

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



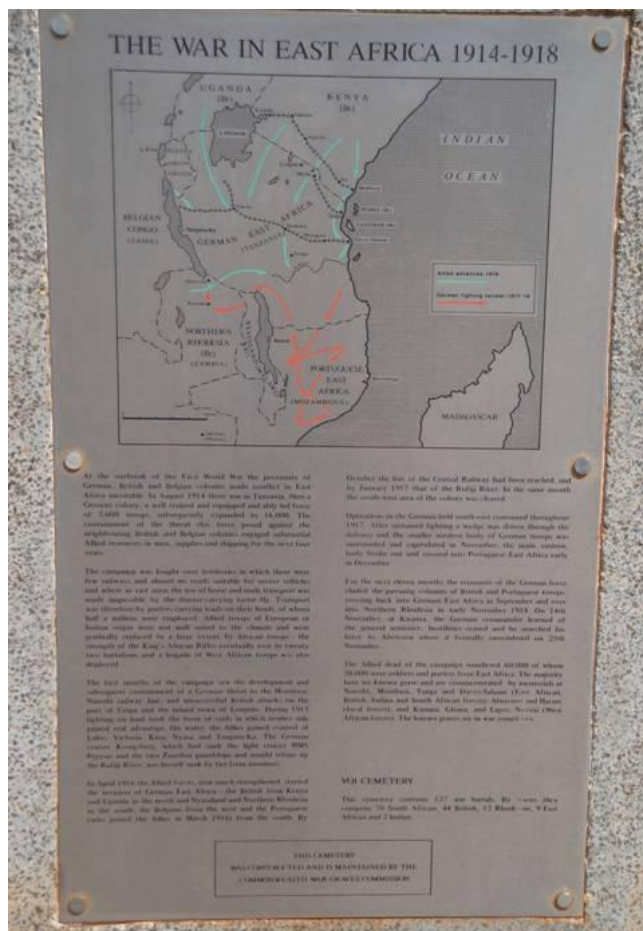
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99 YEARS AND COUNTING – BATTLEFIELD EAST AFRICA

(Posted 04th August 2013)



When the guns opened up in Europe 99 years ago, on 28th July 1914, their thunder signaling the start of the Great War, later known as World War I, the German cruiser Koenigsberg on 31st of July slipped out of the harbour of Dar es Salaam. She left port before war was officially declared by Britain, managing to escape the watchful eyes of the British, a lapse they lived to rue in the early years of the war, which unfolded on and off the shores of East Africa with as much a vengeance as in the European theater.

Across East Africa were the war cemeteries given a clean up for the occasion, not that it would be necessary really since the Commonwealth War Graves Commission keeps these locations in ship shape throughout the year, not just ahead of commemorations like the start or the end of the respective wars.

Just over a year ago I visited the Taita Taveta area, the one location where indeed trenches, fortifications and bunkers dug into the earth can still be found until today, while the other area where the German and Allied Forces clashed, in the highlands around Kisii, nothing much of substance can now be found.

The World War I cemeteries in Voi, Maktau and Taveta are today a permanent reminder, though few actually are able to put the history properly together, of what played out in this part of Kenya, in a war where over 100.000 Africans died in the service of their colonial masters, fighting for causes which were not theirs and for which they got little if any recognition but a few monuments across the region, yet not a single war cemetery where today's generation of Kenyans and Tanzanians could pay their respects to their fallen ancestors.

A few days ago I sat with Kenya's tourism gurus at KTB, discussing how the centenary commemorations of World War I, which will extend to all parts of Europe where troops fought, but also to the East African battlefields, where Jan Smuts' and von Lettow-Vorbeck's boys shed their blood, can be used to restore some of the fortifications, trenches and positions like high up on Salaita Hill or Mashoti, to create an open air monument, honouring those who died in action and a permanent reminder for today's generation that bloody conflict is best avoided.

Since my visit a year ago has James Willson Esq. published his book '*Guerillas of Tsavo*'

(www.guerillasoftsavo.com), in which he describes the various engagements, on Mile 27, at Mashoti and other parts of what today is Tsavo West and the Taita Taveta border region with Tanzania and of course the attempt of a final showdown at Salaita Hill, from which the Germans withdrew overnight, sneaked back into Tanganyika to fight another day, a day which lasted in fact until the end of the war even though they had lost control of Tanganyika when the Koenigsberg in the Rufiji Delta and the Graf von Goetzen on Lake Tanganyika were scuttled by their crews. Von Lettow-Vorbeck never was defeated in the field though surrendered immediately when the news of the Armistice in Europe were broken to him in late 1918.



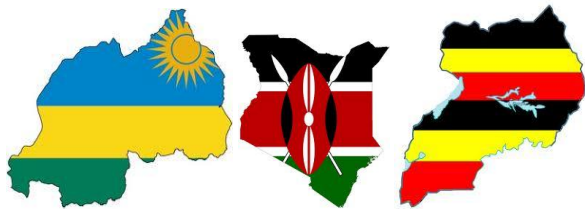
And now commences the countdown to the centenary commemoration and memorials of what was first known as the Great War, and time will tell just how prepared Kenya will be to showcase these locations to the war historians and war buffs who will no doubt flock to Kenya to see Battlefield East Africa where perhaps their forefathers fought, pay their respects, trace their steps and the German and Allied troop movements on the maps and in the field and see the giant Baobab tree not far from Taveta which got shot up by Allied forces, thinking a sniper had taken position in the hollow of it.

Time to remember, time to once again look at the past and the history of pre-independence Kenya and of other colonies and protectorates in the region back then, what role they played and how the European war played out in our part of the world.

East Africa News

RWANDA, KENYA AND UGANDA FAST TRACK MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AND TOURISTS

(Posted 03rd August 2013)



In a departure from norm, and clearly as a sign of growing frustration with EAC partners putting the brakes on key developments which could push the East African Community forward, have Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda taken steps to ensure that a common tourist Visa among the three countries will be reality by January 2014, as will unrestricted travel by using national Identity Cards.

The recent summit in Entebbe, hosted by President Museveni, had already stirred the attention of pundits when the three agreed to make Mombasa their preferred port of call and link the city with Nairobi, Kampala and Kigali by standard gauge railway, which according to the latest information at hand is due to be fully operational by 2018. Security, a matter of common concern among the three, too was high on the agenda, likely leading to a full exchange of data of entries and exits as captured by the electronic systems now in place at all border points.

For the tourism industry it is of key interest that the common Visa, at least among three member states, will be operationalised sooner rather than later. *'We cannot allow ourselves to be held back by other partners who are not ready for whatever reason. The three are willing partners and ready to move on key issues. The two remaining EAC members Burundi and Tanzania can join when they are ready to join. The three will use trilateral agreements, outside the EAC protocols, to implement their decisions now but those agreements can become part of protocol implementation when the others agree. We must have a single customs territory and when the presidents agree that taxes and duty will be collected in Mombasa by Uganda and Rwanda too, then that must be implemented. Once the taxes and duties are paid, there is also no longer an issue with long queues at Malaba or Busia and there is no issue any longer between importers from Uganda and Kenya Revenue Authority. We have a common tariff band for imports for all three countries and therefore, once the importers paid in Mombasa for Uganda or Rwanda, there is no more threat of dumping goods in transit. There is a lot of growing trade and tourism exchange between Kenya and Uganda and Rwanda. We want to encourage tourists from overseas to come and visit all three because of the different attractions they offer. Until now, they would have to pay about 150 US Dollars in Visa fees but in the future, this will be cut to just one Visa fee, though a bit higher than it is now but valid for three countries which can then share the proceeds.* [Information obtained from Kigali speaks of a common Visa fee of 100 US Dollars, valid for 90 days for all three countries irrespective of how often a tourist crosses the borders between the participating countries]

Even more important, every citizen of our countries holding a Kipande [Kiswahili word for ID document] will be able to travel by road, rail or air using the national ID cards. This will allow more trade, more travel and greater integration between our people. It will make citizens appreciate that the EAC has become serious and relevant in so many ways and is now finally moving. Again, when others are ready, they can join this process which by then will have proven its value' said a source close to the action in Kigali, where a tripartite meeting was held until yesterday of ministers and technical personnel, to follow up on the head of state summit in July.

While tourism sources in Rwanda, who were understandably close to the event, already welcomed the move, sources in Uganda and Kenya, by end of business yesterday, still expressed to have no knowledge of the Kigali meeting and its outcome. Watch this space for breaking and regular news from a range of events impacting on tourism and travel in the entire region.

EMIRATES ANNOUNCES SECOND DAILY AMSTERDAM FLIGHT

(Posted 02nd August 2013)



Emirates has just announced that effective 04th of December they will add a second daily nonstop frequency from Dubai to Amsterdam, using a B777-200LR aircraft with 8 seats in First Class, 42 seats in Business class, 216 seats

in Economy class and 17 tons of cargo uplift capacity. This development comes only months after Amsterdam flights were introduced by Emirates, a sign of strong demand for both seats but also quality. Besides injecting another 1.750+ seats per week on the route, notably exporters of perishable goods and flowers from East Africa to Europe will be happy to learn about the second flight as it will provide much needed export cargo capacity to one of Europe's most important flower auction platforms.

In an overnight communication by Emirates' Regional Vice President for Eastern Africa, Mr. Khalid Ben Jaflah, the airline stated: ***'Our decision to add another daily service to Amsterdam is a direct result of a surge in customer demand. The enhanced capacity and schedule will offer our customers more choice when travelling between Amsterdam and Dubai and onwards to a multitude of destinations in the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Far East and Australasia. Emirates' value proposition to travellers is exceptionally appealing, with more access and connections through our perfectly located hub in Dubai, and unsurpassed standards of luxury and sophistication in air travel. Amsterdam is also a stronger for the Kenyan flowers and the additional capacity will greatly complement the freighter service Emirates already has on the route'***.

