

Africa Travel Magazine

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News from 'Uganda - Gifted by Nature'... and the East African region



By Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome

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BRUSSELS AIRLINES SET TO JOIN STAR ALLIANCE

December 09th was announced by the Kampala office of Brussels Airlines as the date, when SN will graduate from applicant status to full member status in the world's leading airline alliance 'STAR'. Initiated originally by Lufthansa and the US's United Airlines, it has since grown in leaps and bounds, offering code shared operations with partners from around the entire world, the use of lounges and a common frequent flier programme, amongst other benefits like seat selection, upgrades and priority for passengers with 'standing' when it comes to select passengers on standby for a full flight. SN has already converted their own 'Privilege' programme and integrated into 'Miles and More' earlier in the year, benefitting their faithful passengers with a greater range of 'goodies'.

Meanwhile it was also learned that the code shared flights between SN and LH to Eastern and Western Africa have yielded positive results already, showing that the full acquisition of SN by LH may well be on course.

In a related development has Brussels Airlines also confirmed that Continental Airlines of the US has now joined Star Alliance as the 25th member airline. SN already has a existing and mutually beneficial partnership with Continental and this is now set to intensify even further with likely more joined connections and codeshares from Brussels to destinations in the US beyond the main gateways.

UWA THANKS PARTNERS

Following the successful launch of the www.friendagorilla.org campaign last month, which drew the global media attention to the events and celebrations, UWA has now thanked, in a two page centrepiece four coloured advert in Uganda's leading newspaper 'New Vision', some 43 companies and organizations, which contributed money and 'in kind' towards the launch. Notably it included such big names like USAID, Emirates, Brussels Airlines, The Uganda Safari Company, Marasa, Pepsi Cola but also the Embassies of Belgium and France, the British High Commission and banking giant STANBIC, amongst many others. Well

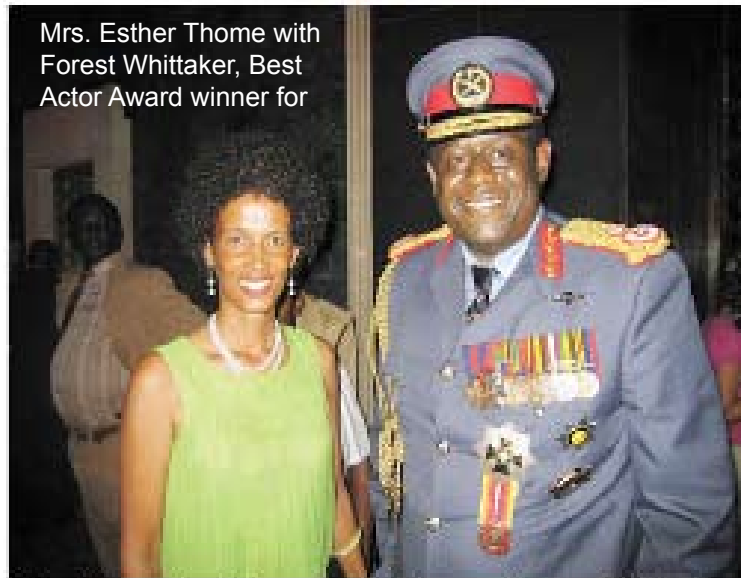
done to all, even those unnamed due to space restrictions, and thanks for supporting UWA's UN Year of the Gorilla 2009 activities.

AIR UGANDA 'SATISFIED' WITH CRJ PERFORMANCE

Sources close to Air Uganda have given the clearest indication yet that the recent fleet change from their ageing MD 87 to the more modern CRJ aircraft has already yielded positive results, both in terms of economic performance as well as in customer acceptance. With prices for JetA1 again on the rise, the superior fuel burn of the CRJ is making a significant difference for U7 compared to the performance of the fuel guzzling MD 87. The airline now operates two daily flights again between Entebbe and Nairobi, and also serves Dar es Salaam / Zanzibar and Juba / Southern Sudan. More destinations are under consideration but have not yet been confirmed at this moment in time by the airline's management, although industry observers are speculating about such upcoming new routes like Kigali and Eastern Congo, the latter of which would also help Entebbe International Airport to become more of a regional hub and connecting point further abroad for such passengers. Like the Southern Sudanese, most of whom detest flying via Khartoum to travel abroad for either real or perceived reasons, are many of the Eastern Congolese loath to travel via Kinshasa, leave alone the history of aviation safety in the Congo, which makes flying indeed a part of 'living dangerously', considering their air accident record in recent years. Hence, connecting via Entebbe on a Ugandan airline is for many of these potential passengers the better option, considering safety, punctuality, comfort and onward connectivity.

FIFA WORLD CUP TROPHY COMES TO EAST AFRICA

As the main draw for the FIFA World Cup next year approaches, now just over a month away, the global footballing body is displaying the winner's trophy in Eastern Africa in coming days across Eastern Africa, to promote the event hosted by South Africa and raise interest and attention levels to the biggest sporting event, besides the Olympics. The World Cup will for the first time be held in Africa, although the lower age tournaments, most recently the 'Under 20 World Cup' in Egypt and now the 'Under 17 World Cup' in Nigeria, have been organized on the continent



Mrs. Esther Thome with Forest Whittaker, Best Actor Award winner for

before to build capacity and promote equality for the award of such events. Ugandans, being soccer super fans with large groups of supporters for in particular the English clubs, will undoubtedly flock in their tens of thousands to the stadium, where the trophy will be displayed and the final countdown launched. Sadly, Uganda has once again not qualified for the World Cup finals but will undoubtedly try again for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

UWA BOSS RESPONDS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT HUNTING

As promised in an earlier column, once a response from UWA about the recent articles was received, it would also be published in the interest of balanced reporting. Here is the feedback taken from the mail received from UWA's Executive Director Moses Mapesa and published without editing in the full original text. I should also commend him individually for promising to avail the consultative reports for review, to permit this column a balanced overview and all required background information of value for our readership. These will be published in one of the future columns. Start quote:

'I do not think we are [legally] obliged to publish the internal reviews of all of our management programs.

As for publicly sharing the findings, we did that at [a] meeting with stakeholders. Of course there are people who are averse to sport hunting and they are entitled to their opinion. It is also true that when you pilot any program there will be the positives and negatives. Overall in this sport hunting program the positives far outweigh the negatives. We have seen a dramatic increase in the animal populations, impala, zebra, waterbuck, bushbuck because of reduced poaching

while at same time realizing additional income. The issue now is how to manage the activity and share the proceeds. The new areas for partnership management have suffered perennial poaching



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that we cannot pretend to be able to control. But adding value through sport hunting does enhance control of poaching. Moreover the poachers now get formally employed as trackers and still get the meat with the option of processing it for more value. The report of course outlined areas of improvement that we are addressing e.g. quota setting and supervision. On the law, we have the Wildlife Act 2000 that provides for hunting so how can we still talk about a ban that was imposed [earlier on] by decree. The Wildlife Act was passed by parliament so what other

debate in parliament is necessary to lift the ban?
Remember in the 1970s Queen Elizabeth was called Rwenzori and Murchison Kabalega? Why is not anybody demanding that we go to parliament to change the names again or that we call them the 1970 names and the same for L. Edward and L. Albert.
Well, those interested in the report on sport hunting should ask for it and we shall give them. We believe we are on the right track, challenges notwithstanding.'
End quote

POACHERS SHOT IN MURCHISONS
Anti poaching patrols of the Uganda Wildlife Authority a few days ago encountered armed poachers inside the park boundaries, and when trying to stop them were engaged in a fire fight resulting in the death of at least two poachers, according to local news sources. The location of the incident was not far off the road towards Pakwach, a township on the river Nile.

IN MEMORIAM FATHER BYARUHANGA
Presidential Assistant in charge of special duties, Catholic Father Albert Byaruhanga, has earlier in the week died following a car accident. Father Byaruhanga, an age mate of this correspondent and regular source of information, and inspiring guidance for that matter, stood out through the clarity of his thoughts and his ability to speak candidly when needed, a virtue now much missed. Rest in peace Father Albert until we meet again.

INEPT ELECTRICITY COMPANY TRIES TO COLLECT

Umeme, the national power distribution company – presently under increasing public and governmental pressure over a range of allegations – last week advertised some 19,000 defaulters through a public newspaper advert. However, ineptitude manifested itself promptly when it became apparent, that neither were the names in alphabetical order nor were the account numbers given in any form of order, which would permit defaulters to easily identify themselves and make arrangements to sort out their accounts and pay up.

Hence, the 56 page supplement was then largely used as wrapping paper and to light fires, as few alleged defaulters took the trouble to meticulously go through 56 pages and 19,000 names.

To further demonstrate the mess Umeme is in, this correspondent, paid up in full of course, received his last bill reading ZERO, due to ‘disconnection’ – the power is of course ON – leaving me bewildered and bemused, but predictably all emails to Umeme for immediate clarification remained unanswered to date.

Efforts to introduce prepaid meters, as already in use in other parts of Africa, have also so far failed, a measure which could assist the company with its cash flow. Oooops....

KAMPALA SKAL MEMBER FAILS IN BID FOR FIA VICE PRESIDENCY

Jack Wavamunno, Skal member, owner and Managing Director of a leading travel agency in Kampala – besides his involvement in the motor sport in Uganda – last Friday failed in his bid to become FIA’s first African Vice President, a position Ari Vatanen had nominated him for. Ari himself of course came a distant second with reportedly only 49 votes, while favourite Jean Todt, former Ferrari F1 team chief, earned 135 votes and a four year term as President of FIA. Congratulations anyway to Jack for a sporting effort and the honour to be on the ballot as an African candidate. Well done, even though coming in second this time.

GADAFFI STAYS AWOL AT KAMPALA AU SUMMIT

The African Union Summit on Refugees, Internally Displaced People and Returnees took a knock when AU Chairman Gadaffi did not turn up in Kampala, and after allegedly also keeping several other heads of state away who had initially indicated personal attendance, according to other news sources. The information was broken just as it became public that the Mbeki Commission had endorsed the ICC warrants and prosecutions over the Darfur war, which in clear text means that African ICC signatory members states, so far hiding behind an obscure AU ‘resolution’ not to act until the commission

report was submitted, must now arrest the wanted individuals including regime leader Bashir of Khartoum. It is now speculated that with this document available, several heads of state, and in particular Gadaffi, may not have wanted to come to Kampala to avoid the issue for a little longer and ‘consult first’ before meeting and concluding the inevitable. That meeting is expected to take place in Nigeria next week, and the AU must have been uncomfortable with the present Kampala meeting bringing together too many heads of state and providing an opportunity to brainstorm and set the tone for the Nigeria summit, in particular as it was dealing with the very fallout of politically inspired violence on the continent. Watch this space as the clock is now ticking down on alleged Darfur war criminals and human rights violators wanted by the ICC.

On a positive note did the summit reach agreement on a range of measures to end causes of conflict, which have driven millions of innocent families from their homes and farms and made them refugees abroad or else saw them herded into IDP camps. It was also learned that apparent agreement has been reached to turn the African Union peace keeping force in Somalia into a fully fledged UN mission to relief logistical and financial constraints from the African Union. Uganda is presently seconding the most troops to the Somali mission and has as a result incurred the wrath of the militant Somali Islamists.

UGANDA AND KENYA DEFY DONORS ON RAILWAY

The Ugandan and Kenyan governments have agreed to go ahead with the building of a new standard gauge railway line from Mombasa via Nairobi and the common border further into Uganda, against reportedly spirited opposition of the World Bank and other development partners. Their preferred option was the ‘upgrade’ of the existing line, which was built 110 years ago, called ‘the Lunatic Express’ at the time and winds its way along a route, which a century ago was the only viable one in the absence of large scale earth and rock moving equipment or bridge technology able to span larger valleys. Uganda in particular has had very bad experiences with such meddling, as in the 1990’s, when government wanted to build two additional hydro electric dams at once, World Bank and other consultants told the country there would be no demand for such an increase in capacity. Years later the country was plunged into darkness when the existing dam in Jinja had to partially shut down owing to low water levels of Lake Victoria, belying the ‘experts’ which had misdirected the country. Hence, it seems the two governments are now determined to have their way with this huge infrastructural project to make import and export transportation more affordable, move heavy traffic from the road to the rail and cut the long transit times to no more than a day, considering the time an express freight train would need to travel from Mombasa to Kampala on a new rail track, using new technology. The ‘defeated’ development partners, whose ‘studies’ were tossed aside, predictably went on the offensive though, querying the vision and the availability of ready finance, all in all sowing doubt to belatedly try and ‘derail the new railway line’. Rift Valley Railways’ performance also came under fire at the bilateral meeting, as the share of cargo transported has fallen to

only 10 percent overall, down from some 16 percent at the time RVR took charge some years ago.

On a more humorous note, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was quoted in the media of saying the old railway ‘is only fit for the museum’. Watch this space for future updates on these exciting new developments for the Eastern African rail sector.

