The New Face of Kenya’s Tourism

By Judy Kepher-Gona

ESOK Eco-rating Scheme

Top industry executives graced the occasion to witness the dawn of a new era for Kenya tourism industry. But the launch did not only generate interest from within, there was equally great interest from international circles. The latest issue of the National Geographic Traveler magazine carries a feature on the scheme and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) has listed Mombasa Serena and Elsa’s Kopje, Bronze qualifiers, in their guide for preferred eco-destinations. Malewa River Lodge, Olonana and Kampi Ya Kanzi, who have recently received their Bronze certification, will soon be included in the TIES list of preferred eco-destinations. (See page 8 for details of certified hotels/lodges)

And the international interest did not stop with journalists. ESOK has continued to receive enquiries on the scheme from web. Out of some 896 enquiries received through our website since January 2003, 80% had a question on the Eco-rating scheme. And because most of those asking the questions are tomorrow’s travellers, we can only imagine the future impacts of the scheme in terms of influencing the choice of destination.

Back at home, more than 20 hotels/lodges have requested for the evaluation questionnaire since the beginning of the year. ESOK has established that the only reason most hotels/lodges have not applied for certification is because they are ‘putting their houses in order”. As intended, the scheme is prompting hotels/lodges to change and/or improve their environmental and socio-economic practices towards best practice.

For more information on how to participate in the scheme, send us an e-mail at info@esok.org or call us on 2724755/2724403 and ask for evaluation questionnaire.
Vanessa Rogier wanted an environmentally friendly safari. So the marketing coordinator for the Happy Hollow Park & Zoo in San Jose, CA, bombarded her tour company with questions about solar panels and community development. “Selecting an eco-friendly hotel can be tricky” she complained. Travel experts agree. “Eco” is such a widely abused prefix that a term has emerged to refer to slick operators who make dubious claims: “greenwashers.”

Soon it should be easier to weed out the pretenders. Last October, Kenya became the first African country to introduce a national certification program rating the “eco-friendliness” of lodges and hotels. Think of it as the equivalent of the Michelin hotel ratings. “Travelers would ask me for recommendations and I could only give them my personal opinion on which operations were doing a good job” says Anne Loehr, of Eco-resorts, a tour operator. “Now people won’t have to take my word for it.”

The Ecotourism Society of Kenya, a members nonprofit, runs the program. Independent inspectors look at a range of criteria, from environmental measures (recycling of bath water to irrigate trees) to economic benefits (buying produce from local farmers). Lodges that pass the test start out at the Bronze level and can apply for two additional levels of certification. As of February, only four hotels had received certifications, but officials expect to audit six to eight properties a month in the future.

Countries such as Australia and Costa Rica have also set up “green” lodging rating programs. But Kenya’s scheme has a large emphasis on community development, which conservationists such as David Western, former director of the Kenya Wildlife Service, feel is a key element of true ecotourism: Give local people an economic incentive to save wildlife. Many of the country’s lodges already support local communities by building schools and clinics. In South Africa, the government last year issued “national guidelines for responsible tourism,” which could be a precursor to a rating program. If Kenya’s program is successful, industry observers expect other African countries to follow. That will make it easier for travelers to make educated decisions about their lodging, says Martha Honey, who has written books on ecocertification. “So far, it’s been too difficult to find out who the good guys are.”

By Judy Kepher-Gona

Mt. Kenya region has in the recent past been the subject of many studies and the focus of international and local media after being declared a world heritage site.

To be declared a world heritage site, an area must be accepted as being of ‘outstanding universal value’. But apart from having ‘outstanding universal value’, Mt. Kenya forest is also in the limelight over its open secret - that it has been massively degraded despite being under the watchful eyes of paid government foresters/ guards and being a protected area (national reserve). This is where the second highest mountain in Africa, Mt. Kenya is found and is famous for mountaineering. The region is home to a variety of wildlife thus providing a pristine retreat for tourists. Lest you forget, its fading glaciers are attracting attention of scientists and ecologists worldwide. And as if this is not enough, Mt. Kenya is now receiving political attention in the new NARC era. Mt. Kenya has become popular for something else - it’s a landmark in President Kibaki’s home area.