Emirates operates double daily flights from Nairobi to Dubai and flies daily from Entebbe and Dar es Salaam to Dubai. Travelers from the three East African countries can connect to 131 destinations worldwide in Dubai.

Uganda News

BRIDE AND GROOM EXHIBITION DRAWS IN HOTELS, RESORTS AND LODGES

(Posted 03rd August 2013)



Uganda's fifth Bride and Groom Expo at the Uganda Manufacturers Association showground has again drawn thousands of visitors, keen to see what the over 100 exhibitors and service providers had to showcase, to make that dream wedding become a reality.

Participation from the exhibitors came from as varied a back ground as Bridal Shop Owners, Beauty Salons, Venue Owners, Honeymoon destinations, Tours and Travel Agents, Event Managers/Wedding Planners but also, of course, Fashion Designers, Marriage Counselors, Photography Studios, Transporters, Caterers and Service Providers for Tents and other equipment and a range of additional services apparently all needed today to make a wedding day perfect in any respect – though the men doing the rain dance were positively barred from attending.

A number of Ugandan travel agencies specializing in organizing honeymoon travel were in attendance, as were key venue and honeymoon destination providers like Kampala's key hotels and several lodge and resort companies from inside Uganda and Kenya. Popular in Kampala are the Sheraton Gardens, for wedding pictures in particular, as applies to the Kampala Serena Hotel, where wedding receptions and dinners are en vogue for sure.

The sprawling grounds of the Speke and Commonwealth Resorts, commonly referred to as Munyonyo, too have seen mega weddings with between 1.000 to over 3.000 invited guests take place and all three of them regularly host the newlyweds for their wedding night before they set out on their honeymoon to the Seychelles, the beaches of Mombasa or to Zanzibar, to name but three regional destinations much in demand for starting married life. Said a travel agent, in retrospect asking for her name not to be given: ***'Honeymoon planning is a demanding business. If the budget is there, and if Branson's spacecraft were available, we could send them to space even. Some of our clients fly first class or business class to Dubai and enjoy the best hotels like Atlantis or the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi. Others follow royal footsteps and go to the Seychelles, which is very very popular in Uganda not little thanks to you always harping on about it. But Mombasa and Zanzibar are also in demand. Here in Uganda some of our safari lodges like Mwera or Paraa offer honeymooners upgrades to suites and GeoLodges have special packages for honeymoon travel. The RainForest Lodge is a good example because they have some of their cottages a bit remote and honeymooners like their privacy. It is a good way to start a marriage, to get away from the post wedding stress for a while. Many couples actually get their honeymoon package as a gift from parents or friends, suites, champagne, limos and all included. We make sure for every client that their trips are well planned and organized but for honeymooners it is extra special because they will talk about it their entire life. We cannot afford to have it messed up unless we want to be the cause for an early divorce'***.

The Bride and Groom Exhibition is one of Kampala's key social trade show events, organized by the country's leading daily newspaper the New Vision and details can be found via www.brideandgroomexpo.co.ug

SERENA'S JAPANESE WEEK A RECORD BUSTING SELL OUT

(Posted 03rd August 2013)



Few hotels in Kampala take the trouble to bring in visiting chefs, periodically the Sheraton and more often the Kampala Serena, and when they do, one can be sure of a scramble for tables to sample the dishes they create, the exotic tastes, the presentation on the plates and the fusion of both the finest organic local ingredients with the food items and spices the chefs bring along with them.

Serena's Japanese Week, celebrated in Kampala over the past 6 days, ended last night with another sellout at the hotel's Pearl of Africa Restaurant, where Chef Masanori Tomikawa received rave reviews, from diners and the Ugandan food critics alike. His 'normal' workplace is at the Hotel Okura in Amsterdam, where he celebrates the fine art of producing Japanese dishes for his Dutch and international clientele, including many Japanese visitors coming to Europe and craving for some dishes from back home.

Here in Kampala, Tomikawa San brought his signature dishes to Uganda, offering for the past 6 days a daily lunch menu of 5 dishes and a daily dinner menu of 9 dishes, which included Sakizuke, Zensai, Dobin-mushi, Tsukuri, Sugiita-yaki, Tempura, Shiizakana, Shokuji and Mizukashi.

Guests included, needless to say, Japanese resident in Kampala, who came to sample Uganda's first ever original and authentic Japanese food festival, but also the who is who of the capital's 'high' society as well as ordinary folks just wanting to get a taste of Japan and were ready to pay the 60 or so US Dollar equivalent for dinner. Lunch and dinner were sell outs, a resounding vote of success by hotel guests and patrons from Kampala and beyond, who literally queued up to be part of a celebration of high cuisine.

Comments received and seen by this correspondent from guests included: *'Compliments to the Chef ... the food was yummy all the way through the nine course meal'.*

'My Japanese girlfriend I had lunch with, rubber stamped it "INCREDIBLE"..... to all that she tasted saying 'Even in Japan I have not eaten anything better'.

'A million thanks to the Serena staff too for their usual personalized care, it complemented the ambiance at the Pearl of Africa Restaurant and was the perfect setting for introducing the best of Japan's cuisine – Chef Tomikawa produced such a variety of excellent dishes, it set my tastebuds alight'.



As always, the Kampala Serena was the place to be and the place to eat over the past week and allowed Ugandans' to sample the best tastes of Japan, learn a bit about the culture of traditional dishes made in Japan and how they are presented on the plates and perhaps stimulated the interest to visit that distant island nation for some more. Both the Kampala Serena Hotel and the Okura Amsterdam are Members of the Leading Hotels of the World.

Kenya News

KEMPINSKI VILLA ROSA IN NAIROBI ENTERS SOFT OPENING STAGE

(Posted 02nd August 2013)



The new Villa Rosa Kempinski in Nairobi has yesterday finally opened its doors to the general public, after a series of delays had pushed this date further down the line than the management had anticipated.

While the traditional 100 days soft opening stage is now underway, allowing to iron out any last minute challenges, spot operational bottle necks and allow for the staff to put into practice what they have been trained for over the past weeks and months, the official opening has been set for Friday, 01st November.

This latest addition to Nairobi's luxury hotel segment rings in a period of other international hotel chains preparing for the opening of their own hotels, or having planned new hotels go into the construction phase, as business opportunities across Kenya, from oil to construction to manufacturing to agro processing, and last but not least tourism, have re-emerged with a vengeance under the new government's plan for major infrastructure projects and double digit economic growth.

The Villa Rosa Kempinski offers 200 rooms and suites, 4 restaurants, meeting facilities as well as a Spa and operates alongside a small luxury tented camp in the Olare Orok Conservancy adjoining the main Masai Mara Game Reserve, which comprises 12 twin and double tents and a dedicated honeymoon suite. Watch this space for future updates and a report from the formal opening of the Villa Rosa Kempinski in three months time.



KENYA AIRPORT AUTHORITY ACCUSED TO PLAY ALI BABA WITH DUTY FREE SHOP

(Posted 01st August 2013)



News of a cloak and dagger raid on Jomo Kenyatta's main duty free shop in the early hours of today, starting reportedly not long after midnight, has shaken observers and a number of regular sources at Kenya's main airport, with mails, tweets and Facebook messages starting to come in thick and fast not long after the raid had started. A long running lease dispute which has played out before the country's courts for several years now, was apparently moved to the platform of hooliganised self administered justice by gangs of KAA personnel, who were clearly set to ambush the staff and management of the duty free complex, in view of hundreds of passengers who must have been

perplexed to the maximum, witnessing the scuffles and invasion of the shops which to them must have looked like an unfolding robbery.

One regular source from JKIA in fact insisted that the duty free company had a valid court order to prevent exactly that from happening but added: ***‘When has KAA respected court orders? Are they not the ones who in cohorts with others destroyed billions of shillings worth of residences, homes and property some time ago, claiming they were taking back airport land? Did they not ignore an injunction served on them to prevent that destruction? Are they not guilty of contempt of court I want to know? And as if they learned no lesson from that public relations disaster, now they do it again? I truly hope that the owners sue the daylight out of them and that the board of directors, the chairman, the CEO and those directly involved are held personally liable and lose their life savings in paying personal compensation for the role they played. If Kenya does not respect the rule of law, no matter how hard the circumstances, what is left of our republic at 50? Those visitors leaving Nairobi last night, what impression of a lawless country will they take home with them. In front of everyone, really?’***

Multiple messages to a similar effect were received and pictures are now emerging from JKIA via Twitter and other social media of duty free goods thrown out of the building, piled up, exposed to the elements of weather and a target for opportunistic thieves and looters.

Staff of the duty free shop complex were reportedly left in tears, some claiming their personal property too was mishandled and got lost, threatening to sue KAA for the losses and damages they suffered. Suggestions were made about excessive force being used, expensive goods being deliberately ‘banged around’ and by the look of it almost intentionally damaged and that restraint and managerial oversight were glaringly absent to keep the situation calm. This for sure was not KAA’s finest hour and whatever they have coming their way as a result of the action taken last night from subsequent court action and through court orders, they richly deserve.

HOTEL SUMMIT EAST AFRICA BEATS EXPECTATIONS

(Posted 01st August 2013)



The recently concluded Hotel Summit East Africa, run in conjunction with the Kenya Hospitality Trade Fair, was in its inaugural edition termed a resounding success with over 150 participants from Kenya and the region, including nearly 20 Ugandan participants led by the chairman of the Uganda Hotel Owners Association B.M. Kibirige and the chairman of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators Boniface Byamukama.