MP’S KEEP HUNTING FOR ‘CHOGM THIEVES’

While a group of members of parliament continues in their hunt for details of government expenditure for the 2007 Commonwealth Summit in Kampala, unsavoury undertones have now been introduced by some of them and been echoed by willing sections of the media sensing ‘blood’ and making sales boosting headlines. It has of late become more common to speak generally of ‘catching the thieves’ without however being able to put names, companies or specific circumstances to the hunt for the truth, thereby compromising the ultimate goals of full accountability. Sections of the media have also started singling out certain hotels on which they report prominently, relishing the publicity they create with such one sided broad sides. One hotel, clearly not a favourite of one of the local papers, was once again being ripped into but, as incidentally reported in this column some months ago, the management was swift to reject the claims for refunds saying the rooms were ready for occupancy but 1) many of the booked CHOGM participants did not show up, resulting in contractually agreed no-show charges, while 2) others on arrival tried to bargain on rates and several of those then did not take up residence and moved elsewhere, again resulting in no-show and cancellation charges. That, according to a hotel source, was the reason the advance payments had not been returned and government had been informed accordingly, and should they be sued they will vigorously defend their claims. Read the full article via www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/699251 which also included the shenanigans of a hotel along Entebbe road, never on the list of approved CHOGM hotels, not housing any events or CHOGM delegates, never completed and still having received, according to the reports now gradually becoming available, over 2.2 billion Uganda Shillings.

While this column too is hoping that a comprehensive final audit result can point to areas of weakness, and where possible recover some of the funds if overcharges or unjustified charges are proven, it also concludes that pre-empting the ultimate findings with speculation and allegations is not helpful and may in fact damage Uganda’s efforts to attract conferences, meetings and conventions to the superior facilities created ahead of the summit, should potential organizers be thrown off the destination by such rumours. Watch this space.

KENYA TOURISM INDUSTRY CONDEMNS MURDER, WELCOMES ARRESTS

Messages sent to this column from Kenya soundly condemned the recent murder of a British couple, saying it was not characteristic or common that tourists would be attacked like this in the country, but the same sources equally rejoiced in the swift arrest of at least three suspects, who have already been produced in court and charged

with the murder. It was pointed out to this column that murder offences in Kenya are dealt with under the 'Hanging Act' and if convicted the culprits may face the death penalty, the ultimate price to pay of course for their vile crime.

MOBILE PHONE PAYMENTS NOW POSSIBLE FOR TICKETS

The latest advance in technology has started to take root on Kenya, when payment schemes via mobile phones were accepted by several airlines as method of purchasing tickets, alongside the use of cash and the traditional credit cards. Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile phone company, was the first to introduce the service and some of the Kenyan airlines have already signed up to this option while others are reportedly still considering their own participation.

ETHIOPIAN COMMENCES MOMBASA FLIGHTS

As mentioned a few weeks ago in this column, when ET was in the final stage of planning their scheduled flights from Addis Ababa to Mombasa, linking the Kenyan Indian Ocean port city with Ethiopian's global network, this has over the last weekend materialised. The inaugural flight took place last Sunday and received the usual fanfare greetings, with traditional dancers reportedly greeting the passengers, crew and official airline delegation from Addis. Mombasa has for long only seen Kenya Airways and other domestic airlines operate scheduled flights from Nairobi while inclusive tour charters from predominantly European gateways brought the bulk of the holiday makers to the Kenyan resorts and hotels along the white Indian Ocean beaches. The entry of Ethiopian will now hopefully also turn the attention of other scheduled airlines to the opportunities which direct or nonstop flights to Mombasa may bring to them and serve as a trigger for more such developments. Mombasa would certainly deserve it and Kenya tourism would undoubtedly get a boost out of it.

PLANS TO USE PARK LAND FOR 'DEVELOPMENT' ARE EXPOSED

Conservationists, and leading members of the conservation fraternity, are standing shoulder to shoulder in their opposition to clandestine plans to excise a large piece of land from the Nairobi National Park for allocation to individual owners. The plans were unearthed by investigative journalists in Kenya who tracked down inconsistencies in the national park land title and then blew the whistle. Some staff of the Kenya Wildlife Service were reportedly also interviewed by anti corruption officials, and the investigation is also extending to the land office in Nairobi according to several sources in Nairobi. A senior manager of KWS is also quoted to have said, the organization would vigorously oppose any plans to carve out any of their park land for either industrial, office, residential or leisure developments in the disputed area. Much of the park is now fenced but curiously the disputed section appears 'open', where either no fence was ever erected or has been removed by collaborators in the scheme. The national park at the doorstep of Kenya's capital city is a huge attraction

for foreign visitors and residents alike, being home to a range of different game species. The park only recently received an initial 8 more rhinos from the Nakuru National Park as part of a relocation project, making visits even more of a 'must see'. However, the open range of old, when game could migrate in and out of the park from the Athi plains has now been largely cut off, making it an 'island' in an ever more populated and farmed area, effectively ending the chances of regular migration and a free flow of fresh 'gene pool' animals.

POWER RATIONING TO END IN TANZANIA

The crippling power shortage across Tanzania will come to an end, or so the electricity company is saying, by next week when an additional 165 MW will come on line, generated by three power plants. The power cuts added substantial extra cost to the operation of beach resorts and hotels which needed to run their back up generators to keep the fridges and freezers cold, the air conditioning units running and the general guest welfare intact.

5TH INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN DIASPORA HERITAGE TRAIL CONFERENCE FOR TANZANIA

Throughout the week did several hundred participants meet and discuss matters of mutual concern in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, with extra activities also held in Bagamoyo. Tanzania has been keenly pursuing the creation of a 'heritage trail', which was appropriately named the 'Ivory and Slavery Route'. Both Bagamoyo as well as Zanzibar were previously notorious slave trading posts and alongside the human cargo ivory and skins were also transported on the same vessels, normally ancient 'dhows' plying the routes between Arabia and Eastern Africa. However, the bitter memories of those long past ages have now been replaced with new optimism to make economic capital out of the opportunity to attract tourist visitors to follow the historical events, as narrated by their guides when they visit these places and sites.

Conference participants were drawn from all over the world and the event was supported, besides generous help from the Tanzanian

government, by amongst others the Africa Travel Association and the International Institute for Peace through Tourism.

RUAHA NATIONAL PARK SET TO GET BOOST

The Tanzanian government now appears set to extend help to TANAPA and inject funds towards road upgrades and improvements of a nearby aerodrome, to permit tourist visitors reach the park with greater ease. Plans to build an aerodrome inside the park were rejected and environmentally unsound and harmful to the game, a lesson which should be transferred to those intent to build an international airport in the Serengeti district. According to statements availed to this column it is also understood that other highways, linking the area, were due for upgrades too, to generally open up the vast area for both tourist visitors but more notably also for business opportunities, permitting agricultural produce to reach markets so far beyond accessibility. Government has also invited private investment for the Ruaha National Park and hopes that new safari camps or lodges, and related facilities can be put up to increase the attraction of the park.

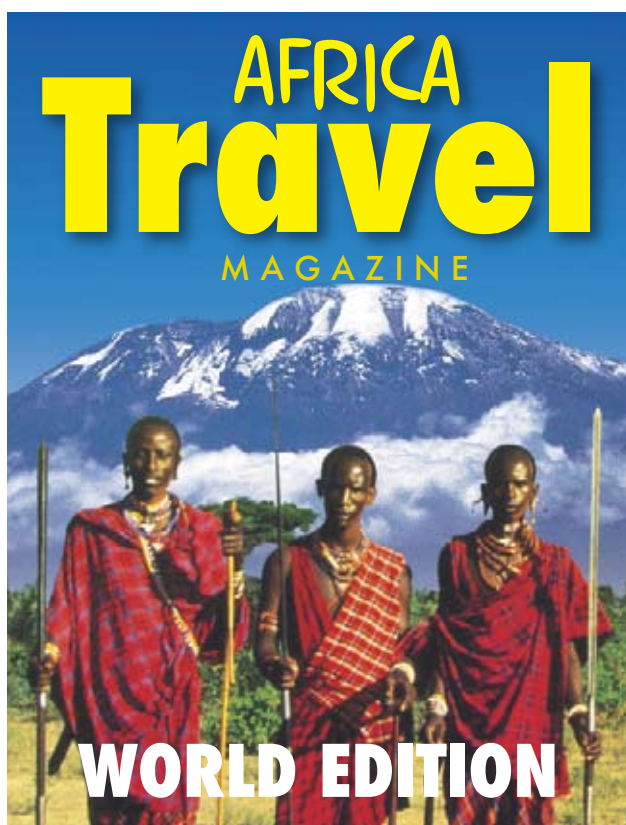
TANZANIA - KENYA BORDER POST DISPUTE RAISES THE HEAT

A report in eTN last week to the effect, that the Tanzania Tourist Board has advised the Bologonja border between the Masai Mara and the Serengeti must remain closed, has attracted dozens of agitated mails, hot tempered and at times foul mouthed responses and explicit text messages to this correspondent, with most in favour of opening the border – including surprisingly many from Tanzania – and far less opposed to the move already announced in Kenya and then denounced in Tanzania last week.

The border crossing at the Sand River, between the Keekorok Lodge in Kenya's Masai Mara and the Lobo Lodge in Tanzania's Serengeti, was in the old days a convenient way to attract safari tourists from overseas wishing to see all the main national parks by way of 'circuit'. After the breakdown of the first East African Community in 1977 ALL border posts with Kenya were shut by Tanzania for several years, before in late 1984 cross border

traffic was allowed to resume. This however was restricted to the main highway border crossing points, while the park border remained closed for 'commercial traffic' but permitting individual travellers to cross with prior arrangements.

As previously said in this column, this adds substantial extra cost on those safari packages which cover both the Serengeti and the Masai Mara, as tourists have to back track the entire way via Nairobi and/or Arusha to reach 'the other side', a situation which in times of economic crisis and tight money simply cannot be explained away any longer. Most comments were not fit not to be repeated here, but all except seven were in favour of opening the border crossing once again. About the same 'sample' was in agreement not to promote 'one day trips' to the other side, but use the crossing for safaris which then proceed onwards to other national parks in the respective countries. All the pro comments made however called in various terminology



the environmental reasons advanced by the Tanzanian Tourist Board an ‘utterly misleading statement’ and ‘wilfully false’. Official sources in Nairobi remained unusually quiet and non responsive over this development, probably not wanting to rock the boat ahead of the next East African Head of State Summit in November, where the agreements towards the common market protocol are due to be signed. Under these agreements the way could be paved to overrule the continued closure of the border post, but it is probably too early to make reliable predictions towards that end, knowing how a reluctant partner can quite deliberately, and for almost indefinite periods of time, delay final agreements. It is however understood from usually well informed sources that intense consultations are ongoing between senior government figures to seek a way out of the far too public disagreement, news of which has gone around the world and caused considerable consternation in tourism circles.

However, with other deliberate non tariff barriers still in place in regard for instance on aviation movements, amongst others, pressure will undoubtedly increase from the EAC head quarters as well as affected other member states to resolve such issues on the fast track to avoid making the regular head of state unity announcements a laughing stock and become ridiculed over their divided stand on such obstacles to unity.

TANZANIA PROVOKES YET MORE CONTROVERSY WITH EAC NEIGHBOURS

It was learned that Tanzania has broken ranks with her East African neighbours over the ban of trade in ivory products, which was introduced under CITES rules to protect the species. Southern African states have periodically asked, and at times obtained, a dispensation for the sale of ‘legal’ ivory stocks, but this was every single time followed by a sharp increase in poaching in Eastern Africa, from where then allegedly the ivory was smuggled into those very Southern African states to ‘integrate’ it into the so called legal stocks. This is however now becoming ever more difficult as DNA analysis is also used to establish the origins of ivory, as seen more recently in South Asia, where several consignments were nabbed by customs in Bangkok, Singapore and Vietnam and traced to where the elephant slaughter took place inspite of efforts by the smugglers to conceal the real country of origin. The breaking of ranks by Tanzania is viewed as a slap in the face of East African conservation efforts, with the other states opposing any such sale, and most notably Kenya at one stage rather burning tens of tons of ivory to make a public statement against poaching and trading in animal products. Sources in Tanzania claim their change of mind is necessitated by a lack of funds for anti poaching and conservation measures and that the proceeds of an auction could find their way into the coffers of the wildlife managers, however without any firm and enforceable commitment being tabled at this moment in time that those funds would indeed exclusively be used

for conservation measures. Several ivory smugglers were recently nabbed in Dar es Salaam, while trying to ship ivory out of the country to presumable China, where the greed and hunger for ivory goes on unabated, fuelling the increase in poaching in Africa. The attempt to have this sanctioned at the next CITES meeting has been met with both disbelief by conservationists as well as protests by members of the tourism trade, who fear that, according to information sent to this column: 1) it would discredit Tanzania as a tourist destination and 2) give the impression that poaching for ivory is unstoppable after admitting to a lack of funds and resources for anti poaching measures. Oooops...

TANZANIA AIRPORTS TO GET LATEST TECHNOLOGY

It was learned early this week that the Tanzania Airports Authority is now commencing work towards a technological upgrade of their three main airports in Dar es Salaam, Arusha and Mwanza and that SITA, the global airline communications and technology platform, will be closely involved in the various work stages. Over 20 million US Dollars have been earmarked to implement the projects which are aimed to improve passenger handling, baggage movement and the flow of information through SITA’s data bases and information systems, including the installation of ‘common use terminal equipment’ allowing all airlines to use check in desks which can then link into their own data terminals. Terminal 2 of the Dar es Salaam ‘Julius Nyerere International Airport’ is also due for further infrastructural improvements and will get new baggage handling equipment, although the planned expansion of the terminal seem presently under some doubt due to funding issues remaining unresolved.

