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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Third edition August 2012

East Africa News
COMESA TOURISM FORUM DRAFT AGENDA RELEASED

COMESA, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the COMESA Business Council have now released the daft agenda for the upcoming Tourism Forum to be held in Nairobi / Kenya between August 22 and 24.
The lineup of speakers is now largely confirmed, with some changes from the earlier versions of the agenda, and still makes impressive reading with tourism and aviation experts coming from as far as the Seychelles, Ethiopia, Zambia and of course the East African Community member states to deliver their key note speeches and topical addresses to the plenary sessions.
Notably will this correspondent read the welcome message by the UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai to the plenary session, before later in the proceedings appearing again as speaker and then as moderator.
This first meeting by COMESA focusing entirely on the hugely important tourism industry in the 19 member trade block is seen as a starting point to develop a more integrated approach across the membership and to have the more advanced countries with significant tourism sectors share some of their experience with those member countries still at the very start of tapping into their tourism resources and marketing them.
Expect live reporting from on site in Nairobi next week to stay informed on the proceedings and the recommendations the forum will make for COMESA to consider for action in coming months.

FIRST COMESA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Theme: Shaping the Future of Tourism in the Region

22 - 23 August, 2012, Nairobi, Kenya

Venue:

Windsor Golf Hotel and Country Club

DAY ONE- 22 August, 2012

08.30AM- 09.00 AM REGISTRATION FOR THE FORUM

09.00 – 10.00 Official Opening Ceremony

Opening Remarks:

. CEO, Kenya Tourist Board
. Chairman of COMESA Business Council
. Secretary General, COMESA
. Message from UN WTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai, read by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome

OFFICIAL OPENING STATEMENT – Hon Minister of Tourism, Conservation and Natural Resources, Kenya

10.00-10.30: Group Photograph - Coffee Break and Networking Session

10.30- 11.15: Session 1

Innovative Tourism: Success stories among key business leaders in Africa

Moderator: Mr. Thierry Kalonji, Acting Director, IPPSD, COMESA Secretariat

Speakers:

. Mr Tewolde Gebremariam, Group CEO, Ethiopian Airlines
. Mrs. Rosemary Mugambi, Marketing Manager, Serena Hotel
. Mr. Josue Cesar, Manager Tourism Product and Visitor Services, Seychelles Tourism Board

Discussion

11.15- 12.00: Session 2

Tourism Sector: Expanding economic opportunities and regional development to impact the global economy

Moderator: Mr. Eric S. Maseko, CEO, Swaziland Tourism Authority (TBC)

Speakers:

. UN World Tourism Organization, Message of the Secretary General - Read by Prof. Wolfgang H. Thome
. Ms. Agatha Juma, CEO, Kenya Tourism Federation
. Mr. Josue Cesar, Manager - Tourism Product and Visitor Services, Seychelles Tourism Board

Discussion

12.00- 12.45: Session 3

The COMESA Sustainable Tourism Development Framework: Basis for Policy and Strategy

Speakers:

. Mr. Thierry Mutombo, Director of Investment Promotion and Private Sector Development, COMESA
. Rosette Rugamba, Tourism Expert

Discussion

12.45- 14.00 Lunch Break

14.00- 15.00: Session 3 (continues)

Sustainable Tourism: Prioritizing the tourism industry to ensure corporate and environmental responsibility for community development

Focusing on:

. Foster collaboration in terms of trans-frontier agreements and resource management
. Encourage the prioritization of the tourism sector at the national level for economic and social development
. Improve the collection of tourism data and capturing of statistics

Moderator: Mr. Kahindi Lekalhaile, CEO, Ecotourism Kenya

Speakers:

. Mr. Gibson Phiri, Deputy General Manager, Garden Groups Hotel
. Mr. Amon Wekesa, President, Uganda Tourism Association
. Mr. Helen Lubowa, Chief Executive Officer, UCOTA

Discussion

15.00- 16.00: Session 3 (continues)

Relaxation of Visa requirements

Focusing on:

. Creation and implementation of a COMESA single visa
. Encourage country immigration authorities develop an appropriate framework to facilitate adoption of single tourist visa for the region
. Integrate flexibilities in immigration requirements to allow visa requirements for extensions of legitimate activities

Moderator: Ms. Rosette Rugamba, Tourism Expert

Speakers:

. Mr. Simba Mandinyenya, Director, Research, Planning and Development- RETOSA
. Kenya Ministry of Immigration (TBC)
. Prof. Wolfgang H. Thome, Eastern Africa and Indian Ocean Islands Correspondent, eTurboNews Inc

Discussion

16.00 - 16.15 Coffee Break

16.15 - 17.15: Session 3 (continues)

Coalition in the Tourism Industry: Regional Cooperation amongst players in the tourism sector

Moderator: Ms. Lucy Karume, Chairperson, Kenya Tourism Federation (TBC)

Speakers:

. Mr. Francis Ngwenya, Vice President (Hospitality), Zimbabwe Tourism Council
. Mr. Shadrack Mashauri, Principal Tourism Officer, EAC Secretariat
. Ms. Rosemary Mugambi, Marketing Manager, Serena Group of Hotels
. Ms. Waturi Matu, Coordinator, East African Tourism Platform (TBC)

Discussion

END OF DAY ONE

DAY TWO: 23 August, 2012

08.30 - 09.30: Session 3 (continues)

Tourism and Climate Change: Conserving biodiversity for tourism development

Focusing on:

. Involving the private sector in the formulation of tourism regulations, industry and policy frameworks at the national and regional levels
. Consider tourism sector's response to climate change
. Enhance the development of ecotourism at the national and regional levels

Moderator: Dr. Amany Asfour, Board Member, COMESA Business Council

Speakers:

. Mr. Jamil Butt, Tourism Ambassador to Zambia, Seychelles.
. Mr. Edwin Sebuhoro- CEO, Eco-tours Rwanda
. Mr. Charles Arden Clarke, Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism (TBC)
. Mr. George Manyara, Tourism Office, IGAD (TBC)

Discussion

09.30 - 10.30: Session 3 (continues)

Upgrading the tourism industry standards and developing human and institutional capacities

Focusing on:

. Conduct and initiate relevant research, which is regional in scope, on the impact of the tourism industry on natural and socio-cultural environments
. Provide necessary training and technical support to members countries to enable them to meet necessary standards, as well as training for regional and international
. Implement appropriate policies to ensure skills transfer and provisions for a skilled regional labour force

Moderator: Dr. Amany Asfour, Board Member, COMESA Business Council

Speakers:

. Dr. Nsengimana Hemogene, Secretary General, Africa Standardization Organization
. Mr. Jeffreys Manjengwa, Zimbabwe Tourism Board
. Dr. Kenneth Ombongi, Principal, Utalii College (TBC)

Discussion

10.30-10.45 - Networking Coffee Break

10.45 - 11.45: Session 3 (continues)

Tourism and Infrastructure Development: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Air Transport

Focusing on:

. Develop e-tourism policies and strategies both at the national and regional levels
. Encourage Member states to develop ICT infrastructure to facilitate the tourism sector in the region
. Consider the challenges affecting the air transport industry and way forward
. Promote interconnectivity in air transport for tourism development in the region, taking consideration the responsibility of governments and air service providers

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome

Speakers

. Mr. Damien Cook, Director, Managing Director, E- Tourism Frontiers Limited
. Mr. Tewolde, Gebre Mariam, CEO, Ethiopia Airlines

