in 2011, an increase of about 3 percent over 2010 and remarkable considering the weakening economic situation in some of Mauritius' key tourism source markets across Europe.

The information also confirmed that once the new terminal was in full operation, the existing terminal buildings and facilities would undergo refurbishment and upgrading to keep the entire airport in top form.

The Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport had earlier in the year again been voted by the World Travel Awards as the leading airport in the Indian Ocean, an accolade these added investments are sure to retain in coming years. With all these developments, if only now tourism promotion could begin to match the dynamism and forward vision other *Vanilla Islands* have rolled out in recent years. Watch this space.

AIR MAURITIUS REACTS TO STINGING CRITICISM



Following more losses by Air Mauritius in the last quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012, and decisions to cut initially 8 routes, leaving tour operators and holiday companies in more than just a little lurch, has the airline now apparently decided to go on the media offensive and put their own version of events into the public domain. A regular source from Port Louis made information available overnight, giving some explanations on the various decisions taken in recent weeks, to cut cost and destinations.

Routes to Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Australia were axed at the time, leaving connectivity from some of Mauritius' strong tourist markets to other airlines, in particular the ever expanding Gulf carriers which are reportedly using this development to seek more flights to Mauritius, something the airline countered by saying that the resulting overcapacity had put undue pressure on revenues, thereby contributing to the disappointing financial results seen in recent quarters.

In the case of Australia, neighbouring La Reunion based Air Austral swiftly stepped into the breach, reversing their own decision taken only weeks earlier to halt flights to Sydney, now offering convenient connections with more or less immediate onward flights, news received with great relief by the Mauritius expatriate community in Eastern Australia as well as the Australian tourism trade.

In turn though did Air Mauritius announce they would up their flights to Johannesburg from one per day to two per day later in the year while adding a third flight to Nairobi / Kenya. In both cases agreements have been made to tap into the African and international network of South African Airways and of Kenya Airways, to connect passengers destined for Mauritius via their hubs on to Air Mauritius flights. A similar deal appears to have been struck with Malaysian Airlines, and again from later this year Air Mauritius intends to fly 3 times a week to Kuala Lumpur, leaving the '*feeding and de-feeding*' traffic beyond that destination to Malaysian.

As further part of cost cutting and savings it is expected that the airline's remaining A340 aircraft will be retired and sold in coming months as will the entire fleet undergo a critical analysis to ensure the best operating economics are being brought to Air Mauritius, which with a fleet of 12 aircraft and 4 different aircraft types is not possible. Again in turn is the airline keen to up their customer rating, as determined by Skytrax, from the present three stars to four stars in coming years, and by doing so offering a much improved inflight product aimed to retain as well as reclaim market share.

Towards that end a consulting firm was retained to make recommendations to the board of directors of Air Mauritius and from available information it appears that the board did accept the various proposals for cost cutting and operational changes, including the potential divesture from noncore assets and shareholdings. Also included in the consultants reports were suggestions in the search for a strategic partner, a topic however kept very close to the chest of the powers that be in Port Louis, so as not to compromise ongoing negotiations, difficult as they are anyway considering the precarious financial position of Air Mauritius.

Since the boards' acceptance of the various recommendations on February 13th, did the CEO of Air France visit Mauritius for 'consultations' in March, intriguing as to the timing chosen for the meetings inspite the fact that Air France has been holding a minority share in Air Mauritius since its inception in 1967, although local and regional flights only started in 1972 and international flights only in 1977.

There is no telling right now, if the Mauritius government will opt for a closer partnership with Air France, perhaps by selling them more shares, or if another partner could be preferred, one with deeper pockets and stronger ambitions as was seen earlier in the year in the Seychelles, where Etihad, Abu Dhabi's national airline, took a 40 percent stake in Air Seychelles but also assumed the management of that airline, setting an equally loss making airline on the path to recovery.

Trying times these are for Air Mauritius, so watch this space for more news, as and when available.

