

EAST AFRICA **TOURISM PLATFORM**

STANDARD GAUGE **RAILWAY**

Nairobi, June 03, 2017





STANDARD GAUGE RAILWAY - A PROMISING REGIONAL TOURISM GAME CHANGER

- » A single transformative event can shape the destiny of a nation. It can upend convention and leapfrog several developmental stages.¹
- » The linkage between infrastructure and economic growth cannot be overstated. Railway network was particularly hailed as a major boost for industrial revolution in Western Europe and North America. Railways play a critical role in driving economic growth. In Europe, for instance, travellers are able to affordably traverse across countries over a span of a few hours.
- » This week we witnessed one of the most historic events in the history of transportation in Kenya and the entire East African Community; with the launch of the new Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) network.
- » The SGR connects Mombasa and Nairobi with stop overs at Miritini, Voi, Mtito Andei, Athi-River and Syokimau; giving travellers a chance to experience the breath-taking landscapes, Tsavo East National Park and other sceneries along the route. The railway opens opportunities for hotel and restaurant development, among other businesses in the tourism value chain in these areas.
- » In spite of facing a barrage of criticism, only an utter cynic or perpetual naysayer would deny that the new network will be a game changer in the movement of people and goods from the Indian Ocean coastline to the hinterland and beyond to neighbouring countries of Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, especially after the remaining phases to the Ugandan border are completed.²
- » This is a positive development for regional tourism, given the fact that the regional market is growing; with for instance, Uganda accounting for 51,023 tourists to Kenya in 2016, and

¹ Linus Gitahi, 31-5-2017

² Macharia Gaitho 30-5-2017



occupying a top 4 position in the country's tourist arrivals.

- » Drawing lessons from Western Europe and North America, standard gauge railway network is expected to spur growth. Passenger traffic between Mombasa and Nairobi is expected to increase as more people find it easier to travel in comfort at a pocket-friendly price.

PARTING SHOT

- » East Africa Tourism Platform believes that the SGR is a game-changer as far as domestic and regional transport and tourism is concerned. With the capacity of 260 passengers and economy class costing Ksh. 700 (US\$ 7), it will make travel truly affordable. The most remarkable part is that the SGR is traversing the most scenic parts of Kenya. At the same time, this development is a major boost to regional product diversification.
- » If it works as advertised, it will become the most preferred mode of transport to and from Mombasa. It will offer many the chance to travel in comfort at affordable rates while getting a feel of the beautiful countryside.³
- » Over the years, domestic tourism has stuttered with hotels only surviving because of the Christmas/Easter boom. However, with the SGR that will no longer be the case. A weekend at the coast will no longer be the preserve of the rich who can afford to fly. It will be a short four-hour journey; giving a major boost to an industry that accounts for 56% of the country's tourism industry.
- » We are optimistic political goodwill will push SGR through the second phase into neighbouring countries of Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

³ *Op Cit*



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