ARUSHA AVIATION MEETING FAILS TO ADDRESS NON TARIFF BARRIERS

A recent one day aviation meeting conducted by the East African Community in Arusha focused on a five year development plan and strategy, while stakeholders from the region, suffering from non tariff barriers still

in place and hindering the regional aviation development, were left pondering. While commitments were made to achieve FAA’s Category One status in regard to international air safety standards, which participants from the regulatory bodies cited as a key to attract more investment in the sector, the aviators would have had them focus rather on what is obstructing air traffic between the member states and to remove those hindrances as soon as possible, rather than looking into the future and forgetting the present. CASSOA, the EAC agency for aviation safety and security, would reportedly not be drawn into such aspects however, referring the issues to the national regulatory bodies for harmonisation and resolution.

RWANDAIR INTRODUCES FREQUENT FLIER BENEFITS

The Rwandan national airline has now moved a step further to ensure customer loyalty by launching a benefit programme for the regular passengers, offering a free ticket after every 5 round trips into the region or 10 round trips on their domestic routes. Evidence of any tickets purchased since January 2009 will also be included in the count. This comes only weeks after substantially reducing fares to their regional destinations like Entebbe, Nairobi and Kilimanjaro.

RWANDA’S GORILLA TOURISM GETS PUBLICITY BOOST

A former super model, one Veronica Varekova was in Rwanda last week and travelled to the renowned gorilla national park in the highlands. While there she reportedly went three times to see the gentle giants of the mountain rain forest, a remarkable task for commitment and sign of fitness, as the strain of trekking in often nearly impenetrable terrain poses particular challenges to the visitors. During a farewell visit to the Rwanda Development Board – Tourism and Conservation, Veronica met RDB Deputy Chief Executive in charge of Tourism and Conservation Mrs. Rosette Rugamba, and accepted to become a goodwill ambassador for Rwanda abroad.

AIR SEYCHELLES RESUMES MOSCOW FLIGHTS

The Seychelles national airline is set to return to Moscow next week, after a low season suspension of flights due to low demand. However, recent promotional activities, combined with Russian naval visits, have raised interest levels once again, leading to the restoration of air services.

According to tourist board sources, Russian visitors have overtaken the South Africans, now being the fifth largest market for the archipelago while other Eastern European countries too have shown marked increases in the arrival statistics.

The positive changes are attributed to a more focused marketing and sales strategy by the revamped tourist board, which was partly privatised early this year, a move which seemingly paid off as the country enjoys growing market shares and intense interest from not just their old but also new and emerging markets.



SEYCHELLES TOURISM PROMOTION REACHES SOUTH AFRICA

The Seychelles Tourism Board has during the week worked the South African markets, trying to widen their reach and appeal to this most active outbound travel market on the continent. Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban were on the visiting schedule and in each city the STB held workshops and seminars for travel agents and consumers before embarking on B2B sessions with agencies and organizations thought to be able to produce more visitors. This follows similar visits in the past weeks to Kenya, Uganda, La Reunion, Mayotte and Mauritius, from where visitors can easily reach the archipelago by air on either direct or connecting flights. ‘Affordable Seychelles’ has successfully shed the image of a high price destination for the chosen few and attracted new market segments for the islands.

The delegation also used the opportunity to open a second ‘tourism office’ when at the Seychelles Embassy in Pretoria a new trade attaché was introduced solely concerned with tourism promotion. The ‘original’ tourist office in Cape Town will remain open but now enjoys the added support of an extra staff to work the South African ‘up country’ areas.

Only last week did a sizeable tourism delegation also return from the Far and South East, where similar activities were aimed to ‘work the market’ in Beijing and Singapore, a sign that the part privatisation of the Seychelles Tourist Board earlier in the year is bearing fruits and providing hints and pointers for those governments still hanging on for dear life on their authoritarian and often incompetent running of their countries’ primary marketing agencies.

ANTI PIRACY MEASURES NOW EXTEND TO SEYCHELLES’ OUTER ISLANDS

After strengthening the naval and aerial capacity of the Seychelles defence forces under bilateral and multilateral support schemes by friendly countries, has the government in Victoria now also decided to man some of the outer islands with security personnel to prevent undetected landings of Somali pirates. It is understood that those troop contingents have rather robust orders, mandates and rules of engagement tailored to deal with any intruders on the spot, attempting to land on any of these often tiny islands. This is the latest measure learned from sources in the capital Victoria to be taken by the Seychelles government to protect their two mainstream economic activities, tourism and fishing, and not let Somali ocean terrorists freely dictate their sphere of operations in to the waters of a sovereign state.

SEAJACKING OF BRITISH YACHT LEADS TO FRESH CALL FOR DECISIVE REACTION

The capture of a private yacht and seizure of a British couple, sailing from the Seychelles towards Tanzania, has brought about fresh calls for more determined action against the pirates. The tourism industry, including visiting yachts and cruise ships, is big business in the Seychelles, and as mentioned in the earlier piece in this column, the government is doing increasingly more to prevent any incidents in Seychelles waters, leave alone any of their islands. The impunity of pirates, operating ever wider out to sea,

has now led to demands that the international naval coalition and air forces need to be more determined to create credible deterrent against pirate motherships and skiffs, and that unmanned aerial vehicles, also often referred to as drones, now be armed instead of only providing surveying capacity. It has also been demanded that the area in question be put under notice that unidentified crafts can and will be engaged decisively to stop the ocean terror wreaked on the rest of the world by Somalis resorting to these criminal and terror like activities. It is understood that the latest series of incidents may now also lead to more forward action to engage and incapacitate the safe havens the pirates have used so far to deny them the future use of land based logistical support.

Such a widening of the mandate of the international naval coalition and change of the rules of engagement may be the only way to draw a line in the sand and make the ocean terrorists understand that enough is now enough, and they will themselves become targets the moment they head towards these waters.

ZAMBIA / 1TIME AIRLINE UPDATE

Following enquiries by readers this column can now confirm that the airline will be using MD 87 equipment for their flights from Johannesburg to Livingstone, which are due to commence in a few weeks. The aircraft will operate with 130 seats in an all economy configuration.

SUDAN’S AZZA AIR TEMPORARILY BANNED FROM UAE FLIGHTS

Following the crash of a Boeing 707-320C, owned by Azza Air but leased to and operated by Sudan Airways, the UAE aviation authorities have slapped a temporary ban on the airline banning it from flights in and out of the UAE, until clarity has been reached over the cause of the accident.

Added information received since then ruled out overloading but points at a piece of the wing, likely to be a flap – crucial to provide lift to aircraft taking off and landing – had detached when reaching rotation speed, then causing the aircraft to veer sharply before crashing. Flight data recorders are already being examined by experts under the leadership of the GCAA based in Abu Dhabi. Other flights by AZZA on Sudan’s domestic routes are said to be operating normal, although travel agents in Juba, this column was in touch with, spoke of some apprehension by passengers to be booked on the airline.

Fourth edition October 2009

AFRICAN UNION MEETS AT MUNYONYO

A special summit of the African Union was held earlier in the week at Uganda’s premier lake side resort of Munyonyo and brought together 6 Presidents, heads of government, governmental representatives as well as several hundred experts from governments across Africa, plus of course the usual observers from the UN departments concerned with refugees, multilateral agencies, NGO’s and the diplomatic corps. The summit dealt with the growing problem of refugees, internally displaced people, returnees and the causes of the respective conflicts which bring Africa into the negative headlines time and again. Over 17 million

Africans are thought to be affected by civil war and other conflicts and ‘on the run’ seeking safe havens. Uganda alone presently hosts over 150.000 refugees from mainly the Congo DR and the Sudan, while many more previous refugees from the Rwanda conflict in the past have now returned home again. President Yoweri Museveni has during the Smart Partnership Dialogue earlier in the year pronounced the Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort as a ‘peace zone’ and since then frequently invited warring parties from Africa and beyond to come to Uganda, sit down in the tranquil surroundings of Munyonyo and talk to each other rather than shoot at each other.

Notably, Sudan’s regime leader Bashir, wanted by the ICC on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes, did not attend, probably to avoid arrest, and instead sent two junior ministers, clearly not taking any chances. All the countries he has visited since the warrant was published were non ICC signatory states and therefore not obliged to accept or execute warrants for the International Criminal Court.

In another development, not confirmed to be related to this conference but impeccably timed in any case, did the US Africa Command also hold a meeting in Kampala, while joint exercises of the five East African armies were ongoing in Uganda.

UGANDA AIR CARGO INTRODUCES Y-12’S

As reported in a related column item recently, the Uganda Air Cargo Corporation has taken delivery of two Harbin Y-12 Chinese built passenger planes, each with a seating capacity of 19 passengers. Up to that limit no cabin crew is mandatory in flight under Ugandan and international air service regulations, making operations more economical on short sectors, although UACC may put a cabin attendant on board of their flights. According to usually well informed sources the airline intends to venture into the passenger business but will initially offer the planes for charters to domestic and regional destinations, while later on trying to secure an expanded air services license (ASL) for scheduled operations. No reliable information could be obtained however on planned destinations in the region. No information was available either on the location of the maintenance facility looking after these aircraft, but these details must be revealed upon application for a ‘new’ air services license in a public hearing, conducted by the UCAA’s board of directors’ licensing committee. Watch this space.

IMMIGRATION FEES GO UP

Various fees charged by the Department of Immigration have been revised, and effective 19th October the following key tariffs will apply: Ordinary Visa / Tourist and Business US Dollars 50 per entry, Multiple Entries for a timeframe of 6 – 12 months US Dollars 100, timeframe up to 24 months 150 US Dollars and (new category) up to 36 months 200 US Dollars. Visa for multiple entries are only granted at Immigration head quarters at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Plot 75 Jinja Road, Kampala. Applications must be submitted in person and waiting periods of up to two weeks are not uncommon. Work permit fees have also been revised, with the ‘business / self employed’ category now costing a whopping US Dollars 1.500 per annum.

A further measure now also permits for fines to be levied on persons 'overstaying' in the country, and a fine of US Dollars 30 per day can now be demanded, when a Visa has expired and not been renewed in time. Notably, airlines carrying illegal immigrations without Visa to Uganda are now faced with a fine of 2.500 US Dollars per person so landed, basically introducing a level of reciprocity for similar 'offenses' when airlines carry persons with no Visa, or prohibited immigrants, to Europe or the US. Unlike Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda has not lowered their Visa fees to attract more visitors, while Rwanda does not require payment for visitor passes on arrival for a substantial number of nationalities. Thankfully this correspondent holds a status known as 'residency for life' in Uganda, which makes any further visits to immigration unnecessary other than periodically renewing the biannual 're-entry pass' which is however done for free and within the hour.

SHILLINGS KEEPS RISING

As reported a few weeks ago, the Ugandan Shilling has appreciated considerably against the 'greenback', from a low of nearly 2.300 Shillings for one Dollar to now below 1.900 Shillings for one US Dollar. Similarly other currencies like the UK Pound, the Euro, the Swiss Franc, Yen and UAE Dinar are affected in the same way. Local expenses are therefore dearer for visitors, who have to change more of their home currency to 'afford' locally procured meals, drinks and souvenirs, while exporters fetch less in shillings for their dollar earnings, already leading to complaints by farmers and agricultural / horticultural businesses that their income no longer covers the risen cost suffered in recent years.

BUSOGA KINGDOM REMAINS WITHOUT KING

In a predicted development have the 11 chiefs of the Busoga Kingdom met in Kampala under the moderation of a government minister, to discuss the recent 'election' of a new 'Kyabazinga' or king for their kingdom east of the River Nile. While one of the chiefs was reportedly out of country, the other 10 apparently agreed to hold a fresh round of elections to select a new king in an apparent move to find a more harmonious outcome to the process prescribed by the kingdom's constitution and rules. Watch this space as this year long saga continues to grip the attention of Ugandans.

A KING IS CROWNED IN KASESE

The long demand by the Rwenzururu clans in the west of Uganda, around the area of Kasese on the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains, has now led to the formal coronation of their own king after years of struggle to have their cultural institution recognised. It appears from the sketchy historical records available at this time that the demand was first voiced over 40 years ago, when the area residents began to oppose the Toro kings as their overlords and created a growing split, eventually succeeding. The ceremony reportedly brought some 60.000 people from the area together in Kasese to witness the crowning ceremony, and President Yoweri Museveni was the Guest of Honour at the coronation. His advice, to respect and live in peace with

communities around the kingdom not wishing to be associated with the cultural institution was well placed, considering the recent events related to the Buganda kingdom, where a section of communities living along the River Nile's Eastern bank have rejected the traditional Buganda overlord, leading to incited riots in Kampala at the time. (see the related previous reports in www.eturbonews.com/africa)

Government supporters were swift to point out that, contrary to allegations made by Buganda kingdom hardliners, that the president was 'anti monarchy', his support for the creation of the new kingdom and presence during the entire function, was enough evidence that this was wishful thinking and far from reality.

SHERATON HITS MEETING MARKET WITH EXTRAORDINARY OFFERS

The cost of meetings at the Sheraton Kampala Hotel has now been set as low as 35 US Dollars per participant, which includes the use of the selected meeting room, notepad and branded pen, and one coffee break either in the morning or in the afternoon. Lunch for participants is served on the outside terrace from the daily buffet and inclusive in the quoted rate. A second coffee break, needed for a full day meeting, goes for an additional 2 US Dollars per participant and all taxes and service charges are included. The Sheraton features a number of state of the art meeting and board rooms and free, ample and secure parking is also available for guests, an added benefit the hotel can offer its patrons.