But far from receiving attention from the media, politics, conservationists and ecologists, tourism operators and tourists; what Mt. Kenya needs are true burden bearers. The problems of Mt. Kenya are as complex and diverse, as are the reasons for its fame and rape. Even the local populace have varied approaches to conserving the forest. A lot has been researched, written, and debated about Mt. Kenya forest. It is common knowledge, to everyone who cares to know, that the degradation of the forest over the years is due to illegal logging, charcoal burning, poaching, encroachment and other unsustainable practices like growing of bhang. Is it not true that most of the time we hear and read about forest degradation, its always a report of some international or local NGO, a forest lobby group, multinational companies making efforts to save the forests while accruing points to their social image - what with eco-option, eco-challenge, etc. But aside from brilliant strategic plans, management plans, utilization strategies, trust-funds, policies and bills on forest management, Mt. Kenya needs go-getters, who are ready to sweat and soil their hands planting trees and watching over them to see that they grow. Bravo to Serena group of hotels for planting 75,000 seedlings in Hombe forest. Its time to walk the talk!
Exploring Ecotourism in Namanga Hill Forest

The Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), in partnership with the UNDP/GEF East African Cross Border Biodiversity Project has been working with community groups around Namanga Hill Forest to explore opportunities for ecotourism development in the area as a tool for managing the pressures currently exerted on the forest by the local population. The local Maasai use the forest for grazing during the dry season. Its many streams provide water for residents of Namanga town and it also serves as a cultural theatre where most, if not all, local Maasai cultural ceremonies are performed. The Hill is surrounded by three group ranches namely Oldoinyo orok, Mailua and Meto, which are at different stages of demarcation.

Namanga Hill, known to the local people as Oldoinyo Orok (the black mountain), lies 150 Km South West of Nairobi in Kajiado district. The attractions of the forest include its wildlife, historical sites, cultural sites, scenery and its proximity to Amboseli National Park, a major tourist attraction in Kajiado district.

Through seminars, training, workshops and exposure tours, the communities living around the forest and other user groups have been sensitized by ITDG on the importance of using the forest resources in a sustainable manner. Among the proposed uses is ecotourism or for this the groups have proposed various activities including a tented camp, camel treks to the hill, camp sites, craft market and cultural bomas to tap the market provided by tourists on transit to and from Tanzania and to Amboseli National Park. A Private sector/community partnership is one of the proposed implementation strategies for ecotourism development in the area.

For more information, please contact: Isabella Masinde
ITDG
Telephone: 2719413/ 2719313

isecheno bandas

A CBO’s vision to Bridge the Accommodation Gap in Kakamega Forest

KEEP- (Kakamega Environment & Education Programme) will receive support under ESOK/UNDP Environment Programme to construct accommodation bandas at Isecheno to meet the demand for accommodation by tourists to the area. The bandas will be part of a larger initiative, partly supported by Nature Kenya, to diversify the product in a bid to extend benefits to a wider section of the neighboring communities. Among other activities, Nature Kenya hopes to build a watch tower to give bird watches a greater opportunity to spot some of the rarest birds found in this tropical rain forest. In addition, they hope to construct a snake park, have a butterfly farm and to build a gift shop for the community. Latest statistics reveal that visitation to Kakamega forest has steadily increased during the last five years and with campaigns to open the western Kenya tourism circuit, it is bound to rise even higher. The project implementation committee is currently looking for creative individuals who can assist them in designing bandas that meet the triple challenge of sustaining environment standards, providing comfort & value for money while reflecting local culture.

For more information, please contact ESOK offices.
> ESOK Annual General Meeting
The AGM of the Society will be held on 15/5/2003 from 4.00pm at ESOK Offices. There will be a special presentation by Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) representatives on the mission of (TTF) in Kenya’s Tourism Agenda.

> Update on Current Society Activities
- Implementing the Eco-rating Scheme for accommodation facilities
- Liaising with like-minded institutions to promote sustainable tourism practices
- Running an awareness creation programme for communities living in high biodiversity areas through open day forums
- Implementing/carrying out an education programme to school and colleges through lectures and talks
- Gathering and providing information to members through the society’s Newsletter and Ecoforum magazine
- Gathering reports, publications, books and other material on ecotourism and sustainable tourism to create a reference library for members
- Organizing workshops to educate community groups (CBOs) on ecotourism
- Maintaining a website where information on society activities as well as member’s information can be obtained

> The Tourism Trust Fund - Supporting Opportunities to Diversify Kenya’s Tourism Product
The Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) is a Government of Kenya and European Union Initiative whose goal is to “contribute to poverty reduction and private sector growth in Kenya, whilst ensuring a sustainable use of natural resources and optimization of tourist satisfaction”.