Seychelles News

AIR SEYCHELLES BENEFITS FROM ETIHAD LINK



The linkage between Air Seychelles and Abu Dhabi's national airline Etihad is starting to bear fruits as from the beginning of May new, initially wet-leased aircraft, will come on line for Air Seychelles.

The twice weekly flights between Mahe and Mauritius will be operated from 02nd May on an Etihad Airbus A320, the aircraft type eventually expected to join the Air Mauritius fleet for good, when crew training has been completed and the range of added destinations been determined, which is still undergoing final analysis.

The longer haul flights to Johannesburg will in May be operated by an Etihad Airbus A330-200 as will the flights between Mahe and Abu Dhabi, where Air Seychelles has been using their B767-300 under a code share arrangement with Etihad.

A regular source in Victoria has indicated that by latest end of May more clarity will have been achieved over the way forward for Air Seychelles in regard of the type and number of aircraft they will operate in the future, as well as on new destinations, in particular a potential nonstop flight from Mahe to China, which has turned into the fastest growing market for the archipelago.

Etihad earlier in the year took a 40 percent stake in Air Seychelles and seconded a management team comprising the CEO and CFO to the airline, after a deal was struck on political level between President James Michel and the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Al Nahyan, who enjoy a personal friendship which led to this extraordinary *bail out* at the time. Watch this space as more news become available.

HELICOPTER SEYCHELLES – GONE FOR GOOD FROM THE SKIES OVER THE ARCHIPELAGO?



Many questions have been asked since the beginning of the month about Helicopter Seychelles, and if indeed the message now seen on the company website will stick, or only be temporary, which reads:

Helicopter Seychelles regrets to announce it has ceased operating commercial flying services. No further reservations will be accepted. For inquiries regarding existing bookings, please call [\(+248\) 4385858](tel:+2484385858).

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and wish you safe travels.

In service for 20 years before the sudden end, or perhaps temporary end only, was announced early in April, Air Seychelles was a regular sight in the skies over the islands of Mahe, Praslin, La Digue – the latter only reachable by air via helicopter – and a number of other islands, private, exclusive and hidden from prying eyes of the paparazzi of this world like North Island, where guests are whisked to straight from their international flight from the main airport, to arrive and depart in near anonymity as they prefer.

In mid 2010 it was reported here that Helicopter Seychelles was in merger talks with its main rotor wing competitor Zil Air, and after initial success to bringing the two operations together, for cost savings and other financial considerations, the short lived ‘marriage’ equally suddenly broke up again and the two companies were back at competing terms. Helicopter Seychelles underwent a fresh auditing process by the Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority, before being granted their Air Operator Certificate or in short AOC, which permits operations to commence under a set of strict rules and regulations CAA’s set in compliance with ICAO’s binding requirements. With operations resumed, the airline continued flights, and though no financial details could be ascertained, there was speculation over the bounced merger and the impact on the company’s balance sheet and bottom line and the fact that the available operating capital was bleeding away.

Then came March 2012 and at least three known incidents took place, which made the company issue a public statement to which the SCAA reacted sharpish, the resulting in the announcement that the company would not just suspend but cease operations.

What happened was that according to an impeccable source with deep insight into the aviation sector in the Seychelles, two of the three helicopters of the company suffered engine malfunctions, leading to an emergency landing of one of the crafts near the company’s main hangar at Providence. While no passengers were on board, the heli was returning from dropping off passengers in Praslin, the skids were seriously damaged and the tail rotor did touch the water. No one was injured but the helicopter was due to undergo major repairs of course. Only days later did the company’s second helicopter suffer an emergency landing while on a ferry flight to South Africa, when due to another engine malfunction it had to land in Madagascar, raising the red flags amongst the safety oversight inspectors at the SCAA. Both incidents are under ongoing investigation by the SCAA’s personnel and no final report has been filed by the time of going to press with this article.

Helicopter Seychelles then announced a temporary halt to operations, stating their intent to introduce new equipment before resuming flights again, but with the SCAA seeking answers and compliance assurances that was apparently not going to happen just that easily.

