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East Africa News

EMIRATES ANNOUNCES SECOND DAILY A380 FREQUENCY TO SYDNEY



A regular source from the Kampala office of Emirates, Dubai's award winning airline, has confirmed that from 01st of June onwards they will operate a second daily Airbus A380 nonstop flight between Dubai and Sydney. The move will add nearly 1.900 extra seats per week on the route and give passengers on the very long haul service to Australia's commercial capital the added comfort they can enjoy in the three class configured aircraft. The version to be deployed will comprise 399 Economy Class seats, 76 state of the art flat bed seats in Business Class and 14 luxurious First Class suites on the upper deck, which presently constitute the non plus ultra of First Class travel across the entire aviation world.

The morning departure from Dubai is presently being served by B777-300ER aircraft.

Said the source: *'We are getting more A380 aircraft now at regular intervals and routes in high demand, and routes over very long distances are now being added as A380 destinations. We only fly wide body aircraft wherever we go around the world. But the A380 is in a class of its own and will give us the competitive advantage over all other rivals and their aircraft for the comfort our passengers from Uganda can enjoy when they connect in Dubai'*. The rivalry among airlines has inched up recently since KLM announced the introduction of daily flights between Entebbe and Amsterdam and with both Turkish and Qatar Airways both using narrow body single aisle aircraft on their sectors from Entebbe, and in fact Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam too to Istanbul and Doha respectively, Emirates has been hitting the market hard with passenger comfort on wide body aircraft PLUS the growing number of destinations now served by the world's largest passenger aircraft.

Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from the East African region.

Kenya News

KENYAN WILDLIFE EXPERTS DISMISS SUGGESTIONS OF 'MISSING MIGRATION' AS NONSENSE



Two Kenyan wildlife and conservation experts have dismissed *with prejudice* as one of them put it in an overnight communication, suggestions floated in the Tanzanian media that the annual migration may not reach Kenya's Masai Mara later this year.

'I have no idea what the quoted individual is up to' wrote one of them before adding *'but for sure he needs to get the facts right. If anyone claims the migration was only two weeks in the Masai Mara last year, that is simply not true. It casts doubts over the motive for such misleading statements. The migration last year was there and between the arrival of the first herds crossing the river and the last remnants leaving it was about 11 weeks start to finish. The records are there, we now have Facebook accounts which deal with the migration in the Masai Mara and they document their sightings every day. I can only conclude that this is yet another act of trying to desperately de-campaign Kenya's Masai Mara destination by throwing mud and making false statements. Besides that, there are always resident populations of wildebeest and zebras in the Masai Mara though admittedly it is the spectacle of the great migration every year which is the biggest event in the reserve'*.

The other source was even more candid when writing: *'This is now a regular thing some individuals do year after year. I am not surprised at the so called 'expert' quoted in the Tanzanian media. Previous suggestions of similar nature have failed to happen. What should concern all of us is the case about plans to build a highway across the park, because that would destroy the migration and by broad consensus of wildlife experts decimate the great herds to a fraction of their size today. Secondly, there are rumours about the railway from Tanga to Musoma, where the Tanzanians want to construct a new lake port to connect to Uganda. Is this railway going to go all the way around the Serengeti? Bypassing Mwanza where a port exists already? Or are there hidden plans to have the railroad also run across the Serengeti which would be the most direct route? These are issues we should concern ourselves with, poaching should be an issue, not playing cheap competitive tricks'*.

The comments came alongside reminders of allegations that fires were laid last year in the path of the approaching migration juggernaut to keep the herds from their direct course towards the Mara River, which they have to cross, running a gauntlet of crocodiles in the process, to reach the pastures in the Kenyan Masai Mara. Tanzanian source last year denied categorically that any burning was done with such intent but with this latest acid outpouring it is expected that there will be close monitoring of any fires laid or started from May or June onwards and located in the approach path of the great migration, to see if a similar pattern emerges like last year.

'The great migration, like shown in Alan Root's film The Year of The Wildebeest, is ancient in its nature. The great herds follow the pastures, which is the only way to stay well fed and survive. Therefore they migrate every year those long distances. They return to the low grass plains between Ngorongoro and the Serengeti every December before they calf. The grass is rich in calcium and this is the last stage of their pregnancies before they give birth by the tens of thousands and then start migrating again. When they cross to the Mara they do so because there is not enough food for them elsewhere in the ecosystem. Before they come to the Mara the grass is high and they go through like lawnmowers and by the time they leave back to Tanzania they have eaten everything in their path and then follow fresh pastures to complete the cycle' added the first source.

Like last year, it will be again a game of wait and see, and watch from the distance while weighing the facts of the migration of last year before rushing into judgment. Watch this space therefore starting from June onwards when the *'scouts'* traditionally reach the Mara River and then expect links to key websites and webcams now in place to show what is happening in the world of the wildebeest.

KENYA CONSERVATION FRATERNITY MOURNS DR. ANTHONY KING



Dr. Anthony King, former CEO of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and more recently manager of the Ngolale Ranch in Rumuruti, died yesterday afternoon when his plane crashed on Mt. Kenya after taking off from the Nanyuki airfield earlier on. The light aircraft, an Aeroprakt A22 Foxbat, was registered in Kenya as 5Y-LWF, was owned by the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and sadly also carried a Canadian journalist as the sole passenger, with Dr. King piloting the plane.