After the meeting the hotel offers a different evening theme or activity every workday of the week, often started with the 'happy hour', enticing the 'workshoppers' to stay on a little longer and enjoy the 'good life' in the heart of the city after work.

UWA COUNTS ITS SUCCESSES

Statistics released by the Uganda Wildlife Authority show again an increase in visitor numbers to the parks, proving the attraction even for 'locals' now making up a larger portion of the overall part entries. Transit traffic has largely moved from Murchisons Falls National Park to the main road, newly build and therefore faster, while in the past security concerns also contributed towards much of the traffic using the park road and ferry at Paraa park head quarters. Leading the park statistics is Queen Elizabeth National Park, followed by Murchisons Falls in second place and Lake Mburo in third position. Bwindi, the gorilla park, maintained over 10.000 visitors in 2008 and is on course to do even better this year, now that the high profile campaign www.friendagorilla.org is underway and the UN Year of the Gorilla 2009 has brought the international spotlight to the challenges of gorilla conservation. In fact in August 2009 some 1.440 visitors were entering Bwindi, a new record for a single month, and arguably supported by the launch of the new Nshongi gorilla group which now allows 8 more tourist a day into the forest for gorilla tracking.

Of the 134.486 visitors to the parks in 2008 the highest segment were still the 'foreign non resident' tourists, while Ugandans and East Africans recorded 24.214 entries, about the same as in 2007. Local expatriate visits, recorded as 'foreign residents' with reduced entry fees, also grew to over 13.100.

However, educational programmes bringing students and pupils into the parks showed

the best growth rates and results, as those entries went from 2007 with 28.471 to now 37.774 in 2008. This is undoubtedly a result of having wildlife clubs re-invigorated as a co-curricular activity in schools and also demonstrates a growing awareness amongst students towards conservation and ecological issues.

'Transit passengers' through Murchisons continued to reduce to less than 5.000 in 2008 (from tens of thousands at the height of the LRA rebel and terror campaign) and are thought to fall further still in 2009, as the new tarmac road and good security along the route now make it unnecessary to travel through the park in order to safely reach Pakwach and the Nile bridge to 'West Nile', unless one wants to add some game viewing en route. This is also possible however from the main road as recently witnessed by this correspondent during a trip to the area.

This is positive news as the heavy goods vehicles are now leaving the park alone and the condition of the park roads, tracks and the ferry are all benefiting from this development. Besides, tourists can enjoy the park as they should, without heavy traffic disturbing them or the game.

With the onset of the East African Community common market in July 2010, and the expected launch of a common tourist Visa for all of Eastern Africa (long promised but still somewhat doubtful), UWA can expect to breach the 150.000 visitor entry mark to their parks by 2011 at the latest, and new lodge and safari camp developments, like the Chobi Safari Lodge, will support this trend by offering more accommodation in- and outside the protected areas.

Still, it must be said that these numbers are a far cry from the entry statistics into the Kenyan and Tanzanian national parks. This gives visitors to the Ugandan parks the added bonus of greater privacy and a more intense feeling to have had their game drive 'alone', since sightings of herds of busses circling a pride of lions, as seen elsewhere in East Africa, is not the norm here. Uganda may be more pricey than some of the 'economy tours' offered elsewhere, but with the great variety of over 1.040 bird species, the gorillas, chimpanzees and 12 other species of primates, the lakes, rivers, waterfalls and Rwenzori mountain range it is definitely a destination worth visiting and remains 'the Pearl of Africa'.

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE AND EVER LESS TO DRINK

The national water corporation has lamented the ongoing pollution of Lake Victoria and the present blooming of new algae fields not far from their main pumping station in the suburb of Gaba / Kampala. Consumers across the city have of late complained of falling water supplies and irregular supplies, blamed by the water company on a reduction in processing capacity of presently some 30.000 cubic metres a day. The algae bloom and other pollutants makes the production of potable water more lengthy in its process and more costly due to the added quantities of chemicals now required. Lake Victoria is the world's second largest fresh water lake, after Lake Superior in North America, and a source of water and fish for millions of Africans living along its extensive shores. The lake is shared between Tanzania, with about 49 percent of the surface, Uganda with about 45 percent of the surface including the source of the river Nile, and

Kenya with the remaining 6 percent of the surface of the lake falling into their territory. However, recent allegations of overfishing and pollution caused by fertiliser run off, has caused serious concerns amongst not just environmentalists but society at large and several major projects are rolling out to improve the water quality and protect the tributary rivers too.

Meanwhile, in regard of the lamentations of the water managers, broken pipes at times wait for days to be repaired, spilling the precious liquid either back into the gutters or else making mud pools or breaking up tarmac. Mmmmh ... maybe another attempt to justify planned tariff increases?

AIRPORT HANDLING UNDER FRESH STRIKE THREAT

Entebbe Handling Services, in short ENHAS, has been subjected to a fresh strike threat by the unions to enforce their demand for better pay. A few days ago workers downed their tools in a sudden wild cat strike, trying to use the threat of lack of handling of inbound and outgoing aircraft as a pressure point towards management, but this was swiftly overcome and ultimately without success. The company's management offered a flat rate increase of Uganda Shillings 70.000 for the lower pay grades, but this was rejected by the union as not enough. The figure translates into about 37 US Dollars per month at current exchange rates. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union and their shop stewards demand however a 50 percent pay rise, considered unlikely to succeed given the economic situation in the country at large and the level of profitability of airport handling in particular. Entebbe has two handling companies licensed right now, the other one being DAS Handling, which amongst others looks after Kenya Airways while ENHAS handles Air Uganda and most of the 'big' airlines coming from overseas. It cannot be ruled out that government may intervene if indeed a strike would threaten to ground operations in Entebbe as the country, being land locked, depends on air transport for passengers and cargo movements.

'ONE MINUTE SOUTH' GETTING READY TO OPEN ON BULAGO ISLAND

Alison Porteous, co-owner of the Bulago Island's holding company LVSC, has set her eyes on a new venture on the island, after the main lodge has been handed over to Wild Places Africa for refurbishment and future management. Ali will be opening a private residence soon, named '1 Minute South' after the geographical location of the island on Lake Victoria. The private residence will feature an 'infinity pool' for the maximum of 14 guests able to stay at the 'mansion' and they will enjoy a fully fledged 'butler service' and excellent cuisine is promised too. The residence also has a private beach accessible only by guests staying at the house. Watch this space for the opening announcement in due course. Bulago Island is only 6 to 8 minutes by air from the Kajjansi airfield and speed boats take between 40 – 50 minutes from the mainland.

BOEING 787 WOES WORSEN

While Kenya Airways is now actively considering what model of aircraft they will

choose to substitute their well near failed order of the B787, Boeing had to digest yet more bad news when Air Astana reportedly cancelled their firm order of 3 and options for another three also now seeking a viable and available alternative. Recent comments attributed to a senior Boeing executive,



trying to reassure jittery customers that the first flight would still take place this year, was met with not just ordinary scepticism but acid comments from a range of sources claiming to have been 'fooled' by Boeing's announcements before, as they were all later on found to be wanting. In fact, some sources regularly monitoring the 787's development have in the past suggested that Boeing executives were well aware of the true extent of the delays and still made 'soothing' comments meant for public consumption as a smoke screen to conceal the true extent of their various problems in the production processes.

It is also thought that once cancellations reach the magical threshold of 100 orders, now not far away it is understood, that this might open the floodgates for other airlines to react likewise, join the cancellation bandwagon and inflict yet more financial pain on the Boeing Company. Watch this space.

KENYA HOSTS 'EL NINO' MEETING

The threat of widespread flooding as a result of the onset of the el Nino induced rainy season has shocked the member states of the East African Community into action, after the first taste of those excessive rains has already caused landslides and partial flooding in some areas. The EAC countries were joined by Ethiopia and reportedly also Eritrea earlier in the week in Nairobi to map out emergency responses, raise the level of preparedness and agree on food and material assistance which may be extended to the affected countries and regions to reduce the impact on already impoverished populations as a result of the long lasting draught.

Meanwhile have the rains caused the first major traffic snarl up in Kenya, when a heavy truck slid and got 'stuck' on a temporary bypass alongside the road construction area along the main Mombasa to Nairobi highway, causing other vehicles to also get stuck in the softening quagmire and eventually bringing

traffic to a standstill for 17 kilometres, lasting for more than 10 hours before clearing the 'obstacle'. Did these road builders ever read about el Nino induced extra heavy rains and prepare for it accordingly? Apparently not!

KENYA AIRWAYS LADY CAPTAIN HONOURED

Captain Irene Mutungi will this weekend receive the 'Africa Legend of Travel' Award as part of the Africa Travel Awards ceremony held in Lagos, Nigeria. Having made her way through the ranks of piloting she made it to the 'summit' when she got her four stripes handed by Kenya Airways, after a successful previous flying career with the airline as a co-pilot. It is understood from sources within KQ that Capt. Irene was not just their (KQ's) first lady captain but also the first African lady captain appointed by a major continental airline. In total Kenya Airways employs four lady captains and over 20 lady co-pilots, underscoring the 'Pride of Africa's' ambition to become a full equal opportunity employer. This deliberate policy has not just benefited the airline by tapping into the hitherto neglected pool of female piloting aspirants, permitting them to fill vacancies with Kenyan nationals, but it also opened the door for professional woman on a continent still struggling to come to terms with 'equality' and in an industry and profession which was for decades marked by male domination and resistance to open the doors for the other half of the world population.

Kenya Airways has in the past on occasions deliberately put an all female crew on board of one of their aircraft, cockpit and cabin, for PR purposes and to demonstrate their support to equal opportunities in the aviation sector and also show their passengers that times have indeed, and thankfully, changed. Well done Capt. Irene and well done of course Kenya Airways.

MOMBASA HOSTS INTERNATIONAL FISHING CONFERENCE

Over two dozen countries have sent experts to the Kenyan port city of Mombasa to discuss reigning in the excesses of fishing, in particular for tuna species, in the Indian Ocean off the Eastern African coast line. The meeting is looking into research data released previously to assess the 'damage' already done to the fish stocks, and find sustainable solutions to permit them recover in future years.

Of concern to many of the poorer countries is also the matter of illegal fishing inside the declared 200 nautical miles economic exclusion zones which has in the past denied such countries revenues, as they were not able to enforce a naval blockade against illegal fishing vessels, nor pursue them and arrest them.

One of the aims of the meeting is to establish a mechanism, like CITES for wildlife, to apply for the fishing industry too and make it eventually impossible to trade illegally caught fish on the open market, as is presently the case.

As a side issue, discussions on the Somali piracy are also taking place on the fringes of the conference, and it is generally expected that the naval coalition will receive support for tougher mandates and increases in their fleet size to more effectively patrol the sea lanes and prevent hijacking of ships. Deep sea fishing (angling) has long been

a favourite pastime of local expatriates and tourists coming to East Africa, but the depletion of certain species over the years has now led to a widely practised ‘tag and release’ policy amongst the leading boat owner companies in Malindi, Mombasa, the Pemba Channel, Zanzibar and further down south towards the Mozambique Channel and beyond into South African waters.

KENYA BUZZ TO LAUNCH PUBLIC TRANSPORT MAP

Kenya’s premier insider web guide is now in the final stage to launch a ‘matau map’ for the greater Nairobi area, which gives the more adventurous visitors to the country, or those on a shoe string budget, renewed options how to explore the capital and its environs by the same mode of transportation used by millions of Kenyans every day. Visit www.kenyabuzz.com for more information and also to subscribe to their free weekly mailing for any sort of activity one can imagine or wish to take part in, from Salsa dancing lessons over pottery classes, making flower arrangements or learning how to cook a particular dish, to the latest restaurants, sporting and charity events, outdoor activities, 4X4 driving training on a proper off road range and ‘you name it – it’s in Kenya Buzz’.

RWANDA EMBRACES CYCLING TOURS

The latest en vogue activity in Rwanda appears to be cycling, as several safari operators are now offering such tours in selected locations across the country. RDB – T&C has also confirmed that cycling inside the Nyungwe National Park is permitted upon prior notification, but this present applies only to individual cyclists, while organized ‘tours’ are expected to be on the market for 2010. It could also be established that some companies are importing ‘mountain bikes’ suitable for rough off road terrain, and that such tours would be operated with qualified guides trained not only in safe operations but also first aid, just in case a cyclist takes an unintended ‘dive’. Meanwhile, sports cycling also gained greater popularity in Rwanda and the national team has now participated in several races both inside Rwanda as well as abroad. The terrain of the country, being hilly at best and mountainous at worst for beginners, sets its own challenges for cycling the country, but being able to see the magnificent scenery will be a great reward for those tourists taking ‘the slow route’ across Rwanda.

KING’S HUNTING PALACE TO BECOME TOURISM ATTRACTION

The hunting palace of the late King Mutara III, located in the Nyagatare district of Rwanda, is due to be rehabilitated and then transformed into a historical site, it was announced earlier in the week. This will permit visitors to Rwanda to sample the cultural history of the country, which spans back many centuries, besides having a nature based wildlife safari experience. The ‘land of a thousand hills’ is presently diversifying its tourism products and will undoubtedly benefit from extra interest by tourist visitors coming to learn about history and culture of the former kingdom. Sadly the historic palace was looted and desecrated during the 1994 genocide, when artefacts, memorabilia and furniture were taken or destroyed but the coming restoration will be based on available file photos and

recollections by survivors to make it as ‘real’ as possible.

