

Elections? Tourists shrug off jittery polls to flock Kenya's star attractions

NAIROBI, Kenya - Kenya continues to report an increase in arrivals with the key attractions being the wildebeest migration at the Mara, the Madaraka Express rail services to Mombasa and increased chartered flights by international carriers including from Poland, Italy and Oman. As such, international arrivals from January to April this year closed at 292,160 compared to 264,784 in 2016 - representing a 10.3 percent increase in tourist inflows in the country



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Kenya Tourism Board CEO Dr. Betty Radier said that a majority of hoteliers are reporting to be fully booked. "Given the feedback we have received from numerous stakeholders, including hoteliers at the coast as well as the Maasai Mara, most hotels and resorts are currently experiencing full booking," says Radier.

Wildebeest migration continues to attract tourist from around the globe

The wildebeest migration, also known as the 8th wonder of the world, started in June and is expected to continue until October. This attraction continues to bring many tourists globally to the Maasai Mara.

In fact, a single search of the Maasai Mara on Instagram generates more than 50,000 posts, mostly from international visitors in the past month. World influencers and celebrities including Jack Ma, the Executive Chairperson of Alibaba and Veronica Ferraro, Italian fashion blogger added to those keen to experience the magic.

Kenya has also provided a haven for honeymooners such as newlyweds Julliane Hough and Brooks Laich who decided to have an adventurous honeymoon at the Mara. The two enjoyed watching the great migration, going on a magnificent game drive, hot air balloon rides and nature walks.

Madaraka Express a boon for tourism in coastal region

The number of tourists visiting the coastal region also tremendously increased following the commencement of the Madaraka Express rail services. Launched just two months ago, the Madaraka Express so far has ferried over 200,000 passengers between Mombasa and Nairobi.

Hoteliers say the rail services have opened up the coastal area to a new segment of holidaymakers that range from domestic to international tourists. They further highlighted more holidaymakers are visiting their facilities due to the efficiency, low cost and convenience of the rail service.

At this time of the year bed occupancy rate usually oscillates between 40-50 percent, but currently, the situation is much better with some reporting as high as 80 percent.

WU18 Championships

Kenya's hosting of the just concluded 10th and final edition of the IAAF WU18 Championships also added to the increase of arrivals into the country. The WU18 Championships brought 130 nations and over 70 international media into the country and broke records at the highest attended world under 18 and 20 championships globally.

"We believe the data for the months of May to July are representative of growth in tourism numbers to Kenya. We are optimistic that the sector will remain resilient," said Radier.

The tourism private sector through Chairman Mohamed Hersi acknowledged the collective gains that tourism has made over time, he said, "The sector is experiencing the best season since 2012 and we are certain that we are heading to reclaim our number one position in contribution to Kenya's economy.

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