

AVIATION TOURISM & CONSERVATION

NEWS EAST AFRICA

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



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East Africa News

BRUSSELS AIRLINES BOOSTS INFLIGHT CUISINE

(Posted 31st October 2013)



(First class inflight meals with the help from a friendly chef)

Starting tomorrow, 01st of November, will Brussels Airlines introduce a range of new inflight meals on their intercontinental flights, which includes the routes from Brussels to Entebbe, Kigali, Bujumbura and Nairobi, the airline's East African destinations. Over the coming weeks will Belgium's top chefs, starting with Geert van Hecke, a culinary star from West Flanders, produce food for passengers in Brussels Airlines award winning business class, reflecting on both the season as well as the region of Belgium the respective chefs will come from.

As an old saying goes, that love goes through the stomach, so has Brussels Airlines apparently also concluded that passenger loyalty too goes through the stomach and the new range of meals available on their long haul flights to New York, Washington and the entire West African destinations, will go a long way to cement 'friendship' as the passengers taste buds are tickled at 39.000 feet above sea level. Savoir Vivre returning once again to the air, which has always been a hallmark, first of the good old Sabena days when this phrase was coined and now with Brussels Airlines. And for those travelling together as a couple on SN, perhaps the question 'Can I take you for dinner on Brussels Airlines darling?' is now not completely out of question. Bon Appetite!



QATAR AIRWAYS JOINS ONEWORLD ALLIANCE

(Posted 30th October 2013)



Travellers using Qatar Airways from their East African destinations of Entebbe, Kigali, Nairobi, Kilimanjaro, Dar es Salaam and Addis Ababa will effective today be able to enjoy the benefits of QR having joined the third of the global airline alliances, **oneworld**. It is thought that following the lukewarm approach by British Airways to the East African market place – they dropped flights to Tanzania earlier this year and more recently also their flights to Lusaka – **oneworld** will get a visibility boost through Qatar Airways' membership as few others of their alliance members in fact operate into key airports across the African continent, in particular into sub Saharan Africa.

While aviation pundits are divided over who the greater beneficiary is, most leaning towards the alliance getting the larger boost from the entry of such a quality airline as Qatar Airways has become over the years, passengers loyal to QR will at least enjoy some added benefits with greater connectivity into the destination network of alliance airlines where the Gulf airline is not, or not yet flying directly to.

There is though the perception that some of the other carriers are in terms of inflight and ground handling abilities and qualities a distant second compared to the services passengers are used to from QR, lending credibility to claims that – while Qatar Airways joined in near record time after aligning and harmonizing systems and procedures – it is the other alliance members which now need to strive to attain the higher service levels Qatar Airways is bringing to **oneworld**, a challenge in particular for the 'mass production' airlines like American and British Airways, the latter of the two today being a far cry from the once 'World's favourite airline'.

In a media release received from Qatar Airways, some of the immediate benefits to their own frequent flyer programme cardholders have been outlined as follows:

*The 3 million members of Qatar Airways' Privilege Club loyalty programme will from midnight tonight enjoy the full range of **oneworld** frequent flyer benefits when travelling with any **oneworld** member airline worldwide – airberlin, American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Finnair, Iberia, Japan Airlines, LAN Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Qantas, Royal Jordanian, S7 Airlines and their 30 affiliated airlines.*

*Privilege members will be able to earn and redeem Qmiles on any **oneworld** flight. In celebration of the airline's addition to the alliance, they will receive double Qmiles award miles when flying on Qatar Airways' **oneworld** partners between 15 November and 31 January (except between 20 December and 5 January).*

Privilege Club members will also receive Qpoints for tier status when flying with all these airlines.

*Privilege Club Platinum cardholders will have Emerald status in the **oneworld** programme. Privilege Club Gold will be equivalent to **oneworld** Sapphire and Privilege Club Silver will be **oneworld** Ruby.*

From midnight tonight, Privilege Club Platinum and Gold members will be able to access more than 550 airport lounges worldwide offered by oneworld member airlines when they fly with one of the alliance's carriers – five times more than they can use up until now. Qatar Airways' First and Business Class passengers will also be able to use oneworld partner airline lounges.

As oneworld Emeralds, Privilege Club Platinum cardholders will be able to use First Class lounges, where available – and receive an additional baggage allowance and access fast tracks through departure security at select airports.

Also from midnight tonight, the 140 million members of the established oneworld airlines' frequent flyer programmes will be able to earn and redeem awards and tier status points and receive all other oneworld benefits when flying on Qatar Airways.

To celebrate the addition of the new recruit to oneworld, members of established member airlines' loyalty programmes will receive double the normal mileage awards when flying on Qatar Airways between 15 November and 31 January (except between 20 December and 5 January).

Meanwhile has Qatar Airways' CEO Akbar Al Baker commented on his airline's joining of oneworld when he said: ***'Alliances are playing an increasingly important role in the airline industry today – and that will continue long into the future. Becoming a member of oneworld is one of the most significant landmarks in Qatar Airways' history. It will strengthen our competitive offering and give our customers what they fully deserve – more choice across a truly global network served together with airline partners who include some of the best and biggest in the world. In Qatar Airways' relatively short history, we have quickly established a reputation for innovation, quality and excellence in everything we do. We are pleased to build on that by becoming the only major airline from the Gulf to join any of the global airline alliances – and we are proud to become part of what is clearly the world's top quality airline alliance, oneworld'.***

In contrast have the other two major Gulf airlines opted to go their own ways, with Emirates notably relying entirely on their own strengths in the global market place. While cooperating with other airlines, when they see benefits in commercial agreements, they are clearly not interested to become part of any alliance but prefer, and rightly so, to remain purely Emirates, which is set to soon become the world's largest international airline.

Etihad opted for a different approach, also outside the conventional alliance framework, by making strategic investments in key airlines, among them Air Berlin and Air Seychelles, and seeking close commercial ties and code share partnerships with others where it enhances the market standing for themselves, and those selected for cooperation.

Watch this space for breaking and regular news from Eastern Africa's vibrant aviation market.

COMMON VISA ANNOUNCEMENT FOR UGANDA, RWANDA AND KENYA DELAYED

(Posted 29th October 2013)



An announcement was to be made at the World Travel Market next week in London, that the long awaited common tourist Visa, applicable for Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya, would be launched by the first of January next year, to add to the marketing buzz the three countries will be generating. However, the latest information from Kigali, following the third Head of State Summit of the 'Coalition of the Willing' – a phrase coined here and now widely used in local and regional media – indicates that such an announcement will now be made at the next summit, which is due to be held in late December. Tourism operators were immediately suspicious over this development as they had been led to believe that WTM would be the best possible platform to promote this decision, which will, when finally implemented, cut down on Visa cost for tourists visiting more than one country to the region.

'We had enough of these constant delays' wrote a regular source before continuing 'I understand that there were big issues when the common tourist Visa was on the agenda for the entire EAC countries but then, the three made a lot of noise about it and our panel of experts agreed at the Nairobi meeting two weeks ago that we can

make the announcement in London. Now what happened is a mystery but it seems there are still unresolved issues. We have already informed our clients overseas that in future, come 2014, they can send clients on a safari across the three countries and save on Visa fees and I hope this will still be on track even if the formal announcement has been delayed. The credibility of the fast tracking is at stake here. Slowing down to the previous pace is not an option for us'.

At the same time however good news emerged from Kigali that work permits for citizens of the three countries, come January 2014, will be issued free of charge, a move seen to further promote regional integration and filling urgent manpower shortages in the hospitality industry. On the downside it was learned that the single sky operation will have to wait a little longer as regulators and airlines are still searching for a modus operandum to which all can sign on. What was apparently agreed upon was the integration of the three single air traffic management systems over the coming months before full rights, already existing on paper for that matter, will be extended to any registered and licensed airline in any of the three countries for cross border flights.

Uganda News

NORTHERN UGANDA BRACES FOR MASSIVE VISITOR INFLUX AHEAD OF 'HYBRID ECLIPSE'

(Posted 01st November 2013)



Over 10.000 visitors made up by a large number of locals and several hundred foreign tourists, are expected to flock to Northern Uganda from today to witness, good weather permitting, one of the great spectacles of the skies above us, a hybrid solar eclipse.

While sections of the private sector have been working on this 'project' for over a year, getting ready by block booking accommodation ahead of the pack and even contracting temporary tented camps to be erected for this weekend, 'official Uganda' took rather long to catch on to this event, but when they did they made up for lost time and engaged with a vengeance.

Major security arrangements have been put into place in the districts around Pakwach to ensure the safety of visitors while hotels and lodges which still have a bed or a few to sell, are now charging full rack rates, some in fact reported to have added 'eclipse supplements' to their rates.

The path of the eclipse has favoured the locations around Pakwach, though it will also be seen in Eastern Congo and Northern Kenya, before traversing into the Indian Ocean after crossing the African continent.

Uganda was last year Lonely Planet's top global destination, was named this year by National Geographic as one of their top choices to travel to and the Kidepo Valley National Park named by CNN as their top choice in Africa. The upcoming eclipse is seen as one great opportunity to showcase the country ahead of next week's World Travel Market in London, where Uganda will of course be present, led by the Uganda Tourism Board and a large number of private sector representatives from hotels, lodges, the national parks and other attractions and of course the DMC's. Time to visit 'Uganda, the Pearl of Africa'.

See www.visituganda.com – the official Uganda Tourism Board website or www.ugandawildlife.org – the official site of Uganda National Parks for more details about the country. Another useful site is www.theeye.co.ug, a bi-monthly full detail free visitor guide to Uganda.



AIR UGANDA LAUNCHES MOBILE MONEY PAYMENT OPTION

(Posted 30th October 2013)



Air Uganda yesterday formally launched their new payment option which prospective passengers can now use to pay for their ticket. An agreement with MTN's Mobile Money now permits instant payment when booking on line, securing the reservation made by simply accessing their mobile money account via their phone, touching a few dials, entering a few digits and successfully concluding the transaction.

The airline's CEO Cornwell Muleya was in a media release sent out overnight quoted to have said at the launch of the new feature: ***'Using MTN Mobile Money, our customers can now pay for air tickets and fly! At Air Uganda we want to empower our customers, so we introducing innovative products and technologies to ease the travel experience for the customer. This mobile money platform is easy to use, convenient, reliable and fast. It will save our customers a lot time, since they can now buy tickets from wherever they are'.***

Air Uganda flies from their home base in Entebbe to Juba, Nairobi, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Bujumbura, Kigali and Mogadishu, using a fleet of 3 Bombardier CRJ200 aircraft.

The two other main mobile money operators in Uganda, Airtel and Uganda Telecom, have reportedly also expressed interest to sign up with Air Uganda to provide equal services to their own subscribers.

UGANDA IMPOUNDS OVER 2 TONS OF IVORY AS TWO CHINESE ARRESTED IN KAMPALA

(Posted 28th October 2013)



Last weekend did security operatives working hand in hand with enforcement officers from the Uganda Wildlife Authority arrest two Chinese and two Guineans in Kampala, with a haul of over 1.9 tons of blood ivory ready to be shipped out of the country, after earlier in the week confiscating 116 kilogrammes of ivory at the airport.

UWA intelligence personnel were, following that seizure, able to confiscate the larger consignment which was due to leave the country by road to Mombasa and make the arrests.

The Guineans, according to a Kampala based source, were already arrested two weeks earlier and their testimony thought crucial in arresting the Chinese.

Ugandan officials were swift in reassuring that the ivory was not likely to have come from inside Uganda but was brought into the country from possibly Eastern Congo or South Sudan, where poaching is rife and little done in terms of law enforcement to protect their elephants or prevent regular smuggling of the contraband out of the country. One of the parcels seized appears to have been sent by overland bus from Bujumbura / Burundi to Uganda, but as no poaching figures are available from Burundi it is again suspected that the ivory could have come from either neighbouring Congo DR or even from Tanzania, where in recent weeks the government finally seems to take a stand and make a more determined effort to combat poaching and ivory smuggling.

