

AVIATION TOURISM & CONSERVATION NEWS EAST AFRICA

A daily service 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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Second edition February 2014

Africa News

LAM MOZAMBIQUE ANNOUNCES ORDER FOR THREE B737-700NG'S

(Posted 06th February 2014)



Mozambique's national airline LAM announced yesterday the firm purchase of three Boeing B737-700NG aircraft with an option for another three. The deal is worth about 228 million US Dollars if the three options are converted into firm orders.

The new aircrafts, no delivery dates could be ascertained at this moment in time, will help LAM to expand their operations and offer additional capacity and destinations from its main hub at Maputo International Airport. LAM presently uses one B737-500 and two Embraer E190 aircraft and this latest order is set to double the number of aircraft on the fleet.

Meanwhile has Marlene Manave taken charge as the airline's new CEO, effective February 2014, coming on board as one of the few female airline CEO's in Africa.



LAM is on the EU 'Black List' of airlines banned to fly into or across European airspace but is working towards being allowed to return to Europe. Watch this space for aviation updates from across Eastern Africa.

BELGIUM HERE COMES AFRICA

(Posted 01st February 2014)



East Africa's tourism companies targeting the Belgian market may still want to jump on the band wagon for this year's largest tourism fair in that country, which takes place in Brussels from 06th to 10th of February. More than 700 exhibitors from 65 countries are expecting over 100.000 visitors to crowd their stands at the fair as they showcase their Sunday best attractions. Alongside the tourism trade fair will a B2B event take place, allowing exhibitors to meet the travel trade from Belgium under the name '*Travel Top*'.

Past attendees were full of compliments about this particular tourism trade show, which while not ranked among the greatest on the annual calendar nevertheless is crucial for penetrating the Belgian market. Exhibitors from Africa will once again find a dedicated '*African Village*', as are there again an Asia / Pacific, Latin American and North American Village, among others. By the time of uploading this article some 17 participants from Africa had signed up including Ethiopia and Madagascar, the latter's participation significant as sanctions against the country were just lifted following democratic elections in December.

Brussels Airlines, the official airline of the event, flies from Nairobi, Entebbe, Kigali and Bujumbura to Brussels, using an Airbus A330-200 on the route, and has reportedly special fares on offer for confirmed trade fair exhibitors. For more details visit <http://exposant.salondesvacances.eu/EXEN/site/index.aspx>

East Africa News

QATAR AIRWAYS WELCOMES FIRST A350 ARRIVAL IN DOHA

(Posted 06th February 2014)



Qatar Airways, the launch customer for the world's latest high performance wide bodied plane, yesterday welcomed the first ever arrival of this aircraft type at their new hub at Doha's Hamad International Airport, where it was showcased to Qatari government officials, management, staff and invited guests before flying on to Singapore where the aircraft, painted in Qatar Airways livery, will be on display.

The arrival of the A350 XWB to Doha from its Airbus base in Toulouse was a unique opportunity for both Airbus' flight crew as well as HIA air traffic control and ground officials to experience the landing of the new mid-sized wide-body jet on HIA's 4,850-metre eastern runway engineered to meet the requirements of the world's biggest and most advanced aircraft. HIA's dual runway system comprises a 4,850-metre eastern runway and a 4,250-metre western runway that are two kilometers apart. Designed for superior runway efficiency, it will be able to handle an incredible 100 aircraft every hour. Representing one third the size of the city of Doha, HIA spans 22 square km's and is one of the most elaborate Greenfield airport projects in the world today. Its state-of-the-art design aims to set a new global standard in commercial aviation. Upon initial opening, it will accommodate up to 24 million passengers, and up to 50 million by 2015. With its dual runway system, it will have the capacity to handle up to 360,000 aircraft annually, approximately 2.5 times more than the current airport.

Commenting on the occasion, Qatar Airways' CEO Akbar Al Baker said: *'This is yet another key milestone in Qatar's aviation progress. We have been steadily investing in our infrastructure to enable us to stay ahead of the latest developments in the global aviation sector. Hamad International Airport, which was built for advanced aircraft such as the Airbus A350 XWB, is our flagship asset and will soon be the new home of Qatar Airways and our modern fleet of aircraft, including the A350 XWB family. It was certainly a proud and symbolic occasion for Qatar Airways and our team of air traffic and ground control crew at HIA to experience landing the new A350 at our new airport, as it gave us a unique glimpse into the exciting developments around the corner'.*



(To mark the arrival of the Airbus A350 aircraft in Doha, Qatar Airways Chief Executive Officer His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker jointly hosts a press conference in Doha with Airbus Executive Vice President A350 XWB Programme Didier Evrard and Rolls Royce Senior Vice President Phil Harris)



(Qatar Airways Chief Executive Officer His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker (centre) and His Excellency Mr. Issa Al Mohannadi Chairman of Qatar Tourism Authority and Board Member of Qatar Airways (left) in the cockpit of the Airbus A350 aircraft during its visit to Doha)

Now in its advanced flight test program phase, the A350 XWB airliners are scheduled to enter into commercial service in the fourth quarter of 2014. Qatar Airways has ordered 80 aircraft to date, leaning towards the larger A350-900 and A350-1000 models, which better suit its business model and passenger requirements.

The A350 XWB is a family of mid-sized wide-body airliners designed to enhance fuel, operating costs and environmental efficiencies during medium-to-long haul airline operations. Featuring the very latest in aerodynamics, design and advanced technologies, these highly efficient aircraft provide better fuel efficiency of up to 25 percent

compared to existing similar aircraft types. Over 70 percent of the A350 XWB's weight-efficient airframe is made from advanced materials combining composites (53 percent), titanium and advanced aluminum alloys. The aircraft's innovative all-new Carbon Fibre Reinforced Plastic (CFRP) fuselage results in lower fuel burn as well as easier maintenance.

When entering service with Qatar Airways, travellers from across East Africa will be the first to sample this aircraft when connecting via Doha to the first A350 destination, soon to be announced.

Qatar Airways flies to all key airports in Eastern Africa, to Entebbe and Kigali, to Kilimanjaro and Dar es Salaam and 18 times a week to Nairobi. Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from Eastern Africa.

EMIRATES AND THE A380 – 5 GIANT YEARS OF A GIANT IN THE SKY

(Posted 06th February 2014)



Ugandans as well as Kenyans and Tanzanians, connected to the world by Emirates, can now look back at 5 years of being able to fly from Dubai to their final destination with the Airbus A380, the largest passenger plane today in the skies. From the very first A380 destination by Emirates – where else but to the Big Apple, aka New York on the 01st of August 2008 – has the destination network grown in leaps and bounds since then and East Africans can now connect through Concourse A, the first ever purpose built airport terminal dedicated to exclusively handle A380 aircraft, to 25 destinations around the world.



(Concourse A at Dubai International Airport / DXB)

From Los Angeles to Auckland. Emirates' faithful passengers can now reach Amsterdam, Auckland, Bangkok, Beijing, Dubai, Hong Kong, Jeddah, Kuala Lumpur, London Heathrow, Los Angeles, Manchester, Mauritius, Melbourne, Moscow, Munich, New York JFK, Paris, Rome, Seoul, Singapore, Shanghai, Sydney, Toronto and Brisbane. Zurich became the newest destination for the Emirates A380 when it was launched on January 8 this year. Over these last 5 and a bit years, interesting statistics were compiled, all fact but some of them quite quirky come to think of it.

Only yesterday did the local Emirates office in Kampala make some of those available and they make interesting reading:

Bread rolls loaded: 14,000,000

Fresh fruit baskets: 22,438

Fresh flower displays: 157,062

Caviar tins (30 grams): 210,477 (6,314 kilogrammes of 6.314 metric tons)

Shaving kits: 224,414

Toothbrushes: 1,009,767

Cornflake packs: 516,061

Coffee packs: 2,153,988

Teabags: 4,375,237

Sugar packs: 6,731,580

Baby food jars: 538,500

It was of course the 6.3 tons of caviar which stood out the most, served to what is arguably the most luxurious First Class Suite anywhere in the skies on a scheduled aircraft, where guests, not just mere passengers, are pampered from check in over the magnificent First Class lounge at Dubai International Airport to their stay on board.