Discussion

11.45 - 12.45: Session 3 (continues)

Tourism Product Development and Marketing

Focusing on:

. Branding COMESA as a single destination;
. Creating innovative products that are competitive
. Developing affordable transfrontier and regional tourism packages;

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome

Speakers

. Ms. Doris Kofi,Zambia Tourism Board
. Mr. Fred Okeyo, Regional Marketing Manager, Kenya Tourist Board (TBC)

Discussion

12.45 - 14.00 Lunch Break

14.00 - 15.00:

Formation of the CBC tourism workgroup –

Introduction by Ms. Sandra Uwera, Coordinator, COMESA Business Council

Consideration of the recommendations of the forum
Closing remarks
END OF THE FORUM

QATAR AIRWAYS ADDS THE WINDY CITY AS US DESTINATION NUMBER FOUR

The World's Five Star Airline has just announced their plans to commence daily flights between Doha and Chicago from April 10th next year onwards, bringing to four the number of US destinations served nonstop, following New York, Washington DC and Houston. The airline, already flying a cargo service twice a week to the '***Windy City***' will be using a B777-300ER with 335 seats for the 15 hour flight, offering the award winning business and economy class service for which QR has bagged award after award. The aircraft offers a configuration of 2x2x2 in business class and 3x3x3 in the economy class cabin, 1 seat less per row than most of their competitors, giving the passengers added comfort and space. Qatar Airways flies daily into the East African region using state of the art Airbus A320 equipment, connecting Entebbe and Kigali, Dar es Salaam and Kilimanjaro and Nairobi to their global network. Notably though have flights initially planned for mid August to Mombasa been shelved for the time being, suspected to be a result of a row over verbally assured traffic rights between Nairobi and Kilimanjaro, which the Kenyan government then at the last moment withheld just days prior to the inaugural flight, which was to route from Doha via Nairobi to JRO. The launch flight then had to be hastily re-routed via Dar es Salaam, prompting this sharpish reaction by the airline at a time when Mombasa is in great need of extra flights and travelers, having suffered a more than 20 percent decline of arrivals this year over 2011.
Qatar Airways Chief Executive Akbar Al Baker, said on the occasion of announcing the new destination: **'*As Qatar Airways continues its aggressive expansion, we are pleased to finally offer another gateway in the United States, this time to the 'The Windy City' of Chicago, five years after we began operations to North America. Chicago is a key route for business and leisure travellers alike, connecting them from destinations across India, Africa, Middle East and Asia Pacific with a one-stop service via Doha to the Midwest. For the people of Chicago and the Midwest, we look forward to offering a great travel experience on the world's best airline to cities across our network with one-stop convenience through our Doha hub. Our onboard experience is distinct and provides an unparalleled commitment to service quality, reinforced by the recent accolade from Skytrax, naming Qatar Airways the world's best airline for the second consecutive year*'**.
Flying to now 118 destinations around the world with a fleet of 110 aircraft, Qatar Airways continues to take delivery of a new aircraft in average every two weeks and has already announced more destinations to be served in the coming months, including Yangon / Myanmar, Maputo / Mozambique and Belgrade / Serbia. The airline was only recently pronounced the world's best airline by Skytrax for the second consecutive year and the premium class ground handling in Doha too was awarded the same accolade, expected to get better still when the new international airport will be opened in either late 2012 or early 2013, the exact date still to be announced.
Watch this space for aviation news from the Eastern African region.

Uganda News
BUJAGALI LAKE – FALLS NO MORE

(This correspondent during a recent visit to the Nile Porch, with the new *Bujagali Lake* in the background)

When in November 2011 the dam of the new Bujagali hydro electric power plant was finally completed and closed, the water levels of the Nile behind the dam wall immediately started to rise, first almost unnoticed, then gradually and in the end quite progressively, '*drowning*' the rapids and smaller falls upstream before eventually reaching one of Uganda's best known whitewater rapids and falls, Bujagali itself.
Long the centre of adventure tourism activities, with two rafting companies having their base right there and overnight facilities for overland truck tourists and backpackers at the Nile River Camp, and of course the rather up-market '***Nile Porch***' with its restaurant '***The Black Lantern***', the area underwent a dramatic change, at least as far as the river is concerned. The Nile, formerly gushing across rocks and bolder down rapids and falls is now showing itself more like a lake, created behind the dam wall further downstream.
It is at the ***Nile Porch*** I spent a few days recently to let this new experience sink in, the sound of rushing and gushing white waters from the falls below gone forever and substituted by the subdued noises of the African night and the now audible calls in the early hours of the day of over 150 bird species identified from and at the safari styled resort.
The immediate area around Bujagali Falls was in the past literally inundated with visitors every day, many local Ugandans especially on weekends but also hordes of '*wagenis*', aka tourists, who came by 4x4 as part of their Ugandan safari, or by '*boda boda*' from the Jinja – Kampala road roundabout some 7 + kilometres away, where they got off overland busses from across East Africa to experience the thrills of white water rafting, boating, quad biking, horseback safaris along the river banks or bungee jumping with a little dip into the Nile, as in being baptized by the world's longest river.
Today, the spectacle of white water rafting has moved to below the Bujagali Falls, in a way a loss of attraction as the rafts no longer race over the rapids which are now submerged of course, but that has given way to an entire range of new opportunities, which previously did not exist.
The tourism stakeholders, led in an initiative to turn the wider Bujagali area into a conservation zone by Bingo, aka Frasier Small of Nalubale Rafting, also the owner of the Nile Porch and its adjoining operations like the Nile River Camp and his wife Hannah, are keen to see the '*lake zone*' which has now emerged to become a tourism hub in the future, working hand in hand with Bujagali Energy Limited, in short BEL, which owns and operates the new hydro electric power plant that so fundamentally changed the goal posts for adventure tourism along the upper Nile valley.
Proposals are now being fine-tuned to get formal government backing for the establishment of a conservation zone or a nature reserve encompassing the entire river banks between Owen Falls and the new dam and regulating fishing, so as to turn the new '*lake*' into a new centre for tourism activities, albeit different of course from the previous adrenalin rush activities.
Bird watching on the calm waters of the river / lake is now possible and boat trips with expert bird guides on board are on offer every morning and evening, when the birds are at the most active. Sport fishing too is being promoted but here a regime of regulations is needed to ensure that local fishermen stop using drag nets and participate in fish conservation and support restocking, and not, as seems presently the case, fish the area empty. Such unsustainable behaviour will leave them in the end with nothing while also impacting on the potential revenues of sports fishing tourists would come for and pay handsomely for the privilege to pull a large Nile perch from the waters. Even house-boating is under consideration, and what a thrill that will be when available, to spend a night actually on the Nile, which would add another unique attraction to Uganda.
NEMA, Uganda's environmental watchdog, has already signaled that they will support a private sector led initiative which would be able to enforce a halt to cultivation on the river banks, stop the greedy fishing with explosives and illegal nets and through re-forestation halt soil erosion.
Hand in hand with BEL, land owners along the river corridor from the former Bujagali Falls to the dam and operators of tourism related businesses, the initiative, provisionally called Nile River Guardians, would seek to incorporate the local communities and in particular the community elders, to create a completely new and re-invented hub of activities, where the loss of the rafting has led to the creation of new opportunities, from which all can benefit if properly done.
While the roll out of NRG, or whichever name is ultimately chosen by a united front of stakeholders, will be taking some time it will nevertheless be interesting to see how the concept of conservation for the sake of promoting new business opportunities will take root and in what format it will present itself in coming months.
One prediction though has come true, sadly, which is that the intransigence of the Uganda Power Transmission Company's chosen path of the high voltage power line has irreparably destroyed part of the unique ambience, and the sights, as the monstrous pylons run only a short distance from the river bank itself, instead of, as had been repeatedly pointed out to them, putting it half a kilometre or so back along the main road between Jinja an Kayunga. There, a great potential has been destroyed by bureaucrats with frankly no clue of what they have missed out on, which is making the best possible use of the land near the river. This has now been literally made impossible as