Subsequently the two following and clearly conflicting statements were issued AFTER the incidents, first the one by Helicopter Seychelles and then by the SCAA as shown below:

Providence, Mahé©

22 March 2012

Dear Trade Partners

OPERATIONAL SUSPENSION FOR HELICOPTER FLEET UPGRADE

For 20 years, we have operated a safe flying service under the watchful eye of the local aviation regulator, the Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority, and with your enthusiastic support. We are very proud of our unblemished safety record and commitment to upholding the highest standards of flying performance, aircraft maintenance and customer service.

*In light of a few **minor incidents** recently involving our helicopters, and all without personal injury, we have decided today to suspend our flying operations briefly pending an operational safety review and complete replacement of our existing fleet.*

We are taking this decisive action in full consultation with the SCAA to ensure that the safety of our passengers and crew is never compromised. It underlines our absolute commitment to maintain safety as our foremost

priority. We seek to preserve Seychelles' international reputation as an environment where aviation is conducted to the very highest standards.

With immediate effect, we will temporarily cease to operate all aircraft from our existing fleet. This will necessarily cause a brief interruption to our operational commitments to you, which we deeply regret and for which we offer our very sincere apologies. However, we expect the hiatus to be short-lived and we ask for your patience while we introduce new aircraft to service.

In the coming days, a new aircraft will join Helicopter Seychelles' fleet, providing a new level of luxury charter service to the nation's inner islands. The fresh arrival - S7-NMK - is the very latest model Bell JetRanger BIII and is expected to receive certification imminently.

Next, we are taking steps to acquire a second and larger single-engine helicopter to carry greater payloads of passengers and luggage. It will be equipped with a rapid re-configuration facility to support medical evacuation flights, with stretcher carrying capability.

Meanwhile, in the coming weeks, we expect to further underline our safety credentials by achieving confirmation of full compliance with the latest European maintenance safety standards which have been adopted in this country. The award of the EASA Part 145 certification will clearly demonstrate our uncompromising engineering standards.

Our company remains fully committed to providing a commercial helicopter flying service for Seychelles well into the years ahead. As such, several projects are in progress to re-align our offering to fit better the present and future needs of our clients.

We re-entered a difficult market in November last year with an operation and aircraft fleet which met every technical and regulatory requirement. We did so with awareness that we had your encouragement and committed support. We remain extremely grateful for that.

With the actions we are announcing today and our future commitment to safety, new investment and fair pricing, we would ask for your continued confidence in us.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to continue building good relationships with each of you in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours faithfully

*Capt Matt Hayes
CEO, Helicopter Seychelles Ltd*

To this the Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority responded with a counter statement which in part reads:

SCAA clarifies its position with regards to comments made in Seychelles Nations and other publications After several references and queries made in the press related to Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority (SCAA) following Helicopter Seychelles Limited (HSL) decision to stop their operation, the Authority would like to clarify and state a few facts in relation to the cessation of HSL operations.

With regards to Helicopter Seychelles, it is to be noted that following a rigorous 7 month certification process, SCAA issued Helicopter Seychelles with an AOC on 8th November 2011.

Helicopter Seychelles informed SCAA in writing on 21st March 2012, that following three incidents, they were suspending operations temporarily.

On the 29th March 2012 Helicopter Seychelles sent a "Trade Communiqué" by email to trade partners announcing that it is recommencing operations with full backing of SCAA, quoting:

"The SCAA is satisfied that our aircraft, our pilots, our engineers, our operational support team and maintenance facilities comply fully with their rigorous requirements. They do not judge us lightly and rightly so". The Authority would like to confirm that this Trade Communiqué was issued without prior knowledge of the Authority and the statement made without consultation with SCAA.

Following discussions with HSL relating to the incidents and mitigating actions that had been implemented since then, the Authority agreed for HSL to resume operations.

On 30th March 2012 the Authority suspended HSL AOC in view of certain lapses in regulatory compliance.

On the 04th April the Authority was formally advised by the HSL Accountable Manager that HSL would with immediate effect be ceasing operation and trading as a company.

