

Russia: An Untapped Tourism Market for Africa



By Kester Kenn Klomegah

MOSCOW, July 31, 2015 (Business Africa) – With exception of a few Africa countries, Russian tourists flow has generally hit stumbling blocks over the past two decades which experts and operators said was due to lack of adequate information, low marketing strategies of existing tourism destinations and ineffective institutional organization in Russia and the former Soviet republics.

“Russian tourism market is viewed as a sea of opportunity for expanding tourism business to many external countries or regions including Africa, unfortunately Africa is a quite challenging destination to sell. Africa is still unknown, although the continent has promising destinations for a large number of Russian tourists,” Natalya Privalenko, Rwanda Tourism Board representative in Russia, explained recently to Business Africa.

The crisis in Europe could spur potential Russian tourists to Africa, much depends on the destination and tourism infrastructure in Africa. European crisis, of course, has affected the travel business as a whole and Africa as well, Privalenko said, and pointed out that “during the first half of 2015, fewer clients went visiting Africa but it didn't mean people were not interested in Africa. When the economy situation was good, we saw growing number of clients willing to

visit Africa each year. We hope soon it will get better.”

Some diplomatic missions in conjunction with Russian travel agencies have made efforts at prioritizing tourism. The Ethiopian Travel Club (ETC), established under the auspices of the Embassy, has more than 50 Russian tourism agencies and tour operators. The ETC plans to create a website dedicated to Ethiopian holiday attractions, publish Ethiopian guidebooks in Russian language and organize promotional tours more frequently and participate in future tourism exhibitions.

In May 2009, the club was purposefully created primarily to boost tourism and encourage Russian operators to popularize Ethiopia's historical and cultural destinations among Russian vacationers, to discuss problems mitigating against the tourism industry, to share useful data and vital information necessary for the promotion of the industry, and in the process to identify other investment opportunities, but the laudable initiative died after the change over of the diplomatic staff three years later.

Ethiopia is an east African country rich in history and natural extremes. It is a place where travelers can explore the natural landscape, learn about east African culture and visit archaeological sites, according to Veronica Bierman, General Manager of Exotic Time, a Russian Tourism Agency.

The most interesting thing about Ethiopia is that the country is completely exotic in each tiny

way. The combination of food, culture, religion, places (from religious and historical meccas in the North to wild tribes of the South), the hospitality of the people, music, landscapes, smells, authenticity and so forth - every little thing amazes or surprises our visitors. All that makes it viable for tourism.

Bierman told Buziness Africa in an interview: “Russians will definitely need higher level of accommodation (some luxurious hotels and lodges to be developed), to attract more and more of the wealthy customers, better hotels should be built, and improve tourism infrastructure to make tourism one of the leading economic sectors in Ethiopia.”

Some diplomatic missions have been successful in pushing through their tourism plans. For example, the former Ambassador of the Republic of Mauritius to the Russian Federation, Indira Savitree Thacoor-Sidaya, told Buziness Africa in a pre-departure interview that “Russian tourists have increased over the last three years with high occupancy rates in high-end luxury hotel such as St Regis and Four Seasons.”