under or near the high voltage lines, no sensible investor would nor could put up weekend homes, time shares, restaurants, entertainment complexes or even a casino with an attached resort hotel. Government planners here must bear their share of the blame for that, as a little more thoughtfulness and looking ahead – and not that they were not all told of the stark consequences of running the power line so close to the river – could have made such a significant, and for certain profitable impact on the development of a real estate towards a comprehensive tourism hub along the upper Nile valley. Water under the bridge, or rather water into the lake that is now, but these sentiments will for long linger and are evidence, that bureaucrazy – pun fully intended – has claimed the scalp of what could have been a purpose built centre of hospitality and tourism. That ugly sight apart though, coming to Jinja and staying at the Nile Porch, or for the more budget minded at the Nile River Camp, is certainly a preferred weekend or even mid week getaway, considering that it is only 100 kilometres from the capital Kampala and reachable on decent tarmac roads except for the last few kilometres on recently maintained murram. Visit Uganda 2012 and beyond comes to mind, and this part of the Pearl of Africa surely has its appeal and charm, inspite of the '*knock*' government functionaries have dealt it here with their lack of vision.
Visit www.nileporch.com for more information, also on related activities at Mt. Elgon vis a vis trout fishing and the sister Sipi River Lodge. And of course do visit www.softpowereducation.com to see what this NGO has done in the wider area around Bujagali for schools and education through donations and volunteers.

UGANDA CAA COMPLETES PLANNING FOR GULU AND KASESE AERODROME EXPANSION

Planning for the expansion of two important upcountry aerodromes, Gulu in Northern Uganda and Kasese in Western Uganda, has reportedly been completed, according to information released by the organizations Corporate Communications and PR Manager Ignie Igundura.
It was stated on the occasion that the cost to fully develop both aerodromes into international airports, meeting ICAO requirements and safety and security standards, some 240 million US Dollars would be required at today's cost, prompting the UCAA to opt for a gradual approach of upgrading and modernizing the two, while in addition still having to maintain and eventually modernize another 10 aerodromes and airfields under their jurisdiction.
A regular source, close to the UCAA, on condition of anonymity for not being an authorized spokesperson, had this to say: '***True that is. Right now the masterplans are complete and the UCAA is looking for finance. The priority right now is to complete the masterplan roll out for Entebbe International Airport because that is our country's gateway to the world. We are seeking to relocate the cargo terminal from the passenger side to the 'old airport' side and for that we are looking for partners from the private sector. When that is accomplished, the passenger terminal can at last be extended to cater for more traffic, because we are soon looking at 1.5 million passengers. But concentrating on finishing the plans for Entebbe does not mean the UCAA will lose sight of the other aerodromes under their jurisdiction and management. Kasese could be important as a gateway to Eastern Congo and Gulu the same for South Sudan. So of course there is a need to advance work. Kasese has an issue with land acquisition but that will be resolved soon we hope to expand the runway. One of the issues we however have is the lack of scheduled domestic flights. Eagle Air is flying to Arua but all the other Northern destinations they operate on demand only. In the 90's as you will recall we even had scheduled flights to Kasese and Kisoro with light aircraft from Entebbe but with good roads, traffic as shifted.***
The licensing committee, when it last sat, you were there after all, granted scheduled licenses to the Kampala Aero Club and also to the Ugandan offspring of Air Kenya. They are supposed to start scheduled flights where passengers can buy a seat instead of chartering a whole plane. That will maybe add interest for tourists to fly to Murchisons' two airfields at Pakuba and Bugungu and Kasese might open up Queen Elizabeth, the Rwenzori Mountains and Kibaale national parks. Demand right now seems not very stable from what we hear as a result of other factors but we hope that will stabilize soon and rise again for domestic flights. The East African Community has committed itself to really improve aviation infrastructure on the ground to promote air traffic and within this initiative I am sure we will also see new radar and navigation equipment procured and installed'.
It was also learned from the same source that preliminary talks have taken place between the UCAA and companies willing to finance in full or part the expansion works at Gulu and Kasese, probably as a requirement within any tenders, as and when those will be published for bidding. Going by recent experience, it will be an almost safe bet that it might be major Chinese construction companies going for bids and financing packages and being awarded

tenders, considering their pricing policy and readily available project finance from the Chinese government. Watch this space.

GEOLODGES AND EAGLE AIR MAKE IT INTO UGANDA'S TOP 50 BRANDS

GeoLodges Africa, owners and operators of some of Uganda's best known lodges like the Nile Safari Lodge, Jacana Safari Lodge, the award winning RainForest Lodge in Mabira and the upcoming 'Equator Snow' in the foothills of the Mountains of the Moon, has beaten more fancied opposition to make it into Uganda's top 50 brands in a function last night organized by the Private Sector Foundation Uganda. Alongside did Eagle Air, currently the only airline offering scheduled flights to domestic destinations in Uganda, make it into the top bracket, also beating more fancied opposition along the way.

Voting took place over some weeks via SMS text messages, giving a broad section of Ugandans the opportunity to name their favourite brand from amongst industry, manufacturing and services sectors, ahead of the upcoming 50th anniversary of Independence, due to be celebrated on the 09th of October.

Determining the top 50 brands of the country, though designed towards the Golden Jubilee of Independent Uganda, will reportedly become a regular feature in the future to make sure that consumers on an annual basis will have the opportunity to select what they think are the top performers in the market place.

Well done and congratulations to Zahid Alam, Emily Wissanji and their team at GeoLodges Africa and to Capt. Tony Rubumbora and his team at Eagle Air. Well done for putting tourism on the map of Uganda's best recognized enterprises and businesses.

UGANDAN TRAVELERS ALSO GET SPECIAL VISA DEAL FROM EMIRATES

Dubai's award winning national airline, Emirates, leaves apparently no stone unturned when it comes to capturing more traffic and travelers from Uganda too will now be given a special deal for Visa in coming weeks, following the launch of the promotion in Kenya earlier in the week.

The airline is arranging for a 30 day free Visa for passengers in all classes or on any fares, for tickets booked between August 13 and 20 and for travel anytime between September 05 and October 04, from Entebbe to Dubai and back, NOT for transit passengers though it was pointed out.

Given for free over this period, and literally granted unless previous infringements would in a rare case prevent an application to be rejected, the offer will undoubtedly draw in the extra numbers of Ugandans wishing to visit the city that never sleeps and which has become the home of some of the world's greatest tourist attractions, such as the Burj Khalifa, around which an entirely new part of Dubai has grown in recent years, or else visit some of the many other global attractions like the largest indoor skiing arena, the water parks, the legendary hotels or simply go shopping. In addition, a visit to the site of the world's largest airport at Jebel Ali, is for sure a tempting proposition for aviation buffs from East Africa.

With the summer heat slowly making way for cooler autumn temperatures, now indeed is a time to get a free Visa and travel to Dubai and the other Emirates.

