

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



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Second edition August 2012

REED EXHIBITIONS TO LAUNCH FIRST EVER 'LUXURY AFRICA TRAVEL FAIR' IN APRIL 2013



Following in the footsteps of the hugely successful ILTM – International Luxury Travel Market series which includes dedicated Asia and Americas editions, Reed Exhibitions has just announced that the first ever Africa edition has been scheduled for April next year in Cape Town / South Africa.

It is one of ILTM's policies of pre-qualifying both buyers and exhibitors. Each of the buyers and suppliers invited to attend will be specially accredited for participation in ILTM Africa. Pre-scheduled appointments will be arranged on a strict one-to-one ratio to ensure the best possible business environment, a formula which has made the Asia and America editions the success they have become.

Alison Gilmore, ILTM Exhibition Director said when launching the media release for the event: *'Reed has been exploring opportunities in Africa for sometime and because of the sheer size of the continent, the diversity of its luxury travel offering with natural beauty, world-class facilities, adventure and wildlife experiences, it makes sense to take our global brand, already on 3 continents, to a new one, Africa. From the day we launched ILTM Americas earlier this year, we sold out within a matter of weeks and with the debut event opening on 1st October, there will be a wait list of companies who will ensure substantial growth for the event in 2013, we fully expect ILTM Africa to have the same support'.*

One of the invited participants for the Africa event, Frances Geoghegan of Africa Travel UK, was in the media release quoted to have said: *'Africa offers it all for the luxury traveller - exotic locations, stunning properties and unique experiences. Where else can you watch the phenomenon that is Tanzania's wildebeest migration? Watch hippos from a canoe as you glide down the Zambezi, trek the mighty mountain gorillas of Rwanda, or enjoy the varying splendour of Africa's mother city, Cape Town? It is fitting that Africa now has a platform with ILTM to showcase its wonders and diversity. ILTM has been the pioneer of luxury travel forums, matching buyers and suppliers in a highly professional and successful environment. ILTM coming to Cape Town will be of great benefit to the whole of the African travel industry'.*

And how true that is, time that Africa can showcase its natural miracles and wonders in particular for the top end of the market and finally get a fair share of this market segment which pays top dollars for top services, from Southern to Eastern and Northern Africa. Watch this space for added information as and when available.

About ILTM: [www.iltm.net](#)

International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) and ILTM Asia are the leading annual business to business events for the global luxury travel community, bringing together the world's most sought after destinations, ultra-luxurious

accommodation, elite transportation and unique travel experiences showcased for the most discerning luxury travel buyer via an unrivalled pre-scheduled appointment system and effective networking and information opportunities. ILTM – which invites only the most discerning buyers from across the world – takes place in Cannes, 3 - 6 December 2012. ILTM Americas – a one-to-one summit designed for the Americas travel agents – takes place for the first time in Mayakoba, Mexico, 1-3 October 2012. ILTM Asia – which selects buyers from across the Asia Pacific – takes place in Shanghai, 3 - 6 June 2013.

East Africa News

COMESA ISSUES MEDIA STATEMENT AHEAD OF TOURISM FORUM IN NAIROBI



The Lusaka based headquarters of Africa's largest trade block, COMESA, has today issued a media statement ahead of their First Sustainable Tourism Summit due to be held in Nairobi / Kenya in just under two weeks time. Initially scheduled to take place earlier in the year the organization then decided to prepare even more comprehensively for the event, due to be held at Nairobi's Windsor Golf and Country Club between August 22 – 24.

Keynot speakers have been invited from across the 19 member countries and from Eastern Africa speakers lined up, still to be finally confirmed, include Dr. Titus Naikuni, Group Managing Director and CEO of Kenya Airways, The CEO of Ethiopian Airlines Tewolde Gebre Mariam and the Group Managing Director and CEO of Serena Hotels Mahmoud Janmohamed, amongst several other top reputed captains of industry.

The three day event, organized jointly by the COMESA Secretariat and the Ministry of Tourism in Kenya as host country, will be packed with key note speeches, workshop and discussion sessions and Q&A opportunities where the plenary will have the opportunity to question industry leaders, from both private and public sector, on the way forward for the tourism industry across COMESA.

The statement received reads in full as follows:

**MARCHE COMMUN DE
L'AFRIQUE ORIENTALE
ET AUSTRALE**

**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA**



Tel : (260 – 211) 229725/32
Fax : (260 - 211) 225107
Email : info@comesa.int; and
info@comesabusinesscouncil.org
Web : <http://www.comesa.int>

السوق المشتركة للشرق
والجنوب الأفريقي

COMESA Centre
Ben Bella Road
P O Box 30051
LUSAKA 10101
Zambia

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– 09 AUGUST 2012

First COMESA Regional Sustainable Tourism Development Forum

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA - Business leaders and policy makers will for the first time discuss a competitive approach to tourism in the region. COMESA has organised the Sustainable

Tourism Development Forum, to be held on 22-24 August 2012 in Nairobi, Kenya. The public-private dialogue, to be held under the theme “*Shaping the Future of Tourism in COMESA*”, will bring together over 70 regional participants from tourism boards, investment promotion agencies, tourism businesses and development partners.

The meeting, is to be hosted by COMESA Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism for Kenya .The Forum has been organized through the support of the COMESA Business Council in partnership with Kenya Investment Authority and Kenya Tourism Board. The meeting will analyze the regional diagnostic study of COMESA’s 19 Member States, whose aim was to come up with a framework for regional approaches that can be undertaken by both the public and private sector stakeholders to promote a more competitive, investor friendly, sustainable tourism sector in the region.

The framework addresses issues such as putting in place a regional policy and strategy that defines tourism in the region, promotes the relaxation of visa requirements for tourists, packages and brands tourism, investment in infrastructure for tourism development, upgrades the sector to meet regional and global standards, promotes investment in key areas of tourism such as hospitality and catering, addresses supply side constraints in the hotel industry, and exploits the quick benefits of E-Tourism; among others.

The setting of the Forum, Windsor Resort Hotel, one of the luxury resorts of Kenya, will provide the country an opportunity to showcase its tourism attractions and provide the participants with a taste of Kenya’s natural beauty, diverse culture, local brands and quality wildlife experience.

It is expected that dignitaries from the tourism sectors of Morocco, Egypt, and the Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa (RETOSA) will also attend the meeting, which will share the experiences of corporate hotels like Serena Group, Speke Hotel Group, and renown tour operators from all countries in the COMESA region.