NEW RULES WILL BE OUT ON 05TH NOVEMBER

The Rwanda Development Board – Tourism and Conservation, in short RDB-T&C, has now announced that they will publish all relevant new documentation in regard of hotel standards and classification by early November, to permit both the business community as well as the public to understand better the concept of the changes now underway – aimed to align Rwanda with the rest of the East African Community. It is also understood that legislation and regulations will be aligned too, as will policy white papers, so that in coming years the region can indeed be marketed as one destination with many attractions, permitting tourist visitors seamless itineraries free of bothersome custom and immigration procedures other than at the initial point of entry and final point of departure from the EAC.

VISITING GERMAN DELEGATION CHIEF GETS IT WRONG

A delegation from the German state of Rheinland-Pfalz to see development projects in Rwanda last week saw their leader, a minister in the state government, display a large element of ignorance and lack of knowledge, when he called for the cost of fees to see the country’s gorillas to be reduced from US Dollars 500 per person to ‘between 150 and 200 US Dollars a day’ which in his words would allow ‘more average citizens of Rheinland-Pfalz to tour the park’. Sadly miscued the official failed to understand that each of the gorilla groups can only be visited by 8 tourists a day, the same also in Uganda and the Congo DR, and that this level of fees has been arrived at over the past decade as a result of cooperation between the wildlife management bodies and after careful study of the market conditions. It is in fact this level of regular income for the wildlife managers which permits the level of conservation and protection of these endangered animals and has ultimately allowed this ‘resource’ to be tapped into in a sustainable manner, expected to last for many generations to come. Gorilla tracking permits are in such demand, that even at a cost of US Dollars 500 per person they are regularly sold out as it is a finite resource, and the number of 8 visitors is very unlikely to be revised according to gorilla researchers this column has spoken to after receiving the information from Kigali. The advice of this column therefore to ‘political tourists’ of whatever ilk: don’t speak about what you don’t know, stick to what you came for and don’t lecture where no lectures are needed.

CRUISE ITINERARIES CANCELLED DUE TO PIRACY FEARS

The first of possibly more cruises in the Indian Ocean and along the Eastern African countries has now been cancelled and the vessel is due to be moved to the Caribbean instead of the Indian Ocean in 2010. Cruise line company ‘Yachts of the Seabourn’ decided to move their ‘Seabourn Legend’ which was scheduled to sail during the 2010 and 2011 seasons between the Seychelles, Kenya, Zanzibar and Madagascar amongst others, after the latest spate of attacks on vessels along the Horn of Africa. The

decision may have been influenced by the growing radius of pirate attacks further out into the open sea, the latest being the reported hijacking of a Chinese ship. The company has a special appeal to cruise aficionados as the company uses smaller vessels offering a true luxury hospitality environment and fear for their very posh and wealthy clientele being taken hostage by Somali ocean terrorists may have been a major factor to avoid the Indian Ocean in the immediate future. Passengers already booked now have the option to select other itineraries operated elsewhere in the world or else get a refund for deposits made. No response was yet received from tour and safari operators lined up to handle the ship during port calls and take the passengers on safaris or island tours, but the loss of revenue is thought to be considerable. This loss will undoubtedly add to the sentiments against the Somali pirates and bring about even stronger calls for a more robust and determined engagement against their safe havens, their mother boats and skiffs out on the ocean, including hot pursuit into waters claimed by Somalia as their own.

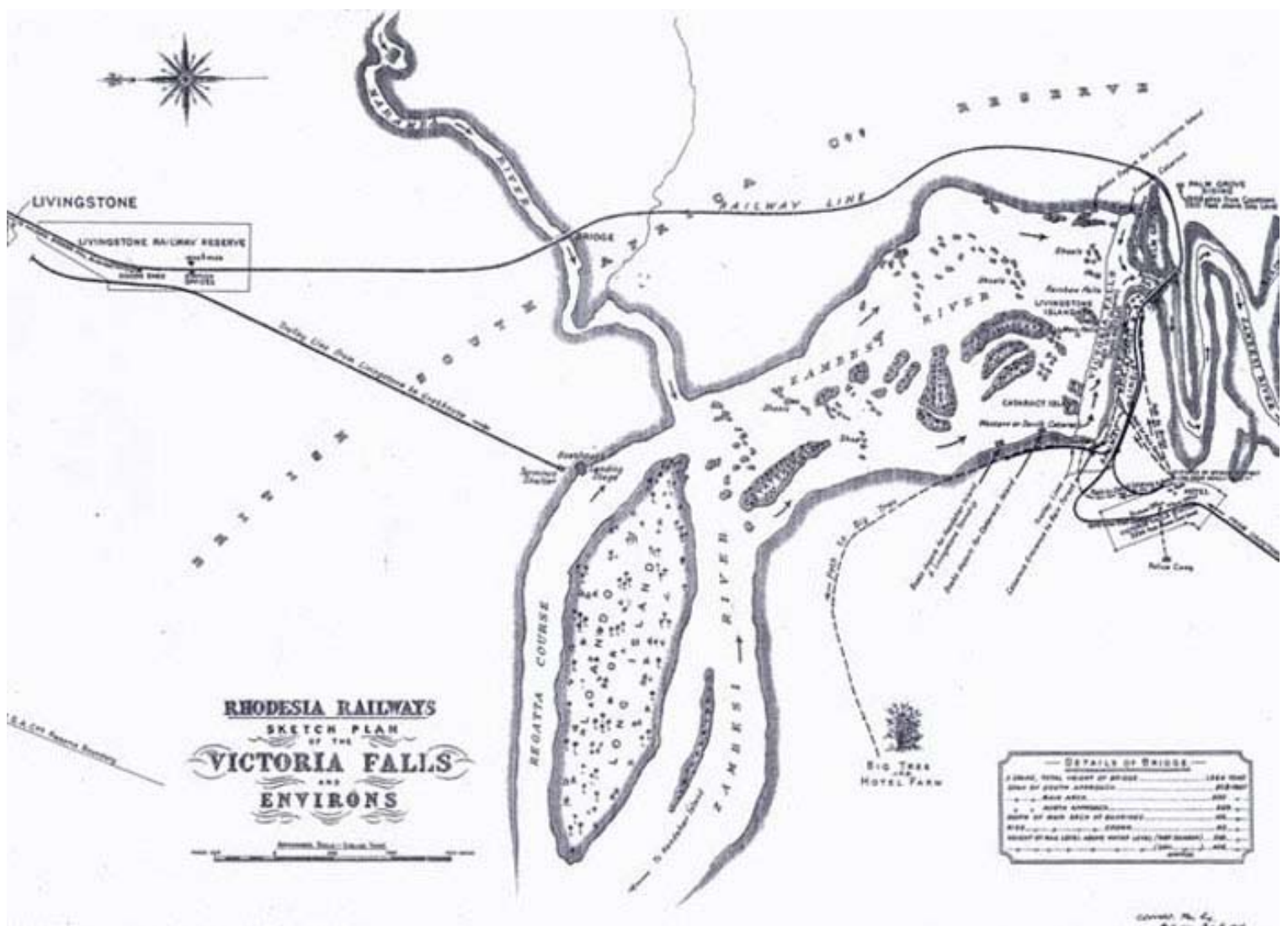
The Seychelles in particular depend on tourism as one of the main sources of their national income and has openly embraced overtures of the naval coalition partners for more support to patrol and police their extensive national waters, which extend 200 nautical miles around the archipelago. Subsequently the capacity of the Seychelles Coast Guard and related units has been substantially boosted in recent months in regard of both surface as well as aerial capabilities in a bid to create a credible deterrent.

AIR SEYCHELLES TO GET NEW TWIN OTTER

The national airline of the Seychelles expects to take delivery of a new De Havilland Twin Otter aircraft before the end of the year to boost their ‘domestic’ capacity for flights from the main international airport on the island of Mahe to the outlying islands of the extensive archipelago. Passengers flying to the Seychelles on the national airline, but also on other carriers, can in advance already book their onward flights to their final destination and many of the exotic resorts on smaller ‘Robinson type’ islands depend on regular air services to bring in their guests and much needed urgent supplies. The aircraft’s avionics, engines and related systems are ‘state of the art’ making significant operational savings on fuel and maintenance possible. A second new Twin Otter aircraft purchase has been deferred for the time being until the economic impact of the new aircraft has been assessed and relevant data are at hand to make an informed decision. The Twin Otter is a short take off and short landing aircraft and operates in and out of very short and narrow airstrips on some of the smaller outlying islands, which often span from one beach across the entire island to the other side, making the use of smaller ‘STOL’ capable aircraft a must.

SEYCHELLES IS UK’S ‘TOP HONEYMOON DESTINATION’

UK tour operators termed the Seychelles as their top honeymoon destination, with Marrakech, Jamaica and Las Vegas occupying the next three places. ‘Affordable Seychelles’ has apparently made its way to the top with a combination of the ‘exotic’,



fair prices and easy access by air with major airlines, all factors for making the decision where to go after the 'most important day in one's life'. Many resorts have specialised in honeymoon packages and even weddings on one of the many islands of the archipelago have gained popularity. Some of the smaller island resorts in fact are booked almost exclusively by honeymooners, offering privacy, private beach access from their cottages or beach villas and a befitting social programme which is available either for the couple alone or in small groups of other honeymooners.

ANNUAL CREOLE FESTIVAL KICKS OFF

The 24th edition of the annual 'Creole Festival' is taking place this weekend, celebrating the diversity and rich cultural heritage of the archipelago. Corporate sponsors and tourism businesses have contributed in cash and kind towards the holding of the festival, which will feature performing arts, crafts, fashion and food, amongst many other activities. Tourist visitors on the island will receive relevant information from their respective hotels to be able to visit sites and observe the various events.

SEYCHELLES PRESIDENT ADDRESSES TOURISM MEETING IN BEIJING

The Seychelles Tourism Board conducted a workshop and B2B sessions last week seeking to attract a greater number of Chinese citizens to visit the archipelago. The president, while on an official visit to the Chinese capital, used the opportunity to underscore his government's commitment to the tourism sector by appearing in person. He also invited Chinese airlines to fly to the Seychelles to provide a direct connection from China to the islands.

1TIME AIRLINE COMMENCES

LIVINGSTONE FLIGHTS

(Information provided by Gill Staden / eTN Zambia Ambassador via this column) South African visitors will soon have added choices if they opt to see the Victoria Falls of the Zambezi River. Information was received that the '1Time Airline' is commencing flights from Johannesburg into Livingstone on the Zambian side of the falls on 26th November 2009. They will initially operate four times a week on Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Friday, all flights being nonstop and taking about 1 hour and 45 minutes flying time.

The special start up fares have been published at ZAR890 one way and ZAR1850 return (payable in Zambian Kwacha) subject to seat availability at the time of booking. Different fares however may apply when booking in South Africa and intending travellers are advised to make early enquiries.

For reservations and sales in Zambia contact the airline's General Sales Agent Southend Travel as follows:

tel +260 213 320241 or +260 213 320773
or +260 213 322128
cell +260 99619700
or email Mr. Ramesh at southend@zamnet.zm

SUDANESE CARGO PLANE CRASHES IN SHARJAH

A Sudanese registered Boeing 707-320C crashed on Wednesday afternoon around 15.30 local time, shortly after takeoff from Sharjah International Airport – a regional cargo hub from which many flights take off for African destinations – killing all 6 crew and other staff on board. Sudan has been hard hit in recent years with air accidents, many of which involved aged former Soviet Union type aircrafts like Antonovs and Iljushins. First information available from Sharjah points to a possible case of overloading as a cause of the crash, when the aircraft appears to have struggled to gain altitude before it

then veered sharply off course and flipped before crashing and bursting into flames. There is confirmation that the plane was owned by Azza Air, a privately owned airline operating cargo and passenger flights within the Sudan and into the region, but apparently on lease to Sudan Airways, itself hard hit by a spate of recent crashes. The accident led to the temporary closure of the airport to allow for the retrieval of the flight data and voice recorders, other parts needed for the accident investigation and the clearing of the debris before resuming operations.

The Sudanese aviation fraternity, with many of whom this correspondent enjoys good relations for many years, has expressed their shock over the crash and are mourning their colleagues who died in the inferno.

SOUTHERN SUDAN INTRODUCES INVESTMENT LEGISLATION

Investors interested in the Southern Sudan will soon find a changed 'legal environment' for them, making projects in the South more attractive and facilitating a number of crucial issues like ownership or lease of land, an absolute prerequisite for anyone wishing to put up a hotel, resort or safari lodge, farm commercially or build and set up factories. The information about the new laws are now beginning to circulate within the East African Community, where the South Sudan missions are propagating the new Investment Promotions Act, the new Land Act and the new regulations in regard of taxation. It is of particular importance here that the new land laws will finally permit land, owned or leased, be used as collateral with financial institutions and banks to back up credits with a tangible security, not possible so far under the old legislation.

New rules regarding the registration of businesses have also been published last week which will culminate in the launch of a new business registry unit under the Ministry of Finance.

Greater regional and international showcasing of Southern Sudan's investment opportunities in trade fairs and investment exhibitions is also on the drawing board to allow the private sector participate and play a lead role in bringing infrastructure, services and industry to the South, able to create much needed jobs in the post civil war era, fighting poverty and spreading prosperity.

SPLM REACHES REFERENDUM DEAL

Following the upping of the stakes by the Southern Sudanese leadership has the regime in Khartoum finally accepted that a simple 51 majority will in 2010 decide on the future of the now semi autonomous region. The SPLM led southern coalition had threatened to boycott the last parliamentary session before the elections next year, should no consensus be achieved on the referendum bill, after the regime had set their demands as high as 90 percent yes vote to be able to claim independence.

