

SUPPORT

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Best ways to make tourism tick

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Arusha. Something very significant in the tourism and hospitality industries happened in the Lake Zone recently.

The Global Tourism week at the national level was held in Mwanza.

This year's theme centred on sustainability of tourism, and the main topics presented were either directly or indirectly related to sustainability. The most thrilling issue was the fact that the Lake

Zone was apparently an unnoticed gateway to central and eastern Africa World Class Tourism attractions both natural and man-made.

These attractions are just enormous opportunities as far as tourism is concerned. There is every sign that the Lake Zone (Mara, Mwanza, Kagera and Shinyanga) is taking a new lead in tourism and hospitality in Tanzania.

Political commitment

The new dynamics will not only pose change in ways the tourism business is perceived, but will even alter the landscape in the hospitality industry. It will definitely shift the paradigm from the traditionally northern-circuit-dominated industry.

In Tanzania, like in any other developing country, political commitment on any development initiatives is vital and of paramount importance.

Fortunately enough, the Mwanza regional commissioner, Mr Evarist Ndikilo, is the person behind the current move to transform the Lake Zone to a new tourism destination. It is high time for the private sector players to invest in this noble drive by the current Mwanza RC.

However, this does not mean that the lake zone is free of challenges, but rather a sign that someone is willing to deal with them accordingly. It is even more impressive to learn the efforts are spearheaded by the top regional authority. It is also a call to other lake zone regional commissioners to emulate and join the initiative.

It is no longer a secret that the government is planning to upgrade Mwanza Airport to international standards and give it the iconic name of Serengeti International Airport. This ground-breaking news if translated into reality would definitely open the key tourism hub to neighbouring countries such as Uganda, DRC, Burundi and beyond.



Tourists use binoculars to observe animals. Tourism stakeholders in the country want the removal of unnecessary levied to encourage growth in the sector.
PHOTO | FILE

This literally adds more tourism packages and products to tourists across the countries at their convenience. The fact that the hub would be connected internationally will boost the lake zone not only in tourism but also provide synergy with other booming sectors such as mining and trade.

While we are rejoicing about these glittering opportunities, it is of great importance that our international diplomacy and economic policies work towards peace, progress and stability in the great lakes region. This is because there will not be any successful business in the lake zone if the prominent image of the region will still be insane civil wars.

These efforts will complement the ongoing internal efforts of well-wishers, private sector players and the government at large.

The overlapping regulatory framework in administering the tourism industry needs to be streamlined to be at pace with creating an equitable and fair tourism cake.

The new Finance Act, June 2011, which enables the respective local government authori-

ties to make by-laws for the imposition of fees for various categories of licences proved to be an impediment to the tourism business.

Heavily taxed

Not knowing that the tourism business is already seriously taxed, in many areas where there are investments, the local government used the Finance Act to impose exorbitant prices which are transferred to the final consumer. Some districts are well known for applying this law notoriously.

A study has revealed that currently tour operators in Tanzania are subjected to twelve tax and licence payments. It pointed out that for each vehicle engaged in the tourism business to pay eleven duties, which include licences and fees.

The controversial point here is modality and the time spent on paying. The same study clearly pointed out that tour operators spend more than four months trying to secure licences and documents in Tanzania. This is inconsistent with the spirit of improving and creating a conducive business environment.

This is because logic dictates

that there will be more production time, more taxes to be collected, employment opportunities created and businesses improved if tax payment would be done at once, transparently and under one roof.

The government stands to gain more than any other stakeholder by simplifying the existing tax regime specifically in the tourism and hospitality industry.

A mismatch between the existing skills and demands in the industry is another outstanding concern in the tourism and hospitality sector in Tanzania.

There is a general feeling that despite the current significant economic contribution of the sector to Tanzania's economy, standing at close to 20 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), the skills and development levy collected by authorities does not resonate with the expectation within the industry.

Universities offering tourism courses are in dilemma as the number of students doing hospitality and tourism courses are decreasing significantly since the Higher Education Students Loans Board does not treat them with priority as is expected.

Owing to the share of contribution by this sector and as a good gesture through the loans board the government should support students to match the skills gap that exists in the tourism industry.

It is obvious that foreign business competitors will be able to schedule their airline routes in such a way that tourists will be able to spend at least the first night in their countries if things don't change. It is disheartening

also that Tanzania as a country has no successful national airline.

Despite many excuses supporting the current situation, Tanzania is able to invest and revive the national carrier to tap into the air transport segment which is the backbone of the tourism industry as a majority of tourists come from abroad.

Government role

Tanzania needs a national airline because its importance can never be understated even if local airlines will be hundred per cent owned by Tanzanians.

Safety and security is the most important aspect for any business.

to flourish, especially in the tourism sector. This aspect of tourism is of grave concern not only in the lake zone but in Tanzania at large.

One of the most compelling roles of the government is to establish an efficient working justice system that protects everyone including tourists. Establishment of a diplomatic and tourism police unit, at least in Mwanza, would be a good start.

Commitment and consistency at top ministerial level is highly needed especially at this point where the industry needs government attention most. The fact that the ministry of Tourism and Natural resources has the fifth minister and fourth permanent Secretary within eight years period is not very healthy.

The author is an Executive officer of Tanzania Association of Tour Operators (Tato).

Attractions: TANZANIA GAME PARKS

Tanzania has more land devoted to national parks and game reserves than any other wildlife destination in the world. Everything from pristine coral reefs to the Crater Highlands, remote game reserves and the famous national parks are protected by government law and

placed in trust for future generations to marvel at in wonder and awe. In addition to a listing of the main attractions of Tanzania, we have included many parks that are largely neglected in favour of the big names like Serengeti and Ngorongoro.

20

Percentage points in income contribution of the tourism sector to the national income

12

Number of tax and other licensing payments that tour operators are subjected to