The four now in custody in Kampala are considered important elements in the search for financiers and traders and indication was given that more arrests could be made soon to hopefully dismantle the entire smuggling operation using Uganda as a transit point for their criminal activities. Well done UWA.

TURKISH WEEK ENDS AT KAMPALA SERENA

(30th October 2013)



A week of delightful Turkish music and cuisine came to an end on Monday night as the Kampala Serena Hotel hosted a dedicated '*Turkish Week*' which they had organized in conjunction with Turkish Airlines. Chefs, foodstuffs and spices were flown into Entebbe by Turkish, as were the musical performers, aimed to showcase Turkey as both a trading partner and also as a destination to visit, besides of course promoting travel by Turkish via Istanbul.

With over 200 aircraft in service, a modern fleet from both Airbus and Boeing, Turkey and Uganda now enjoy daily flights and passengers have a host of European, Asian and American destinations to choose from.

By the end of 2014 will Turkish Airlines connect some 40 African cities, mostly using their Boeing B737-800NG and on selected routes the larger B737-900NG aircraft, while then for onward flights from Istanbul using wide body equipment in a classic hub and spoke operation.

The Kampala Serena has also announced that they will shortly launch their holiday season programme for Christmas and New Year, with special culinary extravaganzas planned and special offers for guests staying during the holiday period when business traffic will have largely come to a standstill. This will apply to both the Kampala Serena Hotel and the Lake Victoria Serena Hotel outside the city at Lweza. On sale over the holiday season will be gift hampers and the hotel's renowned pastry shop will be turning out Christmas '*Stollen*' and Christmas puddings, besides cakes made to order.

BLAZING NEW TRAILS – A JOURNEY FROM KABALE VIA BUNYONYI TO KISORO

(Posted 27th October 2013)



The South West of Uganda has of late made waves among tourism operators as new lodges, camps and even home stays have started to line up along the various tourist routes and hiking trails, which visitors can explore by foot, mountain bike, boda boda, taxi, public busses and even using dugout canoes to get across the extensive waters of Lake Bunyonyi. Of course there is always the option of using one's own car to get to these places and then stroll about a bit before motoring on.

Specialized tour operators, fully licensed of course with qualified guides and relevant insurance covers, today welcome dozens of hiking enthusiasts during the high season months, but interest according to Asgario, the Nkuringo Walking Safaris chief guide, now spans the entire year, even the rainy season.

Another one who confirms the growing interest is Miha Logar, who authored the e-Book about the *Gorilla Highlands*, a must read guide to South Western Uganda which leaves literally no question unanswered, so detailed and exhaustive are the topics in it.

Getting to Kabale by road is, for most of the route, no longer an issue though some sections are still undergoing work, and from Kampala, taking a short fuel and pit stop at one of the stations in Mbarara into account, the journey should not take much over 5 hours by private car. Busses, including the reliable Post Bus service which leaves Kampala every morning at 8 a.m. sharp, ply the route throughout the day and at an affordable cost, and the number

of ‘muzungus’ in these busses, carrying backpacks and heading to the highlands, has been steadily growing over the past years.

Kabale has no airstrip, yet – the Uganda CAA and government have been talking about establishing one for years – so anyone who wants the quick and easy solution of getting there will have to use one of the Kampala Aero Club’s helicopters, at a cost of course and surely not the way how Joe Average is travelling (www.flyuganda.com).

So it was in the end an almost foregone conclusion that travel by bus it had to be, considering that after reaching Kabale days of hikes lay ahead, ending in Kisoro. This would make the use of a private car sort of difficult as, once going per pedes apostulorum (Latin for ‘footing it’), it would not just make an appearance by genie at the other end of the trail no matter how one would wish for it or look for that magic lamp to rub.

Kabale has in recent years grown in leaps and bounds and the good old White Horse Inn still rules the hospitality landscape from its position perched high above the municipality. That said of course, there are a large number of smaller hotels which have sprung up in recent years and available accommodation within and outside the municipality for any budget can be found with ease, especially when carrying the latest edition of The Eye Uganda (www.theeye.co.ug) where all details down to the latest phone numbers can be sourced. The golf course near the White Horse Inn is inviting but carrying that gear in addition to the ‘regular’ hiking outfit and backpack content would be have been stretching it more than just a bit for the purpose of this particular trip.

Kabale is a springboard for tourists visiting the South West of Uganda, and whether they stay put and explore from there, go on to Kisoro and beyond or drive on to Buhoma, perhaps even through the forest itself, passing the tropical forest research station in Ruhija, just getting there is an experience in itself.

When the bus starts the long climb up the hills soon turned mountains, their slopes carefully terraced to enhance crop production and prevent soil erosion and landslides, the reason why this part of country is often called the ‘Switzerland of Uganda’ becomes evident, and while the mighty rock peaks of the alps are missing from the scenery, the volcanoes are not, when they eventually come into sight.

Homesteads are scattered all over the hills outside the regular small roadside settlements, where little shops and kiosks line the streets. The people living there have nowadays often moved to beyond mere subsistence farming by growing produce they can sell, either at the road side or to middlemen and traders who then take it to Uganda’s main urban centres, Kabale itself, Mbarara and of course the capital city of Kampala, where now over 1.5 million regular inhabitants depend on a steady supply of matooke, Irish and sweet potatoes, beans, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, peas and a range of other vegetables and fruits. In some places along the road eggs are sold, artfully packed in banana leaf wrappings and while many small farmers opt to display their wares on the road near their homesteads, there are regular colorful markets popping up as the bus speeds by. It is at such roadside markets that travellers heading ‘home’ load their cars, often already full to the brim with people and their bags, adding the farming goodies of the highlands, until every last nook and cranny inside that vehicle is the filled with food stuffs able to last them for a week or more.

From Kabale it is a short distance to the border with Rwanda at Katuna, should visitors wish to venture into the land of a thousand hills, though the more scenic route undoubtedly would be via the brand new tarmac road to Kisoro and from there along the volcanoes to Cyanika and across the border to Musanze, an equal tourism hub in Rwanda as are Kisoro and Kabale on our side. Also within a short distance from Kisoro is the border with the Congo DR at Bunagana, where to my surprise those backpackers unable to get a gorilla tracking permit in Uganda, often go across the border to see the mountain gorillas from there, brave perhaps or foolish even, considering the ongoing turmoil in that country but a sure bet to get to meet those prized mountain gorillas, and often at a ‘negotiated’ rate rather than those published.

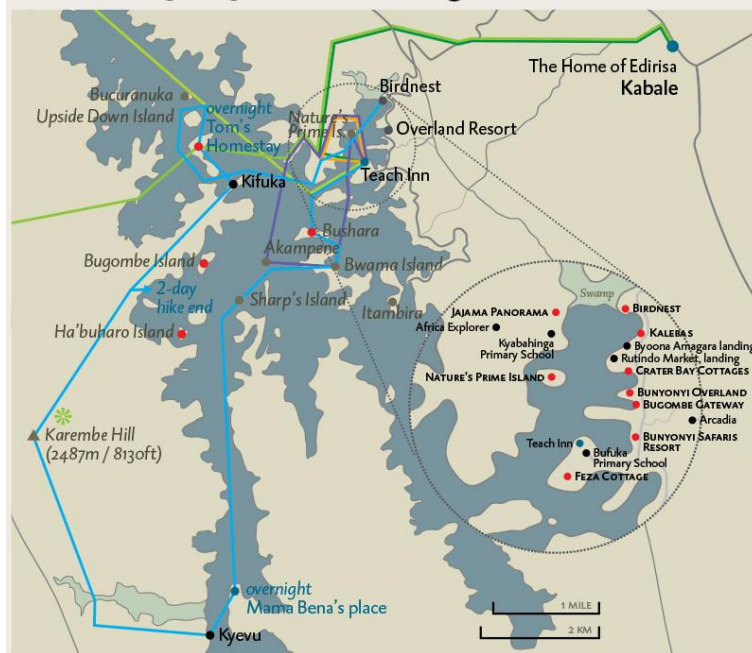
It is this brand new road which is seen by many as the greatest gift government has made to this part of the country, as in the past an often badly washed out murram road made the journey to Kisoro not just an adventure but outright dangerous, especially during the rainy season. Area residents were often unable to ship their produce to the markets due to impassable roads, but today, the new road has served them a dual purpose, to sell their harvests to the markets and have a growing stream of wagenis come to visit and spend their money on location, while enjoying the often spectacular sights, the wildlife of Mgahinga and Bwindi, Lakes Mulehe and Mutanda and of course, the warm hospitality of the local people.



(Map courtesy of www.gorillahighlands.com)

But back to Kabale where my journey by foot, and again by boda boda where necessary to cover distances on the faster track, was to start. Arguably one of the key features of or near Kabale is Lake Bunyonyi, a local word meaning ‘*the place of many little birds*’, and I want to concentrate a bit more about what has been happening there in the recent past, as it has emerged to be a major tourism hub in its own right. Bunyonyi is not just a lake but mired in lore and history and for those actually taking a canoe to explore the shores and islands, be aware of some dark secrets, some of which will be told here. The maps below, thankfully provided courtesy of www.gorillahighlands.com and Miha Logar, the brain behind the publication of the e-Book on what he calls the Gorilla Highlands, show the area and give, most important, hints of distances and the available trails, some starting right in Kabale and others nearer to Lake Bunyonyi.

Lake Bunyonyi & Gorilla Highlands Trails



As the maps show, an array of small accommodation facilities has sprung up around Lake Bunyonyi, and even on some of the islands in the lake, but notably have homestay options become available where visitors travelling on a small budget can find a bed for a night in the home of a family, get a decent night's sleep and enjoy a home cooked meal for dinner and some porridge of millet or maize flour for breakfast. All meals are prepared from local ingredients harvested on the day and often accompanied by a fish caught fresh just hours before it went in to the frying pan.

Such features have emerged almost unnoticed by many in Kampala, travel agents included, and the feedback on my articles about hiking through Bwindi and up to Nteko and Nkuringo in the last www.theeye.co.ug edition, was evidence enough how that information provided helped many potential travellers to plan trips to that part of Uganda and read The Eye beyond just the pages of Kampala, Entebbe and Jinja.



(Starting point for the many hikes now available from Kabale to Bunyonyi, Kisoro and beyond)

When reaching the shores of Lake Bunyonyi, in my case not hiked but boda boda'ed, and as long as one is on time for the canoes to leave on a day trip out on the lake, an exciting couple of hours lie ahead or if so arranged, an overnight on one of the islands can be included in a trip itinerary of course. In fact, to fully explore the lake, up to three day / two night trips are available 'off the shelf' and special itineraries can be tailored at short notice for those wanting to watch birds or simply relax on one of the islands, either camping at night or using a home stay option or else staying on one of the little resorts on the shores or on an island.

My admittedly rushed visit for the day took in most of what regular 'hikers' get to see, and perhaps a bit more after it was known that I am writing an article for The Eye, and my stops included such illustrious and mysterious names like Punishment Island – wherein olden days girls were literally dumped when found pregnant outside marriage –

Upside Down Island – a place where witchcraft is on everyone’s lips, or perhaps not for those who are seriously superstitious – before venturing on to Dr. Sharp’s Island – named after the founder of the leper colony – and finally Bwama Island, where in days long passed that very leper colony was located.



Gliding almost silently across the surface of Lake Bunyonyi has its own magic, the silence only interrupted by the splash of the paddles or the calls of birds of prey, ever watchful gliding through the skies above but swift to swoop down and catch a careless fish lingering just under the water surface and unaware of the imminent danger of becoming lunch for a bird. For those in a hurry, like I was, motorized boats cut down substantially on travelling across the lake and allowing to see many of the islands in a day, which for those who have to paddle is not quite that easily possible, assuming there are no Olympic champions with a rowing title among the passengers on the canoe. My trip took me the following day to the Echuya Forest, where a short Batwa trail can be explored, before moving on to Lake Kayumbu. It is also here that one can follow the trail very likely taken by a small British expeditionary force sent to the South West in 1914 to finally deal with a ‘rebel’ – yes even back then Uganda had those – by the name of Katuregye, but that is an entirely different story and perhaps it will be told here in one of the future *The Eye* editions, to give an insight how even 100 years ago people struggled to shed the yoke of colonialism and determine their own future, not much different from the pre-independence struggle East Africa experienced in the last 50’s and into the early 60’s until granted independence at last.