(Picture courtesy of HK Strategies Nairobi on behalf of Emirates)

A similar deal is also being extended to passengers from Ethiopia it was confirmed overnight from the airline's local PR agency based in Nairobi, to take advantage of this very special deal now available in the wider region. Watch this space for regular aviation news from the Eastern African region.

MV KAAWA DUE TO RETURN TO FERRY DUTY

(Picture courtesy New Vision file photos)

ONLY 7 YEARS after colliding with MV Kabalega, which subsequently sunk into the deep of Lake Victoria, will the MV Kaawa return to service. Diddling with the pro's and con's of repairs versus building a new rail ferry, the concept of repairs finally took hold and a long overhaul and refitting by Southern Engineering has seen the ferry set sail a few days ago for seaworthiness tests, after getting clearance from the marine oversight body in Kampala.
The return of a Ugandan rail ferry will boost the flow of goods to and from the port of Dar es Salaam through the connection with Mwanza port on the Tanzanian side of Lake Victoria, from where imports and exports are transported by rail to the Indian Ocean.
Much of the funding had reportedly come from World Bank loans and grants dedicated to boosting the transport sector and under this programme over 3 million US Dollars were availed by the World Bank towards the final bills of putting the ferry back on the water.
In the past have even vehicles been transported across the lake, allowing residents of Uganda to reach the Tanzanian side of the lake at Mwanza and then self drive into the Serengeti's Grumeti Sector, less than 2 hours drive away from the city while passengers, often backpackers, have also used the ferry services to cross the lake and explore other equally exciting parts of Eastern Africa at a very reasonable transport fee. Welcome back to the MW Kaawa it is and as always watch this space.

Kenya News
SAROVA HOTELS KENYA SIGN UP WITH B4CHECKIN

SAROVA
HOTELS • RESORTS • GAME LODGES
KENYA • EAST AFRICA

b4checkin

B4Checkin has been selected by Sarova Hotels, Resorts and Game Lodges to provide communication and feedback software systems to their entire chain of hotels and lodges throughout Kenya and East Africa. The implementation of B4Checkin solutions at Sarova Hotels' eight properties marks the company's first African installations and reaffirms their continued global growth in the hospitality industry.
According to the World Tourism Organization, in 2009 Africa was the only region in the world to show growth in tourism. In 2010 international arrivals rose by six percent to 49 million and data shows the trend continued through early 2011. With an increasing number of travelers being serviced by Sarova Hotels, the group needed a platform with CRM functionality that could reach guests in a meaningful manner, irrespective of their country of origin.
Sarova Hotels will use B4Checkin technology to better connect with hotel patrons and measure guest satisfaction. B4Checkin's Email Communication package and B4Feedback system are working hand-in-hand to maximize guest service for Sarova Hotels. While the customized email communications allow each property to send pre-arrival and post-stay emails to guests regardless of booking channel, B4Feedback's online comment card system makes it easier

for the guest to provide feedback on their stay. Comments are text-based and received instantaneously. This allows the Hotels to better understand and remedy intermittent service breakdowns and retain the customer's loyalty. Other benefits of the proprietary automated guest feedback management system include real-time business intelligence, customizable reports and the opportunity to generate repeat bookings.

'*Sarova Hotels strives to continuously improve in all aspects of its business'* states Kulgit Rekhi, Director of Operations at Sarova Hotels, Resorts & Game Lodges. '***With this ethos, Sarova will use B4Checkin's cloud-based solutions to capture, centralize and manage its guests' experiences better and in real time. This activity also reaffirms Sarova's commitment to environmental causes. Additionally, Sarova plans to enhance its contribution towards its CSR activities by capitalizing on the savings accruing from reduction in the use of papers, etc. With a robust growth plan for East Africa, Sarova hopes for mutually beneficial partnership with B4Checkin.***'

B4Checkin's Email Communication package and B4Feedback Online Comment Card system are now in use at the Sarova Stanley, Sarova Panafric, Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort & Spa, Sarova Mara Game Camp, Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge, Sarova Shaba Game Lodge, Sarova Taita Hills Game Lodge, and Sarova Salt Lick Game Lodge.

'***It is our commitment to bring innovative, cost-effective software solutions to the worldwide hospitality industry***' said Saar Fabrikant, President and CEO of B4Checkin. '***Recent installations in Africa add to our international presence, helping to make B4Checkin a truly global provider of online reservation management and guest satisfaction measurement tools***.'

Novel ideas, creative solutions – no longer strangers to Africa's key hospitality markets. Watch this space.

KIMUNYA TO FACE PARLIAMENT'S IRE OVER MISGUIDED TENDER DIRECTIVE

'***If he is found to have lied to parliament in what he said earlier to the house about the KAA tenders for the new runway and new terminals, he will be censored and has to be sacked***' said a member of Kenya's parliament to this correspondent in a communication received overnight, when trying to figure out the likely fate of Kenya's hapless transport minister Kimunya, which now hangs in the balance after stepping into the proverbial when trying to scuttle a Vision 2030 project in which President Kibaki has taken a keen interest.

Information gathered over the past days indicates, that Kimunya's mitigative reasons for his directive to cancel the tender and re-start the process, documented in a letter by his Permanent Secretary of 10th January this year, may be a pure afterthought and smokescreen, when he claimed that Kenya Airways had not been involved in the various design issues before tender documents were published. There is intense public speculation what personal reasons, possibly even vested interests Kimunya may have, to take the course of action he opted for. Yet, evidence has since been put into the public domain that Kenya Airways' input into the design drafts has been incorporated last year, making it all but obvious that the minister misled parliament and the public at large.

A regular aviation commentator from Nairobi added '***Kimunya is no stranger to controversy and has been in trouble before. What is interesting is that as a member of President Kibaki's PNU he goes against his boss when he must be aware how the President wants to leave a legacy and break ground on this project before his term ends. He [Kimunya] is even on record saying he does not care who breaks ground, really? His utterances that KQ was not involved have also been shown to be untrue. What motives does he have really when even the AG says the tender award is legal and must stand. And even the cabinet secretary reiterated that following a cabinet decision. Does Kimunya want to be sacked? And that all throws doubts over the future of JKIA as THE hub in East Africa. How often did you write about runway closures and traffic being diverted when we had an incident? And yet here is a man who claims that he knows better than everyone else?***'

Preparing the masterplan and tender documents according to another source in Nairobi cost the Kenyan tax payer over 2 million US Dollars already and the award of the tender was made after the Ethics and Anti Corruption Commission, following a complaint from another bidder, investigated the process before then clearing KAA to proceed as planned. A contract was offered to China's Anhui Construction on December 16th last year before being formally accepted on December 19th 2011. Kenya's Attorney General has since then twice reiterated in formal legal opinions that the contract was valid and any attempt cancelling it would result in major justified claims against Kenya.

Other countries in the region are in the meantime pushing ahead with their respective airport projects, with Addis Ababa set to get a brand new international airport to take over from ageing Bole, while in Rwanda an announcement is expected any time from now about the start of the new Bugesera International Airport some 20 km outside the capital Kigali. Other airports undergoing renovation, modernization and expansion are Dar es Salaam's Julius Nyerere International and the Kilimanjaro International Airport between Arusha and Moshi. Watch this space how the Kimunya saga plays out but be not surprised if sooner or later he will have to move from his ministerial limousine back into a ramshackle.