In the face of an ever changing economic and political environment, tourism continues to succeed as a well performing sector in regional and international markets. While the industry moves towards adopting more sustainable models, the economic outlook of the sector today clearly indicates that there are great benefits to reap through a regional approach to boosting competitiveness, sustainability and investment.

Among the expected results of the Forum is a roadmap and action plan owned by the stakeholders, which will structure tangible approaches towards shaping a sustainable tourism strategy and implementation framework for the COMESA region.

Tourism is the fastest developing enterprise in Africa and one of the continent’s major investment opportunities, standing at 6 percent growth rate the last decennium. Africa receives 4.8 percent of all tourist arrivals in the world, and 3.3percent of the receipts and although it is not at the heart of the global tourist market, this modest proportion of the world’s number one industry is still important for the continent. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that, from direct and indirect activities combined, the tour and travel sector now accounts for a remarkable 9.2percent of global GDP. Tourism’s contribution to employment is estimated at 6 - 7 percent of the overall number of jobs worldwide, and it makes up 4.8 percent of world exports and 9.2 percent of world investments.

-ENDS-

COMESA SET TO HOLD ITS FIRST EVER TOURISM FORUM IN NAIROBI



The Lusaka headquartered Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, in short COMESA, has of late decided to pay greater attention to the trade block's tourism potential. The organization, which now spans much of the African continent and reaches from Zambia to Congo and from East Africa through the Horn of Africa to Egypt, will hold its first ever Tourism Forum in Kenya's capital Nairobi between 22nd and 24th of August.

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

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

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

Discuss and develop a sustainable tourism development programme

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

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

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

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

Uganda News

RHINO FUND PUBLISHES 2013 RATES FOR ZIWA RHINO SANCTUARY SERVICES



The Rhino Fund Uganda has just announced their fee structure for the year 2013, well ahead of the due date to allow for incorporation in tour and safari itineraries, many of which now include a visit to the only place in the wild in

Uganda where rhinos can be seen. Angie Genade, Executive Director of the Rhino Fund and the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, has expressed her satisfaction with the upwards trend in visitor numbers coming to Ziwa and during a recent meeting announced that one of the females appears to be in mating mood already, which could sometime next year result in rhino number 13 joining the dozen now at Ziwa, up from the original 6 imported for breeding.

'The breeding programme was quite successful and I think here at Ziwa we have one of the fastest reproduction rates seen, since the females are going back into heat a lot sooner than expected after rearing their cub. We are also still trying to get more rhinos to Ziwa from South Africa, so that we can increase the speed of reaching that point when together with our partners Uganda Wildlife Authority we can then start to take a breeding stock to one of the parks, very likely Murchisons to start with though Kidepo is also another option. I also want to take the opportunity to thank our donors, friends and supporters through your column for the help and assistance they accord us, which is most appreciated and very necessary too, because the sanctuary and the Rhino Fund still have not reached financial self sustainability' said Angie during a recent meeting in Kampala.

Here are the new rates and anyone is welcome at Ziwa, no reservation for a mere visit required when passing on the main road from Murchisons to Kampala, though a booking for tracking and the other activities is of course highly recommended.

PRICING FOR RHINO FUND UGANDA (ZIWA RHINO SANCTUARY) - 2013

PLEASE TAKE NOTE THE RANGER GUIDE FEE OF USD 15 IS NO LONGER CHARGED

SERVICE	NON-RESIDENT (USD)	EA RESIDENT (USD)	UGANDAN CITIZEN (USD)
Rhino Tracking (Adult) / per person	35	30	5
Rhino Tracking (Child) 4 - 12 / per person	17	12	3
Shoebill (Adult) - Canoe on swamp and Guided swamp Walk / per person (Approximately 4 hours)	30	25	15
Shoebill (Child) 4 - 12 years. Canoe on swamp and Guided swamp Walk / per person (Approximately 4 hours)	15	10	7
Birding Guided Walk (Adult) / per person (Approximately 2 hours)	20	20	10
Birding Guided Walk (Child) 4 - 12 years / per person (Approximately 2 hours)	10	10	5
Nature Walk Guided (Adult) / per person (Approximately 2 hours)	20	20	10
Nature Walk Guided (Child) 4 - 12 years / per person (Approximately 2 hours)	10	10	5
Vehicle Fee / Rental (with our driver) (If rental of our vehicle is needed. Priced per group of maximum 10 people per trip driven)	25	25	25

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING :

- * Drivers and Tour Guides (1 per group) are free of charge for all activities ;
- * ALL activities are done with a Trained Ranger Guide ;
- * Group rates are available upon request (20 or more people) ;
- * You are welcome to pay in UGX, Euro, US Dollar and Pounds - Exchange rates will be given at our reception;

BRITISH AIRWAYS CUTS FARES FOR AUGUST DUE TO LOW LOADS

BRITISH AIRWAYS



A reported downturn in sales out of Entebbe to Europe and the United States has prompted British Airways to counter the trend with some aggressive market fares, which for business class from Uganda to key points in Europe have been pegged at 1.999 US Dollars, plus taxes and fees.

Fares to the **'Big Apple'**, in comparison, are on sale for the entire month of August (travelling period) at US Dollars 2.550, again plus taxes and fees.

British Airways Country Manager Uganda, Faith Chaitezvi, yesterday announced the special fares, set to start with immediate effect and said they will be available for sale until August 31 for outbound travel. Passengers are required to return anytime within 12 months. She went on to say in a media statement availed to this correspondent overnight: ***'At British Airways, we are constantly striving to deliver value for our customers, following a thorough review we have tailored the best possible fares to give our customers, all year round.'*** British Airways currently flies 5 times a week with a B767 between London Heathrow and Entebbe / Uganda.

Anyone got any spare cash left after the annual holiday season or after visiting the London 2012 Olympics – here is a chance to get some extraordinary value for money. Watch this space.

NEMA'S ADMISSION OF FAILURES PROMPTS FEARS FOR FUTURE OF PROTECTED AREAS

The Ugandan conservation fraternity is reeling in shock over NEMA's latest public admission, that they lack the capacity to effectively monitor oil exploration activities in the Albertine Graben, where much of the test drilling has taken place inside Murchisons Falls National Park, the Kaiso Tonga Game Reserve and now extends to the Semliki National Park before in the future reaching sections of the Queen Elizabeth National Park earmarked for test drilling. The organization also all but admitted that they have no capacity to monitor or enforce current regulation effectively in the absence of sufficiently trained and qualified staff, leaving the entire oil sector open to abuse of regulations, which are generally already considered as far too weak to prevent any significant damage to the surrounding environment.