(Emirates' A380 First Class Suite)

Overall were over 35 million meals served for over 18 million passengers who had since 2008 flown on the A380, served by crews from all over the world. While Emirates uses this aircraft type now to fly to 25 destinations a total of 37 airports have seen this bird make an appearance, either on special assignment, like airshows, or for instance on unscheduled diversions due to bad weather at the destination.

Emirates East African destinations Entebbe, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam are presently served by B777 and A330/340 aircraft, all of them offering a three class cabin, and passengers increasingly often ask for their onward flight to be booked on an A380 service to experience the sheer opulence in First Class, the luxury in Business Class and the unprecedented space and inflight experience in Economy Class.



(All pictures and graphs courtesy of Emirates)

Dubai's award winning airline is upping their present A380 fleet from 44 by another 13 deliveries this year and still has a further 96 on order, making it the largest A380 operator in the world. Emirates' new Uganda country manager Thani Abdulla Al Ansari said: *'The A380 is a truly remarkable aircraft and is a travel experience in its own right. Since Emirates began flying to Entebbe almost ten years ago, customers here have been able to link into a growing network of cities served by the A380, while making overseas trips as exciting and fun as the final destinations. Our customers love the A380 - from the quieter cabins and spacious layout on the main deck, to the on-board lounge and shower spas in our premium cabins. It is a beautiful aircraft which we have packed full of the best inflight comforts and products. From an operator standpoint, the A380 is still one of the most fuel efficient aircraft per seat'*.

Little wonder then that so many travelers from East Africa are today opting to fly with Emirates and are embracing *'Hello Tomorrow'* today. For more information visit www.emirates.com

Uganda News

UGANDA WILDLIFE AUTHORITY MOURNS NICHOLAS MBARAGA AHEBWA

(Posted 06th February 2014)



The board, management and staff of Uganda Wildlife Authority are mourning for ranger Nicholas Mbaraga Ahebwa, who was killed earlier this week in a shootout with suspected poachers in the Semliki Toro Game Reserve. Nicholas was on patrol with other rangers when the poachers opened fire on them, killing Nicholas instantly. One poacher was also shot dead in the exchange of fire. Security forces have joined UWA personnel in the field to hunt down the criminals and bring them to justice.

Just over 30 years old, Nicholas had joined UWA 10 years ago and underwent training before being deployed in the field, with his latest posting at the Semliki Toro Game Reserve after previously serving at Lake Mburo National Park.

Details are awaited about a memorial service and funeral arrangements later today when UWA is expected to make an announcement. Suggestions have been floated already to create a conservation monument at the UWA headquarters to honour fallen rangers and other UWA staff who died doing their duty to protect the national heritage and Uganda's wildlife.

The conservation fraternity in Uganda and the wider region joins UWA in expressing their sorrow and grief over the untimely death of Nicholas and extend condolences and sympathy to his family, friends and immediate colleagues.

ENTEBBE PASSENGER GROWTH A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

(Posted 05th February 2014)



Details about the passenger growth at Entebbe International Airport have now been released by the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority which besides being regulator are also owner and operator of Uganda's main international airport. During 2013 an increase in passengers of 8.5 percent was recorded, which puts the overall passenger number to beyond 1.34 million, a figure which previous projections was due to be reached by 2018.

Domestic passenger numbers reversed a long trend of downward figures when the CAA revealed 25,458 for the year 2013 compared to just 13,780 in 2012. This is largely attributed to increased air traffic by tourists but also regular flying for the oil companies exploring in the Albertine Rift.

Transit traffic, an area where Entebbe traditionally falls short of the performance of other regional airports, also improved from 89,798 to 94,583 passengers, who connected via Entebbe to such destinations like Juba, Rwanda, Eastern Congo and elsewhere.

The positive performance in the statistics however also poses an increased challenge to the airport managers, as the airport only has four gates, which are accessed through 2 security check points, causing 'traffic jams' during peak periods of departures from Entebbe to the exasperation of many passengers. Getting into the terminal to start with is a challenge, as passengers have to walk several hundred meters as the car drop off is now restricted to diplomatic vehicles and government vehicles only, leaving travelers to 'schlepp' their baggage by trolley or hand to the one available staircase, with no escalators or elevators available for physically challenged passengers, the elderly without support or those travelling with small children. When then finally approaching the terminal entrance, again during peak periods long queues are experienced outside the doors, leaving departing passengers often exposed to rain or bright sunshine, causing discomfort, upset and in the end anger when the queues move too slowly.

The last major expansion and modernization of Entebbe took place in the run up to the Commonwealth Summit in 2007 but there is now broad agreement, that the Ugandan CAA has been dragging their feet in pushing ahead with the next phase of expansion as was foreseen back then, leaving the ranking and rating for Entebbe, once seen as an airport of short ways and quick service to be sinking to the bottom of the performance lists in East Africa.

‘Unless your CAA does something urgently now, the situation will be as congested as Nairobi is, except they are getting big time relief when their new Terminal 4 is ready and when the new temporary terminal is opened. Here in Entebbe we only see things to get worse because they still talk of master plans. We are tired of hearing of plans we need action and they let us and ourselves down’ ranted an airline manager before shooting off another broadside: *‘They take 40 Dollar for each departing passenger as airport tax and when several flight leave at the same time at night, many of our passenger feel like they are herded like a flock of sheep. And rude officials often then add to the bad experience. It is not a nice farewell to people who have come to track gorillas or visit friend and relatives or even business travellers. There the contrast to the modern airports in Europe and the Gulf is the biggest, no separate processing of premium passengers through security and immigration. They pay high fares and have no special facilities. Bad Bad Bad’.*

Thus shows itself the upside of growing traffic vis a vis the downside of overstretched facilities at peak periods, the success in adding numbers versus the failure to add new structures in a timely fashion. A rare case of bouquets and barbs delivered together it seems. Watch this space for updates from the aviation industry across Eastern Africa.

RHINO FUND UGANDA MAKES RHINO TRACKING POSSIBLE FOR DISABLED VISITOR

(Posted 01st February 2014)



Tracking the now 14 rhinos on the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary of the Rhino Fund Uganda, to which entrance itself remains free, is done daily on foot, though access to a ‘jump off point’ near to them is normally done by vehicle. Once on foot, guided by qualified RFU guides and watched over by armed rangers – after all there is plenty of other game on the sanctuary, including leopard and reported lion presence on and off – the visitors to the sanctuary walk through the bush, and while doing so learn about the flora and fauna at Ziwa.

That, for some of the so called ‘*wagenis*’, a Kiswahili word for tourists, is already a bit of hard work when walking on their own two feet, but to track rhinos from the wheelchair is something quite different altogether.

Yet, the Rhino Fund has repeatedly now facilitated the visiting requests of people with disabilities, especially those in wheelchairs, and a ranger is assigned to assist such a visitor by navigating through the bush and giving a helping hand to push where necessary.



(Pictures courtesy of Rhino Fund Uganda Facebook pages)

People living with disabilities, especially those with restricted movement abilities, often find themselves excluded from activities, especially while others go on a walking safari, but the Rhino Fund has made sure that such a

challenge can be overcome and literally everyone who does want to go tracking, on foot or in a wheel chair, can actually go and see the rhinos.

After the recent birth of another rhino girl Ziwa is now home to 14 rhinos and one more birth is expected before Easter this year, which will bring the number of Southern White rhinos to 15, just under 5 years after the first birth was recorded at Ziwa in June 2009 from an initial breeding stock of three adult males and three adult females.

For more information about the only place in Uganda where rhinos can be seen in the wild, visit www.rhinofund.org or www.facebook.com/rhino.uganda

Kenya News

TSAVO / MKOMANZI WILDLIFE CENSUS TO COST 22 MILLION KENYA SHILLINGS

(Posted 07th February 2014)



An elephant population survey is now underway in the transboundary ecosystem of Tsavo West National Park, the Taita Hills Game Reserve and the Mkomanzi National Park across the border in Tanzania. This survey also affirms to ongoing close partnership and cooperation between TANAPA and KWS when it comes to transboundary activities, which after all benefit both organizations and both countries.