In a second Trade Communiqué again without consultation with the Authority, dated 03rd April 2010 Helicopter Seychelles also referred to "the extremely demanding requirements of the Seychelles CAA". The Authority would like to state that the regulatory regime that Helicopter Seychelles is subject to is the same as that other operators are subjected to and comply with minimum standards set forth by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

However one now looks at it, one thing is certain that Helicopter Seychelles is no longer operating and for all purposes, unless an airborne knight in shining armour with deep pockets appears at the horizon and flies to the company's rescue, the era of HSL has after 20 years come to an end. Many will see this with regret, on personal grounds of relations with the management and staff of HSL, others out of fear that a newly created monopoly will impact on fares and tariffs for island hopping, scenic flights and air transfers, and yet others out of sentiment that a regular sight in the skies over the archipelago's islands is now gone for good.

What remains to be said is continued happy landings to Zil Air's fleet of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft – news on the introduction of the latter was also broken here – and a sad good bye to Helicopter Seychelles, for now that is.

MISGUIDED AUDIT REPORT CONTINUES TO UPSET SEYCHELLES TOURISM INDUSTRY

Not long ago did I file an article here over the allegations made in a report by the Seychelles Auditor General about audits of the Seychelles Tourism Board, which at the time instantly roused the passion of the private sector, condemning in particular the British consultant who wrote the draft report as well near incompetent while also suspecting that he was party to a hidden agenda to sully the shining image of STB.

Letters were since then written by the Seychelles Hospitality and Tourism Association, a key stakeholder in the country's sectoral set up, to express their own and very different view on the affair, which in the interest of full and balanced reporting is being reproduced here:

Seychelles Hospitality and Tourism Association

Tuesday 24th April 2012

Mr Barry Faure

Chairman

Seychelles Tourism Board

Dear Mr Faure,

Re: Seychelles Tourism Board Performance Audit Report of the Auditor General - December 2011

On behalf of the Seychelles Hospitality and Tourism Association, we have seen with surprise the Performance Audit Report completed by the Office of the Auditor General in December 2011. We feel we need to place, through you and through the press, our comments on the report because we have been mandated to lead this Tourism Board by us being part of the four private sector board members in the seven men STB Board. We feel that we have no option but to defend through the press our involvement on the STB Board because the Auditor General chose to do just that, in publicizing his Audit Report. As a private sector controlled board we remained as we still remain today, conscious of the need for us the country's private sector, to guide the Tourism Board in its operation of the industry with a policy of 'ease of doing business' and to be 'business friendly'.

We need to start by placing on record that this private sector controlled Tourism Board with Alain St Ange as CEO came into being only on the 10th August 2010. Seychelles was at that time suffering with a drop in its visitor arrival numbers and this prompted us, as the country's tourism industry representatives to work with the CEO of the board on the need to catch up on lost time to ensure that the country's accommodation establishments and the national economy did not suffer as a result of the consequences of the then widely predicted reduction in visitor arrival numbers. The tourism industry wanted to see a tourism board that would commit to work out side civil service norms, and as such move away from the bureaucratic approach with meetings and paper documents to a more practical and hands-on approach. We have to record points made under key findings and recommendations incorporated in pages 3-7 of the Audit Report:

1. We feel that the presentation of those points and the way they are 'portraying' the facts give the wrong impression of those facts. These points we have discussed at our board meetings, it is important for us as the SHTA to again put our comments on record and to alert all concerned about our observations.

2. We agree with the fact that the Seychelles Tourism Board had been operating since 2005; without a formal strategy and poor management of its financial resources, but this was pre the new private sector controlled Board and its new Management.

3. We agree with the fact that no certified financial statements were produced as duly required by Law, since those of 2004, 2005 & 2006 being certified in 2009 and 2007 & 2008 to be certified in 2011, 2009 & 2010 to be certified in 2012. However we have to state clearly the fact that the Statutory Auditors did not exercise their role, as Statutory Auditors, for this not to happen and to continue for such a long time. The new Seychelles Tourism Board and its management recognized that anomaly and immediately took the decision to request that an external audit firm be recruited to prepare accounts for all those deficiencies of the past which had been allowed to exist unabated.