'The admission before the parliamentary committee on natural resources by NEMA officials is shocking and frightening at the same time. NEMA is supposed to be our national watch dog on environmental issues. Their failure to create capacity to monitor such potentially very hazardous activities is a scandal. If they are not given the funding by government to train staff and give them monitoring skills, or employ enough skilled personnel, then this is either a very bad oversight or a deliberate attempt to make controls fail so that oil companies can get away with anything really. And when the committee demands a full report from NEMA and it is not being produced we wonder what they are hiding from the public eye. There was a time when Heritage Oil used to take environmentalists and journalist to their sites to see for ourselves what they were doing but since they sold and left Uganda that has almost stopped. And we suspect when the Chinese come under the Tullow deal, they will just fence us out altogether and not allow any public scrutiny going by their track record. Does NEMA really have any teeth in their mouth? And the other day I drove to Munyonyo and can confirm what you have written about so many times that the Konge valley wetland is shrinking by the day with more buildings, now even a petrol station being put into the swamp? NEMA has become completely useless and is a disgrace now' roared a regular contributor and eminent environmentalist from Kampala when discussing the parliamentary proceedings with him yesterday.

When confronted with the ire of parliamentarians on the committee the NEMA boss in an almost feeble way tried to offer mitigating factors on the issue of funding and their current level of activities, but MP's would have none of it and laid into the NEMA boss with a vengeance.

Questions are also increasingly being raised on the status of preparedness for a potential oil spill inside the parks, where in particular at Murchisons Falls a spillage could irrevocably alter environmental conditions of this biodiversity hotspot and contaminate the wetlands, Lake Albert and in particular the River Nile, on which downstream tens of millions of people in Northern Uganda, South and North Sudan and Egypt depend on for their livelihood. The impact on the tourism industry could be instant and almost lethal, as the habitat of birds and animals could be wiped out by a spillage, leading to tourists staying away as a result of the resulting negative publicity. However, oil companies have been shtumm on these issues and little is known how they are prepared with pre-positioned equipment and contingency plans to contain and clean up a major spill or leak and the same applies to government, where the level of readiness to deal with an oil accident is shrouded in secrecy. Questions galore and few answers of substance – Quo Vadis Uganda. Watch this space.

Kenya News

NEW HURDLES FOR AIRPORT EXTENSION THREATEN TIMELINES



Over the weekend did news emerge in Nairobi that wrangles over the tender for an additional terminal and a second runway have run into a series of problems, with directives and counterclaims flying from all directions.

While the Office of the President appears keen to see the project break ground before the end of President Kibaki's term of office in March next year, the Minister for Transport appears to have different ideas as he reportedly has instructed the KAA management to cancel the tender award and start afresh.

The expansion of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport into a world class airport facility and hub for Kenya Airways, which intends to grow their fleet over the next 10 years from presently 36 to 105, has been at the core of Kenya's Vision 2030, to facilitate a greater inflow of visitors and offer improved cargo facilities able to ship a growing volume of exports to consumer markets around the world as well as allow for speedy imports by air.

Aimed to add to the ongoing construction of a new terminal, apron spaces and other facilities currently underway, the 55 billion Kenya Shillings '**Greenfield Project**' would indeed make JKIA the undisputed aviation hub in Eastern Africa, large enough to catapult the country truly into the new millennium and provide space for growth for a generation.

It now appears that in disregard of a ministerial directive to cancel the tender awarded to a Chinese construction company the KAA continued to progress the work programme, probably backed by the keen interest coming from the head of state, who during his address at the Kenya Airways share rights issue in April at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi left no doubt where his interest were vested when he said: '**I challenge KAA to hasten the expansion of our airports**' to the thundering applause of all present, including the entire Kenya Airways board of directors and the transport minister, before adding: '**I would like to see the expansion project move faster because any delay is costly to the country**'. This was in many circles seen and understood to be a presidential directive, superseding the ministerial directive, i.e. outranking it and the battered ego of the minister must have been responsible for delivering a slap in the direction of state house when he was quoted in the local Kenyan media to have said to him it did not matter who was breaking ground as long as he was getting it *right*'. This perceived affront will however only bolster those who ignored the stop order and it also appears that KAA involved the country's Attorney General in getting a legal opinion, which when rendered confirmed that the country's highest legal counsel found no issues with the tendering and stated that all requirements as stipulated had been met, giving KAA the legal basis to ignore the minister's wishes and stick to the desires of the President's Office instead. The minister, when confronted with this development then hit out at his cabinet colleague too, calling him a mere '*government lawyer*', another faux pas certain to raise the heat of argument when cabinet next meets. Meanwhile are all eyes of the aviation industry glued to developments on that front as hopes were high that after having the tender award given the project would break ground as early as November this year and the building of a second runway would finally be within sight, or perhaps now not, as spanners seem to be flying into the works from all sides.

Aviation rivals Ethiopia will be seeing these development with some glee, as they are planning to build a new airport in Addis Ababa, where no such squabbles exist, and even in Rwanda is a new airport being planned, with ground breaking too expected later this year, at Bugesera to have a longer runway facilitating intercontinental flights by RwandAir from 2016 onwards, when they expect deliver of their first B787 Dreamliner.

Exciting times for the aviation industry in Eastern Africa, so be sure to watch this space to catch the latest updates.

SOUTH AFRICAN ADD MORE FLIGHTS TO NAIROBI



Information has been confirmed that South African Airways is adding three more flights per week, upping the ante from daily to now 10 between Johannesburg and Nairobi.

The airline, a member of the world's leading airline group '*Star Alliance*' will continue to use a mix of B737-800 and Airbus A319 on the route, which offer between 157 and 120 seats respectively in a two class configuration of Business and Economy.

A regular aviation source attributed the extra capacity put into the market to the growing demand of travel between the two countries but also the number of flights operated by Kenya Airways, which has been flying double daily on the route for a while now. Once in operation there will be 24 weekly flights between the Nairobi and Johannesburg, 3 on most days and 4 on three days every week with KQ operating 14 flights and SAA operating 10.

When making the announcement in Nairobi the airline also pointed out a change in their baggage policy which will now permit 2 pieces of checked baggage, subject to size and weight limitations however, which will apply to all flights to Johannesburg and beyond for connecting passengers for instance flying to Australia or North America. Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

FLY 540 REBRANDING ON HOLD AGAIN



Reports from Nairobi yesterday evening speak of substantial animosity and arguments on the board of Fly 540, where the representatives of one section of shareholders apparently put the brakes on any future developments vis a vis the planned rebranding, until questions on the present legal cases and the implications for the company have been resolved to their satisfaction. A usually reliable source with insight into the affairs at 540 in fact speculated over the possibility of the entire deal being subject to re-negotiation now as allegations have been made that the respective debts or potential liabilities were not fully reflected in the company's books.