The game count commenced yesterday and was officially launched at the Sarova Taita Hills Lodge. The survey is also expected to bring some new insights into the migration patterns of elephant in the area, which in recent years has seen a significant increase of human – wildlife conflict, compelling the Kenya Wildlife Service to fence sections of the Tsavo West National Park to keep the elephant in, though periodic breakouts by large groups of elephant continues to pose a problem when they then raid crops and have to be driven back into the park at considerable cost. The last census in 2011 revealed some 11,000 elephant in the area, making it a magnet for tourist visitors coming to Kenya and Tanzania on a big game safari and there is some concerns, considering the poaching increase over the past three years, that the numbers may be rather different this time.

Watch this space for the census results, as and when they become available.

NAIROBI'S INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL JUST TWO WEEKS AWAY

(Posted 07th February 2014)



Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile communications company, will once again be the main sponsor of this now annual event, when Jazz comes to Kenya.

Participants come of course from within Kenya, where Jazz has become immensely popular in recent years but also from further abroad as a tentative list of performers just received shows. On stage will be Bona, The Nile Project,

Rythm Junks from Belgium, Yuva Cohen from Israel, Aaron Rimbui, Chris Bittok, Eddie Grey, Jacob Asiya and Kavitha Mwanzia.

Tickets will go on sale as of 10th of February and venue is the Ngong Race Course on Ngong Road, Nairobi. The cost of entry for adults will be Kenya Shillings 1.000 per person while VIP tickets will sell at 2.500 Kenya Shillings a person, approximately 30 US Dollars. Students will pay a reduced fee of 300 Kenya Shillings against valid student picture ID.

Visitors from abroad who will be in Nairobi on Sunday the 23rd of February, will have a great opportunity to attend the performance which starts at noon. Tickets can be arranged through the Concierge or Client Relations Desks in all of Nairobi's leading hotels.

1 MILLION SHILLINGS FINE APPEALED, CHINESE MAN REARRESTED WHILE TRYING TO FLEE

(Posted 06th February 2014)



A report a few days ago, that one Zhang Chunsheng was convicted in a magistrates' court of one count only, after pleading guilty to several charges brought against him, saw prompt results as an outcry of disgust and outrage swept the social media time lines as well as made their way to the powers that be in the Kenyan judiciary.

The magistrate in question, who for reasons best known to himself decided that a fine of one million Kenya Shillings was enough and a conviction of one count instead of all counts on the charge sheet was sufficient, is now subject to an investigation to establish why he ignored sentencing directives, while the Director of Public Prosecutions himself launched an appeal against the sentence.

The case was compounded when Zhang Chunsheng was nabbed at Jomo Kenyatta International airport yesterday, trying to leave Kenya, raising additional questions why he was not asked to deposit his passport in court, leaving him with the means to attempt an escape without paying a shilling.

The appeal in a higher court will now most likely result in both a substantially increased fine and a custodial sentence after Zhang's blatant attempt to flee the country will be added to the charge sheet.

Meanwhile though is the career of the magistrate on the line, and unless there are any good reasons he can advance in mitigation of his light sentence and conviction on just one of several counts, his career might well be over, and if so serves as a reminder to other magistrates that unless they uphold the law the law books will be thrown at them for certain.

The link shown below allows access to the initial article written on the 02nd of February.

<http://wolfganghthome.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/one-million-shilling-fine-for-chinese-ivory-smuggler-denounced-as-too-little/>

UAV TRIALS OVER OL PEJETA PREPARE THE WAY FOR FULL TIME AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

(Posted 05th February 2014)



Feedback from the trial flights of a prototype UAV, commonly called a drone, over the sprawling Ol Pejeta Conservancy is very encouraging it was learned, suggesting that aerial surveillance will later this year become a regular feature in order to protect the over 130 rhinos (Eastern Black, Southern White and Northern White) on the conservancy, but also elephant and other species in demand by poachers. The need to be cost effective when operating such aerial devices came fully into play as Airware had prepared a software package which allows non pilots to actually operate the UAV's through a user interface, eliminating the need to employ qualified pilots and yet getting real time surveillance pictures from the ground, which includes thermal imaging at night, allowing to spot illegal movements.



(Pictures from left to right show the thermal image of a lone elephant, the two 'control centre' laptops and Ol Pejeta's CEO Richard Vigne, Robert Breare and other Ol Pejeta / KWS staff following the flight of a drone on line)

When visiting Ol Pejeta late last year, both Richard and Robert emphasized that a number of technical issues still needed to be resolved, like making the device sturdier to withstand the impact of hot weather, dust and often uneven landing terrain but the test flights do suggest that much progress was made since then. With key permissions by the Kenyan government in place already, the deployment of Kenya's first UAV in the service of both anti poaching intelligence gathering but also the overall monitoring of game migration patterns and game numbers is now only a matter of months away.

The Kenya Wildlife Service, and other conservancies and private sanctuaries too, are reportedly closely monitoring developments at Ol Pejeta in order to then decide on the purchase of their own UAV's, which for once would put law enforcement and anti poaching ahead of the poachers who for years were outfoxing rangers through the use of sophisticated communications equipment. Together with regular ground patrols and in the case of Ol Pejeta a rapid deployment unit which can be airlifted by helicopter to intercept suspected poachers, the use of state of the art drones, providing real time images from the ground, will provide a serious deterrent against poachers who when caught can now face up to life prison terms, fines of over 230.000 US Dollars, and worse when stupid enough to engage the ranger force in a fire fight.

Visit www.olpejetaconservancy.org for more details on what is happening on Kenya's leading conservancy.

KENYA HOSPITALITY TRADE FAIR AND HOSEA 2014 PARTNER WITH PERAK

(Posted 05th February 2014)



The Pubs, Entertainment and Restaurants Association of Kenya, in short PERAK, has just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the organizers of this year's Kenya Hospitality Trade Fair and the concurrent symposium '*Hotel Summit East Africa 2014*'.

Slujan Event's Director Lucy Gacheru signed the deal, which is considered significant as it brings one of Kenya's key hospitality associations on board, with PERAK CEO Lillian Kalela.



PERAK, an affiliate of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers & Caterers (KAHC), is the principal voice for the entertainment players to the government and other agencies on matters of regulations, licensing and policy. As Association Partner, PERAK has partnered with the Kenya Hospitality Trade Fair in the delivery and execution of the '*Wine & Beverage Lab*', an elaborate feature of KHTF 2014.

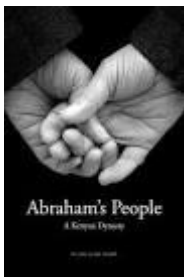
With its wide network of entertainment facilities and members, the partnership between PERAK and Slujan Events is another major avenue for its members to interact and engage with the wider hospitality industry. PERAK KENYA is keen on supporting hospitality related ventures like the Kenya Hospitality Trade Fair because these are the kind of avenues that share its mission to make Kenyan hospitality globally competitive and viable for the stakeholders who include guests, shareholders, employees, local communities, suppliers and the Government. Continuing with last year's theme '*Re-defining the hospitality industry in East & Central Africa*', the Kenya Hospitality Trade Fair will be held from **14th to 16th of May, 2014** at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre. The inaugural event last year, and the second edition this year were organized out of a growing need by hotel developers, owners, investors and industry professionals to engage and interact with quality focused suppliers. Alongside the trade fair, the events company in partnership with the Eastern Africa Economic Chambers of Commerce (EAECC), has also organized the 2nd Hotel Summit East Africa, to be held from **15th to 16th of May, 2014**, at the same venue. The conference targets professionals in C-level management in the wider hospitality industry and discusses trends and issues that propel the hospitality industry in East & Central Africa. This year's summit will run under the theme '*Moving Forward with Confidence*' and will focus on issues to do with regional integration, finance for hospitality projects, state of the art technology, human resources, skill transfer and capacity building among other topical issues.

The Nairobi County Governor Dr. Evans Kidero too has come on board and Kenya's capital city of Nairobi is now official host partner city of the event, adding yet more weight to what has in a short while become one of the region's foremost hospitality trade show and symposium for the industry.

Watch this space for future updates towards this important hospitality industry event for the East African region.

ABRAHAM'S PEOPLE – A KENYAN DYNASTY

(Posted 05th February 2014)



Books covering Kenya's pre- and post independence past have always managed to raise keen interest, both in Kenya itself as well as abroad and while many books were written about more flamboyant characters, often adding a fair amount of fiction to meet '*expectations*' by readers, the book about how Abraham Block build his Kenyan business empire, which at the time included Kenya's leading hotel group – and some say best training school an aspiring hotelier could wish for – Block Hotels, is by and large true to his life's events, from the moment he set foot into Kenya to the day his passed and was buried in the red soil of his adopted country.

