

Tanzania softens stance, pledges to join single visa initiative for EAC

Country says it is not opposed to integration and will soon join efforts to boost cross-border tourism

By PHILIP MWAKIO IN LONDON

Tanzania on Wednesday signalled its readiness to abandon its opposition to the ambitious East African Community (EAC) single visa initiative.

The country's Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism Lazaro S Nyalandu said in London that his country is committed to the true spirit of the region's integration and would soon be joining the initiative.

Early this year, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda launched a single visa that enables tourists to visit the three countries at a flat rate of \$100

per tourist, but Tanzania was not included.

"We have not been a stumbling block as many would have wished to believe. Tanzania is the largest of the five member states and key founder of the EAC. We have all along been trying to put things in order back home and have worked on a number of deliverables, which once complete, we shall join the uni-visa initiative," said Nyalandu while addressing exhibitors at this year's World Travel Market gathered at the Magical Kenya stand in London.

He said Tanzania was fast-tracking issuance of national identity cards for its citizens, and this was one of the issues that his government had laid much emphasis on.

UNIFIED REGION

"We are part and parcel of the EAC and we shall continue to work as one. Tanzania hereby confirms that it is dedicated to work and remain steadfast in its resolve of a unified region. There are a few things that we have



Phyllis Kandle

been sorting out and as soon as we are ready, we shall join the uni-visa," the minister said to the applause of those in attendance.

Tanzania had earlier ruled out joining the single tourist visa initiative, arguing that it would be a threat to her security and economy.

It was then accused of dragging its feet on regional integration even as Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda moved ahead without Tanzania and Burundi.

The close working relationship of the three nations would earn them the tag 'coalition of the willing'.

Cabinet Secretary for the EAC, Commerce and Tourism, Ms Phyllis Kandle said promotion of the trading bloc as a single tourist destination is ongoing, and innovative strategies are being sought to enhance the region's competitiveness.

"Tools such as the East Africa tourist visa facilitates, multiple destination visits while more ways to improve and increase visitor arrivals such as cross-border concessional park fees are strategies being developed that will add value," Kandle said.

She added that any good product requires effective marketing.

"I am happy to inform all and sundry that one such tool, 'The Travellers Roundabout East Africa' magazine is a powerful platform to collate and communicate credible regional information in the tourism/travel sector," the CS said.