The low cost carrier has been battered of late with legal cases which has done little to enhance the reputation of the company and internal disagreements, on board and management level have only added fuel to the fire of rumours which has swept the aviation industry like a wildfire.

More waiting then for regular travelers by air across Eastern Africa it seems who had high hopes when recent media reports spoke of the new brand '*FastJet*' intending to introduce A319 aircraft to the fleet of aging aircraft Fly 540 currently uses for their main domestic and regional destinations. Watch this space as slowly but surely more news emerge and can be shared.

RISING LAKE LEVELS AT BARINGO FORCE RESORTS TO SHUT DOWN



Following a detailed report on a visit to Lake Baringo in December last year, when the lake levels already stood at near record highs, only once exceeded in living memory in the 1960's, the onslaught of the rising water appears to have continued with a vengeance it seems.

Reports from Baringo speak of camps and resorts now being forced to shut down for the time being, the most affected being the Robert's Camp, which according to a source who just returned from Baringo has been flooded for weeks, while the latest '*victim*' is the Lake Baringo Club, where the water has now reached up to the door steps of the buildings. Latest information just received confirms that the Lake Baringo Club has been closed with immediate effect, at least until the water levels recede again to manageable levels, and the company is in the process of rebooking clients already confirmed at the Lake Baringo Club to their Naivasha based Lake Naivasha Country Club. Having carried out major renovations and upgrades in recent months at Lake Baringo Club, this is a major blow to not just the company but also the wider Lake Baringo area, where accommodation is now restricted to the Island Camp and not much more, impacting on tourism receipts and having already led to layoffs of staff.

Lake Baringo and its environs, in particular the tall rock escarpment not far behind the lake shores, are famous for bird watching with more than 450 species of residents and migrants recorded. Across the lake beckon the distant Tugen Hills behind which the sun rises in the morning, making for spectacular light play and picture opportunities for those rising early to appreciate the breaking day.

The gardens of the Lake Baringo Club, now under the management of Sun Africa Hotels, are home to some 36 species of trees, as recorded by renowned Kenyan naturalist Hilary Garland who had spent much of her time in the 1980's at the club as a resident guide when she compiled a listing of all trees, shrubs and flowers she found. And it was also at Lake Baringo Club where the once bird spotting world record holder Terry Stevenson, who for a while was also based at the club as resident ornithologist, wrote his book *'The Birds of Lake Baringo'*, now a textbook for birders from around the world when reading up on the Baringo area.

Watch this space for future updates on the situation at Lake Baringo and be sure to read here when the Lake Baringo Club will re-open its doors again.

KENYA'S TOURISM MINISTER RUSHES TO MEND FENCES WITH QATAR AIRWAYS



The recent launch of Qatar Airways' 5th East African destination, Kilimanjaro, due to have operated from Doha via Nairobi to JRO, found itself with an unexpected new routing as Kenyan authorities, reportedly at the very last moment – perhaps in a warped sense to inflict maximum damage – withheld 5th freedom rights approvals for the sector between Nairobi and Kilimanjaro, compelling the airline to combine JRO with their daily flights to Dar es Salaam, in the process scuttling plans to promote cross border tourism itineraries for the two countries for Qatar Airways passengers.

It is now speculated that the subsequent announcement that the inaugural flight to Qatar Airways' planned 6th destination in East Africa, Mombasa, initially due for the 15th of August, was *'postponed'* as a reaction to this sudden change of heart by the Kenyan government and aviation authorities.

A precedent in fact for such arrangements has been set in neighbouring Uganda, where the daily flight of Qatar Airways between Entebbe to Kigali has full traffic rights and has helped to make the daily flights to both destinations financially more viable, linking the world to Uganda and Rwanda via QR's hub in Doha.

A regular source close to the Kenyan Civil Aviation Authority refused to comment on the development, citing *'higher authorities'*, an answer all by itself over what has been going on behind the scenes. It comes as no surprise therefore that, faced with the *'postponement'* of the much hoped for scheduled daily flight to Mombasa, incidentally due to be operated via Dar es Salaam and also with 5th freedom rights requested as a prerequisite, that Kenya's Tourism Minister Dan Mwazo rushed to pour oil on the stormy waters when he met QR's Vice President in Nairobi earlier this week. He was quoted as having said: ***'For purposes of economic growth and stability, Kenya needs to embrace partnership with other countries by eliminating any impediments that may ruin the tourism industry'***, seen as an admission that an error of judgement appears to have been made and needed urgent correction.

Tourism to Kenya, for a number of reasons, has shown a decline since establishing a new arrival and revenue record last year, and in particular coast hotels have been at the receiving end of this downturn.

'Not all is well about coast tourism right now' said a frequent contributor from Mombasa to this correspondent's news stories before continuing ***'Right now we have our own school holidays which bring domestic tourists to our resorts. But it should be said, this is heavily discounted business of course to make it affordable for Kenyans. Foreign visitors pay higher tariffs and therefore their business is crucial for our bottom line. Our new tourism minister has failed us when the budget for tourism marketing was set. Balala [the former tourism minister sacked by his party boss for telling the plain truth about interparty democracy] came from Mombasa and understood what the sector needs. He fought for us in cabinet. Mwazo lacks these properties and still has to make a compelling case for himself being the tourism minister. We have less purchasing power, a lot less, to pay for tourism marketing this year and we feel abandoned by government. KTB urgently needs more money. We are in a pre-election year and must work the overseas markets now to be sure of having business next year when the elections come in March. Any change in the fortunes of tourism will have a big impact on Kenya. Jobs are immediately at risk, investments are slowing down, forex earnings are down. There are good examples how more marketing dollars translate into more of those issues I just mentioned, more jobs, more investment, more income and then more returns for government. But instead they are even now trying to make tourism services a VAT item and again, our minister has been silent when he should have stood up and said NO in cabinet. Let's see if he can give***

Qatar Airways what those fellows need to fly more to Kenya and especially to Mombasa. We need that flight, we need their promotions and exposure'.

Predictably would Qatar Airways not comment on the matter, though individuals contacted did express their personal disappointment over the last minute changes imposed on the planned flight operation and routing. Time will tell if anything gives in coming weeks and when the inaugural flights of Qatar Airways to Mombasa will finally take place, or rather if it will take place given the circumstances as seen right now. Watch this space.