It was learned from usually well informed sources in Juba that the independence vote will take place between the 09th to the 11th of January 2011, and that success requires a 2/3 turnout of registered voters, failing which the exercise must be repeated within two months. Southern Sudanese living in the North or abroad will also be able to cast their votes, to allow the Southern Sudanese in the Diaspora too to determine their own future.

The South also carried the day when matters pertaining to citizenship, international obligations, debts, assets, water etc were pushed to post referendum negotiations, while the Northern regime had wanted to resolve all these matter pre referendum in a blatant attempt to further delay an agreement. In a significant further development the regime also agreed NOT to rely on any of the allegedly doctored census results in regard to the referendum, although they still insist that the constituency revisions for the forthcoming national elections would rely on those results, a matter of 'no go' for the Southern leadership.

The fate of the southern state of Abyei, source of much of the oil found and pumped in the Sudan at present, will also be decided at the same time when Abyei residents will vote on whether to join the South or remain as part of the Northern Sudan. Similar referenda will also take place in Southern Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains to permit them determine their future.

One of the bigger opposition parties in the North, the Democratic Unionist Party was however quick to criticise the deal, insisting on a 75 percent margin of yes votes to permit secession by the South, but were other than making the predictable noises not successful to reverse the agreement.

In a related development have the actions of the regime in Khartoum been punished by the Obama administration which kept sanctions in place for the time being, a blow to the unjustified expectations and extortionist attempts by the regime. Southern sources welcomed the decision and expressed their hope that the ongoing sanctions, combined with a regime of incentives vis a vis good behaviour and progress in Darfur and the pending issues with the Southern government, can now open the door to resolve such crucial matters as the referendum bill, constituency demarcations for the elections next year, review and revise census results and – after a full audit on the oil revenues – remit the agreed share to

the South. Issues like the alleged re-arming of the northern army by China and other sympathiser countries of the Khartoum regime will also matter before the partial lifting of sanctions can be considered.

And in closing again some material from Gill Staden's 'The Livingstone Weekly' – always gratefully acknowledged, especially today as Gill is taking a well deserved break from column writing for a few weeks while working on a new book:

TRAVEL TO ZIMBABWE

I popped down to Bulawayo during the week to pick up my car. It was a nice drive, if rather hot ... my goodness me ... it was really hot ... and I only have African air-conditioning – the open window.

The picture below was taken of the Centenary Fountain in the gardens at Bulawayo. As you can see, the fountain is going again. All the lawns and gardens are being dug and, hopefully, will be replanted. There were quite a lot of workers on the go ...



I love the drive to Bulawayo. Most of it is through forests and the trees are coming back into leaf. There were loads of cattle on the road which was a bit of a problem. It can get dangerous. One can only assume that the cattle are roaming on the roads through lack of attention by their owners – it never used to be the case.



On the way back I stopped to take a picture of the cream of tartar on display. This is the fruit of the baobab tree. I ended up buying three fruit – the chappie said that he was hungry. So I am going to plant the seeds and

grow some baobabs.

I also stopped to take a photo of the old strip road. I thought it would bring back memories to some many people who used to drive between towns in the old days. The road has long since been out of use and it a bit overgrown. This was the way the roads used to be. Can you imagine us driving on them now??

Wild Horizons' River Cruises

Wild Horizons would like to inform all valued agents and guests that the Zamcruiser is operational again. The cruise boat operates on the Zambian side (Livingstone) of the falls and currently only Sundowner Cruises will be on offer.

A Zambezi River cruise is a superb way to relax and enjoy the beauty of the River. Our 40 seat Pontoon cruise boat is fully carpeted, furnished in teak and powered by two outboard motors. Clients may have the opportunity to see a variety of game; including hippo, crocodile, elephant and sometimes even rhino in their home environment, as well as enjoy the many different bird species.

Important Information

Departure Days – Daily
Minimum / Maximum participants –
Minimum Two / Maximum 40
Departure – 16h00 (Winter months); 16h30 (Summer months)
Duration – 2 hours 30 minutes

**HAPPY DIWALI TO ALL
THOSE WHO OBSERVE THE
INDIAN NEW YEAR**

**ZIWA RHINO SANCTUARY
CELEBRATES SECOND BIRTH
WITHIN MONTHS**

(Mother Bella and a little rhino of yet to be determined gender. Picture courtesy of Mrs. Angie Genade)

Following the birth a few months ago of 'little Obama', the first rhino born in Uganda for about 30 years, good news just emerged from the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, when the Chairman of the Rhino Fund Uganda, Dirk ten Brink, informed this correspondent of the second birth on the 07th of October,

this time from 'Bella'. Bella comes originally from the Solio Sanctuary in Central Kenya near Nyeri, and is now 10 years old. There are now 6 adult rhinos, three males and three females on the 17,000 acre sanctuary and of course the two young ones.

'Little Obama' is now up and running and visits to him and his still very protective mom are finally possible, as long as safe distances are kept between the visitors and the rhinos, but Bella has gone into 'overdrive' to keep rangers, wardens, guides and other staff of the sanctuary away from the newborn, resulting in no gender being established as yet. Once that is accomplished the name giving will be attended to.

'Bella' was the first to become pregnant some two years ago but then suffered complications and lost her unborn baby and it is of special joy at Ziwa that she has finally entered 'proper motherhood'.

The Rhino Fund Uganda made all this happen with the help and assistance of many donors and sponsors, which allowed to build the sanctuary at Ziwa Ranch - courtesy of Capt. and Mrs. Roy who granted the land use rights for initially thirty years and then moved their cattle to a neighbouring estate - while the funds raised, including a major grant from the European Union, helped to fence the 17,000 acre ranch and turn it into a proper sanctuary. That was achieved after the RFU had first built a rhino enclosure at the Wildlife Education Centre in Entebbe, and obtained two rhinos sponsored by the Kampala Sheraton Hotel and the Ruparella Group, aptly named 'Sherino' and 'Kabira'.

Visitor numbers, since the arrival of 'little Obama' have soared but financial sustainability of the sanctuary is still some time off, as vet bills, security cost, ongoing capital expenditures and recurrent expenses keep racing ahead of the monthly income.

Write to Angie, the RFU's Executive Director and CEO of the Sanctuary via angie@rhinofund.org for more information how best to contribute to the upkeep of Ziwa and to help the breeding programme. The success at Ziwa will determine how fast the first rhinos can then be relocated to their 'original' environment like the Kidepo Valley National Park and the Murchisons Falls National Park. But for now, the arrival of baby number two - number three is expected in early 2010 if not before

- will be a boost for tourism and conservation in Uganda and hopefully bring yet more visitors to the sanctuary.

INTERCONTINENTAL TO MANAGE NEW 'SHIMONI' HOTEL?

It appears that government has at last cleared the new partnership which has taken over the Shimoni land from Kingdom Hotels, after the Gulf based hotel company failed to make any progress over the past years, contrary to full mouthed promises made at the time when they schmoozed their way into official favour to grab the 17 acre prime city plot for next to nothing. This act displaced a major primary school and teachers training college, the fallout of which is still felt by many teachers and parents and which has repeatedly led to public calls to deal in a more sharpish manner with 'fake investors' taking the country for a ride after first schmoozing themselves up to the political leadership.

The new partnership, which took over Kingdom's stake, was initially put under the microscope when the former State Minister for Investments and now Ugandan Ambassador to the UAE publicly expressed his doubts over the only recently formed company, but that seems to have now been sorted out after an apparent process of due diligence. The 'new' developers claim to have 80 million US Dollars available already, considered enough to start a project of this magnitude.

No confirmation however has been received about the planned construction start or about size and features of the planned hotel, other than that it will be a 5star facility. Equally, no confirmation would be given by Intercontinental Hotels that they would indeed manage the facility, leaving this also open to ongoing speculation which was raised by some of the local media. The nearest Intercontinental Hotel is the one in Nairobi, which was initially built in the 1970's and has since then seen several major refurbishments.

UWA DEFUSING MT. ELGON HOTSPOTS

Regular readers of this column will recall the challenges the Uganda Wildlife Authority is facing in their task to conserve the Mt. Elgon ecosystem and protect crucially important water sources. However,

the intimidated cooperation and engagement with at least some of the neighbouring communities is now bearing fruits, as a Memorandum of Understanding has finally been signed with the Bududa district authorities. Going by comments from UWA this is only the start of such initiatives, as talks with other districts and local leaders continue in an effort to defuse the tension which exists between UWA on one side and encroachers, timber thieves and hooligans used by their political godfathers to cause conflict around the park boundaries.

NEW HUNTING LICENSE PROMISES MORE CONTROVERSY

Reports earlier in the week in the local media, and a subsequent reproduction of an article by 'The Monitor' on the eTN website, prompted a series of frantic communications to this column from ardent conservationists and sections of the tourism industry, decrying this latest move by the Uganda Wildlife Authority. Amongst the many allegations made stand out the lack of - according to several sources - publication and open discussion of the findings of the 'hunting pilot project' started about 8 years ago outside the Lake Mburo National Park, which the same sources say was to last a limited period of time but is now almost reaching a decade. It is especially alleged that UWA is hiding the findings, which previous managements had promised to publish and discuss with stakeholders, but that has apparently never taken place. 'They used this as a smokescreen to bring in hunting through the back door' said one regular reader of this column from Kampala while others demanded to know 'what happened to the government hunting ban'. It was indeed the policy of the NRM government for a long time that NO hunting would be allowed in Uganda, and those now up in arms are demanding that the matter come before parliament. They accuse the Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry to stand idle over such developments and maybe even covertly support these activities and demanded a fresh policy statement in parliament to then prompt a debate over the pro's and con's of hunting in the country and if the ban should stand. Admittedly, the present Wildlife Statute, under which UWA operates, gives the wildlife authority the facility

to grant such licenses under the section 'wildlife use rights' but that notwithstanding, if indeed the data of the pilot project are being deliberately withheld it may be questionable why to grant a hunting license now. It is also alleged by the same sources that the reports may not be favourable at all towards hunting but this cannot be independently verified unless the reports come into the public domain to scrutinise and interpret the data. Conservationists also point out that hunting for some of the species now advertised by those companies, may not be sustainable as game numbers in those areas are low, but UWA and the conservationists in question use different sets of game numbers to make their point. More recent independent data from a formal game census appear unavailable at present to make an informed judgement. That said, hunting companies overseas have in the past openly advertised hunting the 'Sitatunga', an endangered species of wetland and swamp gazelles which appears on the CITES annex and should under no circumstances be available to hunt, not in Uganda nor elsewhere. That dubious method of drawing hunters from overseas into their fold has further added to the range of allegations, that – like in Southern Sudan where the government has imposed a total ban at present until a game census establishes where and if at all hunting should be permitted in some areas – no licenses be given at present until all details are exhaustively debated in an open public forum. It is also understood from comments made towards this column, that conservationists, sections of the tourism fraternity and other members of civil society are now turning the spotlight on the two hunting companies to 'dig up dirt', i.e. closely monitor and scrutinize their every move to document even the slightest infringements in order to then either demand the cancellation of their licenses or else take them to court outright. And in closing, while relations between this correspondent and UWA are generally friendly and cordial, a Tuesday morning request to clarify on the allegations over the findings of the 'pilot project' went unanswered by the time of dispatching the weekly column. Should a feedback be received at a later stage, it will be published in one of the upcoming columns.

MT. MGAHINGA NATIONAL PARK WELCOMES GORILLAS BACK

The second gorilla national park in Uganda, located near Kisoro along the common border with Rwanda and the Congo DR, has recently welcomed back a group of habituated gorillas, which in the past had made it a habit to migrate across the borders. This made tracking them from Kisoro all but impossible and the park has for long periods of time only had visitors for hikes in the forest but not visiting the gorillas. This of course denied the park income, to be precise 500 US Dollars per person per gorilla tracking, leaving UWA out of pocket after having invested in the 2+ year habituation period for the 'Nyakagezi' group.

However, they are now back and sale of permits has immediately commenced again, while tracking for the so called 'golden monkeys' has also taken root as the park management developed other tourism products while the gorillas were 'AWOL'.

The open borders deep in the forest and up the volcano however always contributes to the possibility of the group to migrate away again, either into the Congo or the Rwanda side of the mountain, and should that happen this column will of course provide readers with updates.

Meanwhile, as the UN Year of the Gorilla 2009 is in its third quarter, the return of the Nyakagezi group will boost tourism in particular in the Kisoro area, and when the new tarmac road from Kabale to Kisoro is finally complete, it will be making visits much easier by road and promises a substantial increase of tourists to one of the most scenic parts of Uganda.

KENYA AIRWAYS EAST AFRICAN CLASSIC SAFARI RALLY FOR NOVEMBER

Entries have now closed for the KQ sponsored East African Classic Safari Rally, which will be held from the 23rd of November, when the classic cars and 'classic drivers' will be flagged off from the Indian Ocean port city of Mombasa. By the time of going to press some 50 cars had been registered with the organizers. The rally, Kenya Airways' main sponsorship event for 2009, will cover some 4,500 kilometres, bringing back fond memories when in fact the 'Safari Rally' was still part of the world championship rally

calendar and held every year over the Easter weekend, to permit volunteers – including your truly on a few occasions – help the local entrants compete against the better equipped works teams. This year's route also extends into Tanzania, making it an 'East African' event. The first rally was called the 'coronation rally' and covered all the East African states of old, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, before various factors then restricted the 'Safari Rally' to Kenya.