Opened by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of East African Affairs, Commerce and Tourism and the national chairman of the Kenya Chamber of Commerce and Industry the event, which was running for three consecutive days, was supported and sponsored by Kenya Airways, the Kenya Data Network, Nestle Kenya – providing all the tea and coffee delegates and trade show visitors could drink – Nomadic Tents and Smoothtel Data Solutions. Visitors to the trade fair were in excess to 3,500, many of them buyers from not just Kenya but neighbouring countries too, making the hospitality trade fair also look back at its most successful year yet. Key note speakers, among them Kenya Airways’ Director of Marketing Chris Diaz, Mary Kimonye who is the CEO of Brand Kenya, Mikul Shah who is the CEO of EatOut Kenya and Catherine Gachie, Director of Barefoot Consulting left a mark on the proceedings which spilled over into the coffee breaks and lunch session, as well as to the evening cocktails for follow up and networking among delegates and speakers / moderators.

Attendees came not just from hotels, lodges and coast based resorts, but notably also from a number of hospitality training institutions, hospitals, institutions of higher learning and schools, as well as a large contingent from the local and regional print and electronic media covering the event.

Next on the calendar will be the second edition of the Africa Hotel Investment Forum, due to take place in September at the InterContinental Hotel, to which the organizers decided to return since the inaugural edition last year was such an overwhelming success. Clearly, Kenya as the regional market leader is not only in demand but seen as a key hospitality investment destination now with all the big international chains which are not yet represented with a property in Nairobi, are pushing into the market. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from Eastern Africa’s vibrant hospitality market.

KENYA AIRWAYS ANNOUNCES HUGELY IMPROVED Q1 PERFORMANCE DATA

(Posted 01st August 2013)



Kenya Airways' performance in Q1, covering April to June 2013, has in comparison with 2012 dramatically improved, telling the story of Kenya putting the pre-election jitters firmly behind them and consequently ringing in a period of economic recovery and expansion.

KQ put offered a total capacity of 3,464m seat kilometres which gives a year on year growth of 3 percent. During the quarter under review the airline also launched three weekly flights into Livingstone, the third destination in Zambia after Lusaka and Ndola.

The capacity into Middle and Far East regions grew by 12.8 percent, largely driven by the introduction of daily flights to Guangzhou via Bangkok combining with the increased deployment of larger B777 equipment to Bombay. Capacity put into Europe was at par with same quarter of prior year despite the withdrawal from Rome, mainly because of two additional weekly frequencies to Paris.

The total capacity offered into the Northern African region remained flat compared to prior year despite the introduction of a third daily frequency to Juba because of the inevitable cutbacks made to Cairo following the volatile political situation in Egypt. The capacity offered in East Africa region grew by 12.9 percent occasioned by increased early morning departures to Entebbe, which is now served 5 times a day and additional Dar-es-Salaam frequencies and daily night stops.

Capacity in Southern Africa region grew by 10.4 percent largely because of the increased night time operations into Lusaka and Lilongwe as well as the introduction of Livingstone. The 10.9 percent decline in capacity seen in the West and Central African regions was driven mainly by the suspension of Bangui, Ouagadougou, N'Djamena and Libreville destinations due to reduced demand.

On the domestic front, capacity grew by 11.6 percent compared to same quarter last year due to the re-launch of Eldoret in October 2012 and the additional two daily flights into Kisumu including a night stop.

Passenger traffic measured in revenue passenger kilometres at 2,330m grew by 5.8 percent ahead of the same quarter last year. The total passenger carrying at 932,912 was 10.9 percent more compared to similar period last year achieving a cabin factor of 67.3 percent against prior year's level of 65.5 percent.

The passenger uplift to Europe at 90,517 shows some recovery compared to last year's level with an achieved cabin factor of 68.5 percent being better than prior year's 66.8 percent.

In the Middle and Far East regions, uplifted passenger traffic at 139,275 showed a 12.3 percent improvement over the year 2012. The cabin load factor of 70.2 percent for flights to and from this region was 2.1 percentage points better than last year.

Within Africa but excluding Kenya, passengers uplifted totalled 480,604 indicating a growth of 9.4 percent because of the reasons already mentioned earlier. The resultant passenger cabin factor of 63.7 percent was however unchanged from a year ago.

Notably did the passengers uplifted within Kenya at 222,516 grow by 22.1 percent with an improved cabin load factor of 76.8 percent, an increase of 3.6 percentage points due to the resurgence of business traffic in the country. Early indications for July, the first month of Q2, suggest a continued trend as seen emerge from Q1 of the airline's financial year, giving hope for significant financial improvements on the bottom line too. Watch this space for emerging news from East Africa's aviation industry.

HEMINGWAYS KAREN – SMALL BUT OH LA LA

(Posted 31st July 2013)



(A partial view of Hemingways' main building, Spa and Gym from the garden / pool side)

A recent conference attendance in Nairobi drove the message home sharpish, that when the meeting season is underway in Kenya's capital, room confirmations can no longer be taken for granted and when combined with the tourist high season, during which in fact thousands of extra travelers come to Kenya to see how the Great Migration pours from the Serengeti into the Masai Mara and the adjoining conservancies, it becomes clear that beds will go for a premium and then some.

The conference, in fact focusing on the hotel industry and the opportunities the economic recovery of Kenya will bring with it for the hospitality sector, outlined a number of international hotels to either open soon, like the Kempinski, or which have announced their intent to either find a hotel for management or else build one, like Dusit Hotels are doing.

But as the race for quality beds in and around the immediate CBD of Nairobi now reaches melting point, almost unnoticed by many has a new boutique hotel opened its doors two months ago, away from the ever congested city centre in the wooded suburb of Karen. Hemingways Nairobi is now open for business, still in the soft opening phase of course to complete pending jobs, some landscaping around a new pond and to allow the staff to progressively get used to having a full contingent of paying clients in house, of the sort who are both extremely discerning as well as extremely demanding.

Hemingways' both sister properties in Watamu and on the Naboisho Conservancy / Masai Mara have been rated 5 star and the latest addition to the portfolio equally aspires, according to General Manager Simon Hodson, to attain the coveted 5 stars, when the new hotel will be inspected and rated in due course.

You might think that all newly opened hotels will struggle to achieve the right mixture and blend between service and facilities, but at Hemingways, where I spent the last few days, it almost seems to come without visible effort. 43 suites, I should probably call them large studio rooms and two Presidential Suites make it 45 keys. That is small enough to apportion close up and personal hospitality and extend more than usual courtesies to the guests and large enough for groups of tourists, or those much sought after corporate retreats, which seek that unique balance between top quality, Germanesque efficiency, Swiss precision, state of the art facilities, located in a great neighbourhood and offering the arguably best food money can buy in Nairobi. Add to that a great view – the Ngong Hills rise large in the distance over the treetops, the hotel is surrounded by mature trees and patches of forest, it is, or should be, a winning combination.

Of course there are enough examples of new hotels messing up on opening, some about which I have written and some of which I have just stoically endured, but thankfully the Hemingways, and I watched with Argus eyes and snooped around and about in order to find some glaring lapses, is not one of them. Even the fire place in the centre of the lounge, a welcome spot to soak in some heat during the 'winter' in Nairobi, has moved with the times and substituted gas for the conventional firewood, providing the expected ambience but in an eco friendlier fashion.



Check in consists of an efficient swift confirmation of the guest's name on the flat screen and the handing over of a key to a personal butler who then whisks his charges off by electric cart. Miraculously was my baggage already at the room on arrival and while a bit of legally required formality is then inevitable, a form has to be filled and signed, the butler prepares to put the bags into the walk in wardrobe, unpacks even if that is what a guest wishes, eyes shirts, trousers and jackets for those travelling creases when they emerge from the case and – again, should the guest so wish – takes them for a swift but thorough ironing job before returning the clothes as crisp as one can wish for.

An introduction of the suite's technology follows, light switches, 'submergible' flat screen TV, mini bar location – the fridge has a glass door and is lit when opened – and then ... silence ... unless the grass is cut on the sponge like lawn, there is only birdsong, or the distant chatter of the gardeners, which penetrates the silence of the location, and, oh yes, the regular sound of light aircraft returning to Wilson Airport, which is just a few kilometres down the road.



(Four poster bed with netting, a sofa set and pictures on the wall matching the name of the suite, in my case of Stanley's journeys and his meeting with the elusive Dr. Livingstone)

The wardrobe drawers glide out and back in as on a cushion of air, there are enough hangers and then some more to cater for a large wardrobe – I do habitually not pack small – and should any of the essentials have 'escaped' into thin air while travelling from place to place, like the toothbrush, a shaving kit or any other, ANY other item needed in the bathroom, the butler is a call away and will provide the missing bits within minutes.



The free standing work desk, generously large, can also serve as a dining table, enough to sit four and in such a case will the butler again provide the extra two chairs and lay the table, uncork the selected wine and serve a meal, but more about meals later. Enough sockets are near the desk to charge all the gadgets we travel with these days, and if required will the butler bring an extension cord which can take a further four battery chargers.

A small business centre on the first floor of the main building, close to the main bar, is ready to dispatch one of the trolleys with a staff member to for instance pick up a memory stick and, once shown, print documents, bind them even and return it all, job well done, on the fast track. Service generally seems to be geared to fast track, efficient, swift and not just courteous but done with joy. It tells the story of selecting the right staff, with the right mindset and attitude to be of service, smiles galore included. They understood, that they are not there for a mere job and earn a salary at the end of the month but are there for their passion to make a career in the hospitality industry and be of service, superior service, to their guests.