THE BOMA ANNOUNCES SOFT OPENING DATE



Nairobi's latest addition to the hotel industry, the Kenya Red Cross owned '**The Boma**' is presently finishing its '*dry runs*' before envisaging soft opening during the second half of August, once all systems have been checked and re-checked and been given the green light as fully functional and operational.

Conveniently located along the main road between the city of Nairobi and the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport near '*South C*', about a kilometre off the highway, this new 5 star hotel is set to offer 150 suites and rooms, fully fledged conference and recreational facilities and a range of restaurants and bars. Views from the rooftop across the Nairobi National Park are said to be almost worth being called a '*roof top safari*' and will undoubtedly be popular with tourists making '**The Boma**' their base while staying in Nairobi, as will be the roof top pool high above the hustle and bustle of Nairobi.

The Red Cross Society of Kenya had five years ago invested in the first of their '**Red Court**' hotels and is now, according to a regular source from Nairobi, set to widen their portfolio in terms of properties in Nairobi and other parts of the country to create sustainable profits and income, all of which then goes to support the operations of the Kenya Red Cross' humanitarian operations.

Expect a report on the impression the new hotel makes on this correspondent after his next visit to Nairobi, to be shared here and on his regular TripAdvisor commentaries of properties visited and re-visited. Watch this space.

SAFARILINK ADDS NEW AIRCRAFT



Safarilink has confirmed the arrival of a brand new Cessna Caravan equipped with a Garmin 3000 avionics suite, the fourth such state of the art aircraft on their fleet, three of them fully owned and one leased. In addition does Safarilink operate another four earlier generation Caravans, beside their DHC Twinotter and Bombardier Dash 8. It is understood that the four 'older' Caravan models are due to be replaced by newer and more fuel efficient aircrafts of the same type over the next two years.

Operating from their base at Wilson Airport in Nairobi, Safarilink offers scheduled services to many of the most in demand national parks, saving clients travelling with them the often lengthy journeys by road and in particular avoiding the dreaded access from Narok to the Masai Mara, where only yesterday the safari tour drivers association again staged a protest and two hour blockade to voice their complaints to government over the pathetic state of this particular road.

The airline flies to the various airstrips in the Masai Mara, depending where clients need to be dropped off or picked up from, but also to Amboseli, Tsavo West, Naivasha, the Nanyuki airstrip, Lewa Downs and Samburu besides their coastal destinations of Lamu, Kiwayu and Diani's Ukunda airfield, amongst many others. Connections from one park to the next destination are conveniently scheduled to change planes in Nairobi, taking tourists not only from the capital city to the parks but from one park to the next, making the most of their time while on safari in Kenya.

Notably Safarilink has gone 'green' already way back in 2009, when in an arrangement with the Mt. Kenya Trust carbon neutrality was accomplished and remains so certified, the first airline in Kenya, in fact Eastern Africa to achieve this accolade. Watch this space for regular updates from East Africa's vibrant aviation industry.

HELI CRASHES AT WILSON AIRPORT



(Picture of a Raven 44 courtesy of Wikipedia)

The pilot and one passenger survived narrowly when their Robinson R44 crashed back to the ground shortly after takeoff from Nairobi's Wilson Airport. Both were taken from the scene in an ambulance to the Nairobi Hospital for treatment but their condition could not be ascertained by the time of filing this article. It is understood from a regular aviation source in Nairobi that the helicopter was destined for Zambia but that the pilot apparently encountered technical problems immediately after takeoff, attempting to land but failing to do so. The helicopter on impact, just over 100 metres from the Wilson Airport control tower, burst into flames and stand by fire trucks took over an hour to extinguish the flames.

The proven two blade, single engine helicopter has nearly 5,400 production models flying around the world and offers up to 4 seats.

Nairobi's Wilson Airport is said to be Africa's busiest aviation facility in terms of take offs and landings and mainly serves for general aviation flights and scheduled services to the country's national parks and to coastal destinations such as Ukunda, Malindi and Lamu served by turboprop and conventional light aircraft. The airport has in recent years developed in to a hub of aviation related consulting and maintenance facilities and is home to the Aero Club of East Africa. Due to the increasing traffic and subsequent congestion a significant part of leisure aviation and training activities has last year moved to the '*Only Airfield*' outside Nairobi, located on the Kitengela plains.

Watch this space for regular and breaking news updates covering East Africa's aviation sector.

BRUSSELS AIRLINES TO ADD MOMBASA TO GROWING AFRICAN ROUTE NETWORK



The Brussels Airlines Country Manager for Kenya, Pierre Declerk, has confirmed that the airline intends to add a nonstop service from Brussels to Mombasa this November, then routing back to the European and Belgian capital city via Nairobi.

The planned connection will bring another scheduled service to the Kenyan coast, opening up the sun-drenched beaches north and south of Mombasa for tourists from Europe and from across the airline's international network and giving tourism to the Kenyan coast a vital shot in the arm, as the country continues to struggle this year to repeat the record breaking arrival and revenue performance of 2011.

Brussels Airlines currently flies to the East African airports of Nairobi, Entebbe, Kigali and Bujumbura, always combining two of the destinations, and the extra flight via Mombasa will further increase SN's footprint in the region. In addition SN offers a further 14 African destinations in West and North Africa, making it the airline of choice for flights from Europe and beyond to the continent and yet more in code share with partner airlines Lufthansa and Swiss.

At the beginning of June did Brussels Airlines launch their own daily flights to New York's JFK, a route which has taken the market by storm, and the brand new Airbus A330 used for this service was the first to be showing off the new cabin product, which from October / November this year will have been retrofitted across the airlines' entire A330 fleet. Good news for those enjoying the '*Savoir Vivre*' in the air.

Tanzania News

CHEF ASSOCIATION OF TANZANIA LAUNCHES '*CHEF CHALLENGE 2012*'



The Hotel Association of Tanzania, in short '**HAT**' has passed on information about the upcoming registration period between August 15th and September 15th, during which chefs, professional, aspiring and those still at amateur level, can sign up to participate in the '**Chef's Challenge 2012**' at the end of which Tanzania's best and most creative individual wearing a tall hat in the kitchen will be crowned.

Generous sponsorship has allowed the Chef's Association to waive any registration and participation fee and it is the support of such corporate entities like Coastal Aviation, LSG Sky Chefs, Red 'n White, Southern Sun Hotels, Hyatt Regency, Tanzania Breweries, Nederburg Wineries, The WaterFront, New Africa Hotel and Casino and the Hotel Association of Tanzania which has made this possible. Details on the competition are found on the HAT website www.hat-tz.org where the rules of the competition are available once the registration has been received and confirmed. At that time the registered contestants will also be provided with an ingredient list and a prescribed template to submit their own menu suggestion for the competition.