KENYAN TOURISM FRATERNITY LAYS INTO FOREIGN MINISTER

Recent remarks attributed to the Kenyan foreign minister, that the 50 percent reduction of the Visa fees has not yielded the expected results, has met with a storm of objections and condemnation by the country's tourism sector, with some accusing the minister of putting income over strategy and not understanding what has been achieved so far.

Indeed, the halving of the Visa fees from 50 US Dollars to only 25 US Dollars has been credited with stabilising the downward trend and assisting a reversal and recover of the Kenyan tourism industry. Ministers are of course often notorious of only thinking from one election cycle to the next and being half way through the present term of parliament seems to have spurred thoughts how best to fill the coffers again to sustain the next campaign.

The tourism industry however countered these comments, with sections now demanding that the Visa fee be dropped altogether while others expressed their opinions to resist increasing it to the previous levels as a minimum condition. Watch this space to find out how this latest effort to lower holiday cost in Kenya plays out in the long run.

NO VAT FOR CRUISE SHIP SERVICES PLEASE

More controversy is brewing between the Kenyan tourism industry and government, as plans became known that 16 percent VAT would be charged soon on all services rendered to visiting cruise liners to Mombasa. As the visiting ships will not be able to reclaim VAT, being registered elsewhere, prices for visits to the Kenyan coast will rise by an equivalent figure, raising doubts if the progress made in past months to attract more cruise ships to call on Mombasa will not be reversed. Leading coast and Kenyan tourism

figures have already made their opposition known to government and warned of a loss of such business to the ports of Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam and that the plans, if not reversed, will spell doom for the local tourism business depending on handling of cruise passengers. Kenya has been partnering with South Africa and of late even the Seychelles and been offering a joint Indian Ocean cruise circuit which could be a very profitable business for Mombasa and Kenya in general, but the taxman's plans are not helpful to support the recovery of the sector hard hit in past years by political unrest after the last elections and the global economic crisis, which has affected the tourism industry considerably before showing a fledgling revival in recent months.

MORE WOES FOR BOEING

The development of the new B747-8F has now joined its sibling the B747-8I and their sister ship B787 in giving the company headaches over the first flight and further subsequent delays in deliveries. The company, in apparent relation to this situation, will also take a 1 billion US Dollars charge into its next balance sheet. Shareholders are now said to become rather jittery over the financial future of the company and more departures of senior management are no longer ruled out, after Boeing's Commercial Airplanes President stepped down a couple of weeks ago over the unmitigated disaster of the B787 development and the constant changes of goal posts – referring to announcements made by Boeing about the B787 timelines, each needing 'adjustments' at a later stage and always after initially denying media reports to the same effect.

In East Africa industry observers are closely watching Kenya Airways' upcoming decision making process about the replacement of their ageing B767 fleet, and a recent interview by this correspondent with KQ's CEO Titus Naikuni gave the clearest indication yet that the purchase of Airbus A330's may substitute the airline's doubtful B787 order. As always, watch this space for emerging news of Eastern African aviation developments linked to the global aviation industry.

'ORLY' AIRPARK OPENS ON 17TH OCTOBER

The long awaited 'airpark' on the Athi plains is now being prepared for the

grand opening, due on Saturday 17th October. Aviators and aviation faithful are all invited to go and witness the event, which will be accompanied with a show of air acrobatics, or so the story has been told. Having been asked on some occasions in the past, when reporting about progress, how this name came about and if it has anything to do with the Paris airport of the same name, here is the answer to the riddle, provided by the venerable Harro Trempenau, Chairman of the Aero Club of East Africa in Nairobi: the exact area of location is by the Masai called 'Olooloitikosh', clearly a tongue breaker for most – thankfully I had a Masai best man at my wedding who taught me a thing or two over the past 30 years – and hence it was shortened into the 'Orly' which most can pronounce and yet have no clue how it came about, until now that is.

The new facility, in which the Aeroclub is a shareholder, already has 15 hangars, seven houses (off the field), a proper lounge and club house of course and a landing strip fit for most 'light' aircraft, both single and twin engine. The 240 acres piece of land is undergoing further development and aviation fans can see skydivers, microlights, gyrocopters and much more in a friendly atmosphere and without the mindboggling and smothering circumstances now witnessed at major aerodromes and airports around the world, where getting near an aircraft is all but impossible – at Orly the kids can still be able to put their hand on 'the real thing' and touch the aircraft skin and maybe interest and create the next generation of fliers ... So don't miss being there on Saturday the 17th October at 1 p.m. or 13.00 hrs local time – 10.00 hrs GMT – to witness Kenyan aviation history being made. Write to harro@trumpetnose.com for directions, if needed.

FLY 540 ADD DASH 8 TO FLEET, CRJ DUE NEXT WEEK

The region's first true low cost airline with operational bases in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania has recently added a Bombardier Dash 8 aircraft with 37 seats to supplement its fleet of ATR 42's and ATR 72's, which continue to be their workhorse aircraft. The new aircraft will be deployed for extra flights on routes within Kenya but may also appear from time to time across their regional network.

In a related development it was

also confirmed by Fly 540's senior management that the long expected Bombardier CRJ is due in Nairobi by next week, and will upon the completion of all registration formalities be deployed on the Entebbe route as of 01st November, operating the two daily services. Fly 540 offers the first flight out of Nairobi to Entebbe and for 'one dayers' a convenient early evening return from Uganda to Kenya. The entry of the Fly 540 jet aircraft on the route will then make for up to 8 daily connections between Entebbe and Nairobi, all operated by jet aircraft of CRJ and B737 makes, undoubtedly bringing more choices to travellers and keeping fares in check. All eyes are now on the regulators which have faced acid criticism over keeping regulatory charges and taxes high, in some cases almost doubling the cost of a flight when added on the airlines' fares. Watch this space.

MORE NEWS FROM THE AERO CLUB OF EAST AFRICA'S REGULAR NEWSLETTER, COURTESY OF HARRO TREMPENEAU:

WEBCAM WEATHER REPORTING SYSTEM ENJOYS GROWING POPULARITY

The following webcams are now operating on www.kenyawebcam.com:

Kijabe-Rift Valley

Wilson Airport - Aero Club of East Africa

Ngong Hills from Langata

Lamu

Kilimanjaro - Kampi ya Kanzi Nyeri

Kilima Camp- Masai Mara Watamu

Two webcams at Diani Beach, to be sponsored by www.Kikoy.com, will be up soon. Keep checking. We need sponsors for additional webcams, especially at Kericho, Marsabit, Nanyuki, and other key areas.

Adds this correspondent: what a wonderful initiative to improve aviation safety by giving the pilots up to date weather information at their destination. Read the following piece to learn even more about the impact of this private sector driven project.

MET WORKSHOP OPENS EYES

The Aero Club and the Kenya Association of Air Operators on 9 and 10 September attended a two day workshop on aviation weather forecasting and reporting. The event, organized by

the Kenya Met Department was very interesting in that it revealed that the Met Department actually possesses plenty of good aviation weather information, but somehow this does not reach the consumer. For example, the Department has excellent quarter - hourly satellite shots of Kenya, winds aloft, location of rain and thunderstorms, etc.).

In a PowerPoint presentation, Harro Trempenau made it clear to the “weathermen” that the target group that does not have sufficient weather info is the 80 % of Kenyan aircraft who fly VFR and who do not necessarily fly in or out of any of the seven airports where there are MET stations (Mombasa, Malindi, Wajir, Nairobi JKIA, Nairobi Wilson, Kisumu and Eldoret). He explained what are needed - decent satellite shots on the internet or through GPRS, weather info enroute and at airfields of destination, info about winds on the ground and aloft, etc. Trempenau explained that, right now, the majority of pilots in Kenya gets their weather info through a “marifa” way (i.e. “self help”). Pilots use their mobile phones to call someone at airports of destination to ask “iko mvua?”, “do you see any blue holes?”, or they go to foreign web sites, get TAFs and METARS from the US Government and Eumetsat, etc. The official Met Dept website contains little of use to pilots.

The eyes of those in attendance really popped out when Trempenau illustrated the webcam system that the aviators in Kenya have created, with great initiative by Elsen Karsted. The KQ rep had just complained that their aircraft had no weather info when flying to Lamu. Trempenau was able to pull out the Lamu webcam ‘live’ to show him that Lamu had blue skies and the tide was high one minute ago.

The inevitable question of user fees also came up. The Met Department wants a share of the income from KAA and KCAA. Stakeholders argued that they should pay nothing until they get a product that is useable. They pushed for an aviation web site run by the Met

Department, showing an hourly high quality sat shot of Kenya and the region, Tafs and Metars for all seven airports where Met Dept is based, an ATIS at all airports where the Met Department has offices, introducing Automatic Weather Recording Stations in critical areas like Mau, Marsabit, Aberdare’s, Nyeri, etc, and sponsoring a large number of webcams of www.kenyawebcam.com. Trempenau also pushed for more accurate seven day forecasts of rain and vertical velocity, etc.

It remains to be seen if the message got across. Until the Met department improves services, the majority of pilots, most of whom fly VFR at lower altitudes, need different information than the high flying airliners. The Met guys really thought that info about upper air turbulence is what we want, so we can fasten our seatbelts. Basically, they had no idea that more than 80% of all flying in Kenya is done by little airplanes, flying VFR, and hoping for the best at any of the 650 bush strips at the other end.

KENYA LAUNCHES ‘FOREST INVENTORY’

After the huge political fallout over the almost total destruction of the Mau forest water catchment area, and similar development elsewhere in the country, has the Kenya government now ordered a full, up to date inventory of existing forests and the extent of any encroachment. The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife will be overseeing the exercise, which is estimated to cost at least 30 million Kenya Shillings.

Qualified foresters and support staff have reportedly already been recruited to kick start the research. By the end of the year the ministry hopes to have covered at least 80.000 hectares of forests but final results are not expected before some time well into 2010.

CONFERENCE CENTRE SEEKS EXPANSION

The Kenyan tourism minister has commented on the Kenyatta International Conference Centre’s plans to expand by saying he would welcome investors’ expressions of

interest to partner in the expansion of the government owned facility. When being built in the 1970’s the KICC was a sparkling piece of architecture in the heart of the city, only minutes walk from the Hilton and Intercontinental hotels. After years of decline however the facility was refurbished and managed to reclaim its former market position by bagging many international meetings, conferences and conventions and a key participant in Kenya’s drive to capture a bigger market share in the MICE segment, considered highly profitable for the country with average spending by a ‘conference tourist’ about 50 percent higher than that of a leisure tourist.

The expansion plans include the building of a hotel, underground parking and a top of the range mall on land adjoining the KICC and presently used for outdoor exhibitions or as recreational grounds.

SKY NEWS REPORT ON DRAUGHT BRINGS SPOTLIGHT TO KENYA

The ongoing draught conditions in Kenya, frequently referred to in this column, has now brought global media big gun SKY News into the fray, when their African news team filmed the hardships of live in Northern Kenya, causing people to starve, livestock to die and game reserves and national parks to be made a last resort of survival for cattle, goats and the wildlife inside already struggling to make it to the next day. In Kenya, as is the case in Tanzania and Uganda too, pastoralists have invaded protected areas in search of pasture and water for their animals, disregarding the standing rules as their last resort. It is understood that the regional wildlife managers are seeking a way out of these circumstances, but until the rains fall it will be hard if not impossible to force the herders away, some of whom have taken to defending their livestock by force to have at least some animals left when the draught breaks.

Tourism marketers too have been struggling to come to terms with the weather conditions, as wildlife has died alongside livestock for lack of water or edible greens and all hopes are now pinned on the onset of the coming rains. Those however are not without their own risks to the populations of draught stricken areas nor the wildlife and livestock, as the soil is baked hard like cement after

years of no rain, fuelling fears of flash floods and subsequent wide spread flooding, during which animals can drown and homesteads be destroyed, worsening an already alarming situation.

Kenyan Masai pastoralists were not long ago expelled from an area near some national parks in Tanzania, where they had taken their herds in search of water and park invasions in Uganda too are now of concern to UWA, as they are in Kenya – especially around the Northern parks – to KWS. However, no easy solution will be found to resolve the human – wildlife conflict now brewing, and the tourism industry is scratching their combined heads to find a way out of the ‘between a rock and a hard place’ scenario.

Senior tourism stakeholders are trying to use the situation to streamline the management of game reserves and other protected areas to have them all brought under KWS auspices and management, allowing to have a unified policy approach towards park invasions and practise a predictable and enforceable response to such situations in coming years.

However, it is people who carry voter’s cards in upcoming elections, not animals, and unless government is able to look after the draught stricken populations and offer them assistance and support when most needed, it will undoubtedly see a backlash come the next elections. That said, considering the Mau disaster where a crucial water catchment area was almost destroyed and sacrificed for the very votes, a fine balance needs to be found between conservation and tourism on one side and the immediate survival needs of the pastoralists, farmers and general population on the other.

Meanwhile has the local Kenyan press projected a dire future for the lion population in Kenya, and Eastern Africa in general and details of that article can be found via: www.nation.co.ke/News/-/1056/672370/-/uo092o/-/index.html

TANZANIA REMEMBERS ‘MWALIMU’

The founding ‘father’ of Tanzania, ‘Mwalimu’ Julius Nyerere was remembered mid week, ten years after his passing. The national service took place in Tanzania’s commercial capital of Dar es Salaam while the family, friends and surviving political allies remembered ‘Mwalimu’ – a Kiswahili word for teacher – in his

home village of Butiama, Mara region.