Yours truly has been asked to write the first formal review for this 400 page strong book and was captivated from the very first chapter – and reading and reviewing is still ongoing. Written by first time book author Jane Barsby, a Nairobi resident for nearly 25 years and a fellow writer, the book has until now been a pleasure to read, and with its help allowed going down memory lane back to my own early days in Kenya.

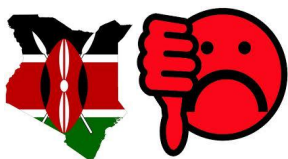
Like many books of the former variety mentioned above, this one too is a must read and must have to understand Kenya better, understand the complexities of the late pre-independence days and the struggle of Kenyans for independence and then, after the 12th of December 1963 as an emerging nation were. One comes to understand what the overt and covert undercurrents of those years demanded of a man like Abraham, to make his dreams become reality and build a business empire about which even today, long after Block Hotels were dismembered and destroyed by new owners, the industry still sits up and takes notice the moment the name is mentioned.

I was privileged to have come to Kenya in days when Nairobi still was the '*Green City in the Sun*' and when Block Hotels was synonymous with the best in hospitality there was to find anywhere in Eastern Africa, from the Norfolk over their safari lodges, from the Nyalí Beach Hotel to Nairobi's most famous of members clubs, the Bacchus. My own path in life, professional and personal, regularly touched base with Block Hotels and the people behind it, and beyond meeting Tubby and Jack, and Jeremy and Nick, sons and grandsons of Abraham it was the likes of Jake

Grieves Cook and David Stogdale I dealt with and all of whom implanted in me the knowledge that delivering top quality on a constant basis was both hard work and a result of a vision and a burning desire to be the best. The book launch has been set for the 26th of February at the Norfolk Hotel's Abraham Block Suite, a befitting venue considering that two of Kenya's most illustrious adopted sons, Abraham Block and Lord Delamere, frequented the hotel, one as the owner and the other as a patron. Both are today remembered at that hotel, Lord Delamere through the Delamere Terrace which emerged from the Delamere Bar (where he reportedly put more than one bullet into the ceiling) and Abraham after whom this superior suite was named, keeping the names and traditions alive. Contact the author Jane Barsby via [janebarsby \(@\) africaonline.co.ke](mailto:janebarsby (@) africaonline.co.ke) for details of stockists where the book is currently available. The book's ISBN code, for those keen to purchase a first edition, is: 978 – 9966 – 065 – 29 – 2

RELIGIOUS FANATICS IS NOT WHAT COAST TOURISM NEEDS RIGHT NOW

(Posted 03rd February 2014)



Reports from Mombasa overnight talk of some serious trouble at two mosques in Mombasa, known for their agitation if not outright indoctrination and radicalization of gullible young people. A police officer died and another was stabbed in the neck when security forces entered the two supposed places of worship, only to discover weapons, including an AK 47 and a range of materials described as a recipe for insubordination, violence and broadly supporting militant views similar to those by Al Shabab in preparation of Jihad. During the operation, according to local sources in Mombasa, at least two of the radical youths were also killed.

Dozens of suspects were arrested both inside the buildings but also later on in the streets as the youths engaged the police and security forces by throwing stones and bottles first and then using weapons like knives, machetes iron bars and clubs after being driven out of the mosques.

The source from Mombasa affirmed that shots had been fired at a police cordon around one of the mosques first before then prompting the security forces to storm the building.

Government is now considering shutting down the two mosques for good after it became known that some of the walls inside were littered with slogans to start a holy war and had been turned into an open recruitment centre for militants.

The coast tourism fraternity, already struggling with a downturn in business and negative publicity over so far admittedly isolated cases of attempted violence against tourists at the Likoni Ferry crossing and directed at local bars at the South Coast, was swift to condemn the actions of what one regular source described as *'a few dozen misled individuals who have fallen for the propaganda of terrorists'*.

Occupancies from the coast are reported to be between 25 and 35 percent below last year's average and some charter flights, it was learned, will already terminate the flight series in February and March, way before the Easter holiday weekend, suggesting a further deterioration of occupancies in coming weeks.

'Such incidents we need like a hole in the head' wrote one source while another encouraged government security forces to use all available tools of intelligence gathering, surveillance and arrests to contain to *'nip it in the bud before it spreads like a cancer'*.

Watch this space for updates from across the region on all matters concerning tourism.

SAROVA HOTELS PRESENT JOHN KARIUKI AS NEW BOARD CHAIRMAN

(Posted 03rd February 2014)



The Board of Directors of Sarova Hotels, left without a substantive Chairman since the passing of 'Channi Vohra' in mid October last year, has over the weekend announced the appointment of John Kariuki as the new Chairman of the company.

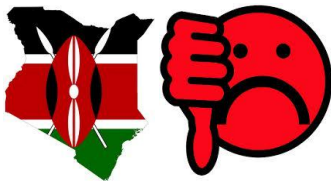
John, well known to this correspondent since his early days in Kenya, was on board from the early stages when Sarova Hotels was formed in the early 1970's and for an extended period of time in fact served as the company's Executive Director at the head office, back then located at the New Stanley Hotel.

Sarova Hotels has over the years built a portfolio of properties across Kenya in key locations and owns and operates the famous Sarova Stanley Hotel in the heart of Nairobi, the Panafric Hotel at the edge of the CBD, but also the 5 star Sarova Whitesands Resort & Spa in Bamburi / Mombasa, the Sarova Shaba Lodge in the Shaba Game Reserve, the Sarova Lion Hill Lodge in Nakuru National Park, the Sarova Mara Game Camp in the Masai Mara and manages the Sarova Taita Hills and Sarova Salt Lick lodges.

Today acknowledged as a leading brand in Kenya's hospitality industry – CEO JS Vohra is presently the chairman of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers – is Sarova Hotels also part of the Kenyan post independence era hospitality scene which from humble beginnings made it to the apex of the industry. Congratulations to John Kariuki on his new appointment and all the best for the challenges ahead in coming months and years.

THE MESS SOCIAL MEDIA NITWITS CAN CAUSE

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



While no one is presently certain why or from where the rumour was started in Nairobi yesterday, that British Airways would be halting flights from London to Nairobi over security threats and concerns, be it ill will, be it incompetence, be it even accomplices of Al Shabab trying to use the social media to spread their terror messages, it did not take long to have the timelines of Twitter and FB awash with the rubbish. From across the region did airlines report calls from passengers booked last night for flights to the UK after they were alarmed by the false information which spread like a mini tsunami on the social media networks.

Even well reputed individuals fell to this urban legend and re-tweeted the patently false information, even after radio stations, TV stations, the national airline Kenya Airways and leading Kenyan business man Chris Kirubi went public, the latter through his Capital FM radio station before he tweeted that it was just that, a rumour.

The UK High Commissioner too was swift to publicly announce that there was not a shred of truth in the rumours and Kenya Airways's Dr. Titus Naikuni had the following statement issued to also nip the mischief in the bud:

NAIROBI February 1, 2014 – Kenya Airways wishes to clarify that it is still operating normal flights to the UK, contrary to rumours over the status of this service.

We are flying to London 7 times a week, as usual.

Thank you for flying 'The Pride of Africa'.

Titus Naikuni
Group Managing Director & CEO
Kenya Airways

For more information, please contact:
Kenya Airways Contact Centre +254-20-3274747

It is understood from usually well informed sources that the cyber crime unit in Kenya is actively following the trail of tweets and other social media messages to establish the origin of them, since such misleading statements are

considered not just borderline but across the red line with such utterances aimed at causing public panic, despondency and disruption. One source was candid enough to equate such behaviour on Twitter and other Social Media with the shout '**Fire Fire**' in a crowded movie theatre or a packed shopping mall and suggested harsh punishment for the culprits when found. Whoever the nitwit was who started this rumour, Al Shabab and their Al Qaida cronies will surely be most grateful for the mess this caused. Tweet responsibly, or stay the heck off the social media!