Preliminary rounds will be held between November 24th and 25th and after the finalists have been selected by a panel of eminent hospitality professionals, the endgame in the battle of the pots will take place on December 08th with the prize giving ceremony to take place at the Southern Sun Hotel in Dar es Salaam.

All hotels, resorts, safari lodges and restaurants have been invited to enter their chefs and cooks in the competition to spur creativity, encourage the use of local ingredients and provide their talented cooks with an opportunity to measure their skills and culinary ambitions against their peers. Superb prizes will be available for the winner and runner ups, such as a trip to Zanzibar by air or a weekend at Kipepeo, but other surprise gifts and bonuses for the winners and other participants will also be handed out during the final ceremony.

'This is part of Tanzania's efforts to professionalize and improve food production and offer better quality. We must search for talent and then support them and see them get further sponsorships, opportunities to train further abroad to attain higher levels of experience and in the process promote Tanzania as a high quality tourism destination' said a periodic contributor from the hospitality industry in Dar es Salaam before continuing: *'I personally can only applaud such initiatives by our hotel association to set such challenges and hope it can be extended to other areas of the tourism industry to make Tanzanians more professional and proficient in their work.'*

Be sure to read who gets into the finals and who carries away the first prize as Tanzania's best chef, so watch this space to stay abreast with news and updates from Eastern Africa.

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

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

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

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

uranium and telling us all is ok and there is no poison and no danger. It is about the Coelacanth marine park in Mwambani which is set to be destroyed when they build a new deep sea port. It is about the routing of the planned railway to Musoma which would by shortest way run across the Serengeti too and again, we have no firm undertakings from government. There is the entire issue of poaching and illegal logging and smuggling of ivory and trophies through our ports. Combined with the sudden rise in airport fees by 10 US Dollars and the increase in immigration permit fees, also with immediate effect and no notice at all, this is all a setback for the sector. The riots in Zanzibar, as much as government wants us to forget those, overseas markets are still asking and are still worried about tourists being targeted next by extremists. The multiple marine accidents also worry people, even foreign tourists some of which seem to have drowned last time. We are being promised action, nothing happens and then there is much lamenting when the next ferry goes down. Air Tanzania coming back, going away again, now they have an aircraft and now they don't and cancel flights on which tourists have been booked, all these many issues have damaged our reputation and the worst was the murder in a Serengeti camp last month of the tourist and the manager. And now TANAPA does that? Are they for real? At least they gave a year notice and not as before just decide to raise fees overnight' commented a regular source from Arusha in audible anger.

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

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

Killing the goose which lays the golden eggs comes to mind, as fees and charges, including a planned VAT charge in Kenya on tourism services, is according to stakeholders creating huge problems on being competitive with other beach and safari destinations while at the same time not investing enough back in the sector in terms of marketing and in particular keeping the roads to the various parks in good shape.

Fodder for thought for sure and another glaring example of how state functionaries live a world apart from the economic realities the private sector is faced with and left to resolve on their own while their respective governments seek to milk them first dry and then some more. Watch this space.

Rwanda News

DOWNTOWN TURNED TO ASHES

One of Kigali's most popular entertainment hotspots, **DOWNTOWN** burned to the ground last Friday, following a fire which reportedly originated in the kitchen of the combined restaurant, bar and nightclub. Well known to this correspondent from his regular visits to Rwanda's capital, though only visited during day hours to avoid 'complications' to an already complicated life, the fire at Downtown is the latest in a series of nightclub and entertainment hotspot fires which has seen several burnt to ashes in recent months.

An equally popular café, La Classe, located next door to Downtown, was also destroyed in the fire, which is now being investigated by police and the insurance company, as – according to a regular source from Kigali – being 'one too many' has raised suspicion levels amongst officials. A pharmacy on the other side of Downtown also burned out and only the swift action of the fire brigade avoided the blaze to spread even further.

The fire started well before the club on normal Friday nights would have been filled to the brim, probably sparing lives and making sure no one was injured, though little of the equipment could be rescued.

Knowing Rwanda's young entrepreneurs though, a new night spot will not take long to be established and opened up to cater for the growing demand of places with good food, good service and good music. Watch this space.

Ethiopia News

ETHIOPIAN MAKES HISTORY FOR AFRICAN AVIATION WITH DELIVERY OF FIRST B787



THE NEW SPIRIT OF AFRICA
A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Ethiopian Airlines will in a week from today make African aviation history once again when the airline takes delivery in Seattle of their first B787 Dreamliner.

Delayed by several years the late delivery has made the planned rollout of new destinations a challenge for Ethiopian Airlines but that will all be soon forgotten when this revolutionary new aircraft will join the ET fleet on the 16th of August in Addis Ababa. Ethiopian plans to showcase the plane in Washington DC to invited guests and members of the large Ethiopian Diaspora community before embarking on the long flight home.

While the airline has been shrouded on the likely routes the new aircraft will be deployed on, there is speculation that the new bird might make appearances in China, to where ET is set to increase frequencies and destinations, as the travel boom to and from that country continues unabated.

According to information received from both Boeing and Ethiopian, this is only the second 'foreign' delivery of the Dreamliner after Japan's ANA and underscores the importance of ET as a leading carrier on the African continent. Said a regular aviation source from Nairobi overnight: *'This will be a proud moment for Africa. It shows the world that we have airlines in Africa which can make a success of aviation and hold their own against the new giants from the Gulf. There is a big gap between the African aviation leaders like Ethiopian, Kenya Airways, South African Airlines, Egypt Air, Royal Air Maroc and a few others which meet global safety standards and have ordered the latest state of the art aircraft to boost their already modern fleets. Africa has a bad reputation in aviation because of a few rotten apple countries which distort the record. We must spread the good news and while as a Kenyan I cannot wait to see our own national airline get their first Dreamliner in year and a half, it still makes me proud to see Africa enter a new aviation age next week when ET get Africa's first B787'*.

Ethiopian is literally tied in first place for the race of supremacy in the African skies with Kenya Airways, both having literally the same medium and long term development strategy to connect Africa to the rest of the world through their respective hubs in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, but will take a competitive lead when the 10 B787 Dreamliners, ordered 7 years ago, will begin to join the fleet from next weekend onwards. Much to watch in coming months about Africa's aviation industry but for now it is congratulations to Ethiopian Airlines and Happy Landings to the new bird, the crews and the passengers on board.