According to Kenyan aviation sources the aircraft was reportedly in a good mechanical condition prior to the last flight and those regularly flying across and around Mt. Kenya have reiterated that sudden gusts of wind often buffet light aircraft and may in this case have been a contributory factor in the crash.

The wreck was located after an aerial search at around 14,500 ft above sea level near Lake Michaelson, where according to other sources a similar crash had happened in 1976, when it did not return nor respond to radio contacts.

Dr. King enjoyed a hero like reputation among Kenya's conservation fraternity for the work he did in the past at LWF and for his most recent involvement in developing a conservation strategy for Kenya.

The Board of LWF issued the following statement:

The Board, membership and staff of Laikipia Wildlife Forum are left with a terrible void in our midst that will be difficult to fill. Our loss however painful cannot compare to that suffered by his family. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Delphine, Oscar and Lorian and the entire King family. We wish them strength and grace during this difficult time.

Fare thee well, Anthony. Thanks for everything you gave us.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada, Executive Director LWF

Keep checking on www.laikipia.org for more information regarding funeral arrangements. We will keep the website updated.

This correspondent too extends his condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of the late Anthony, who will be sorely missed by all those struggling for conservation not only in Kenya but the entire region. Until we meet again!

TOURISM BUSINESSES FACE PRE-ELECTION BLUES AS MORE BLAME IS HEAPED ON MWAZO



'Finally his time in tourism is coming to an end. Too much of what he did was embroiled in controversy and the things which needed doing were not done. I cannot wait for a new government to take over and appoint someone capable as a minister for tourism, not from among politicians but someone who is competent and can do the job. Someone who understands tourism and needs no long education from the private sector and then he is gone and we start again. That is the benefit of the new constitution that ministers now must be technically competent to take on a portfolio and we from the private sector will make sure that only names go on the list the new President will and can choose from which meet the approval from the industry' said a regular senior tourism stakeholder from Nairobi when discussing the final run in to the elections on March 04th and the new ball game awaiting the sector afterwards.

Outgoing tourism minister Mwazo, who never really made an impact, nor built a serious working relationship with the tourism private sector according to a number of well informed individuals in Nairobi and Mombasa, had a stormy term of office, trying to dismiss the CEO of the Kenya Tourism Board before first being defied by the Head of Public Service and then defeated in court too, while on other occasions appointing heads of the new parastatal bodies without the legitimacy of a valid law, after he forgot to gazette the new tourism bill as required.

Mwazo also insisted that Kenya would enjoy another record year in 2012, but those hopes were clearly misguided as at the time the comments were made the data were out and spoke a language of downturn and reductions.

'Tourism in the new government must be given a higher priority, higher ranking and better facilitation so that KTB can more effectively go to all corners of the world to promote the country. The new system of streamlined government with half of the ministries compared to now should also bring wildlife back into the same ministry, maybe even forestry as both elements are crucial to tourism. Ours is wildlife and nature based tourism upcountry and beach tourism in Mombasa and Malindi. Forests are important as you always make clear when you talk of Rwanda. Wildlife coordination with tourism has lacked under the past government when both ministries did often

not see eye to eye and took decisions in isolation which disadvantaged tourism. We hope that a new Ministry of Tourism includes all those elements again so that one competent minister can coordinate wildlife conservation, forest conservation and tourism promotion and marketing under one roof. Additionally we need to have KTDC facilitated to help finance resort refurbishments. The coast has not seen any significant new number of properties other than Swahili Beach some 15 months ago but none before that for maybe 10 years. Beach resorts remain closed robbing Kenya of employment opportunities and beds. When properly promoted the coast should be full of foreign, regional and local tourists. But many resorts have stood still. They need to modernize, refurbish, even expand facilities. That has not taken place for too long now. Money has to come at affordable interest rates and KTDC is well positioned to take up that task.

We need to retain our well trained staff because many are going off as expatriates to the Gulf and even Europe and America. And we need to strengthen industrial training, vocational training by finally building a second campus of Utalii at the coast. We need better roads at the coast which has been neglected in comparison to the Nairobi metropolitan area. We need the bypass to the South Coast, a second bridge to the North Coast and we need that second international conference centre we have been talking about. We need the ministry to carry out a new grading exercise because the last valid valuation of hotel and resort services is now nearly 10 years ago after the most recent exercise was halted as a result of bickering and allegations of fraud and favouritism. We need the dedicated cruiseship berths at Mombasa port and we need more water and electricity supplies to facilitate expansion of the sector.

There is a whole stretch of beach between Ukunda / Msambweni and the Tanzania border which can be tapped into for new resorts. It takes infrastructure to do that. Our beaches are among the best in the world, our safari parks among the best in the world and really, what do we have to show for. In all these visionary things our current minister was clueless. He fought ego and personality battles instead on focusing on the future of the industry. We have sincere hope that all this will change when a new government has been sworn in' added another source from Mombasa by email and call, showing what problems beset the sector, what the challenges are and what the solutions are to turn the tide and get Kenya ready to translate Vision 2030 into reality.

Currently there is a visible trend of reduction of occupancies in beach resorts but also on the safari circuit ahead of the general election on March 04th, and with no clear front runner, the two leading candidates are locked in a battle for numbers with both camps 'stuck' in the mid forty percent margins, the scenario of a runoff election some weeks later raise the spectrum that there will be a very prolonged and pronounced 'low season' for Kenya's coastal tourism businesses until finally a winner can be announced and take office.