SHARK WHALE WATCHING SEASON STARTS IN KENYA

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



News have come from Diani that the day before yesterday the first '*Papa Shillingi*', as the whale sharks are known locally in Kiswahili, was sighted off the Diani beach. This is good news as this season's tagging expeditions are due to commence on February 20th and then run up to the 15th of March.

Volker Bassen subsequently posted this update on his Facebook page, followed by a picture which really tells the story of what visitors can expect to see underwater:

Whale shark season started!! Time to get wet ;)

The season has started!!! We are glad to report a 6 meter juvenile male whale shark off Diani beach yesterday. Although early, it is a very promising start for our tagging expeditions starting next month.



Whale shark watching and of course the tagging of the largest fish in the oceans is one of Kenya's seasonal attractions as visitors from around the world come to the country to get close to these giants, while others sign up for the tagging expeditions which are hugely important for scientific work as the migration pattern of these fish can then be traced back. Volker also posted a YouTube link to a 15 minute documentary video taken two years ago from his base in Diani, showing just how the tagging works: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSwSIIMYQSY> More information about the work of the East African Whale Shark Trust can be accessed via www.giantsharks.org

CONSERVATIONISTS UPSET OVER 1 MILLION FINE FOR CHINESE IVORY SMUGGLER

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



Kenya's judiciary took another blow to its chequered reputation, when only a day after 40 magistrates had participated in a workshop about the new wildlife laws, and less than a week after the first landmark ruling which fined a Chinese blood ivory smuggler to 232,000 US Dollars (20 million Kenya Shillings) or 7 years in prison, another magistrate defied expectations and handed down a fine of 1 million Kenya Shillings only.

This prompted immediate suggestions, amid a firestorm of outrage on the social media, that the magistrate in question may have been ‘*gotten to*’ and one regular commenter from Nairobi vowed to report such cases to the judicial service commission for investigation: ***‘I am consulting right now how best to accomplish that but every single under value conviction should from here on be investigated for foul play. Questions must be asked of such magistrates if they have been corrupted or threatened or for whatever other reasons they could have avoided using the full strength of the law. When I read that a man having sex with a goat is sentenced to 20 years in prison and then I read that an ivory smuggler gets away with a million shilling fine, something is completely wrong in our legal system. People are sent down for years for stealing from a neighbour’s laundry line or stealing food and those guilty of sabotaging Africa’s and Kenya’s economy by poaching elephant and rhinos are let off so lightly. I hope the prosecution will appeal that low sentence and that the magistrate can be named and shamed. These fellows should be aware that they will from now on be under the spotlight and be hang out to dry if they do not meet sentencing expectations. They must from here on be accountable to the people in what they do and no longer hide behind the obscurity of the bench’***.

Meanwhile has Kenya’s if not Africa’s Elephant Lady Dr. Paula Kahumbu, written an extensive article during last week which was published in the Star Newspaper in Nairobi:

Start quote:

Kenya: New Wildlife Law Makes Catching Poachers Easier

By Paula Kahumbu, The Star

30 January 2014

2013 may have been the worst year for rhino's on record with over 1,000 killed for their horns, mostly in South Africa. The rate of killing is nearly doubling every year in Kenya, and in Mozambique they have been poached to extinction. Elephants are being gunned down at a rate of nearly 100 per day across Africa.

The Kenya Government is taking it seriously and threaten that the noose is tightening on the throats of those who poach our wildlife and traffic ivory and rhino horn. A monumental shift in cooperation across agencies in collaboration with the private sector is taking place, an inter-agency anti-poaching force is operational, and the new law is now in effect. For the first time, the President, the First Lady, the Cabinet Secretary, KWS, the Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions and even magistrates are now collaborating to ending the poaching crisis in Kenya. Poachers now fear that their time is up and they are handing themselves in rather than face life in jail, or be killed by anti-poaching squads.

On 14 December 2013, 39 year old Keleshi Parkusaa a Samburu member of the Leparua community, made a shocking confession to his elders. He told them that he had killed a rhino in Lewa Conservancy just days earlier. Lewa is a successful private conservation area in central Kenya. Parkusaa admitted that this was the second rhino he had killed, the first one was shot more than a year ago also in Lewa.

The confession, witness by his community elders, the Kenya Wildlife Service, the police, and the Lewa security forces, was held at the Lewa Conservancy headquarters. About 100 people gathered and sat in neat white rows on plastic seats. Parkusaa admitted that his confession was inspired by fear of being killed by the authorities, and of being excommunicated by his community. He said only poachers ever faced justice, and that the big players, the dealers, the corrupt police and KWS officer, even magistrates were the real threat.

Until now, there was little risk of exposure to dealers - only poachers were ever arrested and magistrates treated these crimes as petty offences and on conviction rarely sentence anyone to jail. Most offenders have been paying laughable fines and continue to repeat the offences. This is not possible anymore.

On 10th of January 2014 Kenya operationalized the new wildlife legislation with the world's most severe penalties. Offences against all endangered species including elephants and rhinos, or their products will now attract a fine of Ksh 20 million or life imprisonment. While these penalties demonstrate the seriousness of the crimes, they will only bite if convictions can actually be achieved. Under the old law 78% of all offenders were convicted, most on their own plea of guilty. Now however, pleading guilty will guarantee an impossible to pay fine or life in prison. Poachers are better off taking their chances with not guilty pleas and hoping that they can influence the verdict. To secure a conviction therefore will require watertight evidence, excellent prosecutions and judicial compliance. This is where men like, Parkusaa comes in, they are promising to reveal all which will grant the KWS the evidence that they need to bring down the cartels

But its not just KWS. All arms of government must work in concert for the new law to have impact. The investigators, prosecutors and magistrates all must be aligned, and in preparation for this the Director of Prosecutions, the Chief Justice, Magistrates, KWS, and private organizations have come together under a series of dialogues and trainings dubbed "Wildlife Crime Dialogue" organized by the Judiciary Training Institute. This is perhaps the most exciting demonstration of commitment seen anywhere in Africa. Judge Joel Ngugi, the architect of "Wildlife Crime Dialogue" is committed to making this work and has engaged KUAPO and WildlifeDirect in planning the series of meetings and trainings. "We want to transform the way that cases are handled so that we achieve outcomes needed to deter poachers".

In the opening of the first Dialogue meeting on Wildlife Crime held on December 21st in Amboseli, the Chief Justice, Willy Mutunga committed his office to the reforms and stated

"Judicial officers and other stakeholders must engage to figure out the weakest links in the criminal justice system so that they can effectively deal with the societal mischiefs which the laws target;"

and

"Judicial officers, as citizens of Kenya, must understand the real threats environmental and wildlife crimes pose to the Kenyan society and be able to articulate this in terms of their obligations and responsibilities to the citizens of Kenya who have bequeathed to them the constitutional authority to decide cases."

The dialogue meeting was attended by magistrates, prosecutors, investigators, customs officer, Kenya Wildlife Service, NGO's, communities and a poacher who explained to the group how corruption is at the heart of the crisis.

The one day meeting and workshop led to agreements on 25 innovative suggestions ranging reforms on public awareness, investigations, to court room practices, and cooperation between agencies and NGO's.

There is no doubt that new laws and reform in the court process will transform the wildlife crime situation in Kenya, but as in the case of Parkusaa, it is clear that justice is not confined to court rooms and judicial chambers - and as the Chief Justice said, "the imperative is to engage with society in order to bring about justice". The role of social values cannot be underestimated, especially in communities like the Leparua who have forgiven Parkusaa on condition that he helps investigations. He will also face punishment according to the Samburu local traditions.

Though he may lose all his cows, Parkusaa is heaving a sigh of relief for his "get out of jail free" card; he knows that becoming an informer is extremely dangerous but his community will protect him. I noticed as I interviewed him that the elders had boarded vehicles to leave, but they watched us with eagle eyes and would not leave until he was in the car amongst them.

Kenya has come a long way in just 12 months. From being named in the Gang of 8 the country has seen several campaigns to mobilize public awareness including the Hands Off Our Elephants with the First Lady Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, to the Elephant March in 18 cities by the David Sheldrick Trust, Kenyan United Against Poaching, and Jim Nyamu's walks across the nation and abroad. The country has traditionally been a leader in conservation and the Cabinet Secretary has committed to the vast collection of NGO's that her ministry will work with them for the sake of the country. All of this energy and activity is getting international attention for good reason, Kenya is now at the threshold of creating a new model for successfully ending the poaching and trafficking crisis.

