

Tourism body now lays ground for local holidaymakers

By Correspondent Monica Luwondo in Arusha

MOTIVATED by a friend living in Arusha about the city's New Year festive experiences, a Dar es Salaam resident, Esther Solos, will be travelling with her son for three days of their first ever holiday.

"My son is so excited to catch a flight for the first time...I wish I had done this long time ago. Anyway, as long as I have changed my attitude, I guarantee him more of such trips in future," she says.

Esther is one of the growing number of middle-class Tanzanians now embracing domestic tourism.

Willy Lyimo, the Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB) branch manager in Arusha supports Esther's move as it is in line with the government's initiatives to improve domestic tourism as a step to building a sustainable sector.

The tourism sector plays a vital role in the country's economic development. It is one of the major sources of foreign exchange and offers employment directly and indirectly. However, Lyimo says tourism earnings are largely depending on the international holiday makers.

"In many of the developed countries local tourism thrived first but to us is the opposite," said in a recent interview. He cited Israel where domestic tourists pay higher charges than non-resident tourists due to demand.

"A vibrant domestic tourism is needed to boost the sector, especially now with the constant warnings on international travel due to terrorism and natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, tsunami and civil unrests," Lyimo explains.

In her vacation plan Esther says she would spend 2.5m/- on two Precision Air return

tickets, taxi charges payment for hotel accommodation.

She will also join family friends for a dine and dance on New Year's eve at Impala Hotel. She will also pay for her son's movie entrance charges at Njiro Shopping Complex on New Year.

On their way to the Kilimanjaro International Airport on their departure day, Esther would stop at the Wakulima Open Market in Tengeru to buy cucumbers, carrots and avocados for take home because they are cheaper compared to her Mwenge Market in Dar es Salaam.

Dr. Wineaster Anderson of the University of Dar es Salaam defines domestic tourism as people taking holidays within their own countries. Holidays include visiting friends and family, business trips or a weekend away somewhere from where one lives and work.

In a paper titled "Domestic Tourism in Tanzania: Opportunities and Challenges"

Dr Wineaster emphasise the importance of the sector to the country's economy.

One of the ways Dr Wineaster suggests to attract majority locals to embrace domestic tourism is improvement of the general economy, which has direct impact on the standard of living of the people because it is vital to raise their real disposable incomes, which provide them with the willingness and ability to travel.

For instance, giving reasonable cash during work leave and travel incentives should be emphasized and policies supporting the move could be put in place to promote more family tours during vacations and work leave to raise the incomes of citizens.

"Increasing disposable income will definitely open the opportunities for domestic

tourism," according to Dr Wineaster.

A member of the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture (TCCIA), Arusha Branch, Javes Sauni, says lack of planning for majority Tanzanians is a predicament to vacationing or holidaying.

"We have quite a good number of middle-class families who can afford holidays in the country but simply fail to plan," he says.

He says many people are spending on other luxuries such as buying expensive cars or accumulating plots.

For him, it was until he was paid by his office to visit a national park in Arusha when he developed interest of self-sponsorship in short trips to neighboring districts of Arusha for relaxing.

Lyimo guarantees Esther and others that the city has attractions, citing the view of Mount Meru and Kilimanjaro visible from all corners, Lake Duluti, coffee plantations, Arusha National Park and the cool weather. Arusha is very near to Tanzania's major geographical and wildlife attractions, including Serengeti National Park, Ngorongoro Crater, Olduvai Gorge, where there are museums displaying recovered artifacts from early humans.

Arusha has also reliable accommodation suitable for all. There are high-class hotels such as Mount Meru, Impala, Kibo Palace, New Safari, New Arusha, Ngurdoto charging in dollars.

There are also affordable accommodation packages from about 3,000 guest houses and modest hotels. Equipped with satellite TV, hot water system, bath robes, and nets, refrigerators for deluxe and executive rooms.

Lyimo quotes hotel room rates of one of such hotels, Mercury, along the Arusha-Nairobi road as 30,000/- for residents and USD 30 for foreigners, standard double

35,000/- for residents and USD 35 for foreigners, deluxe single 45,000/- for residents and USD 45 for non-residents, executive double 50,000/- for residents and USD 50 for foreigners, and executive single for 75,000/- for residents and USD 75 for non-residents.

The hotels also offers internet services 24 hours; organize trips to national parks, airline bookings and visas across the world.

Lyimo attributes such attractions in Arusha to the increasing number of Kenyan and Ugandan families flocking the city during Christmas and New Year, something Tanzanians can emulate.

He emphasises that parents should travel with their children for such vacations to help build them a habit/culture of travelling or holidaying. He said all regions in the country has their own attractions.

In Dar es Salaam, Mtwara and Lindi families can enjoy the sea breeze, in Kigoma and Mwanza families can enjoy train ride and view of Lake Tanganyika and Victoria, respectively while in the Southern Highland regions families can enjoy the view of wild animals at Mikumi on their way.

He says the will to travel can overcome all challenges that affect demand for domestic tourism, which include financial limitations, household structures, attitude towards tourism, lack of tourism knowledge coupled with few programs that enable citizens to participate in domestic tourism, availability of leisure time, interest and habits, age, gender, religious institutions and willingness of individual consumer to travel.

Dr Wineaster calls for measures to set affordable prices of tourism products to attract local citizens as well as improving the condition of destination facilities to attract both international and domestic market segments.