From Lake Kayumbu it is a short distance to Lake Chahafi, where only two weeks ago a small lodge was opened, offering camping facilities and a little restaurant and bar, taking care of stilling that peckish feeling built up over the miles and miles of cross country hikes. From Chahafi it is but a short distance to Kisoro itself, and it can be covered by foot or by boda boda, even special hire if arranged at the Lake Chahafi Resort.

And here closes the circle, well literally it does, as it was in Kisoro that my previous trip ended at the airfield from where Aerolink now flies daily to Entebbe. That last trip took me from Buhoma across Bwindi to Nteko and on to Nkuringo and then via Lake Mutanda’s Chameleon Hill Lodge and along Lake Mulehe to Kisoro.

Hiking is possible in both directions and Nkuringo Walking Safaris and www.gorillahighlands.com are happy to arrange hikes tailored to one’s available time and budget. Options for accommodation range from the very modest homestays over the various simple but clean to more upmarket B&B’s. Some of the fancier lodges are now found on Lake Mutanda and Lake Bunyoni and then there are the hotels in Kisoro and of course those in Kabale.

Going by bus to Kabale allows to hike the trails, like the one described or via Muko, to Kisoro or Nkuringo straight, giving the option to fly from Kisoro to Entebbe or, when hiking across Bwindi from Nkuringo or Nteko to Buhoma, with the Aero Club’s regular coach services from the Kayonza Tea Estate field back to Kajjansi.

Nothing can make up for a personal experience, of the people encountered along the way, their friendly disposition towards those exploring the country on foot or the children cheering on the muzungu riding as passenger on a boda boda across some back breaking tracks and roads, at least that is what the maps call those corrugated rutted lanes.

Uganda is renowned for her friendly people but it is really in the rural areas where this comes across best, when those tilling the fields stop their work, however briefly, to greet when a greeting is called in their direction from the roadside or track before returning to their hard work which feeds their families as the wagenis hike on.

All maps and pictures are from www.gorillahighlands.com with special permission by Miha Logar after the temporary ‘loss’ of my own pictures taken en route. *Uganda, the Pearl of Africa*, close up and personal and ready to receive visitors from near and far.

Kenya News

DELAYED PAYMENTS BY KENYA GOVERNMENT MAY SEE TRAVEL AGENTS BARRED BY IATA

(Posted 01st November 2013)



Some of Kenya's leading travel agencies are in reported trouble with IATA and the Kenyan BSP over alleged failure to fully remit their outstanding ticket sales, which by contract are due every month by the 17th.

At least one source, wishing understandably to remain unnamed, has confirmed that getting money out of government right now is a growing nightmare, as ministries claim to be underfunded and yet the Cabinet Secretary for the Treasury continues full mouthed statements that his ministry allocates sufficient funds to the line ministries which in turn are responsible to pay for services they source from the private sector. *'Getting a government account is always a big thing, they have a lot of travel business and some ministries have their staff travel more often than others. So if you land a big account, that joy can be shortlived when they start slowing down with payments. We as agents must pay BSP on time and if we don't they issue warnings which can ultimately result in an agency being cited, suspended or even kicked out of the clearing process. When you need several staff doing nothing else but chase our money, the pro and con start drifting apart. If we have to pre-finance those payments with bank overdrafts to meet deadlines, this can wipe out the entire profit for that account because interest rates for such overdrafts are a bit high. So if that happens for say two months and we still have no money, our bottom line starts to drop. Revenues and meeting sales targets then become a futile race if there is no profit left to pay staff, overheads and all. Some agencies have boosted their capital base to be in a position to pay perhaps for as long as 3 months business but there is a limit. Government should behave like any other client but I guess with the new media laws I cannot even tweet my disgust or see a story written in the papers for fear of being charged and jailed for causing disaffection for government, and yet it is the truth. And to be honest, at times I have a feeling that they expect a kickback to release our money and otherwise sit on the payment vouchers. But if I say that loud when that bill has become law, I go to jail instead of those asking for chai'.*

Other agencies were reluctant to discuss the emerging media reports that as many as a dozen of them could be in greater or lesser trouble and it remains to be seen if any intervention by KATA, the Kenya Association of Travel Agents will bear fruits to mitigate any default on current dues and give the concerned agencies a breathing space. That however may not go down well with other accredited agencies who pay in time, all the time, as they will likely blame those in default for having walked into the trap with eyes wide open and now have to pay the price for putting revenue growth before profitability and collectability of dues from ticket sales. Expect a twist in the tail of this story and watch this space for future updates.

Tanzania News

ANTI POACHING OPERATIONS MAY BE HALTED OVER OUTCRY ABOUT HARSH MEASURES

(Posted 02nd November 2013)



Members of parliament in Tanzania have voiced their concern over the harsh measures used by security forces drawn in to the fight against poaching, which has in recent weeks gathered some momentum as global pressure over the unabated mass slaughter of Tanzania's elephant finally registered at the highest level of government, prompting deployment of army units alongside regular TANAPA anti poaching operations.

Allegations were flying high and low as members of parliament whose areas were affected by such operations told apparently some gruesome stories of abuse, confiscation and killing of livestock and even killing of pastoralists trying to defend their herds rather than turning wrath on poachers proper.

News from Tanzania has it that as a result, and faced with potentially huge law suits for infringing on human rights and over the destruction of property, the ongoing anti poaching operations may be halted until such time that rules of engagement have been defined and the obscure, not written down but implied and publicly announced shoot to kill scenario is off the table. It was learned in fact that an ad hoc committee of parliament would travel to places where abuse was reported from to get to the bottom of the allegations.

Conservationists immediately stepped into the controversy demanding that anti poaching operations continue uninterrupted to avoid the poachers either time to regroup or else continuing their bloody handiwork. Other conservationists however echoed the sentiment by members of parliament and sections of civil society, saying that the direction and focus of the anti poaching operations were far from where things happened in the field and perhaps deliberately let get out of hand so that the exercise could be officially stopped and '*business as usual*' resume.

'*Tokomeza*' as the operation was named by government, is therefore likely to undergo a period of review and further consideration, before new guidelines will be provided of how to deal with ordinary pastoralists who for times immemorial have walked the pastures with their animals to keep them fed and watered.

As an intermediate step did the Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, Amb. Khamis Kagesheki, issue instructions that any confiscated property, livestock and other, be immediately returned to the owners – a move also seen as an attempt to appease the voting population as the next election is drawing ever nearer and such memories tend to linger on and disenchant the electorate from a sitting government.

Calls for the resignation or even sacking of the ministers responsibly also emerged during the debate in parliament, reminiscent of last year's events, when following a detailed investigation by a parliamentary committee Minister Kagesheki's hapless predecessor Ezekiel Maige was sacked together with other cabinet colleagues for a number of failures seen as too great and too many to remain in a cabinet position.

Watch this space as another twist in the tail of anti poaching operations in Tanzania now emerges, at a time when record hauls of blood ivory are confiscated in African ports, ports in the Middle East and in particular in ports in the South East of Asia, most with final destination China.

Rwanda News

RWANDA TAKES TOP HONOURS AS '*BEST EXHIBITOR*' AT JUST ENDED AKWAABA FAIR

(Posted 02nd November 2013)



Information received from Rwandan participants in this year's 9th edition of African Travel Market / AKWAABA in Lagos Nigeria tells the story of yet another Rwandan success at a tourism trade fair. The Rwandan stand was voted, by participants and other exhibitors, as the best stand of the trade fair. Rwanda had brought their Intore dancers and drummers with them to Nigeria and their displays of the gracious Rwandan dances must have made all the difference for the '*voters*' in acknowledging the effort of the delegation from the land of a thousand hills.

RwandAir had earlier on already taken the prize for '*Best short haul airline in Africa*' and taking the overall exhibitor award crowned Rwanda's presence at the Lagos fair.

RwandAir now connects Lagos daily with Kigali and the number of visitors to and from each country has risen sharply since the introduction of direct flights and Rwanda' abolishing the requirement for advance Visa for citizens of AU member countries, now giving them on arrival in Kigali – something many hope Nigeria will soon reciprocate as that particular issue is often cited as the greatest obstacle to increasing visitor numbers even further. Many members of the Rwandan delegation, after returning home, will now head to London to attend the World Travel Market and hope to generate equal interest in visits to their country. Congratulations go to Team Rwanda, well done once again.

KIGALI SERENA HOSTS BOTH TRIPARTITE AND ‘*TRANSFORM AFRICA SUMMIT*’

(Posted 30th October 2013)



The Kigali Serena Hotel, without argument Kigali’s best city hotel and subsequently awarded the World Travel Award during the Africa award ceremony earlier in the month in Nairobi, is currently hosting the ‘*Transform Africa Summit*’ to which the Rwandan government has invited key partners from across the continent. This follows hot on the heels of the Tripartite Summit between hosts Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya, where a range of issues was reviewed and progress measured towards various goals aimed to make the movement of goods and people easier come 2014. Rwanda has in recent years positioned itself as an upcoming ICT hub country and since linking up to the fibre optic cables from the Indian Ocean coast at Mombasa has progressively rolled out internet connectivity across the entire country. Public service vehicles increasingly offer in car WiFi and many hotspots in Kigali now offer free connectivity to locals and visitors alike while most hotels provide free internet access. Visitors to Rwanda’s capital of Kigali now habitually surf the net when searching for hotels, restaurants and other things to do, bringing home the full benefits of online sales opportunities for the country’s hospitality and tourism industry. Schools have been connected for free too by the main ISP’s which has hugely assisted school administrative staff but also the pupils who were equipped with small laptop computers under the ‘*One Laptop Per Child*’ policy the government in Kigali has launched two years ago. This is aimed to not only to make the next generation of Rwandans computer and internet literate but to empower the next generation in social and economic ways difficult to imagine just a few years ago.

Present at the summit, besides head of state designated representatives, are presidents Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda, Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, Salva Kiir from South Sudan – these three also attending the Tripartite Summit where South Sudan was present as an observer – and Blaise Compaore from Burkina Faso besides Ibrahim Boubacar from Mali. Those interested in the summit proceedings can watch updates and sessions via the following links:

<http://www.orinfor.gov.rw/tvr/watchtv1.php> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/transformafrica2013>.

RWANDAIR SCOOPS ‘*BEST SHORT HAUL AIRLINE*’ AWARD AT NIGERIA’S TOP TRAVEL EXPO

(Posted 30th October 2013)



The 9th Akwaaba Travel Fair in Lagos / Nigeria, where this year the tourism boards of Rwanda and Kenya represented East Africa, has on the opening day awarded RwandAir the coveted trophy as ‘*Best Short Haul Airline in Africa*’ to the delight of the entire Rwandan delegation, which then witnessed the award being received by RwandAir’s Head of Marketing Patrick Manzi, as shown in the picture below.



Rwanda had already made big waves when their Intore dancers and drummers created a buzz as the exhibition kicked off, with their drum beat drawing the crowds to the Rwanda stand in droves, to enjoy the spectacle of their

performance. This coincided with the **Rwanda Day** which was ‘celebrated’ yesterday in what is West Africa’s most important tourism show. RwandAir is flying daily to Lagos / Nigeria using one of their recently acquired B737-800NG aircraft, but has in addition added flight extensions via Lagos to Accra / Ghana, as they continue to roll out more West African destinations. Besides existing services to Brazzaville and Libreville, Lagos and Accra is RwandAir planning to add Douala and Abidjan, presenting itself as an airline of choice for many who want to not only fly to Rwanda but beyond, using the easy network connections with RwandAir out of Kigali to Johannesburg and Dubai on the longer routes and into the East African region’s destinations like Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Entebbe, Bujumbura and of late even Juba. Congratulations to the RwandAir team in Lagos and all the best to the Rwandan exhibitors which include Serena Hotels and New Dawn Associates, among several others. Watch this space.

