

TOURISM

Battle for eastern European tourist begins in Poland

By JULIETT OTIENO

After polishing up its presence in traditional market of Western Europe, marketers of Kenya's tourism industry are with speed to claim their share budding opportunities in the East.

This year, they have pitched tent in Poland, the western frontier of the former Eastern Europe where 2006 has been declared the 'Visit Kenya Year'.

The goal, according to the Kenya Polish Forum (KPF) – a non-governmental volunteer organisation that is doing the footwork on the ground – the number of Polish tourists visiting Kenya are expected to rise from 2000 to 20,000 by 2007, a ten-fold increase.

Poland ranks 14 in the list of Kenya's tourism markets. In 2003 1800 Poles visited Kenya, representing 0.3 per cent of the total tourist arrivals that year.

A recent market research conducted indicates that Kenya is not among the well-known tourist destinations among the Poles. Only one out of eight people had heard of it or had something to say about it.

Twenty eight per cent of the respondents considered Kenya unattractive mainly due to their understanding of it within the "Africa mind frame"

of a country that is beset with poverty and hunger. One out of 10 respondents said Kenya was too far and has an unstable political situation.

Besides, some of the respondents said the country offered more expensive tourism packages compared to other preferred tourist destinations.

However, upon receiving information on what Kenya has to offer, more than 50 per cent of the respondents described it as an attractive destination. They singled out the exotic

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culture, animals, warm climate and beautiful landscapes as the main attractions.

KPF vice President Slawek Muturi attributes the low volumes of Polish tourists visiting Kenya to lack of promotional budgets, non-utilisation of economies of scale, low discounts at hotels, uncompetitive pricing and lack of efforts to

minimise barriers.

"Besides all these, there are some myths and negative perceptions relating to tropical diseases, distance and insecurity," said Muturi.

Muturi admits that attracting Polish tourists to Kenya is an ambitious project that is, however, achievable.

To do this, KPF has organised a series of promotion activities, including reducing the cost of traveling to Kenya through the launch of direct charter flights between Warsaw and Mombasa, and the acquisition of volume discounts from Kenya hotel and tour operators.

The absence of the flights has prompted KPF to propose a direct charter flight programme to LOT Polish Airlines and White Eagle Aviation, also of Poland.

Besides, KPF is organising a special 'Karibu Kenya' offer for Poles in 2006. This will include special visa and park entry fees. KPF is also negotiating with Kenyan authorities for reduced landing charges and passenger taxes for Poles as well as reduced navigational charges.

In Poland, KPF plans to start beating the drums for Kenya as a tourist destination through construction of a zoo in Warsaw in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service. The project is expected to be complete by



HAVING HIS PICK: A Polish samples some of the Kenyan products that were in display during the Kenya week expo in Warsaw last year.

the end of September this year. KPF is also facilitating Kenya's participation in the Warsaw Tourism Trade Fair that will take place later this year.

KPF is also sponsoring the participation of Kenyan runners in the Warsaw Marathon as well as a debate between Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai and Lech Walesa, the former Polish trade union leader and 1983 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

The prime promotion event for Kenya, however, remains the Kenya week, which takes place in Warsaw in September. "We are expecting exhibitors from over 20 sectors of the economy to be represented in this year's event," said Muturi.

The interaction between Kenyan and Polish businessmen is expected to help cultivate mutual trade benefits, whose value is projected to reach Sh7.7 billion 2007 from Sh6.7 million in 2004.

To set the stage for this campaign, KPF has just concluded the Polish Week at Nairobi's Pan-Afric hotel. Trade and Industry Minister Mukhisa Kituyi opened the event, where products from diverse sectors of the economy were showcased.

The programme also featured an educational forum, where Polish universities advertised their courses and made presentations to prospective Kenyan students.

Last October, KPF held a

Kenya Week at the Wola Park Hotel that featured Kenyan food, Swahili lessons, and photo exhibitions.

The result was a slight increase in the number of Poles visiting Kenya, which Muturi says is a sign that the market does exist.

KPF was set up in 2004 and partners with among others the Kenyan Embassy in Rome, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Polish media.

In Kenya, the organisation works in conjunction with the Export Promotion Council, the Marketing Society of Kenya and the Trade and Industry ministry.