4. We note the point of frequent changes in CEO and Financial Controllers but it is important to again point out that since August 2010 after the new Board and management took office only one CEO and Financial Controller have been in office until the report submitted by the Auditor General.

5. We do not agree with all that is being said regarding the 'standards and inspection' as this area, as we have said over and over again, had been drifting towards a 'real bureaucracy' which did not help and sustain the development and maintenance of the tourism and hospitality service industry. The Tourism Board is not the agency with the power in this domain. The Tourism Board remains the advisory agency working alongside the Licensing Authority. The SHTA believes that this is an area that will require a mindset change by many in Seychelles, but the work priority at the Tourism Board led by the SHTA has to be to protect the country's economy first and foremost. The era of 'big brother' syndrome in the inspectorate needed to stop and this is what the SHTA had pushed for. Guests' security is safeguarded by the Health Inspectors and the Fire Brigade Agents, as the private sector led Tourism board pushed to stop meddling in management of establishments, but to instead work with all establishments to ensure they remain open and operate with success for the benefit of our country's economy.

6. This role of the Seychelles Tourism Board was relooked at under the control of the new board:

a. First priority was to boost Marketing to sell the Seychelles, after working to regain credibility in the market place.

b. Second priority was to have the Tourism Board reorganized as a competent and able body so that it would bring immediate results for the country.

c. Third priority was to 'clean' the Financial Management side of the Tourism Board and so as to produce Certified Accounts.

7. We have to openly state that we regret the absence in this report of the fact that:

a. The Government of Seychelles, starting with the President of the Republic who had the responsibility of the tourism portfolio, took the decision of appointing a new chairman of the Board, a new private sector driven Board and a new Chief Executive Officer, in August 2010, to 'restart' a new Seychelles Tourism Board to be better managed, more dynamic and much less bureaucratic.

b. The CEO, with the Board's Approval and the Ministry of Finance's assistance searched and found rapidly a new Financial Controller, to rapidly put the 'Financial side of the House' back in order; one of its priority being to compile and prepare the financial accounts and statements for 2007-2010 which is why a private sector firm was hired.

c. The CEO, working with the office of the president who held the portfolio for tourism presented a new strategy, encompassing the Seychelles Brand of Tourism that would help claim back the country's tourism industry.

8. We do not agree with the proposals made in the report on the overall 'inspection concept' as the country's tourism trade wanted to abandon the 'bureaucratic and punishment routes' to arrive to a more 'service and assistance oriented' approach to the business, as we strongly believe that the private sector controlled Tourism Board is created and funded to 'Cater a Service' to the Business, and certainly not to impose on them more 'bureaucratic red tapes'.

9. We do not agree with the concept of having a fee to be charged to the tourism businesses for inspection purposes. This inspection is for the issuing of a license which is payable already.

Finally we need to remind you, Mr. Chairman, of the Government Management Audit Report completed in August 2010 which we have all sighted as members the STB Board. This report speaks a different song to what has been issued by the Auditor General.

Our controlled Tourism Board has been faced with repositioning Seychelles without Air Seychelles on European Routes and assisting in searching for airlines that will provide direct air access to our country. We remain a long haul tourism destination competing to retain a fair share of the tourist market. Today we have seen an increase in airlines serving Seychelles. This has and will help the country, but the task is to ensure no repeat of the past occurs. 'Easy come easy go' is often the approach of airlines if the country cannot generate enough business for their general marketing to pick up and to give them the business. Seychelles has been down this path before and saw the loss of British Airways, Lufthansa, Air France, Alitalia and South African Airways to name but a few. This is why the SHTA has pushed for open lines of communication with our airlines and this is also why we go out to work with our airlines to market the country.

The SHTA has been advocating for more funds to market our country and not the approach being advocated in the Auditor's Report, as this will only crucify the Seychelles Tourism Industry and in so doing derail the country's economy.