Reunion News

VANILLA ISLAND ORGANIZATION SIGNS MOU WITH CONSTANCE HOTELS

(Posted 30th October 2013)



The Reunion based Vanilla Island Organization, the formation of which was announced in September alongside the UNWTO Conference on Sustainable Tourism Developments on small island states, has yesterday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Constance Hotels in the Seychelles capital of Victoria. The accord covers various areas of cooperation, especially important as Constance Hotels has resorts on several of the Vanilla Islands, such as the Seychelles – the Ephelia on Mahe and the Lemuria on Praslin – but also on Madagascar, Mauritius and the youngest member country of the VIO, the Maldives.

Key among the agreed points is that Constance Hotels will offer free accommodation and meals to the Vanilla Island Organization when they bring in the travel trade for fam trips and the media to report about the islands’ attractions and cover special events like this week’s Festival Kreol.

Airlines flying to and within the islands too have indicated their willingness to play their part in bringing the travel trade and journalists to the islands, as seen this week when Air Seychelles brought in a large number of media personnel from as far as Europe to Mahe, in conjunction with partner Etihad, while also flying in the delegations from Reunion, Mauritius and journalists from as far as South Africa, who came to the Seychelles for the Festival Kreol, one of the Vanilla Island Organization’s annual calendar events.

A new logo is expected to be launched next week at the World Travel Market in London for the Vanilla Island Organization, and a major press conference will also be held at the trade fair under the auspices of the UN World Tourism Organization, when the formal launch of VIO will be announced and key personnel like their CEO, Pascale Viroleau and their Director of Marketing, Derek Savy be introduced to the global travel trade. Watch this space.

Seychelles News

LE MERIDIEN BARBARONS TO CLOSE IN EARLY 2014 FOR MAJOR OVERHAUL

(Posted 02nd November 2013)



Information obtained and confirmed while in the Seychelles speaks of Le Meridien, a Starwood brand for resort operations, will very likely lose the management of the Le Meridien Barbarons, when it reopens in mid to late 2014 after a planned shutdown to allow for major renovations, rebuilding and upgrade of the property.

The owners paid a visit to the Seychelles Tourism and Culture Minister Alain St. Ange's office just prior to his departure for the World Travel Market, briefing him and his senior staff on their plans.

The Le Meridien Barbarons was also earlier this week the venue for an IMF review meeting of progress made on the Seychelles' economic reform programme launched 5 years ago, which has attracted praise from international development partners for the accomplishments during this period of time.

Details sources from usually well informed stakeholders have already put a name to the 'new' Barbarons, which is likely to reopen as Barbarons Beach Avani / Seychelles, then being managed by a company associated with some of the owners. Minor Hotels are also 50 percent partners in the Elewana Collection which owns and operates boutique style safari camps and small but exclusive beach resorts in Tanzania, on Zanzibar, at Mombasa's Diani Beach and in the Masai Mara.

No comment could be received, perhaps due to the short notice or else for senior staff leaving for WTM in London, from Le Meridien in the Seychelles, which will upon the changeover at the Barbarons only retain the Le Meridien Fishermen's Cove in Bel Ombre at the far end of the Beau Vallon Bay beach,

Watch this space for breaking and regular news from the fast changing hospitality scene across the Indian Ocean islands.

MEET ONE OF THE SEYCHELLES' HIDDEN GEMS – THE RESIDENCE ON THE ROCKS

(Posted 02nd November 2013)



Travel to the Seychelles is always a much anticipated affair, an affair which in my case has lasted for many years and which keeps growing stronger every time I visit the islands. In my '*line of business*' I regularly come face to face with luxurious hotels, resorts, safari lodges and safari camps, from the world's top ranked properties in the Gulf to the award winning boutique collections in Eastern Africa and beyond.

Most of these places excel in one key aspect, individuality, though attention to detail, F&B service and superior guest relations, there when you need them and gone when you don't too are key ingredients to earn them my professional respect and the accolades which go along with them. I am known to rate simple facilities, like for instance the Gorilla Camp in Nkuringo with 5 stars, in its own class that is and in comparison with similar places, while tearing down those self awarded 5 stars where the owners live in cuckoo land and need a serious reality check to learn what the word '*Luxury*' really entails and involves. Luxury in fact has come to be one of the most abused notions and words in parts of Eastern Africa, and I guess beyond too, at times attributed to having a flush loo and a trickling shower, clogged with sediment, using lukewarm water from a hastily lit '*Tanganyika boiler*' which is then presented as '*ecofriendly*'.

Oh well, those are the trials and tribulation of a travel writer and for most of the time I just endure such places, move on and NOT write about them, though at times I of course do to unmask them and warn off other travellers from expecting too much when they read '*luxury*' on the websites.



Per chance, during this visit to the Seychelles, mainly to cover the ***Festival Kreol*** and a series of related events by the Seychelles Tourism Board and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, an opportunity arose to sample a residence,

in fact THE RESIDENCE aka www.residenceontherocks.com. I anticipated much, having read up on the place, and yet, nothing could have prepared me for the reality of this it as I entered and stood in awe.

I arrived at the main reception of the Banyan Tree Seychelles, got my orientation alongside a scented cold towel and a delicious fruit punch and enjoyed my view from the terrace with rain bucketing down outside as if there was no tomorrow. Well I thought, where I come from in Africa a visitor bringing rain is considered a blessing, and so I assumed my regular upright posture, smiling ear to ear about having brought the rain and ignored the muttering under the breath of other guests who were not amused in the least to be disturbed and marooned inside by courtesy of my gift. Official meet and greet done, by Alvaro Acebal, Director of F&B and Sheila Banana, Sales Manager, I was whisked into my electric cart, bags already inside and the roll down see through sides zipped up to keep the rain out and off we went for a 5 minute drive, higher and higher up the hills and passing those coveted hill side villas before suddenly the Residence on the Rocks emerged.

The sounds of the Bee Gees' and their California Dreaming song greeted me, setting the right mood and when this classic was followed by more 70's and 80's hits, it all combined, the scent of the tropical flowers, the soft breeze from the ocean and the sights from the hill top to create '*Seychelles Dreams*' in my mind, ready to drop the pen and notebook, camera and sound recorder and just let be for a while. It suddenly was Seychelles at its Sunday best, the hustle and bustle of the world shut out and even the busy resort left behind, reminding me how often I used the phrase *Seychelles*, truly ***Another World*** – and certainly so it was for me.

A residence of such kind of course must have a butler and Lalith Premasiri was instantly at hand when the cart pulled into the drive way, followed by his better half Chandrika Jayaweera, and almost by magic did my bags disappear, a cold juice appear and greetings were showered upon me as if by magic wand I had become the centre of the universe. I guess it is such a welcome which will see guests come back time and again to this place but for a first timer like myself, there was no doubt at all, I had arrived, in all the senses this sentence can be spoken.

Perched high above the beaches of Anse Intendance, at the very far end of Banyan Tree's hillside villas, this 5 bedroomed property offers all one can wish for and more. Two bedrooms in the pool house, two including an opulent master suite in the main house and one added bedroom in a cottage next to the outdoor Jacuzzi, make this an ideal location for a getaway, alone or with a group of friends, who prefer the privacy, which the use of such a private residence can offer and yet can enjoy all the services of Banyan Tree just an in-house phone call away. They send an electric cart for the Spa sessions, advance booking absolutely essential I am told as the booking sheets are literally full for days ahead – not a mean feat by the way considering the cost, which for a multi treatment multi hour session can easily run in excess of 300 US Dollars. Banyan Tree also sends a cart to have dinner at one of their restaurants, normally arriving within a few minutes after calling, though they of course also deliver food a la room service or '*villa service*' rather to the residence if guests wish to remain up on the hill wearing casual rather than having to dress up '*smart*'. The alternative of course is to get one's own chef seconded from the resort who will prepare an a la carte meal according to the guests' preference, from breakfast over lunch to high tea and on to dinner.

It is this level of flexibility which discerning travellers, seeking out such options when they research their holiday destination, treasure in particular as they are not ever bound by meal times or dress codes, demanded of course in the main Banyan Tree resort but at the residence such formalities are tossed aside to let individuality and personal tastes and likes become the rule rather than the exception.

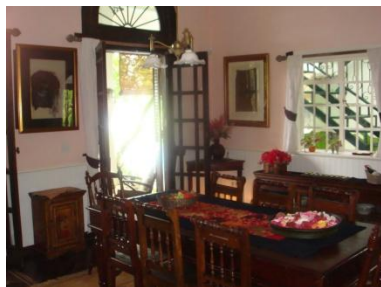
The lounge in the main house, as is the dining room and the pool deck, are for all to share but the individual terraces or balconies of the rooms allow for enough privacy should one care for '*alone time*' before rejoining the other guests again.



(Elephants are everywhere, at the pool and even sculptured on to one of the huge granite rock outcrops)

An infinity pool right outside the main house' lounge invites for a swim, day or night and there is never any fight over sunbeds as each guest – the residence can take as many as 10 with full double occupancy at a time – has her or his own and there are enough shaded places to retreat from the scorching sun, as the vista over the Indian Ocean below evokes more than just one 'awesome'.

The bedrooms, furnished with a tasteful blend of hand crafted cabinets, desks and chests, matching carpets, pictures, pieces of craft and collector's items, leave nothing wanting and neither do the well appointed bathrooms or the walk in wardrobes. The master bedroom suite has 5 doors opening to the upper floor terrace, which runs along the length of the house and which, especially in the morning at dawn, but also in the bright sunlit colours of the early afternoon, often left me rooted to a spot, gazing over the ocean while the surf from far below provided the background beat to supplement the ever present birdsong. Those 'French' doors, like almost every other item used in creating this bespoke home, have a history as the owners brought them from India while the flooring is made of re-used Burma teak. The colonial windows, as I thought on first sight, were brought in from Kenya while much of the metal work, including the spiral staircase leading to a study above the bedroom, was also imported from India and Burma, where Karl Ammann found these treasures and brought them to the Seychelles. Other furniture must have been collected across Eastern Africa and notably are elephant statues, pictures and wall decorations visible everywhere, testament to the owner's work as a renowned wildlife photographer and keen conservationist.



The style of the residence in many ways reminds me of the Seychellois people, the Creole people, a mix of many origins from China to India to Arabia and Africa, and as I said tongue in cheek a few days ago, a fair portion of the pirates of old thrown in for good measure which may explain the sparkle of friendly mischief in some of the eyes when you look at them or they look at you.

The residence certainly brings out this perfect blend and matches the venerable and the antique with the glass and marble in bathrooms which could have come from a modern city hotel, but for the personal touches of flowers, toiletry containers, the mirror frames, the bowls for flower petals and the incense burners. It all gives a guest here

the sense of being at home, well almost for most, as the weather outside of course is vastly different from the one where most come from, Europe in Winter or America in Fall, marked by cold rain and clinging fog, iced over windscreens and the need to dress up warm as the last leaves are blown off the trees by the winter storms. I instantly felt at home here, and the lack of a hammock, one of the hallmarks of my own '*Lake Shores*' on Lake Victoria was more than made up for by sun chairs, deck chairs and comfy sofa sets, where I could lounge about, periodically changing location to be sure I sat on them all during my stay, book in hand and camera at the ready. Anyone opting to stay at the Residence on the Rocks will be rewarded with this '*home away from home*' atmosphere, being able to stroll up to the fridge – which can be stocked with all essentials needed to make that quintessential midnight snack or during the day take care of that peckish feeling – by a quick visit to one of the shops nearby.

A separate entrance not far from the residence allows in fact entry by hired car, for those wanting to take a drive and enjoy the '*Mille Miglia*' Seychelles style where the winding roads hug mountainsides as well as the beaches as one traverses the island by car, and don't one wish for an open roof Porsche 911 at such moments. By car, it is easy to get to the shops, or into Victoria which is about 45 minutes away, but the healthier option for a spot of shopping clearly is the use of a bike, or simply taking a long brisk walk – and the Banyan Tree's network of cart ways give ample opportunity to do exactly that and enjoy the magnificent natural gardens and forests which remained untouched when Banyan Tree was built over 10 years ago.