KENYAN TRAVELERS GET SPECIAL VISA DEAL FROM EMIRATES

Emirates

Dubai's award winning national airline, Emirates, leaves apparently no stone unturned when it comes to capturing more traffic and travelers from Kenya will be given a special deal for Visa in coming weeks.
The airline is arranging for a 30 day free Visa for passengers in all classes or on any fares, for tickets booked between August 13 and 20 and for travel anytime between September 05 and October 04, from Nairobi to Dubai and back, NOT for transit passengers though it was pointed out.
Given for free over this period, and literally granted unless previous infringements would in a rare case prevent an application to be rejected, the offer will undoubtedly draw in the extra numbers of Kenyans wishing to visit the city that never sleeps and which has become the home of some of the world's greatest tourist attractions, such as the Burj Khalifa, around which an entirely new part of Dubai has grown in recent years.


(Picture courtesy of HK Strategies Nairobi on behalf of Emirates)

A similar deal is also being extended to passengers from Tanzania, though it could not be confirmed immediately that Ugandans too would be able to take advantage of this very special deal. Watch this space for regular aviation news from the Eastern African region.

MINISTER ADMITS DISMAL FAILURE AS CHINESE COMPANY SET TO FIX MARA ROAD
All but admitting to have misled the Kenyan public in the past, the Minister for Roads had to eat humble pie during a public interview on one of Nairobi's TV stations, when he had to reveal that the notoriously bad road between Narok to the Masai Mara's Sekenani gate would have to be repaired by a Chinese company, after local companies, contracted and largely paid for the contract, failed to deliver any improvement.
Tour and safari companies have regularly complained to their own ministry of tourism and tour drivers repeatedly staged protests blocking the vital road, on which according to one regular source from Nairobi '***… the profits of a company can be lost through broken springs, broken shock absorbers and damage to the car bodies, and delays in reaching the Mara or returning tourists in time to the airport for departure flights for which we are held responsible. Cars get stuck overnight at times and considering the income tourism brings to Narok Council and the government at large it is a disgrace. They are promising this road upgrade for years and years, ministers come for site visits, make more promises, dish out more money to crony companies and nothing changes. Maybe we should sue the minister together with government for the damages we suffer and make him pay so that others who follow him learn a lesson and keep our roads passable***'.
There has been a wrangle on responsibility for this road between the Narok council and central government which will only be resolved after the next elections, when provisions of the new constitution come into full effect and which will leave the newly formed counties responsible only for feeder roads while the central government will assume full responsibility for all main roads classified as A, B and C.
'***By and large the government of President Kibaki has done a good job on roads and he will be in our history books for these accomplishments for sure. But the road to the Masai Mara remains a sore in our side and as an industry we have been let down in so many things. Less funding for KTB, attempting to make tourism services a VAT item which will raise the cost of holidays at a time when we struggle to keep numbers up, the constant quarrels over the Nairobi airport expansion which prevents new airlines from coming here and bringing more passengers, the poaching and how government deals with it and a lot more. Mombasa has about 20 percent less arrivals this year compared to last year and from receiving the most tourists has now yielded to Nairobi. Coast***

hotels suffer from poor occupancies except a few top performers which always keep their hotels in top shape and the scenes in Amboseli when Masai speared elephants or killed the lions in Kitengela went around the world giving us very negative publicity. Government needs to understand tourism needs a holistic approach and not just a bit here and there' he added in with bitter disappointment.
Minister Franklin Bett during the interview said that a financing deal has been reached with China for the re-construction of the road but left out the crucial element of committing to have the road in its present state repaired, potholes filled and maintenance work continue until the new road will be formally commissioned in a few years time. Said another source in this respect in an overnight mail: '***He was shy to say anything on the money paid to useless contractors. We demand that the road is fixed now while we wait for a new one to be built. We can no longer tolerate the potholes and craters, that has to stop. Let government give that work to the Chinese too if necessary because our Kenyan companies have failed us completely***'.
The Masai Mara is every year the centre of the wildebeest migration when during late June till at times early November the great herds cross into the Masai Mara in search of pasture, before then returning to the low grass plains between the Serengeti and Ngorongoro, where they give birth to the next generation before resuming then the annual pattern of migration. The Masai Mara at this time of the year is normally jam packed with tourists coming from around the world to see the amazing spectacle of the herds crossing the Mara River, running a gauntlet of huge crocodiles waiting for them in the river and the predators on both sides, taking their prey at will. Safaris at their best, Magical Kenya at her best, if only the roads were better. Watch this space.

Tanzania News
TCAA DENIES ANY DANGER TO AIR TRAFFIC AS RADAR EQUIPMENT FAILS

TCAA
Tanzania Civil Aviation Authority

Assurances to airlines and the aviation industry, that air operations across Tanzania were 'safe' inspite of the failure of crucial radar equipment, sounded hollow at best and exculpatory at worst, prompting sharp comments from regular contributors from Tanzania's airlines.
'***If the TCAA Director General really stands up before us and tells us that the absence of radar has no impact on safe operations, what world does he live in? You should be aware yourself of the problems because even in Entebbe your radar is down and it is an issue with airlines. JNIA is our busiest airport in the country and if there is no radar guidance for controllers, or for meteorological purposes, how do they monitor air traffic. Anyone could stray into the airspace, a light aircraft for instance, and how is that detected. Those small birds do not have anti collision avoidance systems on board and something really bad can happen. Imagine we had more flights in and out of JNIA, how would they cope with that without causing a lot of delays? Some time ago the Sudanese only accepted an aircraft into their airspace for overflights every half hour because their equipment was down and what we have here today is not so different.***
It is a shame that we as a country try to boost tourism and yet the main infrastructure supporting it, is out of service. I know that our government is pouring a lot of money into upgrading our various aerodromes and airfields and secondary airports to boost aviation, but at the same time, TCAA must keep the equipment working, or procure new equipment with all the money they make from passenger taxes and not hoodwink us or put up smokescreens. After all, we are the ones flying, they sit on their desks as bureaucrats, today at TCAA but tomorrow perhaps dealing with forestry or fishing or trade. This has to stop' a regular source roared in anger when asked to comment on the statement of TCAA DG Fadhil Manongi made yesterday in Dar es Salaam, when the unease over the lack of radar fueled rumours and unsettled aviation personnel.
Watch this space to read what you need to know about aviation developments across Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

DIRECTOR OF WILDLIFE SACKED OVER ILLEGAL EXPORT OF WILDLIFE
Tanzania's no nonsense minister for natural resources and tourism, Ambassador Khamis Kagesheki, announced today the sacking of several top officials in his ministry for their involvement in the illegal export of wildlife to Qatar in November 2010, as was reported here soon afterwards when the scandal broke. This was following information leaked into the public domain by a number of aviation personnel, who watched in person how a Qatari

airforce aircraft was being loaded with the animals before taking off, following the presentation of forged and falsified documents clearing the cargo and the flight.

The biggest casualty of the affair for now is Mr. Obeid Mbangwa, until now Director of Wildlife in the ministry, alongside two other personnel based in Arusha. The Deputy Director for Wildlife was reportedly demoted to a lower rank while other officials alleged to have been involved in the scandal, to a lesser extent, were given warning letters, a career stopper for all purposes.

Other government personnel are still said to be under investigation however, together with the '*facilitators*' from the private sector, after a parliamentary report raised the alarm and, amongst several other reasons then claimed the scalp of Kagesheki's hapless predecessor Ezekiel Maige, who was sacked earlier in the year by President Kikwete.