Mr Faure, as Chairman of our STB Board, on behalf of the private sector members of the Board we say that we disassociate ourselves with that Audit Report and find it full of flaws and misguided analysis. We feel that it generally lacks the understanding of the tourism industry.

Yours Sincerely,

Louis D'Offay (Mr)
Chairman

Cc:

Mr James Alix Michel - President of the Republic of Seychelles

Mr Alain St Ange - Minister for Tourism and Culture

Mrs Elsia Grandcourt - CEO; Seychelles Tourism Board

In conclusion, one can only wonder how this was allowed to happen in the first place, unless done with a fair degree of malice and ill intent, and for certain this consultant will find a number of black marks against his name, best not to try and get another assignment in the Seychelles, where he stepped on all the wrong toes and sang in all the wrong tunes with total disregard to the reality on the ground, a reality about which the global media rave over as a shining example of how tourism marketing should be conducted.

Watch this space if there are any more twists and turns in this saga.

PRASLIN – SO NEAR AND YET SO DIFFERENT

Considering how much I travel and the often luxurious and exotic places I visit, it has to be very special to be remembered a few weeks or months down the line, since then overshadowed by new experiences, sights and sounds but the Seychelles are just that place which keeps lingering in my mind.

The main island of Mahe, home to the world's smallest capital city, Victoria, is full of activities and being the largest of the 115 islands most of the country's renowned resorts are found there.

There is no argument that Mahe is at the heart of the Seychelles, with the port, the international airport, government ministries, businesses, banks, university, sports stadium, the main hospital of the country and an array of restaurants offering something to every palate and every pocket.

Yet, there are another 114 islands out there to discover and when I wrote a few weeks ago about a visit to the island of La Digue, some of my readers instantly got back to me asking '*how do we get there*' and answers of course given readily and with enthusiasm.

What I left out then was an equally interesting visit to the island of Praslin, the second largest island of the archipelago, just under an hour by the high speed ferry from Port Victoria or about 15 minutes flight on the Air Seychelles domestic services which leave from the international airport.

When one arrives by ferry, something most travelers do, the crossing in good weather offers grand vistas of the surrounding islands, as Mahe remains behind and becomes smaller and smaller, and when entering the port of Praslin it is instantly evident that this island is rather different from Mahe. Leisure boats are moored off shore, ready to take guests for a day trip to some of the islands which cannot be reached by the larger ferries, or even take them for overnight trips, with plenty of opportunities to wade ashore to some of the smaller islands, do some diving or snorkeling, have a picnic under palm trees at a beach or do a spot of fishing to enhance the dinner menu.



Praslin is known for some spectacular beaches, like the Anse Volbert shown below, one of my personal all time favourites, and of course the more fancied Anse Lazio which has found its way into the top 10 of global beach locations. Resorts are dotted along the shores but also higher up on some of the hills, with spectacular views over the ocean at sunrise and sunset. There are no traffic jams, unless counting getting into the harbour parking when the ferries come and go, and life on Praslin is definitely a few notches slower compared to Mahe, but no less friendly for that matter. Less pace means more time for the essentials of a holiday, long strolls on the beaches, leisurely meals at the resort or else in one of the many restaurants, or perhaps a round of golf at the award winning Constance Lemuria Resort, the only one in the Seychelles with their own championship course.

Fans of Mahe will say there is a lot less to do on Praslin, but truly, that depends on the objective of a vacation and what one individually understands about '*a lot less or a lot more*' in terms of holiday experience. I for instance stayed at the Black Parrot Suites / Coco de Mer which has its own nature reserve on the hill behind the resort, worth exploring as is the generally much '*wilder*' interior of the island. With the highest mountain standing at only 1.100 feet, adventuring around the foot paths and little roads and tracks is a lot more fun, less demanding and offers more solitude than similar walks in the Morne Seychellois National Park on Mahe, where with its growing popularity one inevitably encounters more hikers. Not so on Praslin, where space seems to be one's own still across large sections of the island and especially when the day trippers from Mahe have gone back.