All this together makes this a home stay, well almost, but one of the finest kind, where visitors can enjoy the best of both worlds, the opulent luxury and services of a Banyan Tree resort and the style, the perfection in fact of a private villa set apart from the rest, in many more ways than just the geographical distance of course, to spend quality time with oneself, enjoy the presence of a companion or have this long planned getaway with a group of equal minded friends.



(Tea by Theodor – a huge Banyan Tree outside and below the magnificent stretch of beach along Anse Intendance)

By the way, tea in the residence is by none less than Theodor – a full display available in the main lounge of the Banyan Tree, where in fact a fully grown Banyan Tree outside the main entrance symbolizes the link between name and nature.

The magnificent Anse Intendance below allows for long jogs and while the water and the surf are perhaps a little rougher than in other more sheltered bays, it does not at all prevent one from taking a bit of a swim or just stand in the surf and matching strength with strength ... be prepared to lose to the ocean though.

Excursions and day trips to Praslin and La Digue are easy to arrange – again the guest relation staff at the Banyan Tree is happy to assist in the bookings as will the residence' butler, but a day out fishing, sailing, snorkeling or diving as well is at the tip of the finger by either calling guest relations or else, and perhaps more rewarding, making arrangements directly after leafing through the free Seychelles Guide booklet or via the Seychelles App which can be downloaded to iPhones and Android Smartphones to browse. Cable and Wireless as well as Airtel offer local

SIM cards and credit can be loaded at almost every corner in Victoria and across the island's shops, allowing to put a data bundle package on a phone to surf the net, post twitter pictures or share the latest photographs with friends on Facebook and, as I was told repeatedly overnight after posting the first pictures, have those friend turn green with envy. Internet at the Banyan Tree and the Residence on the Rocks is available for free and a laptop, netbook or iPad / Tablet will simply connect without fuss, pass word or complicated step by step procedures often seen elsewhere. Satellite TV is available for those bothered or worried enough to find out what is happening back home, but I hear more and more that while away, fewer and fewer travellers actually use the TV in their rooms, unless their favourite football team plays, a Grand Prix is running or a tennis final underway.

As I end, just after 8 in the morning, having a second cup of steaming tea at my side, I think for the rest of the day I will do what I promised myself, be just another guest in one of the most luxurious places available on this island, read a bit more in my book about the occupation of much of the Iberian peninsula and parts of France by the Moors and try to imagine who, if anyone, in those days lived on, leave alone 'occupied' the Seychelles archipelago.

With conviction of a special dedicate nature I say today... *Seychelles*, truly ***Another World***.

Come visit, no Visa needed but a return ticket, Kenya Airways connects Mahe four times a week with Nairobi as does Ethiopian with Addis Ababa, and a confirmed hotel booking. Air Seychelles flies to Johannesburg and Mauritius three times a week and in conjunction with Etihad almost twice a day to Abu Dhabi, Emirates serves the islands double daily from Dubai and Condor flies in from Germany once a week.

For more information about tourism on the islands see www.seychelles.travel

SEYCHELLES UNVEIL CARNIVAL 2014 POSTER AS SONG CONTEST LAUNCHED BY MINISTER

(Posted 01st November 2013)



Seychelles' Tourism and Culture Minister Alain St. Ange yesterday unveiled the poster for the '*Carnaval de Carnivals – The Carnival International de Victoria*' which is scheduled for 25th to 27th of April next year.

He explained to the media that Seychelles' had opted to shift the dates from the conventional carnival period to April to allow the major world powers of carnival, Brazil, the German carnival club of Duesseldorf, the Notting Hill Carnival, Trinidad and Tobago and others to be well represented in Victoria without a conflict of interest back home, where their own celebrations could be adversely affected with key players and groups absent. In fact he confirmed their presence as already confirmed, in addition of which French carnival groups too are expected to come to the Seychelles to perform.

Festival partners as co-hosts will once more be La Reunion, which has been on board since the inaugural event in 2010, with Madagascar, Mayotte and South Africa already signed up as new co-hosts for the 2014 edition. While the participation of the same carnival group from Mauritius, which won the runner's up prize for best performance last year, has already been confirmed, no word has been received yet if Mauritius will finally come on board as a co-host or again forgo this great opportunity to showcase itself in front of the world media. A 10 minute video on YouTube featuring Minister St. Ange's presentation and answering the question about Mauritius' participation is now available on line via this link: <http://youtu.be/2JxIIKFTAz4>

The carnival has been adopted by the recently incorporated '*Vanilla Island Organization*' as one of their key annual events, supported by VIO as well as the other member islands. It is hoped that new member Maldives will take the

opportunity to be present in Victoria, and with La Reunion, Madagascar and Mayotte already confirmed it leaves only Mauritius and the Comoros to still confirm their official participation as co-hosts.

It was also confirmed that the opening ceremony will again be held next year at the centre of Victoria, around the ‘**Little Big Ben Clocktower**’ as the general weather pattern was unlikely to bring any rain over that period, unlike last year where on the eve of the festival the island was swept by a rainstorm, forcing organizers to move the opening ceremony into the international conference centre to be on the safe side.

The parade route for next year will by and large be the same proven route of past years passing the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Kenwyn House before moving on to the Clock Tower roundabout and beyond.



At the same time of presenting the 2014 poster was the song competition launched, aimed to find the 2014 theme song for the carnival festival with the winning composer / artists taking 30.000 Rupees home, besides the lasting fame they will be generating with their song. The competition has in the past years been hotly contested and the judges, by the look of things, will have a tough job to decide for a winner.

The most significant change however was the news that Air Seychelles and Etihad had come on board as major corporate partner of the carnival festival, providing airtickets to participating groups and the invited media who will once again flock to the archipelago to cover the three day event, termed by Minister St. Ange as ‘**continuing to remain the Seychelles’ most visible and best advertised calendar event of the year**’. Air Seychelles General Manager Commercial Justin Gosling represented the national airline at the function.



At the end of the **Festival Kreol** with the closing gala performance at the Creole Institute at Au Cap last evening all eyes are now on the next big one, the Carnival, even though in between will still come the **Festival of the Sea** aka

SUBIOS which will be held at the end of November. Visit www.seychelles.travel for more information on the Seychelles annual calendar of events to perhaps coincide a holiday visit with the unfolding of one of the archipelago's major showcases. *Seychelles, truly Another World.*

NEW SEYCHELLOIS OWNED HOTELS SIGNAL CONFIDENCE IN TOURISM GROWTH

(Posted 31st October 2013)



The launch this week and last week of two new Seychellois owned hotels, the Treasure Cove Hotel and the Crown Beach Hotel, signal a renewed spirit of confidence in the future of the tourism industry from among local investors in the hospitality industry. The opening earlier this week of the Treasure Cove Hotel in Bel Ombre, located not too far from the proposed site where the Seychelles Heritage Foundation will put up the replica of a pirate frigate as an additional tourism attraction, gave Minister St. Ange once again an opportunity to applaud the entrepreneurial spirit of his fellow citizens who decided to invest in the sector when he said: *'We are proud of you for what you have achieved in doing. I have seen your bedrooms and know that the spectacular and uninterrupted views over the turquoise blue seas will be appreciated by all visitors who will be lucky to select your property. When we said that Seychelles needed to claim back its tourism industry, it was an appeal to get more of our Seychellois business community to do like the MacGregor and Laporte Families have done. We need Seychellois onboard to help our country consolidate its tourism industry for the long term. When Seychellois are involved they will defend and they will protect our tourism industry, the industry that remains the pillar of our country's economy'*.

Similarly did the owners of the Crown Beach Hotel at Pointe Au Sel take pride to show off their new 12 room boutique hotel when they hosted sections of the media invited by the Seychelles Tourism Board to cover the Festival Kreol on Tuesday evening for sundowners.

Meanwhile is a new hotel development, the Savoy, rising along the Beau Vallon Bay stretch of beach as part of the proposed *'Golden Mile'*, due for completion in 2014 but already advertising in the local media for key positions. The Golden Mile project aims to improve the core of the Beau Vallon Bay area and make it more user friendly for locals and tourists alike, who often stroll along the road to the shops, the famous Boathouse Creole Restaurant or the La Plague, renowned for the fresh seafood served either indoors or outdoors. The *'Golden Mile'* development is set to incorporate local hotels and resorts, guest houses, restaurants and shops into a safe zone where visitors can enjoy walks while playgrounds for children will provide the local people to come there on weekends or holidays to interact with foreign visitors. Watch this space for more updates from the *Seychelles, truly Another World.*



(Tourism Minister Alain St. Ange seen here officially unveiling the commemorative plaque in the presence of the owners, including his cabinet colleague on the left, Minister for Finance Pierre Laporte)

ECONOMIC REVIEW UNDERWAY AS ECONOMIC REFORM PROGRAMME CLOCKS 5 YEARS

(Posted 30th October 2013)



Five years ago to the day did President James Alix Michel go on national television to make a ground breaking announcement about a new economic course of action, as the country was coming under the dark cloud of a global financial meltdown and a rapidly spiraling out of control global recession and staring at a major financial default worth over 200 million US Dollars. At the time, President Michel was but 2 years and 3 months into his first elected term of office and the announcements he was going to make were representing a radical break with the country's past economic policies, a litmus test of sorts even for a seasoned politician, more so considering the direction the country had taken under his mentor and predecessor Albert Rene, who had retired from office in April 2004 at which time an orderly succession took place and brought James Alix Michel to power.

The changes for the Seychelles were instant and massive, as the IMF, in order to approve an economic bailout package, had insisted on dropping exchange controls – which led to the free fall of the Seychelles Rupee, halving its value within a day and subsequently doubling the import cost of every item landed on the archipelago, driving inflation to new unprecedented peaks. From about 8 SR to the US Dollar the value of the currency crashed to 16 RS to the Dollar and thankfully stands today at 12 RS to the Dollar, a sign that the economy has taken the bitter medicine and undergone shift and change to the better.

Deep cuts in the civil service, sale of state assets and fiscal and legal reforms were demanded by the Bretton Woods institutions and the Seychelles had little choice but to go along, as the other option would have been a scenario of a default on a wide scale, wreaking worse havoc on the economy and possibly resulting in outright bankruptcy. Tourism, one of the key economic pillars, was hit hard when the global recession struck, as the archipelago's main tourist markets were embroiled in bank closures as a result of the crash in the mortgage market reaching from America, where the card house collapsed, into every banking system around the world. With tourist arrivals falling and the increase in piracy activity in the waters surrounding the islands by Somalis taking ships almost at will, the two factors combined to become a clear and present danger to the very survival of the Seychelles, and something, or several things had to give.

On the piracy front the Seychelles were the first country to aggressively pursue the pirates and engage them at sea, winning several victories which eventually convinced the naval coalition that indeed a change of tack was needed to halt the advance of the Somali pirates deep into the Indian Ocean sea lanes down to the entrance of the Arabian Gulf and in southerly direction as far as the Mozambique channel. The fact that piracy is well near defeated now must surely be credited to the Seychelles having taken the lead in arming ships and fighting back rather than being more concerned with the rights of the pirates than those of the victims.

The second major change was a restructuring of the way tourism was run in the country, giving the private sector a much greater say in the way how the islands were marketed overseas and it was a stroke of good fortunes that one Alain St. Ange was seconded to the tourism board as Director of Tourism Marketing in the first phase of overhauling and restructuring that establishment, before eventually in a second phase changing the board of directors from the ground up while appointing St. Ange as CEO of the STB.

The much hoped for miracle actually did happen, by good fortune and good luck but mostly by developing a vision of a new Brand Seychelles, which received the full support of President Michel and to everyone's relief the gambit paid off and more than just handsomely.