Across the region there is cautious optimism that the elections will be conducted peacefully unlike in late 2007, when Kenya was rocked by nearly 3 months of post election violence, as apparently the powers that be in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Burundi have given the leading candidates a clear message, to prevail upon their supporters in keeping the peace or else face the music when eventually a winner will take his chair among his colleagues in the East African Community.

From sources in Kenya it is understood that 8 days ahead of the elections security everywhere, especially known hot spots, is being cranked up, more personnel being deployed and more reserves kept than available in 2007/8, to ensure that the state has the capacity to swiftly and with overwhelming numbers react to any potential outbreak of violence.

While writing this from Kigali / Rwanda during an assignment tourism stakeholders here also expressed their hope and desire for peaceful elections in Kenya next week so that the region can enjoy economic advance and not see development issues sidelined by having to put out man made political fires which would affect the entire East African Community and beyond to South Sudan and Eastern Congo. Let Peace Prevail – and to find out, watch this space.

Tanzania News

SERENGETI'S NEW SEVEN NATURAL WONDERS OF THE WORLD STATUS DRAWS IN VISITORS



The Serengeti National Park, according to figures released by TANAPA, the Tanzania National Park Authority, has reached record numbers, going by the media statement given from Mr. Pascal Shelutete earlier this week, exceeding 17.000 last month, the highest number ever recorded entering the park.

A regular source in Arusha attributed this development to the inclusion of the Serengeti National Park in the 7 natural wonders of the world list, which was only announced a few weeks ago, but that the relentless campaigning for inclusion had raised visibility and tourist awareness of this UNESCO World Heritage Site national park. The other Tanzanian landmark in the list is Mt. Kilimanjaro, giving the largest East African country a clear edge when heading to the ITB Tourism Fair over the coming days to promote the country even more vigorously.

The rise in visitor numbers will also contribute to cementing the Serengeti's income status, presently laying in number three spot after Mt. Kilimanjaro and the Ngorongoro Crater, but fast catching up now.

It was also learned that Tanzania will be hosting a second tourism fair after the forthcoming Karibu Travel and Tourism trade show in October this year, the Swahili Tourism Fair aimed initially at the South African market, from where a growing number of visitors now come to Tanzania to enjoy safaris and the beaches of the mainland and of Zanzibar. Watch this space for breaking and regular news about tourism developments in Eastern Africa.

FASTJET RESPONDS TO DEBT AND OTHER ALLEGATIONS



Information was received from a source in Dar es Salaam who attended a press conference yesterday called by FastJet at short notice.

Airline executives refuted claims that they were not paying their dues to TCAA or TRA but tried to explain that, while they acquired Fly540 Tanzania last year, the debts owed back then by Fly 540 should be paid by the initial owners and not themselves. The amount owed to TRA, described as a '*historical debt*' was given as over 3 billion Tanzania Shillings although no explanation was reportedly offered as to why the due diligence at the time of negotiating the purchase had not eliminated such old debts prior to acquiring Fly 540 Tanzania or else provided for an iron clad contract. The latter now appears to be full of legal holes and trap doors, enabling Fly 540 in Kenya to sue FastJet and categorically deny that those old debts remained with them but claim it is the sole and entire responsibility of FastJet to now settle those outstanding amounts.

It is also not clear which impact the written notice by Fly 540 in Kenya to halt the use of permits, licenses and other agreed usage, like flying the orange aircraft still painted in livery of Fly 540 in West Africa, on the operation in East Africa, nor was it made clear, according to the source, what impact the reported demand by the leasing company had which demanded the deregistration of planes as a result of overdue payments.

Other issues reportedly raised centred around the conditions of the AOC, which require accountable managers to be resident in Tanzania, and in response the airline officials confirmed that both the airline CEO and the COO (Chief Operating Officer) were indeed based in London and not in Dar es Salaam.

The airline used the opportunity, when trying to clarify on the ton of rumours flying the FastJet colours, to also announce they would at some point in the future also commence selling tickets for the sector Kilimanjaro – Mwanza and start flights to Zanzibar. Watch this space to see how this all will pan out.

PRECISION AIR SHRUGS OFF FASTJET ARRIVAL WITH DOUBLE DIGIT GROWTH



The showmanship of FastJet mouthpieces notwithstanding has Precision Air just announced a 13 percent growth in passenger numbers for the period between April 2012 and end January 2013, with a record uplift of 750.762 passengers compared to the same period in the previous year with 663.636 passengers flown.

The growth since the arrival of another airline on the routes between Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro and Mwanza during the period November 2012 to end January 2013 still made some 6 percent more passengers flown with 222.654 compared to the same period in the previous year of 209.696.

Acting CEO Allen Sharra – Ms. Sauda Rajab will officially take up her new position as CEO on March 01st – said when he announced the figures over the weekend: *'The Tanzania air travel market has become more competitive*

with the introduction of new airlines. However Precision air's performance in terms of passenger uplift has continued to grow impressively despite this increased competition. We have managed to achieve this due to the unmatched services we offer our customers, convenience [and] destination frequencies of our schedules and our true Tanzanian hospitality enjoyed by passengers travelling by Precision. Overall, passenger numbers have todate grown close to a million through a double digit annual percentage growth'.

