

EAST AFRICA **TOURISM PLATFORM**

BATTLE FOR EAST AFRICA'S SKIES

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- Air connectivity and affordability has been a major challenge throughout the region. The region is grappling with high fares, limited connectivity and poor quality of services.
- Air travel within the region accounts for approximately 45 % of the total cost of a tour package. This has been attributed to high taxes and charges caused by a restricted aviation policy; that limits routes and frequencies and therefore the supply of aircraft seats.
- Notwithstanding, all EAC member states are signatories to the Yamoussoukro Decision; the Decision's implementation, in the region, has been slow and stunted by protectionism as partner states protect their national airlines from competition.
- As East Africa Tourism Platform we have put up a spirited campaign for open sky policy to liberalize our region's airspace and create a single aviation territory.
- As Kenya Airways marks its 40 birthday, it is time for reflection. The airline has moved from winning best performance awards to facing one crisis after another. We have witnessed flights being delayed. Passengers stranded. Expensive fares. Just to name a few.
- Strict regulatory protection, poor safety standards, high cost of tickets, mismanagement, poor maintenance and planning have also, in the past, been blamed as contributors to the nose-diving of Ugandair and Air Tanzania.
- Air Tanzania is on the way to full recovery and plans are underway to resuscitate Ugandair. However, it is unfortunate that the rules of the game have not been changed. Protectionism is still stifling regional airlines.
- Paradoxically, the fortunes of Kenya Airways are declining at a time when new entrants such as RwandAir are beginning to ascend, even though; their connectivity has been curtailed by limited 5th freedom rights.

PARTING SHOT

- Policy makers should take decisive and proactive actions to steer regional airlines to greater heights. Besides, innovative strategies are required to restructure the airlines and enable them to operate competitively.
- This is an era for open sky policy. It is estimated that liberalization among the five EAC partner states will result in 46,320 additional jobs and annual revenue of US\$ 202.1 million.
- Regional governments should act with speed and liberalize their airspaces to let their citizens enjoy the benefits enshrined in Yamoussoukro Decision and AU Vision 2063.
- Affordable air travel is not an option. Taxes should be reduced. Low-cost carriers supported. Connectivity enhanced. And the region operate as a single aviation market.



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