Best known in terms of nature reserves on Praslin is of course the ‘*Vallee de Mai*’, located almost at the centre of the island and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983. A visit to this treasured forest is a must see for tourists and remains to this day the most visited natural attraction on the entire archipelago with day trips from the main island of Mahe filling the early morning ferry every day. They all come to the park to see the home of the fabled ‘*Coco de Mer*’, an intriguingly shaped coconut which has all but become a national symbol for the Seychelles. Kilometres upon kilometres of well maintained tracks await the visitors, with view points and park benches along the way to allow for a rest, or to change the batteries in the cameras or just to sit and let this close up feeling of being in an ancient forest sink in. Multilingual guides are available to explain the ancient fauna of the forest and when standing still, as I did – I visited in the afternoon when most of the tour groups had already departed and few voices disrupted the silence – one can hear the wind rustling the leaves of the palms high above, an almost eerie sound at first, before the backdrop of bird song is then joining into this mighty soundtrack only nature pure can produce.



The park is managed by the Seychelles Island Foundation, which also manages the more distant, almost 1.150 kilometres distant to be precise *Aldabra Atoll*, often described as the original *Garden of Eden*, which receives a generous share of the proceeds generated by entrance fees at the *Vallee de Mai*.

The *Coco de Mer* nuts can be purchased, including the required export permit and certification of being legally bought, important as the government is cracking down on ‘*poaching*’ or illegal harvesting of the prized nuts, and only a few weeks ago were several individuals arrested red-handed, when found to have illegally entered the park to cut the nuts off the trees. Dr. Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, CEO of the Seychelles Island Foundation, said at the time: *‘Poaching is one of the most serious threats to the continued existence of the Coco de Mer. Continued theft of Coco de Mer nuts will eventually drive the species into extinction unless action is taken to stop it. The SIF staff did an excellent job to detain the suspected poachers and assist the police on the crime scene. I’m very happy with the work they have done and with the rapid response by the Praslin police and I hope that the case be successfully followed through to prosecution. The Coco de Mer and the Vallée de Mai are vitally important to Praslin’s tourism industry, are unique symbols of Seychelles and are a natural wonder which need our protection. I hope that all agencies involved can work together with the help and support of the people of Praslin to protect and conserve this incredible species’*.

Threatened by acts of poaching by local criminals and of late also by periodic fires due to less than average rainfall, the Coco de Mer has recently been ‘uplisted’ from vulnerable to endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in the organisation’s most recent update of its Red List, which evaluates the conservation status of biological species, going to show how unique and rare this example of pristine nature really is. Worth a visit anytime, whether staying on Mahe, Praslin, La Digue or any of the other ‘*inner islands*’ within easy reach by boat and ferry, or air.

And in honesty, when I often say '*Seychelles, truly Another World*' I should actually say '*Seychelles, truly made of many worlds*'.

The archipelago can be reached by air, 13 times a week with Emirates via Dubai, 7 times with Qatar Airways via Doha, presently 6 times a week, rising to daily flights in July with Etihad / Air Seychelles from Abu Dhabi, 4 times a week with Ethiopian Airlines via Addis Ababa, 3 times a week with Kenya Airways via Nairobi and by Condor once a week from Germany. Get more information on the Seychelles' range of islands and attractions by visiting www.seychelles.travel

SEYCHELLES BECOMES A CHINESE WEDDING AND HONEYMOON DESTINATION



(A Chinese visitor, seen here at a '*Wedding Cove*' on the island of La Digue earlier this year)

The Seychelles Tourism Board announced over the weekend that at least 50 Chinese couples will in July fly to the archipelago to get married there and spend their honeymoon, following an intensive marketing campaign. This will coincide with the Sino – Seychellois friendship week celebrations by may well pave the way for more such visitors in the future. Arrivals from China for 2012 are already up by over 95 percent year by year, and 2011 saw a virtual doubling of arrival figures from China compared to 2010.