Sharra also reiterated that the recently launched flights to Mbeya warranted going daily after only a few weeks since the airline had resumed flights to the newly opened airport in Songwe, while frequencies to Mtwara were upped from daily to 11 per week with the aim of going double daily as demand kept rising for passengers to fly to Tanzania's '*oil and gas capital*'.

Precision Air remains Tanzania's only airline certified by IATA with the coveted IATA Operational Safety Standard accolade which sets it miles apart from any other airline presently competing for space in the skies over the country. Precision was also the first airline worldwide to take delivery last year of an ATR 42-600 series aircraft with more of the same, including the larger sistership ATR 72-600 still awaiting delivery under orders placed with the French manufacturers. Coming up in terms of new destinations will be Lilongwe / Malawi and Harare / Zimbabwe by mid 2013, following in the footsteps of the launch of flights to Lusaka / Zambia via Lubumbashi / Congo DR.

Following the media briefing yesterday at the Precision Air offices in Dar es Salaam it was also learned that self professed rivals FastJet have also hastily called for a media briefing on Tuesday, so watch this space to see what they have to say about their recent woes, as and when information has become available.

Rwanda News

DESTINATION RWANDA – SO MUCH MORE THAN '*JUST GORILLAS*'



(The view to Paradis Malahide's own private island across the water from the resort ... idyllic, tranquil, serene)

A return to *The Land of a Thousand Hills*, aka Rwanda, is always an eye opener and unlike many other visitors, who come as one time tourists, or on business, my regular travels across the country has over the years shown me sides others rarely see, hardly know of and yet they miss some of the greatest sights the country has to offer.

FESPAD 2013 was my current assignment, and amply reported and tweeted about from Kigali, Rwamagana, Huye, Musanze and today from Gisenyi.

Few know for instance that the Institute of National Museums is located in Huye, offering visitors enroute to Nyungwe National Park an opportunity to gain a little insight into how life used to be in the Rwanda of distant days. A homestead constructed in the traditional way shows how Rwandans used to live in rural areas, where besides farming they practiced the craft of basket weaving and of pottery, helping to be largely self sustained in the often distant villages far away from the towns.



(A traditional homestead, basket weaving and a pottery, all seen at the National Museum at Huye)

While in Musanze earlier in the week to see **FESPAD 2013** bring the concept of **Take a Break – Dance** to the enthusiastic locals, a quick visit to the Kinigi Park Headquarters of the Volcanoes National Park was a given. It was a return to friends and familiar sights of course, while my fellow scribes got a briefing on all they needed to know to bring them up to date with the park operation and the challenges faced by the rangers in their task to protect the gentle giants of Rwanda's volcanic mountains.



(Seen here from left to right is the entrance to the park headquarters, the commemorative plaque which recognizes the '*discovery*' of the mountain gorillas in 1902, the media briefing at the park offices and the sight across a sorghum field of one of the 5 volcanoes)

Enroute from Kigali to Musanze, one of the scenic routes across Rwanda, we crossed plenty of hills, making one doubt the statement of the thousand hills as falling way short of the real number one sees when travelling the country. The roads, in excellent condition, passed through farms and fields, showing that every available inch is used to grow food, to keep the 11 or so million Rwandans fed with a variety of crops, and mostly of course organically grown. Roadside eateries keep hungry travelers fed, offering roast maize or even roast potatoes, in case someone missed breakfast or else just feels peckish.



(Roasted maize, the fields which feed the nation, carrying heavy loads on the head and a maize store)

And from Musanze my journey took me, alone for a change, by regular bus service from Musanze to Gisenyi, at the very reasonable cost of 1.100 Rwandan Francs, or about 1.80 US Dollars. These busses, I used Virunga Express, run hourly and at times even at half hourly intervals during rush hours, connecting the key towns across Rwanda with Kigali. It was an opportunity to discover how backpackers, budget travelers and as seen, NGO workers and volunteers travel across the country, not in the back of a 4x4 – rarely needed anyway considering the excellent cross country road network – but by public transport means. I found the service acceptable though the bus was packed to the last seat, the driver sticking to speed limits and considering the cost involved surely a way which will make travelling across Rwanda affordable for explorers with even the smallest of budgets.

My destination for the night was an ‘old acquaintance, the **Paradis Malahide Resort** on the outskirts of Gisenyi, nestled under mature trees right on the beach of Lake Kivu.

The small resort of 6 cottages and 4 rooms is refreshingly unpretentious, but makes guests feel like friends as the staff are exceptionally friendly and accommodating and at their visitors beck and call. Since my last visit they installed wireless internet which extends across the public areas and offers high speed access, an added bonus to the private beach and they now also own and operate a lake boat. Bird watching along the shores or a visit to their private island right across the waters of Lake Kivu, either option is now offered ‘*in house*’. The guest commentbook shows the praise heaped upon the place by visitors, many of them NGO staff or volunteers often coming from across the border in Goma, to relax for the weekend or have one of the crunchy bottom pizzas which is one of the resort’s signature dishes.

I arrived in time to see the fishing ‘*flotilla*’ take to the lake at sunset and the fishermen’s songs echoed across the water, something worth watching on my YouTube account where I posted a short video of my impressions.

It got cooler after sunset and rain suddenly broke from the dark clouds overhead, but the staff swiftly lit a fire in the central fireplace of the lounge / bar / restaurant and brought me a blanket – without having asked for it actually – to wrap around me and keep warm, aided by a small charcoal stove place next to my little table at the easy chairs.



