

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA - Business leaders and policy makers will for the first time discuss a competitive approach to tourism in the region. COMESA has organised the Sustainable Tourism Development Forum, to be held on 22-24 August 2012 in Nairobi, Kenya. The public-private dialogue, to be held under the theme “Shaping the Future of Tourism in COMESA”, will bring together over 70 regional participants from tourism boards, investment promotion agencies, tourism businesses and development partners.

The meeting, is to be hosted by COMESA Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism for Kenya .The Forum has been organized through the support of the COMESA Business Council in partnership with Kenya Investment Authority and Kenya Tourism Board. The meeting will analyze the regional diagnostic study of COMESA's 19 Member States, whose aim was to come up with a framework for regional approaches that can be undertaken by both the public and private sector stakeholders to promote a more competitive, investor friendly, sustainable tourism sector in the region.

The framework addresses issues such as putting in place a regional policy and strategy that defines tourism in the region, promotes the relaxation of visa requirements for tourists, packages and brands tourism, investment in infrastructure for tourism development, upgrades the sector to meet regional and global standards, promotes investment in key areas of tourism such as hospitality and catering, addresses supply side constraints in the hotel industry, and exploits the quick benefits of E-Tourism; among others.

The setting of the Forum, Windsor Resort Hotel, one of the luxury resorts of Kenya, will provide the country an opportunity to showcase its tourism attractions and provide the participants with a taste of Kenya's natural beauty, diverse culture, local brands and quality wildlife experience. It is expected that dignitaries from the tourism sectors of Morocco, Egypt, and the Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa (RETOSA) will also attend the meeting, which will share the experiences of corporate hotels like Serena Group, Speke Hotel Group, and renown tour operators from all countries in the COMESA region.

In the face of an ever changing economic and political environment, tourism continues to succeed as a well performing sector in regional and international markets. While the industry moves towards adopting more sustainable models, the economic outlook of the sector today clearly indicates that there are great benefits to reap through a regional approach to boosting competitiveness, sustainability and investment.

Among the expected results of the Forum is a roadmap and action plan owned by the stakeholders, which will structure tangible approaches towards shaping a sustainable tourism strategy and implementation framework for the COMESA region.

Tourism is the fastest developing enterprise in Africa and one of the continent's major investment opportunities, standing at 6 percent growth rate the last decennium. Africa receives 4.8 percent of all tourist arrivals in the world, and 3.3percent of the receipts and although it is not at the heart of the global tourist market, this modest proportion of the world's number one industry is still important for the continent. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that, from direct and indirect activities combined, the tour and travel sector now accounts for a remarkable 9.2percent of global GDP. Tourism's contribution to employment is estimated at 6 - 7 percent of the overall number of jobs worldwide, and it makes up 4.8 percent of world exports and 9.2 percent of world investments.

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