
3 Regional Tourism Development within the East African Community

Carmen Nibigira, Edwin Sabuhoro and Bernard Kitheka

Introduction

With international tourist arrivals reaching 1.2 billion in 2015 and a sustained annual growth rate of 4%, tourism has become one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (UNWTO, 2016). A UNWTO report shows that tourism accounts for nearly 5% share of the global economy, generates about US \$7.6 trillion per annum and employs 6-7% of the global workforce. International organizations such as World Bank, UNWTO, IMF, EU and – UNDP view tourism as a potential means for achieving economic diversification and regeneration, poverty reduction, post-conflict stability, multilateral integration and peace (Novelli *et al.*, 2012). In over 150 countries, tourism is one of the five top foreign exchange earners, and in 60 it is the number one foreign exchange earner (UNWTO, 2012). In 23 of the 49 least developed countries, tourism is among the top three foreign exchange earners, and for seven, it is their single largest revenue earner (UNWTO, 2012); and therefore, particularly plays a critical role in economic development and sustainable livelihoods of many least developed countries.

From the supply side, many developing countries view tourism as a panacea for poverty alleviation and underdevelopment (Chok *et al.*, 2007). From the demand side, many people living in developed countries are continually intrigued by the allure of pristine landscapes, nature and culture offered by many of the world's least developed countries (Puczko and Smith, 2012). In 2014, tourist arrivals in Africa were 56 million, representing a 5% share of world tourist arrivals and a 3% share in tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2015); and tourism generated more than US\$ 36 billion in exports. In North Africa, international tourist arrivals in Morocco (a leading destination) grew by 2%, while arrivals in Tunisia decreased by 3%. Tourism to sub-Saharan Africa grew by 3%. East Africa is a leading tourist destination in the sub-Saharan Africa region (UNWTO, 2015) and a number of countries in this part of Africa have come together in the East African Community to further tourism and other economic development through political steps.

The Community has five active member states at the time of writing (2016) and one new member, South Sudan, which has joined very recently and is still finalizing details. The tourist attributes and characteristics of each of the active members are

described briefly below, before a discussion of the steps taken by the Community to date and the potential implications of further changes to be made in the political relationships between the member countries. Some of the key features and their locations are shown on Figure 3.1 below, which also shows the boundaries of the member states relative to the African continent.



Figure 3.1: Map of EAC states showing some of the major protected areas. Source: Kitheka, 2015

The following table (Table 3.1) shows some of the key characteristics of the member states of the E.A.C.

Table 3.1: Demographic and economic perspectives of the EAC member states (2014).
Source: Kitheka, 2015

Country	Size (Sq. km.)	Population (million)	GDP (billion US\$)			
			Total	Per Capita	Agriculture Contribution	Service Industry (Tourism inclusive)
Uganda	241,038	37.1	75.1	1,900	26.7%	51.1%
Rwanda	26,338	12.7	18.9	1,700	33.1%	52.5%
Burundi	27,830	10.7	8.409	900	39.9%	42.1%
Tanzania	947,300	51.0	128.2	2,700	26.5%	47.3%
Kenya	580,367	45.9	133.0	3,100	30.3%	50.4%

Despite a slight drop in international visitors to Kenya between 2012 and 2013, all other East African Community (EAC) partner states experienced an average growth of 3% in tourism. In the EAC member states, tourism employs over one million people and contributes an average of 4% of the gross domestic product (GDP), making it the second largest economic sector after agriculture (Table 3.1).

Based on each country's strategic plan (Kenya's Vision 2030, Tanzania's Vision 2025, Uganda's Vision 2040, Rwanda's Vision 2020 and Burundi's Vision 2035), it is apparent that tourism occupies a major position in each state's economic development plan. The next 20 years show promise of continued tourism growth for the continent, and more particularly Sub-Saharan Africa region (UNWTO, 2015). EAC member states view tourism as a crucial tool for economic development, poverty alleviation, foreign exchange and wildlife and cultural conservation (Okello and Novelli, 2014). The region is renowned for its pristine natural features, diverse ecosystems and wildlife including large stocks of the world's largest terrestrial mammals. With Kenya and Tanzania, East Africa is the preferred destination for safari tourism, while in Uganda and Rwanda tourists can experience the unique gorilla tourism (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1997; Ringer, 2002; Van der Duim *et al.*, 2006).

East Africa Community Member States

Kenya

Tourism plays a pivotal role in Kenya's economic development agenda, with the country being recognized as a leading tourist destination in Africa, with has a long-established and highly successful tourist sector catering to both conventional and ecotourism markets (UNECA, 2011). Comprising more than 10 % total share of the country's GDP, tourism ranks third after agriculture and manufacturing in foreign exchange earnings (Okello and Novelli, 2014; WTTC, 2015). The country's tourism peaked in 2007 with arrivals nearly reaching two million. Following post-election violence in 2007, however, tourist arrivals fell below one million but the numbers have since recovered despite recurrent terrorism threats (Okello and Novelli, 2014). Kenya is the best performing country in the region. The country has established and well-functioning government and private institutions to run tourism, highly trained tourism personnel and numerous medium to high level tourism training colleges, compared to the other EAC member states. Kenya's main challenges lie in the areas of price competitiveness, safety and security, health and hygiene, enabling environment and investment in information technology (WEF, 2015).

Tanzania

Tourism provides enormous benefits to Tanzania's economy and if well-managed, could accrue greater revenue for the country. Tourism has been rapidly expanding over the last decade, attracting increasing numbers of visitors (Cunningham *et al.*, 2015). Tanzania has striking landscapes: from snow-capped Mt. Kilimanjaro to the plains of Serengeti, the sandy beaches along the Indian Ocean, the Serengeti National Park and the adjoining Ngorongoro ecosystem. The country is home to