(The gardens at the Paradis Malahide, reflections of the sinking sun and ‘local heating’ when it got chilly)

Gisenyi, connected to Kigali also by daily RwandAir flights, has become the springboard to explore the nearby national forest reserve of Gishwati, but is also the starting, or ending point depending on one’s view point, of the Congo Nile Trail, which runs for 224 kilometres through the hills and along the shores of Lake Kivu all the way to Cyangugu. The best hotel in town is the Lake Kivu Serena, set in extensive gardens with access to a stretch of sandy beach, and being part of the circuit of regional hospitality leaders Serena offers all the hallmarks of fine hospitality. The Congo Nile Trail can be completed by combining hiking, biking and using boats even, which permit to explore the rich birdlife along the shores of the lake and allows for stops on the many islands dotting the lake in Rwandan waters. And then there is of course Nyungwe Forest National Park, accessible from the ‘far end’ of the trail and reachable from Gisenyi within a few hours’ drive.

More and more visitors even make Gisenyi with its pleasant weather and scenic setting their base to go for gorilla tracking, as it takes just over one hour to Kinigi from where the tracking starts.

And for those with an even keener sense of adventure, there is the added option from Gisenyi to cross the border into Congo DR and climb up Mt. Nyirangongo, an active volcano notorious for its eruptions the last of which buried part of the Goma airport under lava and razed part of Goma city as nothing could stop the lava flow until it exhausted itself. The sight from the rim of the crater into the lava lake is said to be ‘awesome’ and worth the 5 hour hike up the steep slopes. Bookings can be done in Gisenyi and your hotel concierge or tour desk will be more than happy to assist. Crossing the border is relatively easy now even for foreign tourists, as they can obtain a Visa on site for 50 US Dollars per person, as long as they have booked a hike up the 3.468 metres high mountain.

Back to Rwanda though. In a few weeks will the Rwanda Development Board launch another range of newly developed tourism products, centered around the Gishwati Forest, which is best accessed from Gisenyi, adding further reasons to include this lakeside town in a visiting itinerary. More about those new activities in due course, very likely at the time from a trial run ahead of the formal launch as done 1 ½ years ago with the Congo Nile Trail.



(Fellow travelers in the RDB media bus)

Leaving the lake behind as the journey back to Kigali commenced made many in our bus look out the rear window of the bus showing signs of regret for having to part company with Lake Kivu but for sure it was for most, who had never been here, an eye opener of the variety of attractions and sights Rwanda has to offer. Way more than '**Just Gorillas**', the country now has produced special maps covering Culture, Kigali City, Rubavu, Karongi, Akagera and Nyungwe over and above the Volcanoes National Park where tracking for gorillas and the golden monkeys is possible. Rwanda now offers a complete destination package and hopes to attract longer stays by visitors in the country, as they explore the added options instead of just doing a flying visit to the prized gorillas. Visit www.rwandatourism.com for more information on the destination and more details on three national parks but also the attractions outside protected areas.

RwandAir flies from all regional airports daily, at times as often as three times a day, to Kigali and so does Kenya Airways, Air Uganda and Ethiopian through their Nairobi, Entebbe and Addis Ababa hubs. International airlines coming to Rwanda are Brussels Airlines, KLM, South African Airways, Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines, giving plenty of options to reach the ***Land of a Thousand Hills***.



(The range of options touring Rwanda, besides ***Just seeing the gorillas***)

INSHOZA BALLET TAKES AUDIENCE BY STORM



When the FESPAD, the Pan African Dance Festival, moved to the Northern Province headquarter town of Huye, expectations were to see much of similarities vis a vis previous days. A stop enroute to the festival venue at the National Museum, which is based together with the Institute of National Museums in Huye, previously known as Butare, allowed the assembled scribes to see a bit of Rwanda's past when it was still a kingdom. In spite of being a press group picture taking in the museum was not permitted, denying readers that priceless '***one picture says more than a thousand words***', leaving only the outdoor homestead, granary and the weaving and pottery projects open to take pictures from. Make sure to check my Facebook pictorials to see what this photo expedition yielded.

Meanwhile though, upon reaching the festival hall did to everyone's surprise the Inshoza Group take to the stage and then the audience by storm with a new concept of blending old and new.

Best described as a choreographed ballet performance the dancers thrilled the crowd to bits when they ably merged the best of the traditional Rwandan dances with equally well presented contemporary moves on stage, moving effortlessly from one theme to the next. One of the judges, visibly pleased with what he saw, only said '***this was very innovative to combine classic and modern, traditional heritage with the way ballets today express themselves***' before joining his colleagues for a break as there was a brief power outage halting the proceedings just when Egypt had taken to the stage.

Members of Inshoza professed to their love for art and dance and their desire to bring the Rwandan heritage and culture closer to the younger people, for many of whom the '*classic*' performances not longer cut it all and who were waiting for some new stuff to come '*to the market*' as their enthusiastic applause clearly indicated.

Best bet would be that Inshoza will make it to the national finals where they can present to the Rwandan nation what they see as the future of dancing in the country. Watch this space.