This fund has been officially launched and an information pack with details on who will benefit, who can apply, how to apply and available grant levels can obtained from the TTF offices on the following address:

The Business Advisory Services Manager 
Tourism Trust Fund 
British American Center, Ragati Rd 
P O Box 5018 
00200- City Square, Nairobi Kenya 
Tel: 272 7262 / 2730333

> Conservation/Ecotourism Open Days
As part of its awareness campaigns, ESOK has been organizing conservation/ecotourism Open Days in various parts of the country. Since the beginning of the year, open days have been held in the Mt. Kenya Forest region and in the Kitengela conservation area. The Open days target areas with high biodiversity and which have potential for initiation of nature-based enterprises, including ecotourism. These open days are aimed at bringing together key stakeholders to enlighten participants on issues, concerns, threats, opportunities, and best strategies for conservation of the areas. The idea is to bring together the various organizations working in these areas with a view to consolidating their efforts for posterity.
Eco-rating Scheme update

More than twenty-five applicants have expressed interest in certification since the launch of the scheme in October 2002. Five facilities have been certified while the rest are at various stages of evaluation. To apply for certification, a lodge or hotel needs to complete a questionnaire and provide all supportive documents as requested in the form. The ESOK secretariat will evaluate the proposal and prepare a report for the Eco-rating committee. Only fully completed questionnaires with supportive documentation are assessed and forwarded to the eco-rating committee. Please call us for a questionnaire.

East African Environment Network (EAEN)

The EAEN will hold its 13th Annual Conference on Networking for Sustainable Livelihoods from 23-24th May 2003 at the National Museums of Kenya. There is opportunity to exhibit and to present papers on themes ranging from ‘sustainable tourism initiatives’ to ‘sustainable utilization of Natural resources’ among others.

For more information, contact
George Malakwen
Tel: 601064, Fax: 601263
E-mail: eaen@onlinekenya.com

World Environment Day

The world environment day will be observed on 6th June 2003. UNEP has organized a series of activities to commemorate this day. For more details, please visit www.unep.org/roa

World Parks Congress

The 13th World Parks Congress will take place in Durban, South Africa in September 2003. For more information, please visit www.uneptie.org/tourism/ecotourism

Catering Levy Trustees

The CLT is a state corporation that manages the catering levy collected from tourism businesses. CLT has recently been mandated to provide certification for all tourism training institutions and accreditation bodies. For more information on this please call Mrs. Sande on telephone 227719/333433

New Partnership Raises Environmental & Social Standards in Tourism Industry

Leading environmental and tourism organizations are joining forces to develop a new partnership aimed at promoting higher environmental and social standards for tourism, one of the world’s largest and fastest growing industries. The project is designed to help tourists choose responsible companies, strengthen government guidelines and “best practices” for eco- and sustainable tourism, and build more sustainable practices within the industry.

Four of the organizations—World Tourism Organization (WTO), Rainforest Alliance, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), and the Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (CESD)—are collaborating on the project.

Further information on each organization can be found at:
CESD at Institute for Policy Studies
www.ips-dc.org/ecotourism
Rainforest Alliance
www.rainforest-alliance.org
The International Ecotourism Society
www.ecotourism.org
UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE)
www.uneptie.org/tourism
World Tourism Organization
www.world-tourism.org
The essential components of a pit latrine are:

- a pit, about a metre in diameter and up to 6 metres deep. A round pit is stronger than a square one. Either type may need strengthening at the top rim to support the slab, depending on the soil.
- a slab with squatting hole, supported safely over the pit, with a cover for the hole. Concrete is desirable to avoid possible hookworm infestation and for ease of cleaning (and also allows the whole unit to be dragged to a new pit nearby in due course).
- a superstructure (hut) for privacy and protection from the weather
- a vent pipe through the slab into the pit, top end reaching above the hut roof and covered with mosquito wire. Plastic pipe of 50mm or more diameter is fine - perfectionists paint it black and site it on the sunny side of the hut to encourage ventilation flow!

There are many variations of possible design and detail, using materials ranging from rustic wood and mud to concrete and stone. But what is vital for hygienic operation of the latrine is that the interior of the hut be kept as dark as possible, the slab floor be kept clean and the hole generally covered. Then any flies which do find their way into the pit do not stay around to breed there and spread diseases: they are attracted to the only light visible (at the top of the vent pipe) and eventually dehydrate and die.

Pit latrines need to be sited carefully, at least 15 metres away from any water source if this is uphill or on the same level (30 metres if downhill), and to be protected from rain runoff. Firm porous soil is best. (In areas where rock layers are close to the surface of the ground or the water table is high, a conventional deep pit cannot work, but a "composting" style double shallow-pit design can be used.)