With new laws, and effective inter-agency cooperation we will catch and jail the ivory dealers and cut them off from poachers which will stem the flow of ivory and quickly secure our elephants and rhino's. It's a realistic short term goal but we must not lose sight of the long term needs, saving Kenya's wildlife will only be achieved when we have created real incentives for communities and land owners to actively support conservation. That is the subject of another article.

The author is an elephant expert. She is the Executive Director of WildlifeDirect and runs the HANDS OFF OUR ELEPHANTS Campaign in which Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta is the patron. Dr. Kahumbu is a board member of Lewa Conservancy.

End quote

Watch this space for regular updates on how the new wildlife law in Kenya functions and what smugglers caught in transit at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, or poachers, middlemen and financiers when caught in Kenya with blood ivory or rhino horns are now facing when prosecuted.

Tanzania News

FASTJET LAUNCHES LUSAKA FLIGHTS

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



FastJet (T) yesterday launched their latest and second international route when the inaugural flight took off on time at 10 a.m. from the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam for Lusaka / Zambia.

The flight which took just under 2 ½ hours – in comparison going by bus, or worse by TAZARA rail connection, can take days at end – was according to a report received overnight welcomed with open arms at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka, where a traditional water cannon salute awaited the taxiing plane while the passengers were greeted by traditional dancers and drummers.

One way tickets sell, EXCLUDING OF CHECKED BAGGAGE FEES, TAXES AND OTHER REGULATORY CHARGES INCLUDED IN THE TICKET PRICE OF OTHER AIRLINES on this route, as low as Tanzania Shillings 120.000 though this fare requires advance booking and payment and increases when bookings are done shortly prior to departure. FastJet is the second airline on the Dar to Lusaka route after Proflight from Zambia launched their operation a few months ago using a turboprop aircraft as opposed to FastJet's Airbus A319.



Happy Landings on this and all the FastJet routes!

BODIES OF TWO MISSING FRENCH CITIZENS FOUND ON UNGUJA ISLAND

(Posted 01st February 2014)



From reports coming from a source on Zanzibar's main island of Unguja it appears that the bodies of a French couple, who intended to settle on the Spice Island and retire there, were found yesterday concealed in a water well on the property they had rented.

The two were reported missing two months ago and the search intensified when apparently friends and relatives of the two, through the French mission in Dar es Salaam, increased the pressure on local authorities to get results. While the circumstances of their death are entirely unclear at this stage, it has been suggested that robbery may have been a motive which led to their murder and police investigations, according to the source, are now focusing on individuals who were in contact with the couple to sell or rent them properties.

Zanzibar, also known as the Spice Island, has had some negative publicity last year when two British girls were subjected to an acid attack, while churches were burned by a small section of radicals seeking to fan religious divisions and hatred.

Fortunately for the tourism industry, on which Zanzibar depends for the 75 percent of overall foreign exchange earnings the island records annually and being a key pillar of economic activity, has not yet taken a downturn as a result of bad publicity over such cases, largely because they are still seen as isolated and not specifically targeting tourists, though not everyone would agree with this conclusion of course.

Rwanda News

RWANDAIR'S BRAND NEW BOMBARDIER Q400 IS TAKING SHAPE

(Posted 05th February 2014)



RwandAir's latest acquisition, due for delivery within a month from now, is steadily gaining '*shape*' as the outfitting of the cabin and the installation of the cockpit, engines and systems is slowly nearing completion.



This is the first owned Bombardier Q400 of RwandAir even though the airline has been flying a wet leased Bombardier Dash 8 for some several years now. The new aircraft, also a turboprop, will offer more seats overall even though it is configured in a two class configuration, allowing passengers flying with this aircraft type from Kamembe or other regional destinations to Kigali to connect there to their regional, pan-African flights or international flights to Dubai, the comfort of a business class section on all sectors.



(A view along the economy class cabin towards the front of the aircraft)

The new aircraft, manufacturer's number 4464 will be registered with the Rwanda Civil Aviation Authority's as 9XR-WL and will according to updated information received from RwandAir arrive in Kigali on the 03rd of March to join a fleet of two Bombardier CRJ900NextGen, two B737-800NG's and two B737-700NG's.

RwandAir has also confirmed that their launch of flights to Douala is on course for the 30th of March, making next month one to remember for the WB team at the international airport in Kigali and across their network, which now spans from Eastern Africa to Southern Africa, West Africa and Dubai. WB serves Kamembe, its only domestic destination at present, Entebbe, Juba, Bujumbura, Kilimanjaro, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Mombasa in the region, Johannesburg daily and flies several times a week to Brazzaville, Libreville, Lagos and Accra, besides daily flights to Dubai.

Watch this space for regular and breaking news updates from the aviation industry in Eastern Africa.

NEW BRIDGE AND BORDER POST BETWEEN RWANDA AND TANZANIA TO IMPROVE TRADE AND TRAVEL

(Posted 04th February 2014)



Rwanda and Eastern neighbours Tanzania are jointly progressing work on a new bridge over the Kagera River at Rusumo, which when completed in late 2014 will replace the old single lane bridge and allow larger cargo volumes to cross between the two member countries of the East African Community. The old bridge, currently used to cross the river which forms the border between Rwanda and Tanzania, is now over 40 years old and has weight restrictions which makes the use of today's modern long distance trucks impossible, a problem the new bridge will finally resolve. The new bridge and custom posts, are financed in a tripartite way, with the bulk of the money coming from Japan while Tanzania and Rwanda are paying for the balance on equal shares.

Both new facilities are expected to be ready by late 2014 and when formally inaugurated will operate 24 hours a day, instead of the present 16 hours which limit the movement of cargo and people across the common border.

The bridge is part of a major road corridor from the port of Dar es Salaam to Kigali and beyond, also serving Burundi and Eastern Congo. It could not be established why the two customs offices would not be unified to serve as a single customs clearance point, as is now emerging for instance between Kenya and Uganda, perhaps a signal that Tanzania is not quite ready yet to fully embrace the opportunities which are provided for under the various EAC protocols in addition to bilateral agreements.

In spite of the currently cooler relations between the two countries, triggered by suggestions from Tanzania last year that Rwanda ought to negotiate with the notorious killer militias holed up in the Eastern Congo, and upon the rejection by Kigali the expulsion of thousands of people from Western Tanzania into Rwanda for alleged immigration offenses, such key infrastructure projects appear to continue to roll out on schedule, offering a glimmer of hope that bilateral relations will eventually become warm and cordial again as they used to be. It is in particular the business community in Tanzania which is keen to improve trade and tourism links, mindful of the possibility to losing out to neighbours Kenya, which together with Uganda and Rwanda has formed a fast tracking alliance for several key projects which under the mainstream EAC have progressed too slowly if not faltered altogether, like the common tourist Visa and the unified customs clearance system, besides such mega projects as the standard gauge railway which is now under construction from Mombasa via Nairobi, through Uganda and on to Kigali.

Vanilla Island News

Mauritius News

MTPA COMES UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE AS STAKEHOLDERS TAKE THEIR GRIEVANCES INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Posted 04th February 2014)



‘The present tourism leadership at MTPA will leave Mauritius tourism as dead as a Dodo’ concluded one regular source from Port Louis, drawing the parallel to the long extinct bird Mauritius was once home to before it vanished from the face of the earth, leaving but a myth behind as well as the byword ***‘Dead as a Dodo’***.

Karl Mootoosamy, still CEO of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority – some hope for not much longer – stuck his nose into a hornets’ nest when a few days ago suggesting that Mauritius should go it alone and pull away from the hitherto all inclusive cooperation with neighbouring Indian Ocean islands, which came together under the brand name of ***‘The Indian Ocean Vanilla Islands’***.

More feedback from incensed tourism stakeholders, several of them now ready to go public under their own name and organization, has allowed to follow up yet more on this unsavoury story, which appears to drag Mauritius into isolation from her neighbours all of whom full heartedly stand behind the Vanilla Island concept and have embraced it to promote their own keynote events across the year.