TAKE A BREAK – DANCE IS THE MOTTO OF FESPAD 2013 AS IT MOVES TO THE COUNTRYSIDE



‘When we hosted FESPAD before, all activities were concentrated in Kigali. This time we wanted to have the entire country have a chance to participate. The national competition is now on and we will have a winner when the roadshow comes back to Kigali for the closing days. It also allows our participants from abroad like Egypt and Namibia to show their own heritage of dance to our people in the regions of Rwanda. Instead of our people travelling to Kigali to see the Pan African Dance Festival, the festival comes to them this time’ said one of the RDB staff attached to our media team yesterday as we travelled to the Eastern Region headquarter town of Rwamagana. 6 local groups competed to be regional winner and make it to the national finals where a winner will be selected while the international participants were able to showcase their dance skills to the locals who had overcrowded the meeting hall and occupied all window spaces from the outside to catch a glimpse of the thrill inside.

The roadshow will today continue to make its way to the Northern Region’s headquarter town of Huye, aka Butare, before then moving to Karongi, Musanze (previously known as Ruhengeri) and finally Gisenyi where a party is planned at the shores of Lake Kivu in the grounds of the Lake Kivu Serena Hotel. On Saturday then the dance juggernaut will return to the capital Kigali for the announcement of the national dance competition winners and the prize giving ceremony for the participating countries from across Africa.

Watch this space for updates and in the meantime enjoy the pictures which document the spirit of the people of Rwanda better than any words could describe.



FESPAD FINALLY LAUNCHES WITH AN EYE CANDY PERFORMANCE OF DANCES

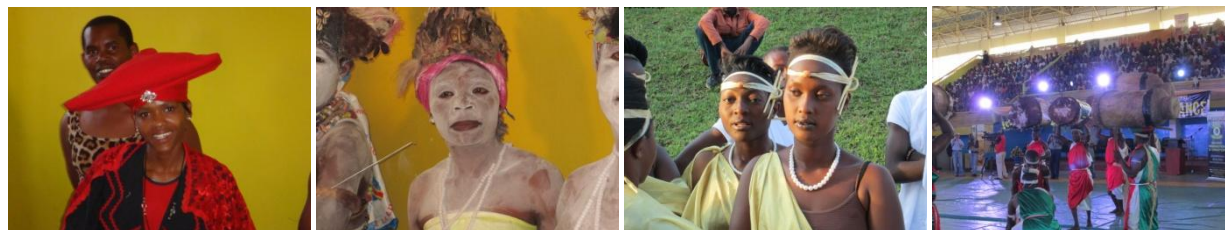


The uncertainties of the weather removed, by staging the second attempt to launch FESPAD 2013 indoors at the Petit Stade of the Amahoro National Stadium in Kigali, the show finally got on the road, opened by the Rwandan Minister for Culture in the presence of the First Lady Mrs. Kagame.

Packed to capacity with not a seat left in the house, thousands were crammed into the stadium parking and park area where giant screens let them see what happened inside, where a spectacle of dance performances from across Africa thrilled the crowd.

Groups from Namibia, Egypt, Burundi, Congo DR, Uganda and of course the host country Rwanda performed at the Gala event, showcasing the best in traditional dance their country has to offer, all of course vying for the prizes available to the best teams at the end of the weeklong festival of dance, song, art and heritage.

Costumes and expressions were beyond expectations and when the big drums of the Rwandan National Ballet were beaten the crowd again leaped to their feet and screams of approval echoed across the Petit Stade, competing with the rolling drum beats and the accompanying music.



FESPAD 2013 today moves into the country side with visits planned across the week to Rwamagana, Huye, Karongi, Musanze and finally Gisenyi where the Lake Kivu Serena will be hosting the performers and spectators for the much awaited '**FESPAD Kivu Party**'.

Meanwhile will dance competitions across Rwanda determine the national champions, due to be presented at the closing ceremony on Saturday 02nd of March while in Kigali and key towns workshops are being conducted to encourage traditional as well as contemporary dancing.

When the main launch ceremony was over, the Petit Stade transformed itself into an arena of contemporary East African music with performers from Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda driving the crowds into a near frenzy as they saw their favourite singers and bands on stage such as King James, Gabi Kamanzi, Keko, Rider Man, the Irangira Makanayaga Group and Camp Mulla. United by music and dance performances, the crowds, especially those outside watching on giant screens, made the most of this event and danced long into the night, before eventually seeking out Kigali's night spots to continue the fun into the early hours of Monday.

Said a fellow scribe, overheard during a conversation: '***If only us Africans would dance more there would be more peace on our continent. People dancing have no time for conflict. Promoting dance through FESPAD is one little way how the AU encourages peace and better understanding between the people of Africa***'. True that is of course and last night's performance for sure also was evidence how Rwanda has come together over the past 18+ years and how there are now but one people of Rwanda, no longer divided by tribe but united as a nation.

Staff from the Ministry of Culture and the Rwanda Development Board also expressed their satisfaction and delight over the turnout and the participation of the crowds inside and outside, a testament of how well organized the re-scheduled launch turned out to be and how their overnight work, following the torrential hailstorm of the previous day, had paid off. Thanks to them, thanks to the performers and thanks for the warm hospitality of the Rwandan people.

WHEN FESPAD TURNED INTO A WETPAD



The combined opinion yesterday at the Amahoro National Stadium was that '*Someone Somewhere*' was responsible for the complete washout, in fact blowout of the opening ceremony as it was just about to start, when a hailstorm of biblical proportions unloaded its icy cargo and unleashed nature's full wrath on the city of Kigali. The VIP section and the stands at the stadium had started to fill up, the bands and choirs were rehearsing and the performers did their warm ups on the pitch or near the stands, with everyone enjoying a music filled funfair atmosphere and getting into gear with clapping and chanting along when popular local songs were aired.