So don’t turn up your nose at the mention of the humble pit latrine! They are cheap, easy to build, and utilise local materials and labour.) Properly designed and used they promote good hygiene, are completely inoffensive and save scarce water for other to use.

For further information see: Community Health, AMREF Rural Health Series 12, 1981 Sanitation without water, Windblad, Kilama and Torstensson, or write to Chris Marshall at charisma@eastafrica.com

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**A Community FLY FISHING Venture on the Slopes of Mt Kenya**

Weru Forest Group is a community-based organization found on the slopes of Mt. Kenya in Njirimiti location, near Timau. Their activities are concentrated around Marania Forest and they live in a settlement scheme adjacent to Marania Farm.

Having identified a fly-fishing project as one of their proposed activities, they invited my father and I, through ESOK, to go and assess the potential for the area to sustain a fly-fishing project. Being a very keen fly fisherman, I am always interested to see what is being done and proposed elsewhere.

Our journey started at Timau where we linked up with the ESOK team and went ahead to meet the community representatives at the home of the group chairlady, Ms Agnes Rigiri, en-route to Rutundu. We drove in convoy through the forest and up the slopes of Mt Kenya to Lake Rutundu – stopping en-route to photograph the fabulous scenery and look into some alleged MAU MAU hideout caves – now used, judging by the evidence inside, as bush meat poachers den.

We finally arrived, after a long drive, at the Rutundu Log Cabins opposite Lake Rutundu and beneath Lake Alice – the scenery was out of this world and well worth the drive up just for that. After a brief lunch, we began to talk to the community members about the project and what they envisaged. They were proposing to develop the small Kathita River for trout fishermen. They talked about creating a better access road bringing it closer to the fishable section of the river, clearing the banks, making a small dam, as well as the possibility of bandas with fulltime caretakers, and ghillies (fishing guides) so that employment is created for the community members, and tourist revenue from fishermen and their friends can be generated.

Still listening to this, we then set off by foot on a small trail, leaving Lake Alice on our right and then over the brow of the undulating hills

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*By Chris Marshall*
What Future for Kitengela Wildlife Corridor

By Philip Marita (ESOK volunteer)

On the 22nd March this year, ESOK and various community groups around Kitengela area conducted an open day to deliberate on the issues of ecotourism and conservation in relation to the Kitengela Wildlife Corridor. ESOK facilitated the event as follow-up to several requests it had received from these community groups seeking assistance to engage in various ecotourism activities in the area.

Through nature-based enterprises, ecotourism could contribute not only to improving the people’s livelihoods but also to the conservation of the vital animal migration routes found in this area. Preservation of these routes is important both for the future of the unique Nairobi National Park (a wild haven just a few kilometers from a major capital city!) and for the survival of diverse animal and plant species that exist along this corridor.

The event brought together community groups and various relevant organizations invited by the community to openly exchange views and exhibit various products all related to their activities and plans for the area. From the forum, it came out clearly that though the corridor faces many threats, including rapid population and urbanization growth, quarrying, land subdivision, fencing and selling, the area has potential for ecotourism, because of its diverse wildlife and natural areas, rich culture, a domestic and foreign market focus and willing community groups. ESOK also found out that there existed other local and external organizations that were ready to contribute not only to ecotourism development but also towards livelihood improvement and mitigation of the various problems that face the corridor. ESOK plans to support the community groups and these other stakeholders (like KWS, EAWLS, SFS and Friends of Nairobi National Park) in an integrated approach to save this corridor.

A Community FLY FISHING Venture on the Slopes of Mt Kenya

Towards Mount Kenya. The walk was fairly lengthy but this gave us time to find out much information about the location, the history, the folklore surrounding the area — and more importantly the quality of the trout fishing there. From the enthusiastic banter, the river certainly had a fair bit to live up to, and some members insisted that large trout the size of a full grown man’s forearm could be caught. Finally we arrived and I carefully made my way down to a pool fed by a well-oxygenated fall. I think it was the first time the community had seen such paraphernalia as fly fishing rods and to their astonishment and to mine, I had a bite on the first cast and hooked into a small brook trout [Salvelinus fontinalis] — which immediately began its spiraling gymnastics as I tried to land it. My first impressions were good.

