

EAC nations waive tourism visa fees

Kigali, Monday

RWANDA, Kenya and Uganda have waived visa fees for foreign residents to allow easy access to the region's diverse tourism experience.

According to Yamina Karitanyi, the Rwanda Development Board's Head of Department for Tourism and Conservation, the waiver was agreed on under the Northern Corridor Integration projects initiative.

Known as the East Africa Tourist Visa (EATV), foreign residents no longer have to pay the \$100 fee for the visa

that is valid for 90 days effective December 15, 2014.

Karitanyi, said the waiver on the single East Africa Tourist Visa was the next step in consolidating and enriching the region's tourism potential.

"We are approaching the rest of the world as a unified and rich tourist destination with varied experiences for travellers. We are also positioning East Africa's tourism assets collectively as part of the Northern Corridor Integration Projects," Karitanyi said at the weekend.

She added that joint mar-

keting programmes will be carried out annually and will cover road shows such as the International Tourism Board (ITB) and World Travel Market (WTM) in 2015.

She pointed out that going forward, the partner states will lobby for a single stand during international tourism marketing events.

Outlining the modalities of implementation, Karitanyi said eligible foreign residents shall be issued with inter state pass on exiting the host state and visitor's pass endorsed in their passports on arrival by presenting valid work-

resident permits. Other immigration procedures and regulations will, however, be maintained.

In preparing for the joint marketing programmes, she noted that the partner states were already gearing up the teams involved by conducting destination training workshops and disseminating information on the use of national identity cards, student voters cards and the East Africa Tourist Visa.

Uganda Tourism Board's Chief Executive Officer Stephen Asimwe, said the development will bring exponential

benefits to foreign residents living in the region.

"Our countries have a rich tourist menu on offer, from serene beaches, to pristine wildlife and nature, exquisite reserves, to hospitable people. It is the place to visit. Our products are inexhaustible and this waiver offers our region the best place to live and work.

"We encourage this community to be a part of the endless discovery, encounter and adventure of the best tourism episode of Africa at the least affordable price." Asimwe said.

"We encourage the private sector to take advantage of this opportunity to offer unbeatable packages while maximising win-win offers."

According to Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) Managing Director, Muriithi Ndegwa, this gives an opportunity to foreign residents in the three Partner States to explore the immense diversity of wildlife, landscapes, culture, and heritage, among other renowned attractions either for weekend gateways, corporate retreats or annual family holidays.

The just concluded 8th

Northern Corridor Integration Summit attended by Presidents Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, Paul Kagame, and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, held in Nairobi last week, also directed Rwanda's Minister of Infrastructure to convene a meeting of Airline Industry stakeholders.

The meeting would finalize negotiations on the 5th Freedom Traffic Rights on Entebbe-Nairobi-Juba-Nairobi meant to address outstanding issues to reduce the cost of air travel in the region and report to the next Summit that will be held in Kigali.