The decorations reflected the heritage and traditions of Rwanda, *The Land of a Thousand Hills* and even the normally stern and reserved presidential security detail on site and ready for President Kagame's arrival were seen tapping their feet to the sounds of music or in some cases even making, albeit carefully concealed, moves with their bodies, clearly also enjoying this assignment of keeping their principal safe.

And then mother nature struck, and struck hard, as the approaching dark clouds suddenly seemed to accelerate as if rushing to reach the stadium, then staying put above and starting to unleash a cargo of heavy rain and hail alongside gale force winds. Everyone who could from the stands scrambled to safety of indoors, others hid under the stages on the pitch while others yet rushed up the VIP stand hoping for a dry spot but were still soaked when the storm blew the rain horizontally around the stadium ring, lashing all and sundry still out with rain drops and small fingertip sized hailcorns.

The covers of the main stage were literally shredded away if not ripped and blown off altogether, exposing the equipment to the elements and Cobra Productions will probably count their losses as by the estimate of many not much of the amplifiers, speakers and conduit cabinets could have survived this storm and be used another day again.



(From left to right a sequence of the storm, at first onset, then at almost full strength and then, with hailcorns flying and gale force winds the view across the stadium was totally obscured)

Performers as well as spectators were united in expressing their regrets for the hard work put in by the staff of the Rwanda Development Board and their colleagues from the Ministry of Culture, who had spent countless days, and the last few nights working nonstop to get everything right for the opening salvo of FESPAD 2013. One cannot be sure, considering the rain and the soaked hair, but at least almost certain that some of the RDB staff in fact shed tears when the destruction became fully evident after the storm had moved on, with decorations annihilated, costumes wrecked, the stages seriously damaged and who knows what equipment was still serviceable for future occasions.



(A view of the centre stage, canopy blown off and equipment covers torn and shredded)

But such is the indefatigable spirit of Rwanda, that in the face of adversity those responsible for FESPAD promptly stood together and announced that a smaller and revised version of the opening ceremony would be held on Sunday afternoon, in lieu if the planned city tour of Kigali for participants, invited guests and the media, in the Petit Stade under roof, serving notice to the elements that they may have been temporarily down but never out, and up again within a day as one put it ‘...*the show must go on. This is a terrible set back but inspite of losing decorations our spirit is high, we are Rwandan, we do not give up, we take the challenge and FESPAD will shine for the rest of the week. It was force majeure but we will meet that challenge and tomorrow a ceremony will still take place, a bit different, maybe a bit smaller because the main stadium could take up to 30.000 people and the indoor stadium has less seats, but we will prevail. We worked very hard to bring FESPAD here and make the continent of Africa proud of us and we will not disappoint our participants, our Rwandan compatriots and you from the media*’.

Indeed, within hours of the aborted opening ceremony it was known that Sunday afternoon would see a fresh effort go underway by 15.00 hrs, and this time for sure it will unfold and another story be told another day of how the Rwandan spirit, shown earlier in the day during ‘*Umuganda*’ has once again prevailed and triumphed. Watch this space.

South Sudan News

SOUTH SUDAN ESTABLISHES INDEPENDENT CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY



South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir has earlier this week issued a decree, establishing the country’s Civil Aviation Authority while at the same time appointing General Agasio Akol as the first chairman of the board, overseeing the new aviation body alongside 6 other members.

SSCAA will now seek formal recognition with global body ICAO, the Montreal based International Civil Aviation Organization and along that way have to accept, and then implement, ICAO’s regulatory requirements governing civil aviation around the world.

SSCAA, when fully established, is expected to carry out all licensing functions for air transport, both domestic but also internationally as governed by Bilateral Air Service Agreements, aka BASA’s, will issue Air Operator Certification for airlines registered in the South Sudan and carry out oversight and safety functions in line with established practice elsewhere in the world.

The formation of the SCAA is according to a periodic aviation source in Juba *'just one step to make our independence fully operational, so that we can become members of in this case ICAO. South Sudan will have to abide by global standards and will be tasked to especially uplift operational safety through strict oversight. We had too many aircraft accidents, often by foreign registered aircraft flying here in South Sudan, because for now we did not have the capacity to establish our own aviation regulators and private aviation industry. This will now change quickly. When SCAA is fully working it will be the same like their counterparts anywhere else in the world and region. Aircraft used in South Sudan must get permits, they will have to show evidence of maintenance and pilots will have to get South Sudan CPL's and ATPL's if they are to fly on aircraft registered in South Sudan. Airlines will have to get air service licenses and AOC's from SSCAA. Foreign airlines need to apply to be recognized when they fly from their own countries to Juba and their own authorities must make them a designated airline to fly to South Sudan. It is all part of building our nation and our institutions slowly by slowly'*. South Sudan at present has no national airline although the government in Juba was reportedly keen to establish one in due course, perhaps under a public private partnership to spread the capital requirements into a wider domain. Several smaller airlines, flying domestically and regionally, have been formed in the past before and after independence but apart from Feeder Airlines failed to make a significant impact on the aviation sector until now. Watch this space for breaking and regular news from across Eastern Africa's vibrant aviation scene.

