

Tanzania: endless opportunities

New life is being breathed into abandoned treasures within this diverse country

WITH

his sights set high, Ezekiel Maige, Tanzania's Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, is looking to capitalize even further on the nation's rich esthetic assets as he works with the Tanzania Tourist Board to draw new clientele to one of Africa's most breathtaking environments.

While highlighting hidden treasures, such as the Ruaha National Park and the Selous game reserve—in the center and south of the country respectively—are top priorities, Maige is also working hard to expand the scope of tourists visiting Tanzania through new infrastructural developments.

Appointed in November 2010, the minister has presented an ambitious marketing strategy that relies on sustaining established attractions, such as Mount Kilimanjaro, the Serengeti National Park, the spice islands of Zanzibar and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area—and their ties with traditional markets—with expansion into new markets and breathing new life into what we might call virgin resources.

Footprints of the past

It is under this guise that excavation of the Laetoli footprints, located 45 kilometers from the renowned, 106-meter deep Olduvai Gorge, has been resumed. A welcome addition to the unique icons that already punctuate the Tanzanian landscape, the footprints, preserved in volcanic ash, document early man's first upright strides over a 3.5-meter naturally cemented path that dates back around 3.6 million years.

Tanzania is the place where visitors can experience one of the last pockets of true wilderness left in the world

The path, originally excavated by British archaeologist and anthropologist, Mary Leakey, in 1976, was buried due to the remoteness of the location, and a lack of resources has limited visitor access until now.

Thanks to the foresight of the new administration, however, a new U.S.\$30 million museum will ensure that the footprints are visible all year round. The dome-like structure will create its own artificial climate system, allowing visitors and scientists to enjoy the historic human remains therein.

Of the 15 national parks on offer in Tanzania, the vast Ruaha is still arguably the most spectacular. Spanning 10,300 square kilometers of seemingly limitless wilderness, Ruaha National Park is described as “a remote bastion of undisturbed



Kilimanjaro: the highest free-standing mountain in the world

wildlife”. Hippos, crocodiles, turtles and fish all inhabit the Great Ruaha River, which flows through the park and creates gorges and wild landscapes.

Photography blinds have been built at strategic places where visitors have a chance of seeing herds of more than 10,000 elephants, vast concentrations of buffalo and gazelle, antelopes and more than 400 bird species.

Meanwhile, the Selous game reserve is the largest protected wildlife reserve in Africa, covering more than five per cent of Tanzania's total land area. Pristine, and largely devoid of tourists, visitors can enjoy magnificent views of the reserve, which is home to more than a million large animals, including almost half of Tanzania's elephant population, the area's famous wild dogs and some of the last remaining black rhino in the region.

Although the southern circuit has previously been accessible by light aircraft, giving it a reputation for attracting only the more adventurous travelers, the Minister has listed new infrastructure developments in this region, ranging from highways to airstrips, as a priority.

Tourism officials believe the move will meet the growing demand from travelers to experience one of the last pockets of true wilderness left in the world.

A new international airport soon to open in the Mbeya region, for example, will open up the Kitulo National Park and its highly impressive flora to even more visitors. Kitulo is affectionately known as “The Serengeti of Flowers.”



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