South Sudan News

SOUTH SUDAN AND KENYA SIGN PIPELINE DEAL

Within days of reaching agreement with hostile neighbour Khartoum Sudan over the fees on transporting South Sudan's oil to Port Sudan for export – said to have been literally forced down South Sudan's throat by Western governments and subsequently the most expensive such deal ever costing the South some 12 billion US Dollars over the lifespan of the 3 year agreement – has South Sudan reacted to provide for alternatives from 2015 onwards. In a deal announced today did they sign a major deal with Kenya, to build a 2,000 kilometre long pipeline to the planned port of Lamu, where an oil export terminal will be constructed to facilitate the loading and shipping of crude oil.

South Sudan had earlier in the year halted oil production and exports completely following the discovery that Khartoum Sudan had systematically stolen Southern oil on a large scale, only to claim it was their right in order to 'recover' phantom charges demanded for the transit of the black gold.

When attaining independence over 75 percent of the united Sudan's oil reserves went to the South Sudan, leaving Khartoum reeling from the sudden deficit of readily available cash used to pay for arms, ammunition and to reward regime friendly militias doing the dirty work for them and soon afterwards started a series of aerial bombings of Southern territory, eventually prompting a sharp reaction from the Juba government. It resulted in the brief 'repatriation' of Abyei, a state still awaiting their chance for an independence referendum as are South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, where ethnic cleansing of a massive scale has taken place over the past year, perpetrated by the same methods used by the regime in Darfur and previously in the South when the Southern African population was still treated literally like 'slaves'.

The announcement in Nairobi of the pipeline deal will go a long way to restore confidence in the South Sudan of a brighter future, while Kenya can now be assured that the South Sudan oil pipeline will become reality along the

LAPSSET corridor which will link Lamu port with Ethiopia and South Sudan by road, rail and pipeline. Construction is expected to commence in early 2013 and completion of the project is hoped for to take place before the present oil transit deal between South Sudan and Khartoum is expiring in 2015. Watch this space.

Mauritius News

AIR MAURITIUS ANNOUNCES SLIGHTLY REDUCED LOSS FOR Q1



Air Mauritius announced a slightly reduces loss from last year for Quarter 1 of 10.4 million Euros, compared to 11.9 million Euros in 2011. Airline sources blamed in particular the change in value between the Euro and the US Dollar for the magnitude of the loss, which according to media statements could have been some 8 million Euros less had it not been for the unfavourable currency developments during the period in review. Other factors however remain the same as last year, a continuously soft core market from Europe for travel to Mauritius, higher fuel cost for much of the period under review. Increased competition through in particular Gulf airlines though did not seem to have affected the load factors too much as passenger numbers in Q1 compared to 2011 appear to have gone up by 7.4 percent, with revenues in fact rising by 12.5 percent, a new record with 104.5 million Euros.

While operating expenses rose by 9.7 percent or 9.6 million Euros, it still left a net positive balance for Air Mauritius.

The ongoing restructuring and cost cutting programme, according to a source from Port Louis, also remains on track and combined with a recently launched customer service initiative should, according to the source, show better financial results for Q2 and the rest of the financial year by further reducing the airline's losses incurred in recent years. Watch this space for aviation news from the Indian Ocean islands and from Eastern Africa.

MAURITIUS STRUGGLES TO RETURN TO WINNING WAY



Stark news have emerged from available tourism statistics for the first half of 2012, confirming fears and doubts by the Mauritius hospitality industry, that indeed the once overwhelming lead in arrival numbers and appeal to holiday travelers choosing to visit the Indian Ocean islands, has now waned and given way to new favourites Maldives.

Inspite of the political troubles in that island state, arrival figures appear to have overtaken those of Mauritius now, and Sri Lanka has kept up the pressure, still behind Mauritius but well on the way to also overtake them if the current trend continues.

According to data received, Mauritius in 2011 received 964.642 visitors, missing the coveted one million mark by a mere 35.000 plus, while the Maldives clocked 931.333 arrivals and Sri Lanka came third with 855.957 visitors.

The clearest indicators of the current trends though are growth rates, where the Maldives for 2011 recorded an astonishing 18 percent, again inspite of the political troubles, the reported doubling of airport fees and the temporary ban on Spa's, while Sri Lanka clocked over 30 percent increase compared to a very poor 2010 when political troubles kept many would be visitors away.

The Seychelles, small but beautiful and committed to keep any notion of mass tourism as far away from the image of the archipelago as possible, still recorded an 11 percent increase in arrivals while Mauritius came off miserably in comparison with only a 3.2 percent rise in arrivals from 2010 to 2011.

A report by the Mauritius Hotel and Restaurant Association in fact claims that for the first six months of 2012 Mauritius has lost percentage ground while other competitors in the Indian Ocean continue to experience growth in the face of a harsher economic environment in their common core markets. Limited air access and wrong promotional direction and focus are the main factors cited for the developments and pressure seems to be growing exponentially now for a decisive change at the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, where CEO Karl Mootoosamy of late engaged in a prolonged trench warfare with his expressed '*enemy*' Seychelles before being pulled back sharply by his Minister of Tourism and the MTPA Chairman who calmed the stormy waters created by several reported outbursts and obvious slights from Mr. Karl. Sections of the Mauritius tourism fraternity are now openly lobbying for a change of leadership at MTPA and the introduction of private sector minded individuals to create a new tag line, a new image and develop a new strategy of how best to tap into new and emerging markets and to promote Mauritius' strong points instead of trying to downtalk competing islands.

And only too true that is, as the massive shift in fortunes in the Seychelles demonstrates, after the civil service mindset at STB was changed a few years ago and a new spirit of private public partnership injected when Alain St. Ange took over first as Director of Tourism Marketing, was then promoted to CEO of the Seychelles Tourism Board before being appointed in March to the cabinet position as Minister of Tourism and Culture. Lessons to be learned but seemingly lost on the current breed of leadership at MTPA, so change is in the air and change is coming according to a regular source from Mauritius. Watch this space.