According to a regular and reliable source, the sacking of the three will pave the way now to start the process of prosecuting them and others for the role they played in the illegal export of game and birds, and although Qatar has been reportedly reluctant to cooperate with investigations initiated via the CITES Secretariat in Lusaka, Tanzanian personnel is expected to travel to Qatar in due course to collect further evidence to be used during the anticipated trial of the culprits.

The development comes hot on the heels of a new report submitted in parliament over massive commercial style poaching of as many as 30 elephant a day and both reports were picked up internationally by the media and conservation organizations, bringing Tanzania into some serious disrepute and denting the legacy left by founding father Nyerere as a conservation minded nation. Watch this space.

TANZANIA PARLIAMENT TOLD OF 30 POACHED ELEPHANT A DAY

A report recently submitted to and discussed by parliament in Dodoma makes stark reading and confirms what has been rumoured for long, that the rate of poaching is way higher than Tanzanian officials have previously admitted. During the period between 2006 and 2009 as many as 30.000 elephant, many from the poorly guarded Selous but generally right across the country and often under the very noses of law enforcement, have been slaughtered in a silent massacre, which casts a dark shadow over the country's commitment to conservation.

The commercial scale killings continue unabated and experts think that as many as 30 elephant are now being killed a day, which would put the annual figure to a staggering 10.000+ and for which the chairman of the committee on land, natural resources and environment as well as the shadow minister for natural resources and tourism blasted the government. Committee chair James Lembeli was quoted to this correspondent to have said when talking about the ongoing wildlife massacres: '***The committee directs the government to address poaching issues in its entirety and stop poaching activities in the country***' while Peter Msigwa, shadow minister on the opposition benches for natural resources and tourism challenged the ministerial statement to the house by reportedly saying: '***It is a shame to hear the government say that poachers have a lot of money and use highly sophisticated methods, when we expect the government to ensure the security of the wild animals***'.

Tourism minister Ambassador Khamis Kagesheki had earlier on tried to put a positive spin on the situation when giving figures of patrols, in this context however seen as largely useless considering the scale of the elephant decline in Tanzania, while claiming that nearly 2.000 suspected poachers have been apprehended and those processed through court been fined nearly 175 million Tanzania Shillings.

It has generally been acknowledged in Eastern Africa that the current legislation is not able to cope with the commercial type poaching any longer and that crippling fines need to be combined with long jail sentences for those found poaching and those financing the activity and then attempting to smuggle the blood ivory out of the country. However, amendments to the respective laws have been slow in coming, often resulting in poachers getting bail and resuming their bloody handiwork literally on the same day, while fines are laughably small and jail sentences, if any, expressed in weeks or months rather than decades.

It has also been noted with growing concern that the respective governments are clearly downplaying the true extent of poaching within their jurisdiction and are not facilitating the anti poaching efforts of TANAPA, KWS and UWA to the extent needed to cope with the use of sophisticated communications gear now regularly found with poachers, nor their gang like structures and business like organisational set up.

Said a conservation source in Nairobi, on condition of anonymity: '***No names please, I do not want to get arrested too like my colleague from EcoTourism a few months ago, but to be honest, what we now face is the final battle to keep our wildlife alive. In Kenya we see a trend to fence parks and reserves and cut off migration, which is going to be very bad for the gene pool development in these areas. Wananchi take the law in their own hands because KWS does often react too slowly. We had lion killings, elephant killings and now new threats to kill elephant in the Narok area too. I personally hold politicians responsible for that. For one, the wildlife act should have been amended a long time ago to cater for higher fines and longer jail terms. Then KWS needs to be facilitated better in anti poaching, surveillance and exit point monitoring to capture illicit cargo. And those with***

political ambitions for next year who incite wananchi to spear lions and elephant should be taken to court and prosecuted. But importantly, KWS also needs to tell the truth no matter how bad the figures are, because by being slow in coming up with figures it opens them to criticism and then rumours start taking over from facts'.
Meanwhile have other sources from Tanzania made a range of further allegations about a new hunting block being allocated to Middle Eastern royalty, where as many as 48.000 people are bracing for being driven off their ancestral land as a multinational company engaged in hunting, similar to events some time ago when in a similar '*deal*' people were beaten up, forcefully removed and their homesteads turned into ashes by security personnel while government big cats enjoyed the alleged pay offs while their compatriots were turned from self sustained herders into paupers. A petition has been started to provide the public shame going along with such questionable practises, in particular in the light of poaching figures now circulating in Tanzania, that the government would still sanction hunting, decimating threatened species even further for the proverbial 30 coins. Watch this space but also click on the petition link and sign: http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_the_maasai/?bBfKgdb&v=17109

Rwanda News

RWANDAIR'S NEW CRJ900 NOW IN PAINTSHOP AT BOMBARDIER

(Picture of a CRJ900, being painted in RwandAir livery)

RwandAir's first of two Bombardier CRJ900 aircraft, due for delivery in October this year, is now, that the annual factory closure for the summer holiday season is over, in the manufacturer's paintshop, where in coming days it will emerge in the blue and yellow colours of RwandAir.
Set for delivery to Kigali in the second or third week of October, according to present information at hand, MSN 15286 will be handed over to the airline in a ceremony at the assembly plant before being flown via Europe to '***The Land of a Thousand Hills***', before the sister ship MSN 15287 will follow.
It is understood that RwandAir has an option for at least one more of these state of the art aircraft and there is speculation if the option will be exercised in due course already, as the national airline of Rwanda continues to expand in terms of destinations and frequencies.
Announcements are expected as to new destinations at the end of September or in early October, and there is excitement amongst the aviation fraternity in Eastern Africa as the carrier will add a further two fully owned brand new aircraft to their fleet, something only Kenya Airways and Precision Air have accomplished in the past, with all other airlines in the region so far having opted for older and ageing aircraft due to the cost involved in outright purchase of new 'birds'. Congratulations to RwandAir therefore for breaking through the ceiling others with less vision have set for themselves and for believing that a small country's airline CAN accomplish phenomenal achievements if only the nation and the leadership are behind it.
Watch this space for breaking news and regular updates from Eastern Africa's vibrant aviation industry.

RWANDAIR SET TO MAKE ROUTES ANNOUNCEMENTS WHEN NEW CRJ900'S ARRIVE

RwandAir
Fly our dream to the heart of Africa.

Regular sources close to Rwanda's national airline RwandAir have given the clearest indication yet that once the two ordered Bombardier CRJ900 jets have been delivered, thought to take place in October or latest November this year, the airline will almost immediately announce an increase in frequencies to key destinations in the East African

region but also additional routes, as the longer distance Boeing 737's can be '*freed*' from flying the present core routes and be re-deployed to new destinations.
From sources in Juba it is understood that the South Sudan capital may well be on the drawing board, either nonstop or via Entebbe, while a number of destinations South of Rwanda are said to be under intense scrutiny vis a vis viability, as is an added West African destination, either stand alone or in combination with the airline's flights to Lagos.
There is also now increased speculation over the announcement of additional aircraft purchases, either through lease or outright ownership and the two B737-500 aircraft, leased from GECAS, are also rumoured to be due for replacement with larger and more modern versions of the short and medium haul jets, as passenger numbers keep growing way above industry average and demand for travel to and from Rwanda has in recent years rocketed.
Next in line for purchase though appears a new turboprop aircraft, with Bombardier being the frontrunners after showcasing their Q400 aircraft in Rwanda three months ago and doing a demonstration flight for pilots and management of the airline.
In a related development are also announcements expected about the timelines of the planned Bugesera International Airport which is due to open in 2016 and will bolster the connectivity of the country by allowing larger wide body jets to fly to the '***Land of a Thousand Hills***'. Watch this space to capture announcements as and when they are made, and at times even ahead of the official release.