Nyerere, a staunch nationalist, led Tanzania down the slippery economic slope of socialism, leading to the near collapse of the economy, before revising his stand and in his latter days acknowledging the mistakes of economically failed policies. He made history when voluntarily leaving office at a time when many African leaders hang on to their jobs by hook or crook, and remained a powerful figure in Tanzanian politics until his passing, putting to rest the common fear of African presidents that after leaving office they become pariahs, persecuted and prosecuted – not in this case though, when ‘Mwalimu’ was held in high esteem right through his twilight years.

MT. MERU FIRES START AGAIN

As reported in the previous column an extensive fire swept up the sides of Mt. Meru, which overlooks Arusha and the surrounding areas. While those fires were eventually brought under control, fresh fires ignited on the lower slopes of the mountain from the ‘Momella’ side. None of the outbreaks are thought to be outright arson but careless use of open fires and trying to smoke out bees to access their honey, may have contributed to the present situation, which is mirrored across Eastern Africa due to a long draught and cinder dry undergrowth along the edges of forests, which aid the fast spread of blazes.

Again, no tourists have come to any harm but some activities in Mt. Meru National Park have been suspended or move to other areas.

US MISSION STUBBORN OVER PEMBA ‘THREATS’

It was learned during the week that the State Department, on recommendation by the US Embassy in Dar es Salaam, has maintained its harsh anti travel advisory against visits to Pemba ahead of the elections in 12 months time. No amount of reasoning by the tourism sector and business community at large have born any fruits, as the American Embassy claims there were several cases of civil unrest alongside voters registration.

Thankfully for Pemba have many Americans seen right through those ‘advisories’ and often ignore them, while it is understood that there are sections of American travellers actually defying such advisories and

deliberately travel to places slapped with such ‘diplomatic courtesies’. Wrote one tour operator from Dar with business interests in Pemba – which is part of Zanzibar – to this column: ‘if those diplomats are so scared, let them go home until after the elections. We welcome any American tourists here, even business people, who are visiting in good numbers and are not scared by those tactics. What is it the Americans want to extort from us, let them be open and not hide behind such bureaucratic barriers’. Oooops...

MT. MERU HOTEL COMMENCES REFURBISHMENT

One of the better known hotels in Arusha, the Mt. Meru Hotel – some time ago under Novotel management – has now started a 1 ½ year refurbishment and modernization project, to restore the hotel to 5 star status when it reopens as the ‘New Mt. Meru Hotel’.

The hotel, which was initially given out by the government owned Tanzania Hotels for management, was eventually privatised some 5 years ago and hopes to see it refurbished had almost dwindled to zero, when the announcements finally came through.

Meanwhile, several new hotels were built in Arusha over the past years, chipping away on Mt. Meru’s former market position, while others like the ‘New Arusha Hotel’ have also undergone substantive refurbishments and upgrades, leaving the managers of the Mt. Meru to face the market challenges when re-entering this competitive market. Arusha is the springboard to the ‘Northern’ safari circuit of Tarangire, Manyara, Ngorongoro and Serengeti and generally considered the ‘safari capital of East Africa’.

WORKPLACE TRAINING INTENSIFIES IN RWANDA

The Rwanda Workforce Development Authority has now also thrown their weight behind vocational training in the hospitality sector, as it launched a one month intensive training course in Musanze and Rubavu districts, both of which are in the thick of tourism activities.

It is understood that through a Commonwealth initiative – Rwanda is expected to join the group of nations shortly – trainers were receiving instructions in Singapore and are now jointly with their Singaporean colleagues rolling out

the courses back home in Rwanda. Various bodies connected with the tourism sector in the country have in past weeks stepped up their efforts to spur workplace training for hospitality staff to equip them with skills similar to the ones found in other parts of Eastern Africa, and ahead of common standards coming into effect soon.

SWINE FLU ADVICE FROM RWANDAN AUTHORITIES

Information for intending visitors to Rwanda about the H1N1 flu type, ordinarily referred to as 'swine flu', is now available at www.tracrwanda.org.rw. Entry to Rwanda at land borders and airports continue to be uninterrupted and the information on the website is regularly revised and as necessary updated.

RWANDA HOTEL CAPACITY UP BY 23 PERCENT

Favourable investment conditions have supported growth in the hospitality sector over the past years in Rwanda and the country has already added 23 percent more rooms, according to statistics released by the RDB – T&C, since the end of 2008. Renovations, modernisation and expansion of existing hotels and lodges have contributed to this trend but newly built properties too are on the rise. Rwanda aims to offer about 6.000 rated rooms (compared to the present 4.225 as of mid 2009) by the end of 2012 in order to meet the accommodation requirements estimated by the sharp growth of tourism and business visitors to the 'land of a thousand hills'. In a related development, the present implementation of the EAC's common standards in the hospitality industry is also progressing well and expected to wind up by the end of the year. All hotels and lodges in Rwanda must submit their particulars to the Rwanda Development Board – Tourism and Conservation to permit a timely conclusion in line with East African Community deadlines. Alongside, training and human resource development activities are also rolling out country wide to 'upgrade' the skills of Rwandan staff and meet expectation of the international clientele now coming to Rwanda in ever growing numbers.

NEW ROAD CONNECTS MUSANZE WITH CONGO DR BORDER

Last weekend also saw a brand new road being commissioned by the Rwandan Prime Minister, connecting the Musanze district with the border to Congo, bringing the area closer to tourist visitors and providing a lifeline for farmers to get their produce to the markets without much ado from now on.

The road was largely funded by the EU, although Rwanda added some branch off roads to one of the Lake Kivu harbours and to the Bralirwa brewery. Roads in Rwanda are in remarkably good shape as maintenance seems to be ongoing year round, keeping the main traffic arteries 'intact' and not falling to pieces as often seen elsewhere in the region.

MORE FLIGHTS BETWEEN KIGALI AND ENTEBBE COMING?

It was learned from aviation sources in Rwanda that they were open to the possibility of Uganda Air Cargo Corporation flying to Kigali, after they reportedly acquired two turboprop passenger planes and were licensed in Uganda to commence passenger operations.

The UCAA in contrast was not able to confirm, what type of license, if any, UACC does in fact hold, in particular if any such license was for scheduled or for charter services.

UACC has in the past operated cargo charters with a single C 130 aircraft, as and when it was not undergoing service, being repaired or hired out long term, and has no apparent experience in passenger operations. Watch this space.

HOTEL OWNER CRIES FOUL

Some readers may still remember the story of a mayoress gone on rampage when she had part of a hotel in the outskirts of Kigali partly demolished in a cloak and dagger action in the early hours of that fateful day. In Rubavu district another such situation arose during last week, when another Kigali based business man, trying to build the Palm Beach Hotel on Lake Kivu, found himself at the receiving end of another local council gone wild when part of his hotel too was demolished. Sources close to the business man wrote to this column expressing their, and apparently his anger, claiming it was spoiling a joint venture with an Italian business man wishing to invest in the hotel industry

in Rwanda. They also suggested a hidden agenda being at work but no independent confirmation could be obtained towards that end.

SEYCHELLES TOURISM ACADEMY MOBILISES

The archipelago's national tourism and hospitality training academy has now launched a new DVD to promote its courses to school leavers and others seeking a vocational education in the country's main industry, the tourism sector. The Seychelles have a deliberate policy of training nationals to be absorbed in hotels and related businesses to gradually substitute expatriate staff, but skills transfer and human resource development are a mandatory first before this can be achieved.

The academy is a brainchild of President Michel whose advice two years ago is now bearing fruits. The DVD was formally launched at the end of September while commemorating the World Tourism Day.

SEYCHELLES BAG 2010 MEETING

The Indian Ocean Islands Chambers of Commerce and Industry have during a recent meeting on Mayotte decided to hold their 2010 conference in the Seychelles, a major boost for the island nation. Over 300 delegates from the 6 island countries of La Reunion, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mayotte, Comoros and Seychelles discussed economic cooperation between the islands and tourism in particular was singled out as a primary opportunity to attract more tourist visitors, and cruise ships into the region, the latter possibly with special circuits between the islands and the various African mainland destinations like Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Maputo, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Cape Town. The Seychelles delegation took the leadership in proposing closer tourism cooperation and joint marketing activities, again underscoring the strides the archipelago has made since their tourism board was 'part privatised'.

SEYCHELLES PARTICIPATES IN TSUNAMI DRILLS

Information received from Victoria indicates that the Seychelles, together with Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique will be the African participants of a coordinated tsunami exercise, which extends to 18

countries around the Indian Ocean rim. The 2004 tsunami wreaked havoc on many countries and the waves reached the African continent where it hit Somalia most severely but also had noticeable effect in Kenya and Tanzania.

Data from the drill will be used to refine the warning system across the Indian Ocean to give maximum warning, once an earthquake – often the trigger for a tsunami – has been registered. The longer the advance notice the better the chances to evacuate populations along the respective coast lines but also from hotels, to avoid the mass casualties which marked the Christmas 2004 disaster.

Initial feedback from the islands about the conduct of the drill and related exercises and training were positive in regard of command and control functions and preparedness of the Seychelles administration to deal with such disasters. This will be good news for island citizens as well as tourist visitors, who can be assured of added safety measures should indeed a major tsunami come to the shores of the Seychelles.

AVIATION MOVES TOWARDS EASA STANDARDS

The Seychelles aviation regulatory regime will now progressively move towards adopting the European Union format, it was said when staff of ‘Helicopter Seychelles’ and other aviation companies completed various courses conducted by a German expert. The certification after the successful exams will now be recognised across the EU but will also enhance skills levels for staff working in the aviation sector across the archipelago.

ROTARY CLUB OF VICTORIA TURNS 40

About 250 Rotarians flew to the Seychelles earlier in the week to participate in the 40th anniversary celebrations of the local Rotary Club, the only one on the archipelago. Part of it is an international conference focusing on development priorities in Africa and community support projects.

SEYCHELLES USE NEW NAVAL CAPABILITIES

Information received from the Seychelles capital Mahe indicates, that the recently boosted Seychellois’ Coast Guard has now for the first time flexed their muscles and, together

with coalition naval and air support engaged suspected Somali pirates and arrested 11 of them inside their maritime boundaries. It was later in the week however learned that there was apparently insufficient evidence to take the 11 to court and they were subsequently deported and ordered to leave the economic exclusion zone immediately.

The Seychelles have in recent months actively strengthened their patrol capacities and are now, with ongoing assistance by the naval coalition, able to operate right up to the boundaries of their 200 nm economic zone, offering a serious and growing deterrent for Somali criminals trying to enter their waters and try their luck in hijacking ships there.

The Seychelles’ main economic activities are based on fishing and tourism, and the government in Victoria can simply not tolerate any attempts of Somali based pirates, or anyone else for that matter, to disrupt or endanger the archipelago’s mainstream sources of income. Meanwhile has a conference of 10 countries taken place in Victoria to draw up an action plan for the implementation of the ‘Djibouti Code of Conduct’ in how to best deal with piracy in the region. The International Maritime Organisation, Interpol and observers from the naval coalition also attended this crucial regional gathering.

GOSS’ MINISTRY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM TRAINS STAFF IN KENYA

Information received from Juba indicates that a first batch of wildlife wardens to be has now been sent to Kenya to undergo training with Kenya Wildlife Services. The first group of about 50 trainees has been received at two of the training camps of KWS and will be there for at least three months.

‘Home’ training however is also going on in Southern Sudan with courses continuously being conducted at Nimule National Park and the Boma National Park, the latter offering leadership and advanced courses for more senior personnel while Nimule trainees acquire more basic skills to carry out their functions in the protected areas, when deployed into the field.

NEW SUDANESE PASSPORTS NOW PERMIT TRAVEL TO ISRAEL

Changes in the new biometric

passports now issued by the Sudanese government indicate that a discriminatory phrase has been removed, making way for Southern, and Northern Sudanese citizens to finally travel to Israel without fear of invalidating their travel document. The ‘old’ passport contained a stamped phrase reading: ‘All countries except Israel’ while another statement threatened that in case of travel to Israel the passport would become void.

Sudan has stuck to a 1958 Arab embargo against Israel but most Arab nations have since then removed these barriers and engaged at one level or another with the Israelis, but for the most hardline regimes.

Sensing political fallout internally however a government spokesperson was swift to clarify, that the Sudan will continue to deny exit Visa to anyone professing to travel to Israel, while Sudanese living abroad, and arguably the Southern population normally anyway flying via Entebbe or Nairobi to avoid the ongoing perceived persecution when leaving or returning via Khartoum, will undoubtedly find that they can finally travel to where their heart desires, even to the ‘Holy Land’.

Meanwhile has the political debate over the 2011 Referendum Law escalated, when the SPLM and her allies in the national assembly threatened to boycott the crucial final session of parliament before the expected national elections in 2010, should the referendum law and the election modalities not be resolved within week. There is growing anger in the South over perceived delays and overt and covert manoeuvrings by the regime in Khartoum to redraw constituency boundaries based on allegedly doctored census figures, all with an eye on allegedly pre-rigging the forthcoming elections and denying the Southern population a fair share of political representations. Watch this space.

AND, in closing today some more of the regular Zambian tourism tidbits, taken from ‘The Livingstone Weekly’, produced and dispatched, ZAMNET permitting I understand, by Gill Staden.