Two sun beds on the balcony offer the option, during the warmer time of the year at least, to lounge about in fresh air, while inside the three seater sofa, besides the arm chairs, invites to feel at home, with not a thing missing. Fresh milk at half past three in the morning to make a decent cup of tea? Cheeky me tried it and the butler was happy to provide that in a jug, and in my case it took all but 4 ½ minutes from putting the phone down to hearing a discreet knock on the door. And in the morning are the newspapers of the day hand delivered, again with a soft knock on the door, unless the DND sign signals exactly that, Do Not Disturb, something they know how to respect at the Hemingways.

All suites are named, after the explorers of old, after writers, famous Kenyans, Hollywood personalities who starred in films about Africa and more, giving that feel of 'belonging' to guests, even though the rooms are of course also numbered.



Spa and Gym are, as one would expect in a place of this quality, of 5 star standard too and ready to offer treatments of many foreign names, something this author knows to evade and instead head for the restaurant and rather check out menus and test the food.

And here comes the biggest surprise the newest Hemingways' baby has in store for visitors and guests, a Michelin rated chef, who's erstwhile restaurant in the UK gained that recognition and who came to Kenya to work with Hemingways and produce the finest meals with, in his words, the finest ingredients.

From corn-fed beef, cut inhouse to meet his exacting standards, sea and lake fish selected daily fresh after it is flown in from the coast or Lake Victoria to organic vegetables, herbs and fruits, Barry Tonks leaves nothing to chance.

The bread, baked at the hotel of course, could have come straight from a quality German bakery, the croissants could have come from Paris, as would the baguettes, and the pastries probably from Vienna, so authentic do his creations look, and taste. The pastry and bread production was in Barry's words a challenge, to get the flour mixtures right, but it is clear from the results, tasted and judged severally, that it is a challenge no more.

I am a soup person and have been spoiled in many places with excellent creations, but what Barry conjured up in his kitchen, one which cannot be more state of the art than it is, exceeded my wildest expectations. The Broccoli soup and my palate made friends at first taste. I refrained asking for it at breakfast, which would probably have perplexed the staff as it did elsewhere when I asked for a chocolate mousse in the morning, but opted to substitute my order with a selection of Egg Benedict, Florentine AND Arlington, do I need to say more? Culinary delights, irresistible culinary delights!



I ate my way through the menu, or what I could actually eat without bursting my trousers, and copy cats beware, the small portions are already large and the regular portions will definitely be a challenge, especially when turning the dinner into a four course affair. Barry, who hails from the North of England, said that big portions of food are a hallmark of the area where he comes from, and, I agree with him, why change a good thing. Excellent food, coming in large portions, what more can an aficionado of fine cuisine wish for.

In fact the food at the Hemingways will make it all worthwhile, even when staying in the city, to drive out to Karen for a spot of lunch or a dinner, but bookings are already now essential to be sure to get a table. I guess while in house guests will have absolute priority for tables, diners from outside will sooner or later be faced with a waiting list, the tell tale sign that a place has 'arrived' and that demand by far outstrips the supply of covers.

Food of such superior quality is still not too common in Nairobi, although Kenya's capital has plenty of excellent restaurants vying for clientele but the arrival of the Hemingways is set to correct that. Other leading hotels will undoubtedly have their own gourmet spies go and find out, if I told tales or told – for them at least, the frightening truth of culinary standards now available in his suburb of the Kenyan capital, which will no doubt spur a fresh race to answer the question: *'Mirror Mirror on the wall who cooks the best food of them all'*. For sure, during the days I stayed at Hemingways, the dining room was regularly full and notably patronized by the locals, who must have heard the rave reviews from friends, just how exceptional the dining experience there is and wanted to sample it themselves.

The new Hemingways, already at this early stage, presents itself as a hotel where the right ingredients of facilities, layout and location are matched with the service provided by a well trained and dedicated staff, and a restaurant which greatly enhances the package.

Rarely did I have such a good feeling about a new place as I do about the Hemingways, that it will not just make an impact on the hospitality scene of Nairobi but soon claim its place in the top level of the rankings and ratings. If there was one item I had to single out, which did not fit into the overall picture, it was the door locks. One could call them 'classic' of course, and going with the overall theme of the hotel to blend the appearance of an English country mansion with that touch of Hollywood deco and flair in recognition of what the greats of the silver screen have done

over the decades to showcase first the hunts and adventures and then the holidays to Kenya. However, the use of the latest key technology would have been the smarter thing to do, sentiments and memories of the old days apart. General Manager Simon Hodson, in the hotel from dawn to late at night, knows that he still has way to go to get to where he wants the hotel to be, but when he reads this review he also knows that he is well on track to achieve that. With the Nairobi National Park close by, as are the Karen Blixen Museum, the Giraffe Manor and Daphne Sheldrick's Elephant Trust and the Karen Golf Club only a short drive away, guests seeking out activities will not be disappointed. Besides, the full range of other options Kenya and her capital city have to offer, are at guests disposal and the butlers will be happy to make the arrangements through the front office of Hemingways. After all, Nairobi's safari airport Wilson, where Safarilink's main operational base is located, is within easy reach, making an overnight trip to sister property Ol Seki in the Mara the proverbial walk in the park.

Visit www.hemingways-collection.com for more information about Nairobi's latest kid on the block of luxury hotels, for details on tariffs and reservations and how to get to hotel which is located along Mbagathi Ridge in Karen.

THE GREAT ESCAPE TO THE GREATEST MIGRATION

(Posted 31st July 2013)



(One of the many river crossings the herds have to get across in their search of pasture)

Included in the natural 8 wonders of the world, the great migration between the Serengeti and the Masai Mara truly is a sight to behold. Tourists flock to the game reserve, which is an integral part of the transboundary ecosystem, in their thousands every year to see this natural spectacle. Long lines of minibuses queue at the main gates to get into the Masai Mara and flights from Wilson Airport come in thick and fast, buzzing the dozen or so airstrips across the Masai Mara and dotted all over the conservancies before landing and discharging their passenger load into custom built 4x4 vehicles. My Safarilink Cessna 208B Grand Caravan landed with a full passenger load at the Naboisho airstrip, which was added at the end of last year, to make access by air to this particular conservancy easier. Fellow travellers on board came from China, the UK and the US while yours truly from Uganda added some local colours to the passenger manifest.



(My Safarilink Cessna 208B, a Grand Caravan)

The 8 minutes drive from the airstrip to the Hemingways Ol Seki Camp extended to nearly half an hour, as our guide took time to explain the nature of the shrub called Ol Seki, after which the camp was called. Frequent stops to

get some early pictures of '*How are Gnu*', Topi, Hartebeest, Tommy and Grant gazelles and impala, a lonely jackal and a band of mongoose turned the transfer already into a game drive of sorts. Cleverly integrated into the terrain contours, the Hemingways Ol Seki Camp is almost invisible until we actually drove into the car park area and the top of the tents popped into view. Scented iced towels were handed out by the staff that suddenly appeared out of nowhere too, a cool mango juice drink offered and following some brief explanation about the upcoming lunch all guests were whisked to their tents. Melinda, the camp manageress, did me the honour herself and in no time we were engrossed in an animated talk about the camp, the game found, the birds and a dozen other issues before she literally had to pry herself loose from me to make sure the preparation for lunch were on course.



(The interior of what can only be described as a suite under canvas at *Ol Seki Hemingways*, Naboisho / Mara)

It takes a while to take in the sheer size of the '*residences under canvas*' and the smart interior design keeps the bathroom and dressing area separated from the bed / sitting area by a canvas '*wall*'. After exploring the inside of the tent I turned my attention to the outside timber terrace deck, which offers sweeping views across the valley below and up the next range of hills. A pack of baboons chased each other back and forth, hyrax peeped out of their hiding places before cautiously emerging and then, for no apparent reason, racing back into their holes, and birds of prey circled overhead, effortlessly riding the thermal upwinds.

Lunch allowed for all guests to meet, first in the Library to enjoy an aperitif, on the house by the way as wines and spirits are included in the accommodation and meal package, and then around the communal table. The first course served, a salad of beetroot, butternut squash, rocket leaves, lettuce and herbs was the opening salvo by the chef, colourful, tasty and gone in a flash, making way for a well presented main course which included couscous and al dente veggies, besides some very tender meat. Homemade ice cream concluded the meal, made the traditional way I remember my maternal grandmother making it all those decades ago, and I knew I had come home, of sorts.

Tea and coffee, soft drinks and freshly made juices, as are a range of alcoholic drinks like wine, beers and spirits, are always available in the Library, a lounge where guests gather to chat, read or use an internet hotspot and of course to conclude the lunch table conversation before everyone returned to the shade of the very airy tents for an afternoon rest, or else in my case, what else, to start working on the story I came to write.

The silence of the mid afternoon only got disrupted by the sudden bursts of bird song and the rustling leaves of the trees in the strengthening breeze before assembling again for the afternoon game drive. Later on probably the same troop of baboons seen earlier made a racket chasing each other around and just as fast as they came they were gone again, silence restored.



Purpose built 4x4 vehicles take guests out in the bush, to explore, see and experience and the guides, in my case David, silver rated by Kenya's professional safari guide association, took pride to explain their heart out, from how ants turn ordinary little thorn trees into the whistling thorn trees, pointing out the pinkish legs of the male ostriches as a sign of the mating season, expertly explaining the unique composition of the zebras' stripes like a human fingerprint and answering the dozens of questions about flora and fauna in general. He in fact found a pair of leopards, a huge male and a female, together only, as he explained, since the mating season was underway, and as the sun progressively came down towards the horizon we were able to watch the mating rituals unfold for over an hour, while enjoying our favourite drinks from the cool box, and in my case from the thermos flask, being African tea and camp made cookies. Only the conservancies can provide that level of intimacy with nature, alone, or at best with one or two more 4x4's around, unlike in the main reserve where prides of lions are often surrounded by dozens of minibuses, struggling for a good vantage point to take pictures.