Visitor arrivals since 2003 give the picture of where tourism was heading, underscoring the need in 2008 to take such drastic action to arrest a downward trend and bring back growth, something which was not only 'just' achieved but exceeded the wildest expectations from both private sector and government since then:

2003	122.038
2004	120.765
2005	128.654
2006	140.627
2007	161.273
2008	158.952 (impact of the global recession when forecasts projected a 30+ percent loss in arrivals)
2009	157.541 (following changes in the management of STB, this projected loss was arrested and reversed)
2010	174.529 (the change in marketing direction and rebranding pays off with a sharp rise in arrivals in 2010)
2011	194.476

2012 208.034

2013 ytd168.995 (January – September)

Since 2010 every year a new arrival record was established and inspite of conservative forecasts for the present year are the projected results for the full year again pointing to a new peak, as the incredible marketing juggernaut STB created under St. Ange's leadership continues to impress in particular the new and emerging markets.

While Alain St. Ange was in March 2012 handed the tourism and culture portfolio as cabinet minister, President Michel himself had kept tourism under his direct control until then, another stroke of good fortune helped to turn ailing Air Seychelles around, completing the revival of key components of how the tourism industry interlinked with global markets.

It comes as no surprise therefore that President Michel was in May 2011 re-elected to a second 5 year term with a significantly larger majority compared to his narrow first win in 2006, a clear sign that the people of Seychelles, perhaps grudgingly but nevertheless knowing that their President took the right economic decisions, awarded him with their votes, leaving the opposition at the time in tatters when claims of voting irregularities were flatly rejected by international observers. This was incidentally equally witnessed by this correspondent at the time, who on election day migrated through many voting stations without seeing one single incident of voter intimidation or vote buying as had been alleged by a the election runner ups, who would in the end not even present themselves for the announcement of the results.

Bold decisions often leave only two possible outcomes, one of either gigantic failure or else jubilant victory and it was the latter the Seychelles' tasted, when the President showed the mettle needed to cut the umbilical cord to the past and embraced a new approach with greater, almost unprecedented economic freedoms. He, supported by a relatively young cabinet, steered the country from the past command economy to a relatively free market regime, proof that even a ruling party can adapt to change when the very survival of it is at stake.

Today, five years down the line, has tourism become the undisputed economic lead sector but that not being enough has President Michel opened new doors with his vision to amalgamate the green and the blue economy, introduce forward looking policies for sustainable use of renewable energies and chart a course ahead for the islands which can see sustained economic growth towards the end of this decade and beyond.

In the morning will President Michel, exactly 5 years since his address on national TV rattled the establishment and the people of the Seychelles with its drastic measures, open an IMF review conference at the La Meridien Barbarons Hotel, taking stock no doubt of the accomplishments of the past 5 years and how the bitter prescription of economic reforms in fact cured the patient to the great relief of the nation, but also looking ahead and outlining what still remains to be done to secure a prosperous future for the Seychelles.

The event will be nationally broadcast by SBC and courtesy of Cable and Wireless will a live stream be made available for interested readers to follow from anywhere around the world, simply by accessing the Live Video Streaming and media information of the day's events, just [click here](#) for the relevant information. Coverage starts at 4.30 GMT/UTC. ***The Seychelles Islands, truly Another World.***

Below is the full text of President James Alix Michel's speech on the 5th anniversary of his announcement of major economic reforms:

**Seychelles Conference on Economic Reforms
Speech by President James Michel
October 31, 2013**

Vice-President Danny Faure,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A nation's strength, its resilience, is defined by its ability to adapt, to change. Every so often in its history, certain harsh and bold decisions have to be made. They are not necessarily popular. They can cost votes. And their outcome is not necessarily predictable. But such decisions have to be made consciously, bravely and strategically. For the common good and in the public interest.

That is exactly what we did on 31st October 2008. Exactly five years to this day Seychelles took a bold decision. And we began a new chapter in our history.

It gives me great pleasure today to join you in this important conference on Seychelles' reform experience under the theme *"From Stabilization to Sustained Growth: Five years of Successful Reforms and the Challenges Ahead"*.

On this day five years ago, I announced to the Seychellois people the new direction that my Government had opted to take for our country. It was not a wild gamble. It was a calculated risk. Without political considerations. Without consideration for my political career. A calculated risk, with – foremost – the welfare of the Seychellois in mind. On that day Seychelles embarked on a journey that would change its socio-economic landscape and lay the new foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As with many journeys, ours was fraught with uncertainty, risk and even fear. Many – and rightly so – were concerned about the impact of measures that lay ahead. Measures of austerity that many governments across the globe had dared not take when needed. The political risks are just too great.

But I knew, without any doubt, that there was only one option and only one way forward. And that was the one that we took. The time had come for a fundamental change; circumstances dictated it.

Domestic policies, with all the good intentions, had led to increased imbalances and significantly weakened the fundamentals. The signs were there for all to see. An over-valued rupee, empty shelves in the shops, a flourishing black market, queuing up to buy \$400 for travel overseas ... Our resilience against international shocks had been eroded and we could no longer honour our commitments to our international creditors. It was clear that the economic model that had served our country for so long was no longer going to take us where we wanted to go as a nation. Our economy could no longer sustain the socio-economic needs of our people. It could no longer mitigate the effects of exogenous shocks, such as rising food and fuel prices on the international markets. And as these were exacerbated by the 2008 global financial meltdown, we knew that we had to act. Act decisively, and act fast. The time and need to change direction had come.

And I did so, after consulting extensively with local and international partners. I did so, putting all political considerations aside – including my own. I did so, putting the interests of our country and our people first and foremost. Because I had absolute faith in the people of Seychelles.

In my address to the nation on 31st October 2008, I emphasised that the time had come for us all to embrace a new reality – a new beginning and a new economic model underpinned by a modern economic framework. But it wasn't just about economics. It was about ushering Seychelles into a new era of modernity, profound change, accountability, responsibility and transparency. It was about reassuring the people that, notwithstanding the harsh realities of the macro-economic reform program that we were about to enter into, no Seychellois would be left behind.

My message was also about the need to change our mindset. That as much as Government would look after the needy, the most vulnerable in our society, those who were capable of working had to get up and fend for themselves.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The reform program that my Government has implemented has been – I do believe – one of the most complete and comprehensive macro-economic and structural reform programmes that the world has experienced in recent times. Whilst we are a small nation and to some we may not matter, the widespread recognition of the international community has shown that actually we DO matter.

Seychelles is today respected as a nation which has done the right thing. We have a track record that is recognized by the international community at large, from the multilateral to bilateral partners, rating agencies, as well as commercial financial organizations. We have a track record of implementing appropriate policies. And adhering to

them. Our people are respected as a resilient and smart people who found the courage to stand by their Government to make our country a better place, a more prosperous, caring and happier place.

In this regard, I pay tribute to the people of Seychelles. They were presented with harsh choices during consultations that I had with them. They listened. They accepted them and they backed them. The success of our programme is entirely owned by them. And this is what we are saying to the world today: if you have the people's backing nothing is impossible.

As President of this country, one of my primary preoccupations is how my Government can continue to improve the quality of life of our people; how we continue to create wealth, create jobs and improve the living standards of each and every Seychellois.

This conference will address the many facets of our programme: its success against overwhelming odds, its challenges and the lessons we have all learnt from the reforms. It will also explore policy actions and options on the way forward. It will also focus on growth.

But I am pleased to note that "growth" will not be an end in itself during the discussions. I strongly urge you to focus more on the quality of growth. How can we make that growth inclusive, such that it touches each and every person in our society? What is growth worth, after all, if it does not benefit everyone?

We need to promote inclusive growth that provides equal opportunities, that reduces inequality, and promotes social justice. Growth should not leave any Seychellois behind.

As we focus on the way forward, let us not forget one fundamental pre-condition for sustainable growth, which has been crucial for taking us to where we are today, five years after the introduction of the Reform Programme: that is macroeconomic stability.

We need strong macro policies and we have to continue to pursue our structural reform. Structural reforms are critical to put in place the right environment, eliminate inefficiencies and further modernize our economy. We have reached where we are today because our policies have been well designed. We have pursued our structural reform agenda with vigour and the results are there for us all to see. It is crucial therefore that we maintain the same discipline that we have shown over the past five years.

I would like to take this opportunity today to reassure our development partners that Seychelles remains more than ever committed to a stable and sustainable economy. We will continue to pursue prudent and strong macroeconomic policies. We will continue to further strengthen our economic base. We will continue to build resilience so that we can better cushion ourselves against the impact of international shocks. We will bring down our debt level to a more sustainable target, and in this regard we remain committed to our 50% debt to GDP ratio target by 2018.

In parallel, we need to continue to invest in our people, in the education of our children, in the health of our citizens and in decent housing for our people. I do recognize that achieving fiscal consolidation and the need for investment are often conflicting objectives. However, as our experience has shown in the past five years in working with key institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the AfDB, and the European Union, to name but a few, we can actually reconcile those "conflicting objectives" when and where there is flexibility, understanding, especially when the spirit of "give and take" prevails.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the IMF for co-organizing this important conference. I thank all international institutions that have accepted our invitation to participate.

Let me also express, on behalf of the people of Seychelles, our utmost appreciation to the IMF, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Union that have been key partners in support of our macro-economic reform program. As much as we had the will to implement our reform program we would not have succeeded without your support. Your financial support has been critical in ensuring the success of our policies, whilst technical assistance has allowed us to modernise our institutional and legal frameworks, and build capacity.

I would also like to thank our bilateral partners that agreed measures to alleviate our debt stock towards them. I would like to express, in particular, my sincere gratitude to Abu Dhabi for extending to us a generous grant, in the aftermath of the introduction of the Programme, which allowed us to weather the storm.

In conclusion, I would like, once again, to thank the people of Seychelles for their indefectible support in the implementation of the Programme. I wish to express my gratitude to Vice-President Danny Faure for driving with such passion the Reform Programme. Thank you Vice-President. I thank the technical teams from all ministries, the Central Bank and government institutions under his leadership for their contribution toward its success. I thank the Minister of Finance, Pierre Laporte. I also want to recognize the efforts and support of all other stakeholders, including the National Assembly, the private sector and civil society in general. We should be especially proud of the fact that our progress has not been at the expense of ideals that we hold dear.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have the pleasure to declare open the conference *"From Stabilization to Sustained Growth: Five years of Successful Reforms and the Challenges Ahead"*.

I thank you all.

QANTAS LANDS IN SEYCHELLES WITH OVER 200 TRAVELERS ON ROUND THE WORLD TRIP

(Posted 30th October 2013)



A special Qantas chartered Boeing B747-400 landed last evening at the international airport on Mahe, bringing 215 travellers to the archipelago under the banner of ‘*Captain’s Choice*’, an Australian specialized tour operation using private jets to take their clientele to exotic locations around the world.

The idea to bring Australians to the Seychelles in such a major operation was born as a result of President James Alix Michel’s state visit to Australia last year, when Tourism Minister Alain St. Ange and his cabinet colleague from Foreign Affairs Jean Paul Adam met with the owner of the company during a business dinner and set the ball rolling. This is the third such trip stopping over in the Seychelles since the company was formed in 1994 and this particular flight had a routing from Australia via Phnom Phen, Mandalay, Aggra, Amman, Addis Ababa and Kilimanjaro International Airport in Tanzania, before flying for a final stop on this tour to magical Seychelles. Mason’s Travel, one of the Seychelles’ leading DMC’s, was handling the passengers and took them to their resorts at the Constance Ephelia, The Seychelles Kempinski and La Meridien Barbaron before the this morning showing them the sites on Mahe. Many of the passengers were already today flying to Praslin on Air Seychelles’ domestic services to see the Vallee de Mai where the unique Coco de Mer is found while others took the ferry to Praslin and on to La Digue to explore some of the world’s greatest beaches.

The visit comes at a time when the Festival Kreol is nearing its grand final and it was befitting that a group of Kreol dancers and musicians welcomed the tourists as they stepped off their plane. Notably did news also break earlier today that the Lonely Planet Guide has named the Seychelles as their 7th most desirable destination for 2014, adding yet more focus among their readership to come to the archipelago and enjoy the warm hospitality in a place like no other on earth. The Qantas special flight will leave back for Australia after a three day stay in the Seychelles. Watch this space for breaking and regular aviation and tourism news, told right here before available anywhere else.