Seychelles News

AFRICAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION SET FOR SEYCHELLES GENERAL MEETING



Only weeks after successfully hosting 4 major international events in succession, the International Council of Tourism Partners, the RETOSA Board Meeting, the Vanilla Island Organization General Meeting and the Routes Africa Conference, will the African Football Confederation's 54 member associations head for the archipelago for a week long extraordinary general meeting to be held at the La Meridien Barbarons and the Constance Ephelia Resort. Seychelles recent efforts to provide a platform for peace talks between Madagascar rival politicians Rajoelina, who heads the transitional council after taking power in a coup from former head of state Ravalomanana, who also attended the two rounds of talks on the island of Desroches and the main island of Mahe, did not go unnoticed on the African continent. This was particularly highlighted in the local media in the SADC countries participating in the mediation, South Africa and Tanzania besides hosts Seychelles – officially Madagascar is currently suspended from all SADC events and positions – where the commentaries about the peace talks, chaired by South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, were full of praise for the Seychellois initiative which made the two meetings more successful than all previous attempts for talks combined over a two year period.

Delegates of CAF, over two hundred of them are expected to make the trip to Mahe, are therefore reportedly looking forward to experiencing the apparently conducive atmosphere of the Seychelles to tackle a range of agenda items, aimed to shape the future of African football.

Hosts Seychelles Football Association, for the first time ever chosen to have this important event held on their own home ground, have confirmed that the meeting will take place between 30th of August and 05th of September and the various sessions have been scheduled between the La Meridien Barbarons and the Constance Ephelia Resort.

What better place to talk football than next to the crystal clear waters of the Indian Ocean with a calming breeze from the sea injecting the right atmosphere into the delegates mood. Watch this space for live updates from the event and a range of other reports and interviews while on Mahe for the week.

BLUE PANORAMA TO SUSPEND FLIGHTS DUE TO ITALIAN ECONOMIC CRISIS



Information was received from the Seychelles that Blue Panorama, which stepped into the void left for direct flights between Italy and the archipelago after the dramatic cessation of flights by Air Seychelles earlier this year, has announced that come mid September they will suspend for the time being operations to Mahe.

The airline cited insufficient numbers for their decision to 'suspend' operations, generally blaming the weak Italian economy on the decline in passengers.

The news were received with mixed feelings by the Seychellois tourism trade, remembering all too well the fallout and significant loss of travelers from France, after the direct flights were halted, and one source from Mahe said in an email response: *'Passengers, of course depending on the fares, prefer nonstop flights when traveling long haul. True, there are enough options now to fly to Seychelles through the Gulf's hubs of Abu Dhabi, Doha and Dubai, but it always involves a stop and a change of planes. Some markets are more sensitive to such changes as we saw in France so there is work to be done in Italy. The tourist board and private sector have to talk to the travel agents and the tour operators to accept the situation and start using for instance Etihad and then connect from Abu Dhabi with Air Seychelles to Mahe. The alternative is to use Qatar Airways or Emirates to come here. There are enough seats available to keep our momentum for 2012 in motion but it is one challenge we did not need. It is always mixed publicity when an airline drops a destination and similar to when Air Austral decided*

against flying from Paris via Mahe to Reunion, although there were also other issues in play. For now Seychelles is ahead of 2011 in numbers and on track to beat the 200.000 arrival mark for the first time. What happens now we shall have to see.'

No formal reaction has yet been seen from official sources in the Seychelles but it is expected that regret will be expressed, with understanding that adverse market conditions in Italy are ultimately held responsible for this regrettable development. Watch this space.

AND in closing news from 'further down south' courtesy of Gill Staden's '*The Livingstone Weekly*' – enjoy!

Victoria Falls Safari Club

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge is one of Victoria Falls Town's most popular lodges. For the past 8 months they have been building an extension to the lodge which will be called Victoria Falls Safari Club. It has 20 rooms spread along the hillside with own main area. Tucked between the main lodge and Lokhutula Lodges, the Safari Club overlooks the valley below with miles of Africa in front and the Zambezi River in the distance.

The lodge was designed by Josh Ward who designed the original lodge and built by the same construction team – the Kiggen family.

As the construction is just about completed and the Kiggens will soon be moving off site, there was a bit of a celebration. The wheelbarrows have been carting cement for the past months but this afternoon were filled with beer and ice blocks and became the fridge. The car park was the place for a party.

The Safari Club will be ready in a couple of weeks when the furniture arrives and the interior designer has done her bit.

In the meantime, the Main Lodge – Victoria Falls Safari Lodge – has had a makeover. The interior designer has gone for muted colours of beige and grey with splashes of vibrant colour.





All, of course, are ready and waiting for the UNWTO next year.

UNWTO

And, what of the UNWTO? Well, it seems as though things are moving on both sides ... in one way or another ...

In a report this week the Permanent Secretary,



Sylvester Maunganidze, who made the rather shocking statements in Zimbabwe's parliament about Zimbabwe lying about its ability to host the UNWTO has been moved to another department. Sylvester Maunganidze told parliament: *If certain things do not happen, it is because we have a Siamese twin (Zambia) who is handcuffed across the river and we breathe the same oxygen unfortunately.*

Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) chief executive officer Karikoga Kaseke told the media that Zimbabwe is quite capable of hosting the UNWTO and that preparations are underway: *The main event in Victoria Falls will be housed in a modern marquee that would be erected on the Elephant Hills golf course with a sitting capacity of 2 000. The issue of us building a convention centre is our own initiative, it was not put in the bid, it was meant to be a legacy building.*

Zimbabwe aims to make Victoria Falls Town a hub for conferences so all the facilities for the UNWTO will be used long after the event.

In one report the preparations for the UNWTO were dubbed 'The Peacock Project'. It doesn't mention why it has been called this, but I assume it has something to do with the way a peacock struts around. Zimbabwe is just coming out of the cold and wants to show itself off as a premier destination, hence their commitment to improving the facilities in Victoria Falls.

Meanwhile in Zambia, our latest Minister of Tourism, Sylvia Masebo, has said that she wants the borders cleaned up and that Victoria Falls, Kazungula and Katima Mulilo borders should be open 24 hours.

And ... The Road Development Agency has been allocated K33billion to rehabilitate 30km of urban roads in Livingstone. Work should begin in November.

Victoria Falls Marathon 26 August 2012

The Victoria Falls Marathon will be held on 26 August.

Last year the event was won by Zimbabwean Michael Ngaseke in a time of 2 hours, 24 minutes and 31 seconds.

The Victoria Falls Marathon is a fun day for everyone and attracts competitors from all over the world.



New Low-Cost Airline for Zimbabwe

1time has joined forces with a local Zimbabwe operator, Nu-Aero to launch a new airline to be called Fresh Air. The airline will start flights in September between Johannesburg and Victoria Falls Town. It is hoped that the new airline will eventually be allowed to cover domestic routes which are chaos at the moment with Air Zimbabwe being off and on ... mostly off, these days.