(Sunset over the Masai Mara)

In fact, for most of the year visiting the conservancies will be the smart choice, making it smarter yet by staying on them for game viewing, and only during the annual migration time are visits into the Masai Mara Game Reserve an absolute must. It is only here that visitors can take escorted walks across the wilderness or do night game drives, during which the rare nocturnal animals can be found.

But at this time of the year, when the great migration sweeps across the Masai Mara like a giant lawn mowing machine, a trip into the main reserve is mandatory as the migration of zebras and wildebeest rarely reaches the conservancies. Ol Seki prepares packed lunches, very lavish packed lunches one should add, and the cool boxes are loaded with ice and drinks to last the entire day, from as early as 6 in the morning till the very late afternoon.

Many ask when is the best time to visit the Masai Mara for the migration and my tip always has been to be there when the great herds reach the Mara River, and assemble in their tens of thousands before the push from the back by yet more arrivals, combined with the instinct and need to reach the pastures across the river, propels the herds into the river, running the gauntlet of the huge crocodiles which lay in wait, expecting their lunch to literally swim into their gaping mouths.

One can use a thousand words to describe the experience of a river crossing by thousands of wildebeest and zebras at a go, the relief when mothers are reunited with their calves after successfully making it across, the animal grief of young ones seeking a mother lost to the crocs or a mother looking and calling desperately for her calf swept away by the often raging currents of the river. But no words, no story ever written down can substitute the personal and close up experience of sitting in the car or on the roof and seeing one of nature's greatest spectacles unfold in front of one's eyes, with all the splendid and all the gory details of life and death, as only Mother Nature can produce.

This is nature's Hollywood and Bollywood combined, directed by forces which were long in place before mankind discovered the destination and a reminder that this needs protecting for future generations to preserve the gift we found. I have seen the migration often, having been resident in East Africa for over 38 years now, and yet, every time I see it I feel the privilege, the blessings of coming eye to eye with the greatest wildlife show on earth.

This time, as before, the animal kingdom was full of twists and turns, of triumph and of tragedy all blended together, leaving the predators with full stomachs and the big herds, for our eyes at least, still looking the same size after the river crossing as they looked before.

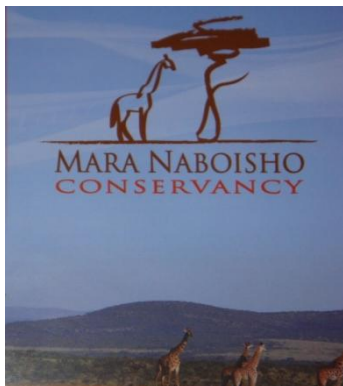
Estimates are that up to 1.5 million animals, mainly wildebeest, aka Gnu and zebras migrate through the Serengeti every year, following age old patterns imprinted in their genes and in spite of twists and turns of the way eventually finding the pastures they need to sustain themselves. From the low grass plains between Serengeti and Ngorongoro

Crater, where between January and February the females give birth by the thousands at a go, the herds make their way back North, when the young ones are strong enough to start that long trek for the first time, one the survivors repeat throughout their life. It is truly a sight to behold, and a dozen 'awesome' will not nearly match reality as it unfolds in front of the eyes of tourists, when the herds, after resting and grazing, suddenly get nervous and then in long lines almost instantly stampede off, galloping and trotting along those routes their kindred has done for thousands and thousands of years. I have seen this miracle of nature many times since I first arrived in Kenya decades ago, and the sight of the Masai Mara's undulating plains, first appearing quite empty and then, when coming across another height and expecting yet more empty vales, the big herds suddenly occupy an entire valley, and the valley beyond, and the one beyond, one teeming mass of hoofs and horns, the bellowing sounds of the males and the answers of the females and the shrieks of the young ones seeking their mothers often reaching a crescendo not even distantly thought possible. When the herds move, at speed, the thunder of their hoofs form a sound which lacks any comparison in nature in today's world as the sheer number of wildebeest use the earth as their drum, beating it with their hoofs to announce their coming for miles ahead.



(Elephant and hippo can be seen, together with big cats and much other game and many bird species, on every game drive across the conservancy)

A visit to Kenya, a visit in fact to East Africa, should go on everyone's bucket list and be ticked off before it is too late. Getting some of the world's finest examples of hospitality combined with those awesome sights of the great herds sweeping across the Masai Mara, cannot be bettered and it was therefore no surprise that fellow guests spent as many as five nights, others four and others three, at the Ol Seki Camp to get their fill of nature's drama not just once but twice or thrice. It is truly the great getaway to the greatest migration on earth, and while thousands of wagenis fly into Kenya from the other side of the world, those of us living in the region have it much easier to get to see the migration. Kenya Airways connects Eastern Africa with Nairobi, and a quick cab ride to Wilson Airport, some 15 kilometres distant from JKIA, will then offer multiple daily departures to the Masai Mara and the conservancies, flights lasting between 45 minutes to an hour.



(The Mara Naboisho Conservancy, one of 8 along the main boundaries of the Masai Mara Game Reserve)

Conservancies have become trendy in more recent years, after pioneers like Lewa Down's Craig family converted from a cattle ranch with wildlife to a pure wildlife area, as did others who followed in the second wave, spearheaded by such foresighted individuals like Jake Grieves Cook, whose successes then opened the way for many others to do their 'deals' with the Masai group ranch owners.

Conservancies have improved the 'health' of the environment, in areas prone to often long droughts, where cattle and goat herds at best find borderline pastures but at the expense of accelerating soil erosion due to overgrazing and regular trekking to the sparse water sources.

The author arrived on the Naboisho conservancy via Safarilink, Kenya's premier safari airline, which connects the country's parks through their hub at Wilson Airport in Nairobi, but also through direct flights between for instance the Masai Mara and the greater Samburu / Lewa Downs / Laikipia / Loisaba conservation area. Naboisho is one of now 8 conservancies lining the boundaries of the Masai Mara Game Reserve like a string of pearls with only two 'blank spots' left on the map before a continuous protective belt of land dedicated to conservation and wildlife will provide a much needed and in fact hugely important added buffer to the Mara's original expanse.

Hemingways' Ol Seki Camp provided the base for this flying visit and being set on the edge of a steep drop into one of the many valleys offers a spectacular vista for guests. The supersized 6 standard tents – frankly there was nothing standard about them in terms of size and furniture – and even the two larger megasized tented suites, are an example what Kenya's hospitality industry now offers, innovative approaches with relatively small properties serving the upper market segment with passengers flying in and out of their chosen locations to spend maximum time on site, in the places they came to see. Ol Seki convinces through both simplicity as well as luxury, the luxury of solitude, the luxury of camp manager Melinda Rees' and her staff's undivided attention, the luxury of sharing meals on a communal table where tales are told and where Melinda, like a matron, holds fort and shares with her guests the stories of events and sightings they may not have experienced.



(Star gazers will at night find '*rich pickings in the skies*' and the main star formations, already looming large overhead are brought closer even when using one of several telescopes available at the camp)

There is no pool at Ol Seki, unless the daring wish to take a dip in the waterhole below the main deck, and as I have often said before, having one or not does not define or redefine one's own perception of what 'luxury' should entail. I much prefer the homely comfort of the Library over a conventional bar where I need to perch myself on a bar stool as opposed to lounging in the sofa sets or arm chairs. In case of the Ol Seki 'Library' a range of reference books is available, as are binoculars, and guests do come in to put the feet up after a morning walk, guided by silver and bronze starred guides who know the area like the back of their hand. Luxury in the bush, and yes, that is a very personal perception and experience, does not need fancy gadgets and in-tent connectivity, aircondition and an infinity pool, but only takes a great location, a designer who dares to turn his or her dreams into reality on the ground and a team of experienced and dedicated staff to give tourists and local visitors alike that very best '**Hospitality made in Kenya**' can provide.

Ol Seki
HEMINGWAYS
MARA



Since Hemingways took over the camp and started putting their own stamp of hospitality on Ol Seki, the camp has gained Silver Rating by EcoTourism Kenya and will in early 2014 start their attempt to have this raised to the rare Gold Rating by implementing further sustainability measures over and above the already stringent requirements for the Silver Rating. Melinda, in several conversations during the two day stay, in fact had answers to all my pertinent questions and said when asked what makes Ol Seki special: *'What makes Ol Seki special? To use a trite phrase, 'let me count the ways'! The height. We are incredibly lucky to be placed up on a high rocky escarpment. Every tent and deck has the ground fall away in front, leaving spectacular views of the open savannah plains below. If you stand on your deck, you can truly see for miles of wilderness; the only movement being the slow motion of a wandering elephant or sudden sideways jump of wary antelope. Every now and then the view gets exciting; we've had both lion and cheetah make kills just below the escarpment and have been lucky enough to watch the chase. There are not many places where you can enjoy your icy cold gin and tonic on a comfortable deck chair while watching a pride of lions have their dinner!*

The personal touch. With only 10 tents; every guest is a friend within hours of arrival. Whether you wish to enjoy privacy, eating in your own private quarters; or join other guests for meals in the mess area, we do our best to ensure that your holiday is exactly as you would like. Fancy lunch at 4pm? Not a problem if that is what suits you! James, Jeff and myself are always here and we actively enjoy spending time with people which makes hosting a pleasure rather than just a job. I believe that this shows and that our guests leave truly knowing that we enjoyed having them with us.