AIR SEYCHELLES SIGNS ORDER FOR 3 DHC 6 – 400 TWIN OTTERS WITH VIKING

(Posted 29th October 2013)



In a surprise announcement at a media briefing late this morning did the Air Seychelles CEO Cramer Ball break the news of the purchase of 3 state of the art Twin Otter DHC 6 – 400 aircraft, carrying the latest technical innovation with a Honeywell Integrated Avionics System which significantly improves the information made available to pilots while in flight but which also sends regular system performance indicators to the airline's base at the Mahe International Airport.

The 20+ million US Dollar deal, which by the look of it is self-financed by Air Seychelles, will replace the ageing 3 Twin Otter DHC 6 -300's, which have been with the airline for between 20+ and 30+ years. Delivery of the new birds, which will join another DHC 6 – 400 already delivered to Air Seychelles in 2010 and in regular service on the main domestic route to Praslin, will take place in June, August and September 2015, although the option of at least one earlier delivery has been kept open. Passenger numbers on the domestic routes have increased by double digit percentages, not only on the scheduled flights to Praslin but also on the charter flights to the outer islands and regular tourist flights to Bird Island, Denis and others.

This latest aircraft type of the former de Havilland company, now manufactured by Viking of Canada, still resembles the older version of the Twin Otter, which has become a hugely successful STOL aircraft [short takeoff and landing] and is in use all over Eastern Africa as a prime people mover on the various safari circuits in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and has earned itself a reputation as one of the most reliable twin engine 19 seat aircraft in used. The – 400 version incorporates new light weight technologies in material to save in fuel consumption as well as uses stronger and more fuel efficient engines. A 'glass cockpit' where computer screens have replaced the rotary dials of old gives the clearest indication of the changes this aircraft type has undergone since production was relaunched in 2010 and Air Seychelles became one of the launch customers.

Viking will provide enhanced back up vis a vis maintenance and spare supplies, as the various mandatory checks – which become due either by cycles, hours flown or time elapsed – will be a regular feature at the Air Seychelles base in Mahe, considering that the fleet operates well over 200 flights a week and nearly 1.000 every month.

During a Q&A session with the Chairman of the Board of Directors Joel Morgan, who is also the Minister for Internal Affairs and Transport, the airline's CEO Cramer Ball and the CEO of Viking David C. Curtis was it also confirmed that Air Seychelles was on course to attain the coveted Skytrax 4 star rating, as it rose through the ranks from near invisibility in the past to become the Indian Ocean's second best rated airline, the 4th best globally for most improved airline and has now risen to position 55 from previously below 130 of Skytrax' global rankings. Cramer also confirmed that in due course another major announcement would be made, likely to coincide with the 35th anniversary of Air Seychelles, or another major codeshare deal and cooperation agreement with an Asian airline, which should significantly expand the reach of Air Seychelles and allow for more passengers to come to the archipelago from the Asian growth markets.

Air Seychelles has since the arrival of Etihad on the scene, which has acquired a 40 percent stake and then seconded the top management to the airline, undergone a near miraculous revival, from staring into the abyss when former CEO Bram Stellar ruthlessly axed one long haul destination after the other and was talking of using a single B737NG for flights to South Africa and to Mauritius, to the newfound fortunes of flying in code share with Etihad to Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong and to Mauritius and Johannesburg after phasing out the five aged B767 aircraft and acquiring two new Airbus A330's. It will no doubt be a very happy 35th birthday for Air Seychelles, and their staff whose job security, with the acquisition of 3 new short haul Twin Otter DHC 6 – 400 aircraft is now secure in the long term. Watch this space for breaking and regular aviation news from the Indian Ocean's vibrant airline scene.

LA DIGUE'S SUCCESS TRIGGERS NEW APPROACH TO ISLAND TRANSPORTATION

(Posted 29th October 2013)



The delegation from Reunion to the Festival Kreol did not just come for fun in the sun but also staged on the opening day a successful renewable energy exhibition, showcasing some of the technology available from Reunion which can equally be installed in the Seychelles, where similar weather conditions exist.

In fact, during the week was a solar unit launched at the Constance Ephelia Resort in Port Launay, which fully powers the entire energy needs of a villa, a start towards greater use of sustainable and renewable energy sources to which the Seychelles government is committed.

This comes just two weeks after President James Alix Michel instituted a ministerial task force to explore how to roll out such sustainable energy sources and make use of them, with in particular the island of La Digue singled out for the introduction of electric carts, eventually substituting the use of petrol and diesel propelled vehicles.

Transport needs on La Digue have risen in recent years as tourism expanded and new resorts, guest houses and small locally owned hotels sprang up, and the pace of motorization has clearly not kept up with the growing number of visitors. Besides the conventional and traditional mode of transport by ox drawn wagon, or by bicycle, have regular saloons and minibuses been introduced to the island over the last decade, but, going by the brief the task force has, this will soon be a thing of the past. Accommodation providers will be able, with immediate effect, to apply for the allocation of electric carts, which can then take guests to and from the ferry port, although it has been pointed out that the number will be limited overall and strictly controlled to avoid proliferation beyond a clearly defined number matching arrivals on the island. The move to electric vehicles on La Digue should be completed by the year 2020 in line with the government's commitment to turn La Digue into the eco capital of the archipelago, and by doing so also setting new standards for tourism islands and resorts elsewhere around the world.

Already are resort operators, business owners and the public at large called upon to use energy saving lamps and equipment, install solar water heaters to cut down on the use of electricity and install solar panels to supplement their electricity needs, all of which is aimed to reduce the amount of fuel burnt in generating electricity. Half a year ago were wind turbines installed and commissioned on the main island of Mahe and more such ventures are presently being explored to accelerate the 'going green' rollout across the Seychelles. Some smaller islands have already converted, as was reported here, to renewable energy sources but none on the scale as is now proposed for La Digue. Be sure to watch this space for future updates and news.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE FIRST FOUR COLOURFUL *FESTIVAL KREOL* DAYS IN THE SEYCHELLES

(Posted 29th October 2013)



(Seychelles bound on KQ 450, the fastest way from Eastern Africa to the archipelago in just about 3 hours. And the aircraft used for the service that day, a *SkyTeam* branded Embraer E190)



(And the ride was smooth all the way to landing in Mahe, so no need for that ...)



(And this is what I came for ... It is Festival Kreol time in the Seychelles, a week when music, song, dance, food, culture and colours all run riot)



(Opening 'salvo' at Eden Plaza – the President of the Region of La Reunion Didier Robert (left) and Seychelles' Minister for Tourism and Culture Alain St. Ange at the media briefing on the eve of the Festival Kreol)



(Seen here at the first event of the Festival Kreol week are President James Alix Michel (left) and the Minister for Tourism and Culture Alain St. Ange next to him)



(Impressions of Creole people as seen at a photo exhibition)



(State House Victoria – the former Governor’s Mansion today serves as the centre of political power in the Seychelles. Impressions from outside and inside ...)



(Seychelles’ presidents since independence, Sir James Mancham, Albert Rene and James Alix Michel. Pictures in the same state room also show two former governors in their splendid uniforms and last but not least, President James Michel receives a gift from the President of the Region of La Reunion, Didier Robert)



(Scenes from the opening night in the centre of Victoria of the *Festival Kreol*)



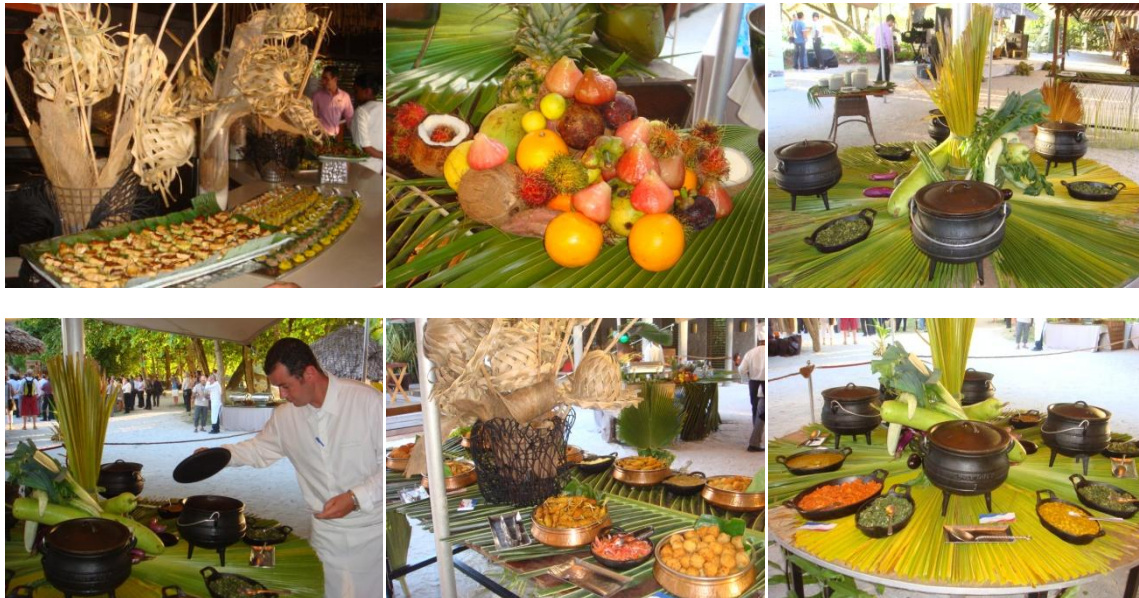
(This ***Festival Kreol*** display is probably the best protected of them all in the entire Victoria ... and it will most definitely NOT be nicked, these five boys and gals in blue will make sure of that)



(And the parade is underway ... colourful, noisy, jubilant, passionate and most of all, so very Creole)



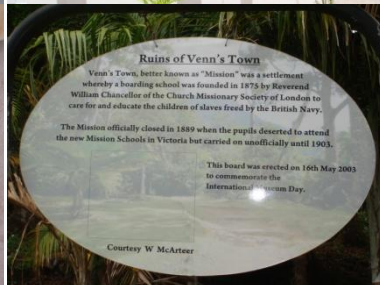
(And yours truly as usual hard at work to get all the stories written up, pictures processed and selected to keep you all informed and entertained ... and yes, well spotted #NeedMoreTea is ever present)



(The chef makes sure that all is set and ready to go when the guests come for some of this delicious food at the Creole night at the Constance Ephelia Resort, Port Launay)



(Two of the performers, one impromptu dance performance and oh yes, those spirits ... do I need say more)



(Action packed programme with visits and project launches at the Institute Creole, the Bel Air Cemetery and Venn's Town / Mission Lodge where visitors have one of the best views from high up on the island across the Indian Ocean)



(And for those who speak Kiswahili, when one has too much Takamaka at night one easily feels like Takataka the next morning ... which brought this presentation to a temporary halt ... says yours truly tongue in cheek – enjoy!)

REUNION'S PRESENCE EVERYWHERE IS TESTAMENT TO A VERY *SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP*

(Posted 28th October 2013)



‘Is Reunion your choice partner in cultural and tourism cooperation’ I asked the Seychelles Minister for Tourism and Culture Alain St. Ange earlier in the day and he quipped back with the broadest of smiles lighting up his face: ***‘We have choice partners in everything we do, everyone cooperating with us is a choice partner’*** to which an earlier quote of his came to my mind when he highlighted Seychelles’ policy of ***‘we are friends with all and enemies of none’***. He did however confirm that clearly a very special relationship had developed over the past years with the Ile de la Reunion, regular participants in the annual Carnaval de Carnivals, the Carnival International de Victoria and also in the annual Festival Kreol, where Reunion arrived with the largest delegation of performers, journalists and officials, led by none other than the President of the Regional Council of Reunion, Didier Robert. Reunion used the opportunity to be in the Seychelles in big numbers by first staging a sustainable energy exhibition before then being at the forefront again of commissioning a solar energy system at the Constance Ephelia Resort. Reunion went on to partnering with the Seychelles in several aspects of the culture side of the Festival Creol, when they committed funds to the rehabilitation of the *‘Cimetiere Bel Air’* where many of the early French settlers were buried. ***‘We want to showcase this to our visitors because it is part of our history and that is something we take very seriously here’*** said an official of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.