The new found fame of the Seychelles is at least in part attributed to the promotional efforts of the 5 airlines now linking China with the archipelago via their home hubs, in particular Emirates with 13 flights per week to Mahe, Qatar Airways with daily flights, Etihad with presently 6 flights a week going up to daily services by June, Ethiopian Airlines with 4 onward connections via Addis Ababa and Kenya Airways which now flies 3 times a week via Nairobi. Ethiopian in fact operated a tourist charter flight to Mahe a few weeks ago and intends to market such special flights to further attract traffic from China.

That said however, the efforts of the Seychelles Tourism Board, the Seychelles embassy in Beijing and their consulate in Shanghai, working hand in hand with key partners from the private sector, DMC's and resorts, have played a major role in this breakthrough to open up the Chinese market and Air Seychelles has already announced that they are planning nonstop services from later this year to at least one major city in China. Mr. Alain St. Ange, Minister for Tourism and Culture in the Seychelles government, had this to say when addressing a press conference in Beijing to promote the Sino – Seychelles Culture Week: *'It gives me great pleasure to address you today as it provides me with an opportunity to showcase the beauty of Seychelles to the Chinese market. Seychelles has enjoyed close ties with China for many years and we share many things in common. In Seychelles, we have a sizeable Chinese population that has been living among us as Seychellois brothers and sisters for well over a century. When you visit our islands, you will notice their influence on our culture and on our traditions, and particularly in our delicious Creole cuisine.'*

The Seychelles Tourism Board remains very interested in China and remains very interested in cementing these ties by welcoming ever greater numbers of Chinese visitors to our shores. Already, China is Seychelles fastest growing tourism market and this looks to continue, as not only do we already have an Embassy and a tourism office here in Beijing, but are looking to expand with a second tourist office in Shanghai in the near future as we continue to explore the possibility of further openings up Macau and Hong Kong.

The reason behind this expansion is that we strongly believe that Seychelles is the new destination that will appeal to Chinese tourists. We are of one of the smallest nations on earth: an archipelago of 115 sparkling islands, largely untouched since the dawn of time, whose beauty is the stuff of legend. Our population is only 87,000 people and our land area only 455 sq km...but the diversity we offer is truly vast.

Seychelles is between 4 and 10 degrees south of the equator and consists of 43 towering granite islands, the oldest mid-oceanic granitic islands on the planet, and 72 low-lying reef islands, sand cays and atolls which extend like stepping stones towards the coast of neighbouring Africa. We are indeed 1000 miles from anywhere - but we are a million miles in terms of the tranquility, in terms of authenticity and in terms of diversity of a Seychelles holiday experience.

We have towering granite mountains, so tall in fact that their peaks are constantly covered in mist. In these exotic habitats lives an array of equally unique flora & fauna that includes some of the rarest species on the planet.

Despite its size, Seychelles boasts two UNESCO World Heritage Sites. One of these is the amazing Vallée de Mai on Praslin Island – a hidden, ancient forest with towering palms upon which grows the legendary Coco-de-Mer, the world's heaviest nut, once believed to grow on a mysterious tree beneath the sea. The other is the extraordinary atoll of Aldabra Island, known as the land that time forgot, with its population of 150, 000 giant tortoises.

Seychelles offers a wide range of authentic experiences that will leave you with the memories of a lifetime: great sailing among the inner islands; diving in places where as many as 800 different species of fish have been spotted on one dive; thrilling big-game fishing for marlin, sailfish, wahoo, tuna, barracuda and many other species besides. We also offer great spa & wellness holidays, casinos, and an opportunity to charge your batteries in Seychelles tranquil environment; we have a spectacular 18-hole championship golf course nestled between a lush mountainside and a sapphire ocean and also fascinating walks & trails upon which to discover Seychelles diverse natural world. As many of you will discover, we are perhaps the world's best known honeymoon venue that was visited recently by the Kate and William, the Duke & Duchess of Cambridge of Great Britain.

Beyond this, and much more besides, we offer a tranquil yet vibrant culture and an enviable, island-style way of life that is gentle, kind and welcoming – a unique break from busy schedules and a chance to rediscover yourself in another world'.

Seychelles, truly 'Another World'.