Being a part of the Naboisho conservancy. The 50,000 acres of the conservancy is owned by 597 individual Masai families who have come together to create a safe haven for wildlife that also benefits themselves. Monies paid for land rent, for bed night fees and accommodation go to help develop schools, medical clinics and the Koiyaki guide school which all helps to create a better quality of life for the local people in the area. Our land owners come to see us on a regular basis, they often drop in, just to say hello. We employ sons and daughters from these landowners and everywhere you go in the area, really does feel like a big extended family and everyone is welcomed.

For me personally? The staff. I could not ask for a more willing, friendly, hospitable group of people. They have made me extremely welcome in their part of the world and are always willing to try new systems and to work to ensure that our guests are as spoiled as possible. Of our 27 staff members, 21 come from within 10km of the camp and it shows. They know the area, the people, the animals, the good and the bad. This makes organisation and activities a great deal easier to arrange.

Lastly, I very much like the tent design. Having a circular room gives a wonderful view spanning almost 270degrees. This gives a lovely sense of airy space and the pale colour of the canvas simply increases this. The tents are large, a family of 4 would not feel cramped and when living out of a suitcase and in hotel rooms for a few weeks on holiday a sense of space for a few days is a luxury to savour'.

Any more questions? Well Melinda will be happy to answer them during a stay at Ol Seki where classic hospitality blends perfectly with the surrounding nature to create that dream spot for a safari holiday.

Visit www.flysafarilink.com and www.hemingways-collection.com for information of how to get connected out of Nairobi to Kenya's great wildlife parks and where else Hemingways has more such gems. A little hint in closing, one is found on the highly acclaimed beaches of Watamu, where the real Ernest Hemingway made regular appearances in the old days to measure himself against the big game fish of the Indian Ocean, and the latest addition, Hemingways Nairobi in the wooded suburb of Karen, at the foot of the Ngong Hills, about which more will be said elsewhere.

SAFARILINK MOVING TO NEW PREMISES AT WILSON AIRPORT

(Posted 30th July 2013)



Safarilink, Kenya's premier safari airline operating out of Wilson Airport, will next week commence their move from their present offices at the ALS building to a location nearer the main gate, where they will progressively, throughout the month of August, consolidate their main offices, check in and passenger boarding and de-boarding in one single location.

Regular travellers know that most airlines operating from Wilson check in their passengers at their own office location, but then need to use the official government operated security check point and single gate, where during the peak times of the day there is often no space for sitting down, perhaps not even for falling down, so tightly are passengers standing while they wait for their flight to be boarded. This involves extra taxiing for aircraft, the driving around for both departing and connecting passengers from the check in to the security gate, which is inconvenient for travellers and the airline personnel alike and costs extra money, something in today's aviation environment a commodity of limited supply.

Safarilink therefore decided to invest in expanding and consolidating their facilities, which will bring all aspects of their operation under one single roof over the next few weeks, starting around the 12th of August. When the approved baggage and personnel scanning machines will have been delivered by the manufacturers and installed, those will then be operated by a joint team of government airport security and Safarilink security, allowing for the check in and boarding of passengers from one location, no further drives required but a short walk out on the apron and to the waiting aircraft, or in case of arriving and transit passengers an equally short walk into the lounge. The new facilities will offer passengers a cafeteria, clean changing and rest rooms and sufficient space to sit down. This will give Safarilink a competitive advantage over those other airlines at Wilson whose passengers continue to be processed through the common security and departure gate and subjected to the crowded surrounds before finally being able to board and fly away. Visit www.flysafarilink.com for more details on the scheduled destinations across Kenya and Tanzania, from the coast to the parks and, by charter at least, into the entire region.

EXPLORING EAST AND SOUTH AFRICA BY AIR IS THE LATEST WAY TO TRAVEL POSH

(Posted 30th July 2013)



Port side out and starboard home was the rule in the olden days, when travel across the world had to be by ship, and the phrase was coined by those who were smart enough enroute to Suez and the East to observe this elementary rule, which was to stay away from the side of the ship the sun would be shining on most of the day, turning the cabins into saunas.

The phrase stuck, travelling *posh* still indicating how to find luxury and comfort, and the launch some time ago of Scenic Air Safaris signaled the arrival of just that way how best to explore Africa, East and South.

Using a Cessna 208B Grand Caravan and a Cessna 206 in VIP configuration, Scenic is able to accommodate single travellers, couples, families and small groups, whose concept of exploring Africa is one of travelling the distances by air and only using vehicles on the ground when in the parks and game reserves.

The company offers itineraries covering Kenya by using small upmarket safari camps like Satao in Tsavo East and Amboseli, Loisaba in the North or the Karen Blixen camp in the Mara but will tailor trips using any other posh and top of the range camp the clients prefer.

Kenya has in recent years seen a marked departure from building larger sized safari lodges towards creating small, intimate and often very luxurious camps, at times with only a handful of tents in locations, which easily take one's breath away when standing on a deck and watching the sunsets. Often such locations are inside private conservancies, or in parks and reserves less visited by fleets of minibuses, with custom built 4x4's the choice vehicle. The imminent launch of Sir Richard Branson's safari camp in the Mara is just the latest in a string of such additions, built with sustainability and eco friendliness in mind and employing the latest green techniques in their day to day operations.

But Scenic has expanded their reach well beyond just Kenya, which is their home base of course, and East Africa at large and now offer trips spanning from two weeks to 24 days, exploring the best of the best in Botswana's Okavango Delta, in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania for those discerning and intrepid travellers intent to see Africa's top ten parks, beaches and attractions like Victoria Falls.

The new trends, luxury travel to and across Africa, using eco-friendly yet top of the range camps, which provide all a traveller comes to expect, location, classic hospitality, gourmet food and upon departure the feeling, if not knowledge, that those who stayed have joined the ranks of other rich, powerful and famous. Travelling in style, cost not being of significant concern, here is a premier way to get that tailor made safari memories of which will last a life time. Visit www.scenicairsafari.com and their partner website www.connoisseursafaris.com

MOMBASA AND COAST TOURIST ASSOCIATION SET FOR MAJOR REBRANDING

(Posted 29th July 2013)



Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association

THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY FOR KENYA COAST TOURISM

The Kenya coast's premier tourism stakeholder body, the Mombasa and Coast Tourism Association, will shortly begin a major rebranding exercise, which will include changed appearance on their website as well as launching a new name.

Kenya Coast Tourism Association will be the revamped organization's name, in short KCTA, showing that their brief, albeit mentioned in the current name with the addition of coast, now goes way beyond just Mombasa but in fact reaches from Lamu to Lunga Lunga. Also changing is the organization's web page presentation, giving a fresher look and more varied content, making it a more relevant tool for their membership at large and also a source of information for intending visitors to the coast.

Information released today in fact shows the how and where to of the new website as MCTA states: ‘

MCTA's Swahili Coast Web Portal development commenced earlier this month. The portal is being built by a team of local youthful consultants who are well versed in development of Portals. The Swahili Coast Portal seeks to market the Kenyan Coast as the ideal tourist destination in Africa but the world at large. The project has the blessing of the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), the body charged with marketing Kenya as an ideal tourist destination in the world.

The Swahili Coast Web portal seeks to add the impetus already created by KTB in marketing Kenya as an ideal tourist destination, but will focus primarily on the Kenyan Coast. This is based on figures which indicate that approximately 70% of all tourists coming to Kenya visit the Kenyan Coast. The Swahili Coast web Portal is being built along the lines of incredibleindia.org, visitbritain.org and visitsweden.com. These are some of the best tourism sites in the world in terms of design content and resourcefulness and the Swahili Coast Portal seeks to replicate elements from the three making it even better than them. Members of MCTA will be afforded special discounts to advertise on the portal. We have no doubt that the portal will indeed put the Kenyan Coast on the global tourism marketplace.

Visit www.kenyacoast.net for more information on MCTA, soon to become KCTA or go directly to the new **Swahili Coast** web portal via www.mcta321.blogspot.com

CHELI & PEACOCK GET DOUBLE GOLD FROM ECOTOURISM KENYA

(Posted 29th July 2013)



One of Kenya's foremost safari and camp operations, Cheli & Peacock, have just received a second Gold Rating Award from EcoTourism Kenya, when their Elephant Pepper Camp in the Masai Mara retained this highest possible rating and their Joy's Camp too rose from Silver to Gold Rating in the latest edition of EcoTourism's annual rankings. Joy's Camp in fact also received the 'Best Sustainable Hotel in Africa' trophy from International Hotel Awards. The renewed recognition for Elephant Pepper Camp comes as C&P celebrates their 28 years of camp operations in the Masai Mara. Back then, C&P joined hands with other likeminded individuals to create the Campfire Conservation initiative, under which Masai landowners were encouraged to dedicate their ranching land towards tourism and conservation, earning royalties, land rent and create employment opportunities, but it took until more recent times to see a string of conservancies now line the Masai Mara boundaries. C&P in fact were founder members of the Mara North Conservancy, one of the oldest such projects and today thriving and providing the Masai families of landowners with regular sustainable income. Congratulations to the C&P family for another 'golden achievement'

IN MEMORIAM HARRO TREMPENAU

(Posted 29th July 2013)



While in Kenya, and while in fact flying in and out of Wilson Airport, for long Harro's stomping ground when he served as Chairman of the Aero Club of East Africa, sad news broke, first that my friend's plane had gone missing and contact was lost, then that a wreckage had been spotted in the Aberdare Mountains and finally the confirmation that Harro, and two passengers with him in his light aircraft, had died in the crash.