The Bel Air cemetery was created in the early 1780's and was the first burial place after the creation of L'Etablissement du Roi by the French Government. The cemetery contains the graves and vaults of the first French settlers – the founding families over 200 years ago of some of today's great Seychellois names. At the cemetery are the tombs of some notable personalities whose names are enshrined in the first chapter of the Seychelles history. Sadly were many graves buried under mud and debris during the great landslide (lavalas) of 1862 while others were dislodged and washed away at the time in the raging floods. Today, the rubble of broken tombs, dilapidated vaults and rusted wrought-iron crosses constitute precious fragments of the Seychelles history. The Bel Air cemetery was officially closed in 1902 but was eventually declared a National Monument in 1985.



And then it was time to move to the next stop, '**Venn's Town – Mission Lodge**' which came into sight high above the beautiful beaches of the island deep inside the Morne National Park.

The Seychelles have applied to have Mission Lodge recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for culture and with the support of Reunion it should be easier to accomplish that goal in the near future.



The last major stop of the morning was then at the Institute Creole, or '**Lenstiti Kreol**' in the right language and here it was again Reunion coming to the aid of the institute with a sizeable donation of books and learning materials which will assist the students of the institute to appreciate the language, poetry, writings and music even more. The Creole Institute is unique around the Creole world as it brings a scientific approach to the studies of all things Creole and it is hoped that in the not too distant future the phrase coined by this correspondent at the opening press

conference of ‘**The Creole Nation**’ will indeed take root and become an accepted fact, a fact of the Creole people, all over the world, becoming one, united through language, culture, art, food and music of course.



Watch this space as the **Festival Kreol** continues until the 31st of October when a colourful gala with performances from across the Creole world and nation will close the 28th festival in style.

AIR SEYCHELLES LAUNCHES ‘VIP’ SERVICES

(Posted 28th October 2013)



‘**Air Seychelles VIP**’ was launched last Thursday evening at the international airport by the airline’s CEO Cramer Ball, who officially inaugurated the new service to the applause of invited dignitaries, government officials and members of the business community. Present was the Seychelles Vice President Danny Faure, former president Sir James Mancham, the Chairman of the airline’s Board of Directors Joel Morgan who is also the Minister for Internal Affairs and Transport and representatives of Royal Jet Services in Dubai.

The service has already been operating since July this year, according to information received while in the Seychelles, but was only now formally launched after new facilities were created at the airport’s VIP area, where normally government officials are received. The new ‘**Air Seychelles VIP**’ lounge, separate from the business and first class long in the main terminal, can cater for as many as 50 passengers at a time, in near total privacy as the facility is a distance away from the main terminal buildings and allows for direct access to a private jet, a mode of transport increasingly often used by wealthy individuals who come to the archipelago to sail the seas or relax in some of the world’s best – and most expensive – resorts.

Said Cramer Ball on the occasion of the launch: ‘***This is more than just an opening. Air Seychelles VIP will permit operations for private jets with twenty four hours and seven days a week all round service which will include catering, communication, entertainment, engineering, refueling, customs, immigration, etc. in the comfort of a high quality luxury lounge. With this five-star service, we are also targeting twenty percent growth in private jets movement in Seychelles. This represents great business for Seychelles. The Seychelles’ economy is to benefit from another important source of revenue as some operators will only go to destinations with an airside FBO. The fact that it is airside contributes greatly to privacy and security. This FBO [aviation language for Fixed Base Operator] is one of the few airside FBO’s in the world and it will definitely put Seychelles on the world map as a luxury travel market.***

Air Seychelles has been emerging from the financial doldrums over the past 1 ½ years since Etihad acquired a 40 percent stake and seconded a top management team to the national airline of the Seychelles, which has since then streamlined its operation by operating flights to the Etihad hub in Abu Dhabi and from there using code share arrangements with Etihad and a number of Etihad partner airlines like Air Berlin, among several others, to reach destinations in Europe way beyond the erstwhile served London, Frankfurt, Paris, Milan and Rome, when the ‘old’ Air Seychelles was flying the Creole Spirit into the wide world. Notably though is Air Seychelles now serving Hong Kong directly via Abu Dhabi, with Etihad code sharing on an HM operated service, while continuing to fly several times a week to Mauritius and Johannesburg.

Air Seychelles has been a major corporate sponsor of the ongoing Festival Kreol, providing air tickets for a number of journalists flying to Mahe from Europe, Asia and Africa, a gesture repeatedly highlighted by the Minister of Tourism and Culture Alain St. Ange during several key events of the festival programme. Watch this space for breaking and regular news from the Indian Ocean’s aviation industry.

FESTIVAL KREOL SUNDAY CELEBRATED WITH A MASS IN CREOLE LANGUAGE

(Posted 28th October 2013)



The Au Cap district church on the Seychelles main island of Mahe was the centre of worship yesterday when hundreds of Catholic faithful attended a special mass, celebrated in Creole language, to mark this year's 28th Festival Kreol. Present at the mass was the Minister for Tourism and Culture Mr. Alain St. Ange, the Principal Secretary in the Ministry overseeing Culture Benjamine Rose, other ministry officials, the area member of parliament and local administration officials in recognition of the effort to celebrate mass in their own language.

Hymns and readings had been translated into Creole to hold the entire service, sermon included in the language which unites Seychellois like few other things.

Speakers, including the Minister, urged the faithful to continue using their own language in church and everyday life throughout the year, not just during the Festival Kreol, but going by my own experience, Creole is truly spoken very widely and very regularly by the people of the archipelago.

The Festival Kreol programme continues this week until the 31st of October with a series of events and commemorations and recognitions for artists and poets. Later this morning will a special plaque be unveiled at '*Venn's Town – Mission Lodge*', the site of the first school for the children of slaves before slavery was abolished and reported here some time ago when the Seychelles government had applied to UNESCO to award a special cultural World Heritage Site status to Mission Lodge, a decision for which is still pending.

From there will a visit take place to the Creole Institute in Au Cap, the presently only institution of its kind promoting the use of the Creole language and giving a platform for research and scientific study of all things Creole, no matter where in the world members of the Creole nation are found. Watch this space for more updates from the Seychelles this week.

AND in closing once again some worthwhile reads from further down south, taken from the *Livingstone Weekly* by Gill Staden:

Road Toll Fees

From Zambia Weekly

Phase 1 of the national road tolling programme will start on 1 November, tolling classes II, III, IV, V and VI (see table).

These vehicles will be required to pay toll at Zambia's 17 ports of entry (clockwise from Chirundu, Kariba,

Livingstone, Kazungula, Katima Mulilo, Chavuma, Jimbe, Kasumbalesa, Tshisenda, Mokambo, Sakania, Chembe,

Nakonde, Lundazi, Mwami (Chipata), Chanida and Luangwa, although some of these are unlikely to see many vehicles, and at eight weighbridges (Kafue, Kapiri Mposhi, Kafulafuta, Solwezi, Mpika, Mwami (Chipata), Livingstone and Kazungula).

Class	Type of vehicles	Classification	Toll tariff
I	Light vehicle	Vehicles other than heavy vehicles less than 3,500kg and below 6,500kg, with or without trailer, including cars, vans, minibuses < 15 seats	K10-K15
II	Buses	> 24 seats	K20
III	Medium heavy vehicles	Heavy vehicles 16,501kg-30,000kg with two or three axles	K25
IV	Large heavy vehicles	Heavy vehicles 30,001kg-56,000kg	K40-K60
V	Large heavy vehicles	> 56 tonnes	K80
VI	Extra large vehicles	Heavy vehicles > 70 tonnes, with five or more axles, including abnormal loads	K160
		Heavy vehicles > 100 tonnes, with five or more axles, including abnormal loads	K250

Mposhi, Kafulafuta, Solwezi, Mpika, Mwami (Chipata), Livingstone and Kazungula).

The Road Development Agency has not specified when phase 2, which will include light vehicles (class I) will commence. Presumably the second phase will take off once the construction of 18 new toll gates has been completed (see box). By then motorists will be required to pay toll whenever they venture onto the Great North Road and the Great East Road.

Selected tolling points:

Lusaka going North

Katuba (outside Kabwe), ZNS Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi, Kafulafuta, Mwanawasa Stadium (Ndola), Kamfinsa (Kitwe), Ganerton (Kitwe), Chingola, Solwezi turnoff (Chingola), Solwezi, Konkola, Mpika, Mwenzo

Lusaka going South

Shimabala (Kafue), Turnpike (between Lusaka and Mazabuka), Chirundu, Nega-Nega turnoff (outside Mazabuka), Kapinga, Choma, Livingstone, Kazungula, Sesheke

Lusaka going East

Chongwe, Luangwa, Chipata

Toll fees are to be paid at each and every toll site – and that can add up, especially considering that toll is being applied to roads with no alternative route from A to B (which is the custom in most of the world).

Vehicles exempt from paying tolls include the president’s and vice-president’s motorcades, military vehicles, authorised emergency vehicles and road contractors.

Zambia Airport selects SITA to modernize airport operations

From Travel Daily News

LIVINGSTONE, ZAMBIA – SITA is transforming Zambia’s Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport in a multi-million dollar deal to automate all airport operations and provide world-class service to the country’s growing tourism market. Under the new agreement, SITA will modernize the airport’s passenger processing, network infrastructure and security management solutions and serve as the master systems integrator to ensure all new solutions work together seamlessly.

Prince Chintimbwe, Director Airport Services for National Airports Corporation Limited (NACL), the company that manages the airport, said: “Zambia’s tourism industry is experiencing year-on-year growth of 10 percent, and our airports are absolutely critical in providing a good first impression. SITA has been instrumental in helping us build and integrate our new airport operations solutions, with a focus on improving customer service. And they’ve done it in record time.”

During the first three months of the project, SITA delivered its AirportConnect Open passenger processing platform, which all airlines can use. The company also provided its new AirportVision flight information display system throughout the airport and a new public address system to keep passengers well informed throughout their journeys. The airport showcased the new technology during the recent UN World Tourism Organization’s General Assembly, which Livingstone hosted.

During the next phase of the project, SITA will implement an integrated system throughout the airport. This will include a Local Area Network, WiFi, Internet Protocol TV, Closed Circuit TV and fire alarm systems, in collaboration with third-party network and security suppliers.

Paul Murphy, SITA Vice President, Sub Sahara Africa, Bahrain, UAE & Kuwait, said: “By the end of this transformation project, Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport will become an intelligent airport. Management will be able to share real-time information with all airport stakeholders, which will improve operational efficiency and facilitate superior service throughout the airport. We’re working closely with the airport against an ambitious timescale to completely modernize and integrate all airport operations.”

SITA’s AirportConnect Open enables airports, airlines and their handling agents to access their respective IT applications in real time on shared equipment. It also allows any airline to use any agent desk, gate position or self-service kiosk for passenger check-in and bag drop. This helps save airlines money because they can share applications and equipment, while also helping airports to optimize real estate and improve operational efficiency.

More than 300 airlines use SITA's AirportConnect Open to process millions of passengers every day in more than 360 airports around the world.

The transformation project at Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport is part of the NACL’s airport infrastructure development master plan, which covers four of the country’s airports. This is the first airport to be upgraded, and the project is expected to be completed by early 2014.

Kasanka National Park

PREPARATIONS FOR BAT SEASON

In the coming weeks Kasanka will once again see the arrival of our biggest attraction from the equatorial forests of Central Africa. It took some time, but some large poles were sourced to replace the ladder up the Fibwe Sitatunga Hide, preparing it for the scores of guests who will be visiting this year.

The BBC-hide is being renovated to allow our visitors excellent views of the Bat Forest and its inhabitants during our famous dawn and dusk Bat Experiences. For the budget conscious the public

viewpoint will once again be freely accessible, and an intern studying Wildlife Management in the Netherlands present to monitor access to the Bat Forest and share information with our guests. Three additional private hides are once again being built down-wind from the forest on the banks of the Musola Stream – a great location for those looking to get close-up shots of the Bats.