One of Mauritius most read newspapers started the week with an article on tourism entitled ***‘Tourism: Mauritius is overtaken by the region’***. Karen Walter of the newspaper presented for all to see the state of affairs of the Mauritian Tourism Industry. This article comes as the Ministry of Tourism is getting ready, we are told from the Mauritius Hotel and Tourism enterprises, to seek the Government's approval to move the island out of the Indian Ocean Vanilla Islands. ***‘Will that also mean that the Indian Ocean Commission (COI) and the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) will be asked to move their Headquarters out of Mauritius’*** a resort General Manager asked in his reaction: ***‘We have lost it completely. We built an airport to become the hub of the Indian Ocean, then we do not want to work with the Indian Ocean’*** another Mauritian owner of a small hotel was quoted to have said. Both the COI and IOR are regional organisations where the island's Anil Gayan, their Minister for Foreign Affairs speaks with a loud voice. Another tourism industry professional of Mauritius asked what Regional Cooperation can Mauritius speak about when Mootoosamy of the MTPA is pushing for isolation.

The L'Express Newspaper stated that now the Russian Media are set for the first time to cover the Carnival International de Victoria that will be taking place in Seychelles this coming April. This, as Mauritius still cannot decide if it is to be present at this regional event with all the other islands of the region or not. But it was Mauritius that was in the leadership under a former Minister of Tourism to form the Vanilla Islands to reposition the Indian

Ocean as a tourism destination. L'Express Newspaper of Mauritius says that this was the aim of the Vanilla Islands and today countries such as Madagascar, South Africa and Sri Lanka amongst others are looking at benefiting from the spirit of togetherness of the region, Mauritius is playing the lone ranger if not envious spoiler all alone, and their participation at the Carnaval International de Victoria in the Seychelles this year still remains undecided, largely attributed to Mootoosamy's personal vendetta against all things Seychelles and in particular their tourism and culture Minister Alain St. Ange. Here a source, wishing to remain unnamed, but close to MTPA, confirmed that ***'Mr. Karl hates St. Ange's guts and is green with envy over his success, the success of the Seychelles islands as a destination and his personal success, rising to a ministerial post'***.

La Reunion, Mayotte, Madagascar are all Vanilla Island members are joining as co-hosts of the carnival festival with the Seychelles and South Africa to organise the 04th Carnaval International de Victoria that is set for the month of April. Even Sri Lanka is showing interest to be associated with this new drive in the Indian Ocean according to Alain St. Ange, the Seychelles Minister for Tourism and Culture.

But an unanswered question remains, Mauritius that has been noticeably absent from past events of the Vanilla Islands, will they yet again be marked as absent at this coming event in Seychelles. L'Express Newspaper of Mauritius says that it is exactly this deliberate absence by Mauritius at events aimed at consolidation regional tourism that is so much regretted by Alain St. Ange, who is also the President of the Vanilla Islands. Karen Walter of the L'Express Newspaper confirms that she interviewed Minister St. Ange of the Seychelles by telephone on Wednesday 29th of January where he said that the Vanilla Islands Organisation aims to reposition the Indian Ocean Region as a key tourism destination. The Seychelles Minister also said that this cannot be achieved without unity and that Mauritius needed to be more involved in regional events. ***'If we are not working together as a united group our region will not be what it could succeed to be and it is our people from our respective islands who suffer as a result. Mauritius tourism must decide what it wants for itself and for the people of Mauritius'*** the Minister is quoted as having said.

Nando Bodha, the former Minister responsible for Tourism of Mauritius agrees with the Seychelles Minister. Former Minister Bodha was one of those who launched the Vanilla Islands concept in 2010. ***'Mauritius is missing out on a rare opportunity'*** former Minister Bodha of Mauritius said. It is reported in the L'Express Newspaper that the former minister went on to say that Mauritius as a country had lost ***'the leadership and the motivation it used to enjoy to make the Indian Ocean the centre for tourism'***, a damning indictment for the present tourism leadership at MTPA and at the Ministry of Tourism.

Karl Braunecker, the Managing Director of Connections, a Destination Management Company in Mauritius takes, according to L'Express Newspaper a different twist to the Mauritius regional saga. Even though he says that he remains convinced that Mauritius must be present at the carnival in Seychelles as this would bring benefits for Mauritius. Mr Braunecker said that it was not a world event that will make the major difference in the island's records ***'I am supporting a Vanilla Islands Carnival on a regional basis that is held each year in a different islands'*** he said. ***'Mauritius is well positioned to become the aviation hub of the region. But we need to double our efforts in the promotion of twin destinations (Africa-Mauritius) on the Asia and Australia markets'*** Mr.

Braunecker further said. This approach is supported by Alain St. Ange ***'Twin centre destinations remains a formula that works and attracts the Japanese, Chinese and South Americans. But for now the Seychelles strategy is to work to remain visible. This is the reason why the Seychellois hoteliers recorded a bumper year in 2013 with 230.272 arrivals and USD 343.3 million US Dollars in revenues. This is an increase of 11% over 2012'*** Alain St. Ange, the Seychelles Minister said.

Karen Walter of the L'Express Newspaper reported that they had tried in vain to get a reaction from Minister Michael Sik Yuen, the Minister of Tourism of Mauritius but calls were not returned nor were other efforts responded to. Watch this space as this saga is sure to get uglier as time goes on while isolationists and a few individuals driven by greed and envy still stand at the helm of Mauritius' tourism bodies, ready to self-destruct if thing do not go their way.

MOOTOOSAMY STABS REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE BACK

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



Disconcerting news emerged earlier today from Mauritius that the divisive and abrasive Karl Mootoosamy, to the surprise of many still CEO of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, has laid into the concept of regional cooperation, in particular the Vanilla Island Organization, with an apparent vengeance still hard to fathom. Long known as envious of the accomplishments of the Seychelles and in particular of Alain St. Ange, from the days when he was CEO of STB until now, in his full capacity of cabinet minister for tourism and culture, he repeatedly in past years spat venom at the Seychelles marketing juggernaut. Yet it was not beyond him and his bunch of merry men to try and repeatedly do a copy and paste job, once when trying to imitate the Seychelles carnival and then attempting to copy cat SUBIOS – the Seychelles Festival of the Sea. The attempted carnival in Mauritius in the end turned out to be a glorified shopping festival widely considered a costly flop, which in the eyes of many revealed the creative bankruptcy and how the once visionary marketing of Mauritius is now almost desperately clinging to straws after losing its award winning ways. Mauritius tourism which was indeed the number one force among the Indian Ocean islands has for several years now yielded the number one spot in arrivals to the Maldives with Sri Lanka now threatening to push Mauritius to third place.

When asked in person during a face to face meeting in September last year at MOCA in St. Denis / La Reunion on the sidelines of a UNWTO Conference on Sustainable Tourism in small island states, what he made of the just announced Vanilla Island Organization, Mootoosamy's entire stature seemed to take the appearance of a snake ready to strike, before a dismissive hand gesture gave the unspoken answer.

Information received and confirmed by a source in Port Louis an hour ago speak of remarks by Mootoosamy which leave little to imagination that he, now risen to the level of selfstyled policy maker for the Mauritius government it almost seems, was vehemently opposed to Mauritius' Minister for Foreign Affairs who stands up for regional cooperation and integration, not a concept MTPA appears to embrace any longer.

News coming out of Mauritius from the island's tourism stakeholders suggests that the MTPA and their CEO presented a report highlighting that Mauritius has nothing to gain from the Vanilla Islands Organization and that gains for Mauritius would come from elsewhere and Mauritius should therefore remove itself from the regional tourism body that itself helped create with the region. It was only in September last year that the 7 tourism ministers were present in Reunion, alongside UNWTO Secretary General Dr. Taleb Rifai, when the announcement of the launch of the Indian Ocean Vanilla Islands Organization was made and the full launch then, again in the presence of all 7 members, took place in November last year at WTM in London.

A growing section of the Mauritius tourism private sector, long disenchanted with the direction of MTPA, has now apparently made a first move to take matters into their own hand when it comes to promoting their own attractions, and the mood was combative according to mailed information which reads as follows: ***'We will be the dynamic tourism body promoting our island with our regional partners, and we can leave the MTPA to sit and do what they do best the waltz of hesitation putting one step forward and two steps back as the tourism industry suffers. As much as Mauritius is part of the regional tourism body of the Vanilla Islands, they do not know at this late stage if they will be participating in the coming Carnival of Victoria in Seychelles. The decision of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority and of Karl Mootoosamy, their CEO is to happily state his disgust for neighbouring islands as his regional tourism policy'***.