I had known Harro for ages, as did everyone who knew anything about the general aviation sector in Kenya and across Eastern Africa, where Harro left a big mark.

As Chairman of the Aero Club with his passion for flying, his passion to serve the industry showed when he ably represented general aviation on official platforms as defender of the '*free skies*' and of course his combative newsletters – much missed in fact since he retired a few years ago – left no doubt at all what he thought of regulators gone bonkers, prohibiting aviation instead of promoting it. After his retirement as Chair of the Aero Club he spent more time at the Orly airfield on the Kitengela plains, a general aviation facility and airfield he helped to set up, where he and his partners tried to make aviation user friendlier again as rules and regulations kept taking the fun out of flying from Wilson airport.

Harro had a big heart, was ever ready to step up for charitable organizations, to help, to assist and where needed to fly for a good cause: people, material, donations.

Much will be said about Harro elsewhere and I am not joining the band of speculators who are now busy figuring out the how and why of the crash.

I simply mourn the passing, the very untimely passing of a great friend who is now soaring in a different dimension, free of the regulatory constraints he fought for so long, when rightly he said that flying a Cessna on visual flight rules must never be treated by the regulators with the same templates like flying a commercial passenger jet.

I pay my respect to a fellow aviator who knew like few others how to capture the attention of those around him with his stories and one could never be quite sure, if those were flyboy yarn he used to pull the wool over our eyes or real events. The twinkle in his eyes for sure did not give away, what was real and what was made up, but no one did cary about that question. One night long ago in Arusha, where we led our respective private sector delegations, he from Kenya and I representing UAAO from Uganda, he thrilled us with some of his exploits and not one eye stayed dry, so much did we laugh, at a time when ROFLing had not even been invented. The bar stayed open at the New Arusha Hotel until long after official closing time and we all looked worse for wear at the session of the EAC the next morning when we bravely fought our battles for a more liberal general aviation regime, one which in the end we lost but it was not for the beers and shots that previous night, that much I can be sure of.

Tonight, I look back and realize I lost too many friends in the recent past, Harro the latest to change over into the great unknown. There, I hope, he is flying on silent wings into eternity. Roger that Harro, over and out.

<http://wolfganghthome.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/kenya-aviation-news-update-from-the-one-and-only-harro-trempenau/>

Tanzania News

FASTJET SETS EYES ON FIRST INTERNATIONAL ROUTE TO JOHANNESBURG

(Posted 29th July 2013)



South Africa will be FastJet's first international route from Tanzania, as the airline has indicated flights between Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg will commence on September 27th. FastJet will initially operate three flights per week, using their A319 for the 3 ½ hour flight, offering full service carrier South African Airways, for some time now alone on the route without competition, the prospect of having to drop fares to retain market share.

Richard Bodin, COO of FastJet, whom this correspondent met recently at the Routes Africa meeting in Kampala, was quoted to have said: ***'For some time the Dar es Salaam to Johannesburg route has only been operated by one airline and the lack of competition has created inflated fares. FastJet will substantially reduce the average fare and in doing so will encourage more leisure and business traffic between Tanzania and South Africa'***.

Precision Air, which has been holding the route rights as designated carrier from Tanzania, did some time ago halt their flights to South Africa, leaving the route to South African Airways, which while flying daily kept fare levels up to a point where many passengers would rather fly with Kenya Airways via Nairobi or with RwandAir via Kigali in order to get more affordably deals. These two airlines will no doubt be watching the market entry of FastJet on the Johannesburg route with hawk eyes too to see how their own connecting traffic to South Africa might be affected.

A regular source in Dar es Salaam quipped: ***'I hope they will this time state ticket prices and not fares, to which then all those other charges have to be added, so that the market has a true measure of what they charge against the charges of SAA, KQ and WB. It should in fact be to their advantage to give the public a direct comparison and not needing calculators again to work out what the final cost will be'***.

No launch fares or ticket cost have yet been announced but are expected to be published shortly, when bookings are opening on July 31st. Watch this space.

Rwanda News

RWANDAIR PUSHES START OF JUBA FLIGHTS TO SEPTEMBER

(Posted 02nd August 2013)



RwandAir yesterday evening announced that the anticipated start of their flights to Juba, expected to be operated in conjunction with one of their three daily flights to Entebbe, has been postponed to next month, presently set for 03rd of September.

When commenting on the development, the CEO of RwandAir, John Mirenge, explained that the reason for this postponement is mainly operational. ***'We have come to the decision to postpone after long hours of review and assessment of our operational readiness. Obviously this decision affects the motion already set for this route and we have engaged all departments to look into the best possible alternatives to support passengers before the beginning of September'*** said John in a statement received by this correspondent late yesterday evening. He added: ***'For passengers already booked and/or ticketed for the period of August, we have put procedures in place to ensure they are given options that respond to any inconvenience this decision may cause'***.

Many passengers, travelling with RwandAir from the airline's destinations across West Africa, South Africa but also from within Eastern Africa, as well as from Rwanda itself, looked forward to this launch as anticipation built up towards the launch flight. Staff of RwandAir also confirmed that bookings received from travel partners and the sales support teams were impressive. In her statement, the Senior Regional Manager Sales Alice Katiti said: ***'We have opened communications and support channels to ensure our travel partners are informed and supported during this month of August, and that no traveler is inconvenienced in any way'***.

During last month's Routes Africa Conference in Munyonyo / Kampala the issue of fifth freedom rights was touched upon by conference participants, including Mrs. Katiti, when discussing the obstacles African airlines are faced with when opening new routes. It was noted during the session moderated by this correspondent that while the Yamoussoukro Agreement governs aviation in Africa, its implementation has lagged way behind the initially set time frames, often hindering route development at the expense of national protectionism. It was equally observed that other regional aviation protocols, like the one under COMESA and under the EAC, were faced with similar obstacles in the implementation stages. Within the East African Community traffic rights between EAC destinations should be granted but remain subject to national regulatory approvals which are not always forthcoming, while traffic from within a waypoint inside the EAC to a final destination outside the EAC boundaries remain a matter of application by the airlines to the regulators of the countries involved.

It is understood that RwandAir was seeking permission from the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority and the South Sudanese aviation regulators to uplift traffic from Entebbe to Juba and back, but with a decision still pending, this too may have been an added factor in delaying the start of the flights until 03rd September. Sources ruled out any impact on the decision announced today vis a vis recent political developments in South Sudan, where President Kiir just appointed a new streamlined cabinet after two weeks ago in a tabula rasa move dismissing the Vice President and the cabinet to make room for an overhaul at the top. ***‘Decisions to fly to a destination are based on many factors and to think that a single political event like reorganizing a government could derail a planned launch is farfetched. In Rwanda there have been changes in cabinet in recent months, so that is a normal political process. In Uganda there have been changes in cabinet too and we are flying there three times a day. Of course do airlines keep an eye on what is happening in a destination but the changes in Juba really have nothing to do with the decision to postpone flights. As the CEO stated, those were purely operational issues’*** said a regular source close to RwandAir on condition of anonymity for not being the official spokesperson of the airline. Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from Eastern Africa.

KENYA AIRWAYS ENHANCES KIGALI / BUJUMBURA CONNECTIVITY

(Posted 01st August 2013)



Kenya Airways has just announced that their daily flights from Nairobi to Kigali / Rwanda and to Bujumbura / Burundi will be enhanced to provide yet better connectivity between the two westernmost member states of the East African Community and their hub in Nairobi, from where the region connects to the entire KQ network across Africa, Europe, the Middle and Far East, and vice versa.

The Pride of Africa has with immediate effect introduced additional city pairs to both capitals routing four times a week Nairobi Kigali Bujumbura Nairobi and three times a week Nairobi Bujumbura Kigali Nairobi.

The twice daily direct flights, in the mornings and evenings, to each of the two East African cities are in addition to the existing flights from Nairobi, passing through Kigali and Bujumbura and back every day.

In the mornings, the new direct flight to Kigali will depart Nairobi at 07.45 hours Kenyan time every day while at 09.05 hours Rwandan time – there is an hour time difference between the two cities – it will set off for the return flight. In the evenings, it will leave Nairobi at 17.00 hours Kenyan time for Kigali, departing Kigali at 18.20 hours Rwandan time. The direct flights to Bujumbura will leave Nairobi at 08.10 hours Kenyan time every morning while the return flight will depart at 09.40 hours Burundian time, also considering the one hour time difference with Nairobi. The evening flight leaves Nairobi at 17.30 hours Kenyan time, returning from Bujumbura at 19.00 hours. Kenya Airways’ Group Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Titus Naikuni, said that the new service aims at enhancing convenient travel and trade amongst East African countries following the implementation of the common market protocol that paved way for free movement of people, goods and services within the region.

‘These twice a day direct flights from Nairobi to Kigali and Bujumbura tie in with our plans to fly to every African capital by 2016 as we seek to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa’ was Dr. Naikuni quoted in a media release just received here.

The new direct flights to Kigali and Bujumbura add to Kenya Airways’ current combined night flight that serves the two cities. Every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, this flight departs from Nairobi at 23.50 hours (Kenyan time) for Kigali, leaves Kigali for Bujumbura at 01.05 (Rwandan time) and arrives back in Nairobi at 05.20 hours (Kenyan time). On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, the flight leaves Nairobi for Bujumbura at 23.50 hours (Kenyan time), leaves Bujumbura for Kigali at 01.25 hours (Burundian time) and arrives back in Nairobi at 05.25 hours (Kenyan time) from Kigali. All services are operated on a two class Embraer E190 jet, which has over the past few years become the regional workhorse aircraft. Two more E190’s are expected to be delivered in Nairobi this year, the first additional brand new aircraft this month and one more in a few weeks time. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from Eastern Africa’s aviation industry.