Sudan News
ANOTHER CRASH CLAIMS 31 LIVES
A delegation of high ranking government, military and administrative officials died when their aircraft crashed earlier today with as many as 31 passengers and crew on board. The crash took place in the disputed state of South Kordofan, as it attempted a second time to land in what was reported to be bad weather. A regular aviation source from Juba could not even confirm the type of aircraft involved as details were both sketchy as well as shrouded in secrecy, as a government minister and senior military officers were reported to have been on board the ill fated flight from Khartoum. He did however say, without full confirmation though, that one of his contacts in Khartoum had identified the aircraft as an Antonov turboprop, which if true would further soil the already terrible reputation of Soviet era ageing aircraft in Africa. Aviation security was tightened immediately according to reports from the Sudan although there is no indication of any foul play or the plane being brought down from the ground in the war torn territory, where Southern liberation groups are fighting the Khartoum government and their proxy militias since being denied their own independence referendum. The crash site is only 50 kilometres from the border between Khartoum Sudan and South Sudan in a mountainous part of South Kordofan often described as 'rugged terrain'.
From other sources if was suggested that the aircraft was not a military plane but a civilian charter aircraft from a yet to be identified airline.
The Sudan has one of the worst aviation accident records in Africa, often attributed to poor aircraft maintenance and the lack of regular crew training as required for commercial aviation but also the use of stone age generation Soviet era aircraft, which have long been banned from registration and use in many other jurisdictions. Watch this space or check on your regular news sources reporting on this crash for updates.

Seychelles News
UNIVERSITY OF SEYCHELLES SIGNS MOU'S WITH MAURITIUS RESORT GROUPS

It was confirmed during the week, that the University of Seychelles' has signed partnership agreements with two leading Mauritius based hospitality groups, to provide for industrial training and work place experience for their hospitality management students presently studying for their Bachelor Degree.
Beachcomber Hotels, one of Mauritius's top brand names in the resort business and The Shanti Maurice will provide training for the 17 students presently enrolled for the hospitality management degree course, which is offered in partnership between UniSey and the Seychelles Tourism Academy.
It was also learned that Constance Hotels, which operates top rated resorts on Mauritius and also on the two Seychelles islands of Mahe and Praslin, will be joining hands soon too as part of the group's commitment to promote the vocational and professional education and training of hospitality personnel.

First year students of the course will undergo a12 week training at participating resorts, with a further 8 weeks for year two students, while for final year students plans have also been revealed that they might be sent for attachment to France to acquire yet more skills before graduating.
The agreement was supported by the Seychelles Tourism Board, which oversees the functions of the Seychelles Tourism Academy, and where there is keen awareness of the need to constantly train and add skills to the indigenous Seychellois workforce, allowing them to build a life time career in the archipelago's tourism industry.

SEYCHELLES' FIBRE OPTIC CONNECTION NOW FULLY OPERATIONAL

Visitors to the tropical Creole island paradise of the Seychelles will now be able to surf the net at full broad band speeds, made possible by the connection to the global grid via fibre optic cable. The connection, originating from the Tanzanian coast off Dar es Salaam, landed in the Beau Vallon Bay area of the main island of Mahe in early June and has since undergone extensive testing, before being officially launched.
Seychelles Cable Systems, jointly owned by the government of Seychelles, Seychelles Cable & Wireless and Airtel, has started offering business and domestic users affordable packages to surf the net. Higher speeds and lower cost will ensure that e-Commerce continues to penetrate the archipelago's businesses, linking Seychelles' commercial sector, amongst them of course the guest houses, holiday villas and resorts but also the DMC's and key conservation organizations to the global market place.
Airtel in particular has across their African mainland countries of operations rolled out superfast 3.75G networks, accessible by USB modem, though companies and commercial users are provided with state of the art network equipment linking them to the world. Cable & Wireless, for long the dominant provider of telecom services in the islands before Airtel commenced operations two years ago, too has undertaken domestic investments with an island wide, presently Mahe only, fibre optic cable link to give new subscribers almost instant access to the fastest ever internet connection available on the archipelago. Outer islands will continue to be linked via satellite to the internet, although it is planned to link the Seychelles second and third islands, Praslin and La Digue, also to the domestic fibre optic grid. Watch this space for future updates and a feedback on speeds and connectivity when next visiting the islands in due course.

SEYCHELLES REMAINS AT THE HEART OF REGIONAL TOURISM INITIATIVES

Information received from the Seychelles continues to affirm that the archipelago is playing a pivotal role in pushing for the restoration of the once flourishing cruiseship trade, when at a meeting of the Indian Ocean port authorities on Mahe brought together key personnel from the ports of Mauritius, La Reunion, Madagascar, Mayotte and meeting hosts Seychelles.
Cruise liners, often bringing hundreds and at times thousands of visitors on shore visits when calling on a port in the region, can be a huge economic factor for the local economies in terms of supplies of fresh supplies, handling fees and the money tourists spend while on an island, for tours, excursions, in restaurants and for souvenirs.
Pirate activities in recent years had a serious impact on cruise tourism, but following Seychelles initiative to have armed security personnel on board of vessels intending to call on Port Victoria, these incidents have greatly reduced in recent months, aided further but a boosted aerial and naval capacity of the Seychelles and her partners from the global coalition.
Alain St.Ange, the Seychelles Minister responsible for Tourism & Culture told members of the Ports Association of the Indian Ocean Islands that together Tourism Boards and Authorities of all islands of the Indian Ocean Group must work with their Pour Authority as the do with their Civil Aviation Authorities. He was according to a media release received overnight from the Seychelles Tourism Board telling the meeting:' ***We need to see not the triangular norm approach for the consolidation of tourism, that is the Tourism Authorities, the Airlines and the***

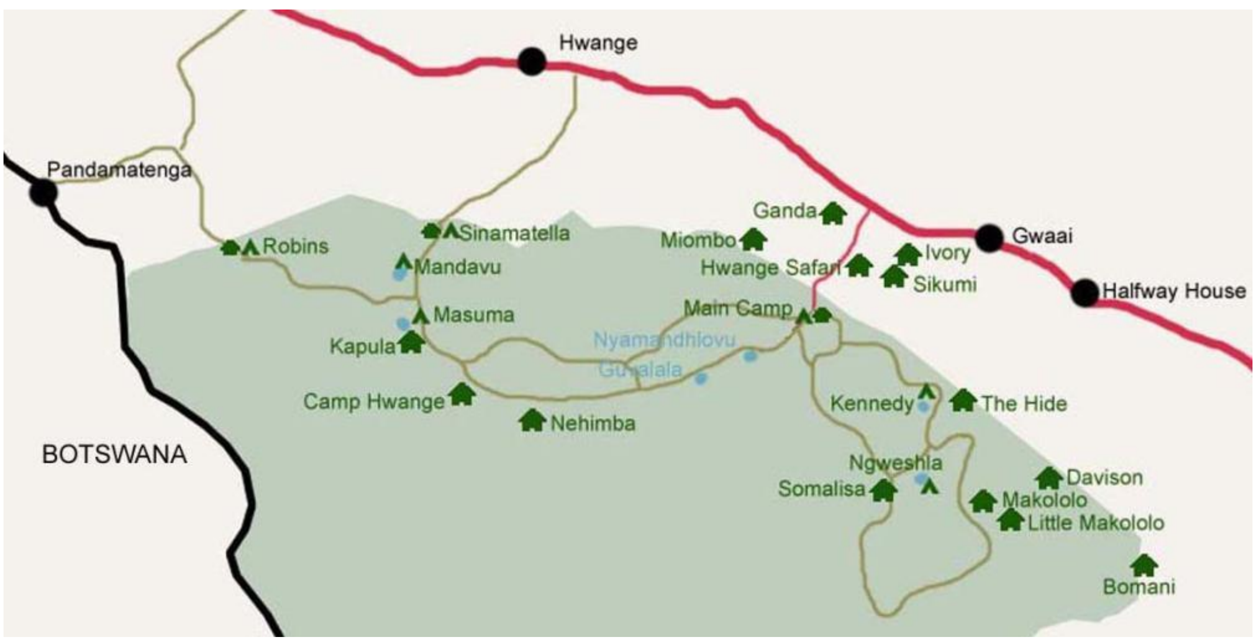
Civil Aviation Authorities , but we are islands and need to rope in and work with Port Authorities as well. We need Ports for our Cruise Ship Business, but also, we need Ports for the guaranteed supplies that our respective island's tourism industries and our population are so dependent on', again underscoring his holistic approach to all matters concerning the tourism industry, not just in the Seychelles but across the Vanilla Island group of islands, another important project he keeps promoting and nurturing.