It is understood that members of the Vanilla Island Organization are now trying to get clarification through diplomatic channels if the official position of Mauritius vis a vis regional cooperation and specifically the tourism cooperation under the Vanilla Island Organization has fundamentally changed, and if so, what the future of cooperation under the Indian Ocean Commission and other bodies will be like considering the outburst of the MTPA chief.

Watch this space to see where this latest spat is going and what, if any, consequences will arise for MTPA and its chief Karl Mootoosamy.

Reunion News

NEW PARTNERS JOIN ILE DE LA REUNION TOURISM

(Posted 07th February 2014)



The Reunion Tourism Office central reservation department has yesterday welcomed new service providers to their extensive list of existing partners, affirming that tourism remains a growth sector on this French Indian Ocean island.

New are the Villa Oté, a colonial style guest house situated in the Entre-Deux. Three bedrooms open onto a living library where a reading area and a coffee corner is available to visitors. Vacationers can enjoy breakfast served outside on the terrace at the floor or in the exotic garden of the house. Villa Oté also offers a table d'hôte evening meal which gives guests the opportunity to enjoy a tasty and creative cuisine, home cooking style. Oté The Villa has an infinity pool and a spa, offering a Hikers relaxing excursion parties on the many trails in the village.



Also new is the Domaine de Café Grille, located in Saint-Pierre which offers guided tours of the botanical garden. This is taking visitors back in time to trace the history of the great culture that has made La Réunion. At the heart of a garden of four acres, visitors will discover shrubs rich in colors that bloom extends throughout the year. Flowering vines, bamboo and palms, walkers will appreciate the biodiversity which can be found here. For those peckish or outright hungry, the Domaine de Café Grille offers tasty local dishes and of course coffee and croissants.



Reunion, one of France's regions in the Indian Ocean – Mayotte is the other one – has over the past years made determined efforts to move its tourism industry away from the past nearly total reliance of the French domestic market, from where home airline Air Austral connects 12 times a week from Charles De Gaulle in Paris to the island's main airport Roland Garros in the capital St. Denis. Agreements with South Africa for a Visa Waiver Programme have born fruits and seen visitor numbers from there increase in leaps and bounds and a similar deal is in the making now for China and reportedly some other countries too.

Reunion's attractions, from the sandy beaches to the rugged interior and active volcano Piton de la Fournaise, can be accessed via www.reunion.fr and the various links to service providers found there.

REUNION TOURISM TARGETS CHINESE MARKET

(Posted 05th February 2014)



IRT, in full Ile de la Reunion Tourism, on Monday held a workshop session at their offices with Prof. Dr. Arlt, Founder and Director of the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, to gain insight into the do's and don'ts when marketing the island to the Chinese market.

High on the agenda were issues surrounding the branding and setting Reunion apart in the eye of the Chinese traveler from other islands, not too difficult a proposition as Reunion after all is so very different from most of the other Vanilla Islands also vying from the same market.

Air connections were named as a challenge, when coming from China and increased cruise ship connections with neighbouring islands was put forward too to enhance the product range for visitors. Getting to know the habits of Chinese travelers and having guides, staff in resorts as well as in restaurants and at other service providers adapt to such requirements, was also mentioned in the workshop and extensively discussed.

Reunion is presently working on a bilateral deal with China to allow Chinese citizens to visit the island, which after all is part of the European Union, to get a Visa waiver arrangement into place, similar to the one with South Africa which has over the past months led to an sharp rise of visitors from there, also encouraged by regular flights of Air Austral, the island's home carrier. Visit www.reunion.fr for more information about the island and its unique attractions or visit www.air-austral.com for details how to fly to St. Denis, the island's capital.

Seychelles News

LE MERIDIEN FISHERMAN'S COVE TO HOST INAUGURAL CHAINE DE ROTISSEURS DINNER

(Posted 04th February 2014)



Good culinary news reached overnight from Victoria, the capital of the Seychelles, confirming the 'arrival' of the global '*Chaîne de Rotisseurs*' on the archipelago.

It is understood that the Le Meridien Fisherman's Cove in Bel Ombre was selected to host the very first dinner the group's local members will be able to celebrate on the evening of the 21st of February, promising a night of delicious food and exquisite wines as is customary on such occasions, when the host venue's chefs will be pulling out all stops to create a perfect menu.

This latest development is significant for the Seychelles as it opens additional avenues of cooperation with other countries where the Chaîne de Rotisseurs have been established, from bilateral chef guest appearances to regional competitions for young chefs from which in particular the Seychelles can benefit to advance skills and creativity among their upcoming local chefs. Local chapters of the Chaîne de Rotisseurs exist for instance in Kenya and Tanzania, the Seychelles' nearest mainland neighbours, where the news will no doubt meet with great interest. Bon Appetite will no doubt be in order on the 21st when the culinary who is who and the Seychelles tourism gurus will assemble in Bel Ombre at the Le Meridien Fisherman's Cove.

MINISTER PAYET APPLAUDS SEYCHELLES ISLAND FOUNDATION AND NATURE SEYCHELLES

(Posted 02nd February 2014)



The Seychelles celebrated their annual Protected Areas Day on Friday and the Minister for Environment and Energy Rolph Payet paid tribute to the country's unique record as the world's leading conservation nation.

Just over half of the Seychelles' terrestrial landmass is protected by law as national parks and bird sanctuaries while a significant section of the ocean is protected as marine parks, compared to an average of just about 15 percent globally.

The Minister, in a statement received overnight, singled out a number of parastatal bodies and NGO's involved in conservation projects, such as the Seychelles Island Foundation, the Seychelles National Park Authority, the Island Conservation Society and Nature Seychelles, among many others, which sole purpose is the protection of the environment and maintaining bio diversity. Few abroad know that on the main island of Mahe the Morne National

Park is open for visitors who come to hike, or visit the *Mission Lodge* which is a cultural landmark in the Seychelles and expected to be recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The Vallee' de Mai on the second largest island of Praslin, home to the Seychelles' prized Coco de Mer palms, already a World Heritage Site for over 30 years now, remains the most visited attraction across the islands while the distant Aldrabra Atoll is the Seychelles' second World Heritage Site, also managed by the Seychelles Island Foundation on behalf of the government and people of the archipelago.

Entire islands have been declared protected areas for their unique flora and fauna and while some are also home to a single and often rather small luxury resort, it is the work put in by the resorts, and the money generated by them, which helps to maintain them in their original natural state.

New resort developments today require the strictest adherence to global best practice in the mitigation of their impact on the area and there are now examples of for instance mangrove forests to thrive within resorts like the Constance Ephelia Resort, after they receive constant care, increased protection and have benefitted from re-planting of mangroves in parts where previously the much sought after hardwoods have been 'harvested', often cut illegally. *Seychelles*, truly ***Another World***.

CONSTANCE EPHELIA SUPPORTS SEYCHELLES HERITAGE FOUNDATION WITH NEW BROCHURE ABOUT PORT GLAUD

(Posted 01st February 2014)



The Constance Ephelia Resort on the Seychelles' main island of Mahe, the island's largest and without doubt one of the best resorts, has earlier in the week handed over a new brochure covering the various attractions of the Port Glaud area, where the resort is located.

The new pamphlet was presented to the CEO of the Seychelles Heritage Foundation Patrick Nanty by the resort's general manager Philipp Gitton with the Principal Secretary for Culture Ms. Rose Benjamin and members of the Port Glaud Heritage Trust in attendance at the function.

Targets for distribution of the brochure are schools, households, businesses and of course tourist visitors keen to learn more about this particular area of Mahe, the landscapes, the Port Launay marine national park, the area's history, its traditions and its culturally important sites.

Constance also operates the Constance Lemuria Resort on the archipelago's second largest island of Praslin, which features a championship golf course and is among the larger resorts considered the leader of the pack, setting standards and providing guest experiences second to none. For more information about the destination visit www.seychelles.travel or look in at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Seychelles-Heritage-Foundation/265713420206643>. *Seychelles*, truly ***Another World***.