Ethiopia News

A MONTH TO GO TO THE LAUNCH OF SINGAPORE FLIGHTS BY ETHIOPIAN

(Posted 04th August 2013)



Ethiopian Airlines has now commenced their service from Addis Ababa to Singapore, in conjunction with Bangkok, which will open up the African continent for a number of new source markets from the South East of Asia. Travellers from Singapore have on arrival in Addis Ababa more or less immediate connections to a range of East African destinations but also across the entire continent, where ET maintains one of the widest networks of any airline in Africa, reaching a large number of countries, capitals and commercial hubs. Singapore has not enjoyed direct flights with Africa and travelers until now had to connect through either Bangkok or the Gulf hubs to reach Africa, this gap however now being closed. The new link also permits, through onwards flights from Addis, to reach Sao Paulo, as Ethiopian has recently launched direct flights, via a West African waypoint in Lome, to South America's economic powerhouse. For more information on fares, schedules and for on line bookings visit www.ethiopianairlines.com

South Sudan News

GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE SEES SPLIT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM

(Posted 04th August 2013)



The recent sacking of the South Sudan cabinet paved the way to reorganize the government and implement sharp cost saving measures by reducing the number of ministries to only 18, from previously twice that number. In the process however it appears that the former Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism was split and its functions bundled with other departments.

Wildlife Conservation is now listed alongside Interior in one Ministry, while Tourism is combined with Agriculture, Forestry, Cooperatives, Rural Development and Animal Resources.

Ministers appointed to these two portfolios are Aleu Ayeny Aleu for the Ministry of Interior and Wildlife Conservation, with Jadada Augustino Wani as Deputy Minister while Beda Machar Deng is the new Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Tourism and Animal Resources, Cooperatives and Rural Development with Nadia Arop Dudi the newly appointed Deputy Minister.

Two regular tourism sources from Juba expressed their consternation however that Wildlife Conservation, a crucial component in the country's largely wildlife based tourism industry, has been hived off to Interior, where, in their words *'it now takes two ministries to agree on coordinated efforts of wildlife protection, sustainable tourism activities and promoting the sector, instead of previously only one. This will be a cumbersome process and going by past experience, where ministers bickered in public over their jurisdiction, this has not been fully thought out nor were key stakeholders consulted. Putting ministries together when the oil money runs out is good, but they should have put complementary functions together, like Tourism, Wildlife Conservation, Forestry and Environment'*.

Valid arguments which reflect a similar sentiment in Kenya where Tourism, instead of being bundled with similarly complementary functions and departments now is lumped together with East African Affairs and Commerce, by many seen as a failure by the principals to consult more widely with key stakeholders and seek their input before they decided how to structure their government set up.

'It is puzzling me because Uhuru [Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya] was once chairman of the Kenya Tourism Board and he should have known better what goes together or not. But I guess politicians'

attention span is perhaps even more limited than that of ordinary folks. It still makes no sense frankly and only complicates workings between key organizations which are reporting to different cabinet secretaries. Coordinating that is not easy and there are already examples where the joints are creaking' added a Nairobi based senior stakeholder on condition of not being named.

Watch this space for regular updates from the tourism sectors across Eastern Africa.

Mauritius News

AIR MAURITIUS LOSS MAKING SPELL MAY BE ENDING

(Posted 01st August 2013)



The reported losses of 33.87 million Euros for the last financial year (2012) of Air Mauritius have now been put in some perspective as the airline recently reported an increase in revenues by 33.9 million Euros, giving hope that the tide has finally turned and the often harsh cost cutting and route rationalization measures finally can generate the income needed to eventually turn the bottom colour on the balance sheet from red to black again.

CEO Andre Viljoen, when presenting results, suggested that the airline was to return to full profitability by the 2015/16 financial year until which further consolidation and cost saving measures will be pursued. Starting in 2011 was a 7 year recovery plan put in place aimed to ensure the financial survival of Air Mauritius in the face of significant losses, though it has not been ruled out that the Mauritius government may eventually bring a strategic investor on board similar to what neighbours Air Seychelles have done. While this may or may not happen any time soon, a fleet renewal however will be undertaken in coming years to phase out fuel guzzling older aircraft and replace them with state of the art jets allowing for major savings in particular vis a vis fuel consumption and maintenance. No announcements are expected though until mid next year when the financial results for 2013/14 are available. Air Mauritius presently operates a mixed fleet of 12 aircraft comprising two A319, 2 A330-200, 6 A340-300 and 2 ATR 72-500 for inter island flights including to Rodrigues. It is in particular the older A340 aircraft which may be targeted for replacement with more economical twin engine jets.

Cutting the route network and re-assessing destinations with the potential to bring in more passengers and allow operations with a higher yield resulted in identifying routes which will be progressively enhanced with more flights, so as to tap into such markets with greater vigour and earlier this year did the airline name Nairobi and Johannesburg as being among those which can do better, alongside new routes to mainland China.

Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

AND in closing some interesting reads from Gill Staden's *The Livingstone Weekly* – enjoy!

Royal Livingstone Express on the Bridge

Bushtracks Africa which runs the Royal Livingstone Express is to take the steam train onto the bridge. An agreement was signed between Zambia Railways and Bushtracks Africa to allow the excursion. The railway tracks to the bridge have to be repaired but soon tourists will be able to take the train to the bridge on Saturdays and Wednesdays.

Bushtracks Africa invested heavily in the tracks from Livingstone towards Simonga in order to make it safe and



will have to do the same for the tracks to the bridge. Interesting in the article in the press we find this picture: Actually, it should be this one below:



Chizombo Lodge, Luangwa

There are loads of reports in the press about the new Norman Carr lodge in Luangwa, so I thought I should show you all a pic. Stunning ...

The lodge was designed by architects Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens from South Africa. It was constructed, according to the report, with recycled or recyclable materials.



The view from a villa at Chinzombo in Zambia's South Luangwa Valley.

It just goes to show how important design is. Isn't it amazing!

Big Dams

From the UK Guardian

The World Bank is bringing back big, bad dams
A renewed focus on mega-dams will make matters worse in Africa and benefit companies, not people



Hydroelectric big dams : Kariba Dam, on the Zambezi River, Zimbabwe

The big, bad dams of past decades are back in style.

In the 1950s and '60s, huge hydropower projects such as the Kariba, Akosombo and Inga dams were supposed to modernise poor African countries almost overnight. It didn't work out this way. As the independent World Commission on Dams found, such big, complex schemes cost far more but produce less energy than expected. Their primary beneficiaries are mining companies and aluminium smelters, while Africa's poor have been left high and dry.

The Inga 1 and 2 dams on the Congo River are a case in point. After donors have spent billions of dollars on them, 85% of the electricity in the Democratic Republic of Congo is used by high-voltage consumers but less than 10% of the population has access to electricity. The communities displaced by the Inga and Kariba dams continue to fight for their compensation and economic rehabilitation after 50 years. Instead of offering a shortcut to prosperity, such projects have become an albatross on Africa's development. Large dams have also helped turn freshwater into the ecosystem most affected by species extinction.

Under public pressure, the World Bank and other financiers largely withdrew from funding large dams in the mid-1990s. For nearly 20 years, the bank has supported mid-sized dams and rehabilitated existing hydropower projects instead.

Following a trend set by new financiers from China and Brazil, the World Bank now wants to return to supporting mega-dams that aim to transform whole regions. In March, it argued that such projects could "catalyse very large-scale benefits to improve access to infrastructure services" and combat climate change at the same time. Its board of directors will discuss the return to mega-dams as part of a new energy strategy on Tuesday.

The World Bank has identified the \$12bn (£8bn) Inga 3 Dam on the Congo River – the most expensive hydropower project ever proposed in Africa – and two other multi-billion dollar schemes on the Zambezi River as illustrative examples of its new approach. All three projects would primarily generate electricity for the mining companies and middle-class consumers of Southern Africa.

The World Bank ignores that better solutions are readily available. In the past 10 years, governments and private investors installed more new wind power than hydropower capacity. Last year, even solar power – long decried as a Mickey Mouse technology by the dam industry – caught up with new hydropower investment. Wind and solar power are not only climate friendly, they are also more effective than big dams in reaching the rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa, most of whom are not connected to the electric grid.

The International Energy Agency recommends that more than 60% of the funds required to bring about universal access to electricity be invested in distributed renewable energy projects such as wind, solar and small hydropower plants. Yet so far, funding for bringing these promising technologies to Africa has been woefully lacking. Like other donors, the World Bank is behind the curve on this. In 2007-12, it spent \$5.4bn on hydropower, but only \$2bn on wind and solar projects combined. A renewed focus on mega-dams would make matters worse.

Is the World Bank blinded by an outdated ideology? More likely, its return to mega-dams is driven by institutional self-interest. A strategy paper leaked from the bank in 2011 recognised that the increase in project size "may seem somewhat at odds with the goal of scaling up activities in areas where many

potential projects – such as solar, wind and micro-hydropower ... tend to be small". Yet, the paper argued, the "ratio of preparation and supervision costs to total project size" is bigger for small projects than large, centralised schemes, and so bank managers are "disincentivised" from undertaking small projects.

The World Bank, in other words, still finds it easier to spend billions of dollars on mega-projects than to support the small, decentralized projects that are most effective at expanding energy access in rural areas. It appears to be caught in the development model of past decades. If internal constraints prevent the bank from doing what is best for the poor, governments should find other vehicles for reducing energy poverty and combating climate change.