Members of the Ports Association of the Indian Ocean Islands and the Seychelles Minister for Tourism and Culture Alain St.Ange at the meeting also agreed to have Port Authorities involved in the marketing of the Indian Ocean Islands as tourism destinations. They agreed in principle to their participation in the Creole Festival to be held in Seychelles on 26th – 30th October 2012. For that event a dedicated Creole Village will be erected in Victoria, the Creole capital of the World, to showcase the Creole speaking nation and the cultures of the people of these nations. The Ports Association has reportedly also accepted the proposal of the Seychelles Minister for Tourism and Culture to use this festival as a platform to show the synergies that exist between Port Authorities of the Indian Ocean Island and the Tourism Industry and how the now safer waters of the Indian Ocean can again become part of the of the schedules for the international cruise lines. Watch this space.

AND in closing this week, as on most occasions, some worthwhile reads from '***The Livingstone Weekly***', produced *further down South* by Gill Staden.

Continuing our trip to Hwange

I left you just as we had left Kapula Lodge near Masuma Dam. We took the road to Main Camp stopping here and there to chat and watch the animals along the way. Actually it wasn't a good day for viewing. It was a bit cold and windy.



We met Dave Carson on the way showing his guests around and were shown (in the distance) his lodge, Camp Hwange, near Shumba Pan. It is now on my list of places to visit …

This practice of dividing up parts of the parks into concessions on lease to private camps works for Hwange National Park and should, I feel, be copied in other parks. In Zambia we use the same idea but the lease fees tend to be extraordinarily high. It makes running a lodge in the 'back of beyond'

economically unviable. The concession holders in Hwange have reasonable lease fees and, because of this, they can give back to the park by providing boreholes and helping game scouts in patrols and logistics.

Anyway, getting back to our trip to Main Camp … We saw little. There were a lot of elephant skeletons, probably about 15 between Sinamatella and Main Camp. Last year's drought certainly took its toll. And it must have cut the other animal populations too.

This year things seem to be a little better although the water in the pans was generally low. Only Mandavu seemed to be full-ish. We do know, though, that ZimParks and the private companies are doing their best to provide the much needed water. The problems will come during October and thereafter as we hope for a good rainy season. These photographs of eles and pals were taken at Nyamandhlovu Pan.

We arrived at Main Camp and took possession of our chalets - all clean, fully equipped, running hot and cold water and electricity. Feeling lazy we went and ate at the restaurant which is functioning well.

The shop too was stocked and I managed to buy some fresh bread and sausages for breakfast.

And, yes, I know that it is wrong, … but I fed the birds with some bread … How could anyone resist their inquisitive looks???

We left Main Camp for a night at Hwange Safari Lodge. With three English teenagers on the trip there are times when adults have to take second place. At Hwange Safari Lodge our young adults could indulge in their loves like getting a tan, chatting, listening to their iPods and generally being teenagers …

Meanwhile us boring adults could watch the waterhole in front and see what came to drink.

Elephants, of course, were constant visitors. The guinea fowl were ever present in large numbers – never seen so many there before.

And then, a lucky sighting, some eland came down to drink.

We finished our holiday the following morning with Josh taking one contingent back to Harare and me taking the other to Livingstone.

As the Livingstone trip was only a couple of hours away we visited the Painted Dog Foundation on the way.
It was good to hear that there were only 3 wild dogs in the facility. Two of them are permanent residents because they are old and would not survive in the wild. The other one, Aurora, was brought in because she was left alone; she will stay at the facility until she can find some more playmates to form a sustainable pack.

From a Tour Operator based in South Africa

As you may know I was raised in Zambia (Copperbelt) and set up my company initially to send South Africans on holiday to Zambia, the country I love passionately. I have just spent the weekend in Victoria Falls courtesy of 1Time (their new destination) and I would like to give you some input as to what we feel are problems facing Zambia tourism.

On the Zimside we experienced nothing but optimistic and passionate operators, hoteliers, lodge owners and even airport authorities (to be expected at an airline launch I suppose). Travelling back via Livingstone we experienced surly border officials at the Falls Zambia side, miserable airport staff (Livingstone) and a general feeling that the old days of the early 90’s are back. In our opinion, Livingstone seems to be sliding and once again becoming a complicated destination to send tourists to.

Having been involved in tourism since the mid 90’s the one thing we have learnt is the KISS principle, and that’s not KISS your tourists as per the Zimside, it’s Keep It Simple, that’s what tourists want and demand.

One small story to add to this was the unforgivable cock-up that occurred due to the Livingstone Airport ground staff. On departure they forgot to take off the chocks that secure the aircraft wheels while at rest, result the 1Time plane could not taxi or even move despite a couple of failed attempts (the pilot initially didn’t realise that the plane was still chocked). Sitting on the plane the pilot announced and explained what had happened, the general feeling amongst the passengers I spoke to was “thank god 1Time is leaving Zambia!”.

OK so I get this email (below) today, another nail in the coffin, what is happening with Zambia tourism? Do the people involved not understand the concept of competition, there are two sides to this wonderful waterfall and the other side is cleaning up by doing exactly the opposite to what Zambia does.

We will always remain involved and send tourists to Zambia but I must say the Zimside is looking very attractive and the market (not I) will demand where they want to go to spend their hard earned Rand. We hope that sense will prevail and that both sides of Victoria Falls will eventually compete on service, value and ease of doing business.

New Airport charge For Zambia

Zambia's National Airports Corporation (NACL) has introduced an Aviation Infrastructure and Development charge effective 01 September 2012 (applies to both existing bookings and new ones). This charge will be applicable at Lusaka, Ndola, Mfuwe and Livingstone airports and will be payable direct to the NACL airport offices along with departure and security taxes. It is a flat rate for adults, children and infants.
The charges are:
Domestic ZMK28, 000 per person
International ZMK56, 000 per person

NAMIBIA

Lower Okavango River

The Okavango Delta is a Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance). Recently, at the meeting held in Bucharest by Ramsar members, Namibia applied to have the Lower Okavango (Kavango) River proclaimed a Ramsar site. This is the part of the river which runs through Bwabwata National Park.