Mauritius News

MAURITIUS AND MALDIVES SIGN NEW AIR ACCORD



The two Indian Ocean island states have earlier this week signed a new bilateral air services agreement, commonly referred to as BASA, allowing the national airlines of the two countries to commence up to 7 flights per week between Port Louis and Male at a later time.

The Maldives, more even than in Mauritius, depends heavily on tourism and has for the first time since records were established beaten Mauritius into second place in terms of passenger arrivals, exceeding the one million mark while Mauritius failed to reach that magic number. The Vanilla Island Cooperation, headquartered on La Reunion, has some weeks ago already floated the idea to incorporate the Maldives into the group to showcase the vacation potential within this part of the Indian Ocean and as and when flights are launched between the two destinations, it may well enhance twin centre holidays incorporating both the Maldives and Mauritius.

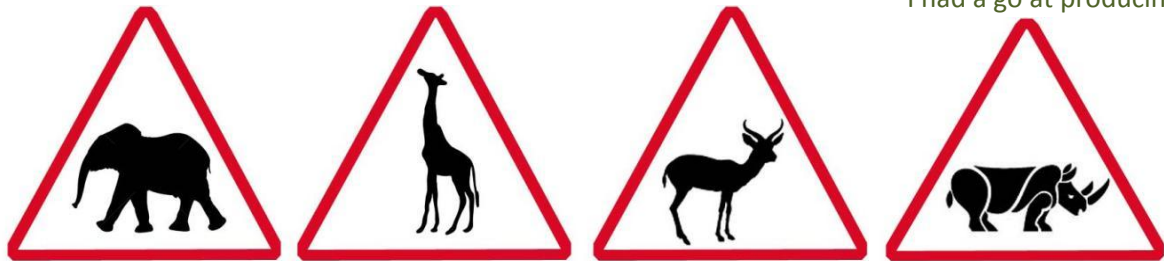
It could however not be established if either national airline would be in a position to commence flights any time soon, considering the cautious approach by Air Mauritius to new destinations, potentially leaving the route to a designated third country airline flying between Male and Port Louis as part of a fifth freedom rights agreement. Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from the Indian Ocean islands.

AND in closing the usual dose of news and travel stories from *'further down south'* courtesy of Gill Staden:

Elephants and Signage



There are lots of elephants around Livingstone at the moment. I took this photo last week on the way to Sun International. The eles just popped out of the trees on the right-hand side and belted across the road at a run. We need some more signage on this road (in fact, on all roads) to inform motorists of the possibility of running elephants.



I had a go at producing

some signs because we could do with some signage through the parks. The road to the Falls is famous for its elephant crossings but the road to Kazungula through the park needs some signage too – there we tend to get giraffe and impala too. And, how about one for our rhino:



While I am on the topic of road signage I put in a sign which I noticed on the road in Namibia through the Bwabwata National Park. I stated that it was a hyena. A Livingstonian emailed me to say that it is not a hyena but a wild dog. Thinking about it, this is probably right as a hyena has a sloping back and this depiction of an animal certainly does not.



As a comment, the signs in Zimbabwe are better for wild dog:

So I have joined the two and come up with:



You will notice that the signs in Zimbabwe are of a different format to ours in Zambia, Botswana and Namibia. We use the European format, whereas Zimbabwe uses a style which is more common in Australia and America.

Kariba Dam Gates Open

Press Release from the Zambezi River Authority

The Zambezi River Authority appreciates all the concerns you raised following the notice we put out regarding the impending opening of the flood gates in early March.

The Authority has delayed opening the floodgates due to major structural maintenance works currently taking place at the reservoir. It is anticipated that the works will be completed at the end of February, following which we need to ensure the solidity of the structure before we can open the floodgates. Some of the stakeholders actually make reference to the fact that “Opening three floodgates at the same time can compromise the integrity of the dam wall,” True. However, the remedial works currently in progress are meant to protect the plunge pool scour-hole against spill jets from the gates. We are carefully watching the Dam Flood Control Rule Curve which requires the dam to be drawn down to below 64% live storage (484.15m level) at the end of February each year. The current average rising rate is 2cm per day and if we factor the highly probable large inflow into the Kariba Dam due to peak inflows of the current season, that is when the necessity to open more gates might arise.

The Zambezi River Authority has a moral duty to alert all the stakeholders downstream of a potential nature-driven eventuality and not to cause alarm. When we plan the reservoir operations, we also factor the weather, based on the information from SARCOF on the prevailing hydro-meteorological conditions on the Kariba sub-basin which indicate continued wet conditions.

At a briefing we held with stakeholders in the lower Zambezi following the opening of the floodgates in 2010, we explained the Zambezi River Authority operations and appealed to all stakeholders to move wherever possible to higher ground. The weather patterns, due to climate change, are beyond our control and like all of you, we are grappling with coping mechanisms. Most of you are aware that there are six gates at the Kariba Dam, which in the case of an emergency, may be opened all at once. This is the extreme scenario which all operators in the Zambezi River Basin should be acquainted with in terms of flood preparedness. It is unfortunate that some of the structures which are very close to the river bank might have been constructed during the prolonged drought periods, hence the situation at hand.

We fully sympathize with all the concerns raised and we shall continue to manage the situation in such a way that our operations do not cause distraction.

Sincerely
Elizabeth M. Karonga, Public Relations & Communications Manager
