

Tourists put off by expensive air fare

Story by LUCAS BARASA in Warsaw

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The high cost of airline tickets is behind the low number of tourists from Poland visiting Kenya, a high-powered government team visiting the country has learnt.



Tourists visiting Kenya

Photo /File

Polish businessmen and women as well as journalists said during a meeting with the team, led by Tourism and Wildlife permanent secretary Rebecca Nabutola on Wednesday that travellers flying to Kenya from Poland paid higher fares than those going to Egypt and other parts of Europe, making the destination expensive.

Most of the locals wonder why it is expensive to visit Kenya, one of the Polish journalists said at Sofitel Hotel.

But Mr James Ofwona, the chairman of the Kenya-Polish Forum (KPF – a group of Kenyans who studied in Poland and some residents) attributed the high costs to distance, saying it costs five times as much to travel to Kenya than Egypt due to distance.

According to the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB), Polish tourists prefer low cost accommodation, as well as bus tour. Last year, 3,381 Poles visited Kenya compared to 180,000 for Egypt, 80,000 for Tunisia, 25,000 for South Africa and 50,000 for Mexico. However, Ms Nabutola said the number of Poles visiting Kenya has been growing, and could be even much higher this year.

"Kenya/Polish relationship goes back to independence in 1963, but this has not translated into business. Kenya is a magnificent and unique destination and residents are not biased," the PS said.

Ms Nabutola also used the promotion of Kenya's tourism in eastern Europe, which she launched in the Czech Republic on Monday – and ends in Russia tomorrow – to promote other Kenyan business, and appeal for investments.

Mr S. K. Maina from Kenya's embassy in Rome, which also covers Poland, said an officer would be deployed in Warsaw in October, to assist in speedy processing of visas for those wanting to visit Kenya.

"The Kenyan embassy in Rome is ready to go an extra mile to process the visas in Warsaw. We want to ensure that Kenya becomes one of the finest destinations as far as tourism is concerned," Mr Maina said.

Mr Maina accused some airlines of over-charging passengers going to Kenya, adding that the Kenyan embassy in Rome had facilitated the start of direct charter flights from Warsaw to Mombasa last October, to prevent the visitors from exploitation.

Relationship

We will continue this year, and possibly the flights will be once after every 10 days, instead of twice a month. Kenya is interested in high spenders, but airline charges are our biggest obstacle, Mr Maina said.

According to Mr Ofwona, KPF has boosted relationships between the two countries, and helped organise 'Kenya Week' in Poland in 2004, 'Polish Day' in Kenya in May and a visit by polish businessmen to Kenya.

He said the entry of Poland into European Union made it a competitive market, and Kenya spend more money advertising its attractions in the country. "Kenya is usually slow in entering new markets. It should increase its presence here. Many Poles love Kenya, but the only place they have seen it on is television," Mr Ofwona said.