We had just over an hour’s fishing — fishing in the most productive-looking places as we could. Access was very tricky generally and the banks were steep and vertical in places, but the water was truly GIN CLEAR — and I was able to see many fish, some of them around a pound lurking in the depths of some of the pools. We caught several small fish — the larger ones were spooked by the fishing line and our artificial flies and we needed more time to work on them, but there was not enough. On the walk back we discussed the project with some of the community key players. Our observations were as follows: the area is very remote and takes a considerable effort to get to — the weather up on Mt. Kenya during the rains is quite miserable and the roads in this weather are very difficult to access. There is need to open an access road to the fishable section of the river if it is to attract fishermen there, as the walk from Rutundu to river kathita is too long to allow for a proper day’s fishing. The small size of the river, its overgrown banks and the limited fishable area would not allow for more than 3-4 people to fish in one day. The accessibility would be improved if the banks are cleared, footpaths are put in and some of the pools developed. The quality of the fishing without the river being stocked is good — so there is decent potential here. But due to the above, the returns on investment would be low. However, putting in a small bush track road, clearing an area for a campsite with a long drop — and clearing some of the banks to open them up for fishing are all realistic and with a little bit of advertising they may well get a few die hard keen fishermen using the facility on weekends. What is required is an unsophisticated low cost approach in developing the area if it is to have any scope for success. I certainly hope so and would gladly use the facilities whenever I had the time and the inclination.

For more details or info on Weru, contact ESOK on info@esok.org.
Why we achieved Bronze Certification
Our commitment to the conservation of the environments in which we operate and a sharp eye for quality service.

Mark Gathuri
Mombasa Serena Beach Hotel
P O Box 90352, Mombasa
Tel: 011- 5497220/5
E-mail: mombasa@serena.co.ke
Website: www.serenahotels.com

Elsa’s Kopje
Type: Lodge
Location: Meru National Park

• The lodge is named after “Elsa” the lionness, made famous by Joy and George Adamson in the film ‘Born Free’.
• Elsa’s Kopje is situated on Mughwango Hill, the site of George Adamson’s original camp.
• Each cottage is spacious and unique, constructed using natural materials incorporating features of the hillside.

Why we achieved Bronze Certification
Elsa’s is more than a lodge; it is an archive of the history of “Elsa” the lioness and world famous conservationists Joy and George Adamson.

Ava paton
Elsa’s Kopje
C/o Cheli & Peacock
P O Box 3906, 00621A-Parklands, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 254-20-604053
E-mail: elsa2@bushmail.net
Website: www.cheliandpeacock.com

Malewa River Lodge
Type: Eco-lodge
Location: Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, Naivasha

• Innovative design built with a labour of love using local methods and materials gathered from the surrounding area.
• Sustainable and eco-friendly waste management through separation and recycling of glass, plastics and metal.
• Sensitivity to the protection of habitat i.e. no exotic plants, use of sustainable fuel source.
• Offering support to local community through employment, training, fund raising and sensitization on conservation matters through environmental education.
• We purchase our supplies from local area as a way of supporting the local economy.

Why we achieved Bronze Certification:
“We do not rely on vague statements of intention, but are truly committed to “best practice” in management of our environment and in our relations with the community.”

Chris Campbell Clause
Malewa River Lodge
P O Box 446 Naivasha
Tel: 254-050-30312
E-mail: malewa@kenyaweb.com
Website: www.malewariverlodge.com

Kampi Ya Kanzi
Type: Tented Camp
Location: Chyulu Hills

• Our main goal is to protect the wildlife and help preserve the cultural heritage of the Maasai of Kuku Group Ranch.
• We take pride in having employed 90% of our staff from the local community.
• Our sustainability initiatives include solar hot water, recycling of used water, solar electricity, low energy appliances - from lights to fridges, no burning of firewood or gas for cooking food, but a recycled charcoal, organic vegetable garden & biodegradable products.
• We promote community tourism initiatives by sending our guests to visit the community initiatives.
• We have registered a wilderness conservation trust that is raising money to support local development initiatives like schools and dispensary and meeting conservation needs.

Why we won
State of the art technology was used in designing the camp to have the lowest impact on the environment.

Luca Belpietro
P O Box 23, Mitio Andei
Tel: 254-302-22516
E-mail: lucasaf@afri.com
Website: www.masai.com

Olonana Camp
Type: Tented Camp
Location: Maasai Mara

• Olonana is at the forefront of eco-tourism in Kenya with solar power, biodegradable products, a tree planting project and a wetlands project which allows for all used water to be totally recycled.
• Olonana is involved in assisting the local community and helps the local primary schools with books and building materials.
• The camp also allows the local community to make and sell their crafts at the camp, offers them priority in employment and shares a percentage of the profits with them.
• The camp comprises 12 spacious and airy en suite accommodation tents.

Why we achieved Bronze Certification
We have demonstrated commitment to good environmental and socio-economic practice in running of the lodge.

Maurice Anami
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